

STATE VERSE CULTURE: AMERICAN POETS LAUREATE, 1945-2015

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ABSTRACT

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Amy Paeth

Bob Perelman

This dissertation argues that the state is the silent center of poetic production in the United States after WWII. “State Verse Culture” is the first history of the national poet, the Poet Laureate Consultant to the Library of Congress, whose office sits at the nexus of institutional actors of postwar poetry. Drawing on archival research at the Library of Congress and the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, it traces the collusion of 1) federal bodies (The Library of Congress, The State Department, The National Endowment for the Arts) with 2) literary-professional organizations (Poetry Society of America, *Poetry* magazine/The Poetry Foundation) and 3) private patrons (Paul Mellon, Ruth Lilly). The cooperation of public and private interests is crucial to the development of what I call *state verse culture*—recognizable at the first National Poetry Festival in 1962, and dominant following the end of the Cold War in the 1990s-2000s.

Chapter 1, “State Verse Scandals: Views from Yaddo, St Elizabeths, and the Library of Congress, 1945-1956” narrates the Bollingen Prize controversy of 1949 and the arbitration of literary capital between the Library, *Poetry* magazine and the university system. Chapter 2, “Inaugurating National Poetry: Robert Frost and Cold War Arts, 1956-1965” argues that the Frost-Kennedy years transformed the function of poetry in national culture. The phonocentric narrative poem provided the expressive agency of artist-citizens as ideological weaponry in the global Cold War, and a blueprint for national poets in the longer project of neoliberal identity formation. Chapter 3, “The Politics of Voice: The Workshop Poet and Poet Laureate as the Expressive Subject, 1965-1993” describes the rise of the creative writing program industry, and argues that the

recentralization of poetic production in the academy after WWII is a twofold legacy: the MFA workshop poet and the poet-critic of the English Department constitute distinct cultural roles in postwar America. Chapter 4, “Civil versus Civic Verse: National Projects of U.S. Poets Laureate, 1991-2015,” examines Poets Laureate initiatives (Robert Pinsky’s Favorite Poem Project, Ted Kooser’s American Life in Poetry and Billy Collins’ Poetry 180) funded through the state verse culture nexus.

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INTRODUCTION

“No art is more stubbornly national than poetry.”
—T.S. Eliot¹

The Consultantship in Poetry in the English Language at the Library of Congress, today the position of the Poet Laureate of the United States, was established in 1937 by a private gift.² When Allen Tate assumed the post in 1943, the Reference Librarian issued a memorandum defining the duties of the incumbent:

1. To survey the existing collections in order to determine their strengths and weaknesses.
2. To initiate recommendations for the purchase of additions to the collection.
3. To engage in correspondence with authors and collections with a view to securing important gifts of books and manuscripts.
4. To respond to reference questions submitted by mail, and to compile occasional bibliographies.
5. To confer with scholars using the Library's collections and facilities.
6. To make suggestions for the improvement of the service.³

The Consultant was not “limited in his work to the single field of poetry” but free “to take all English and American literature for his province, including such forms as the essay, the drama, the novel, indeed creative writing of any and every sort,” as well as literary scholarship, “studies in literature, and the biography and bibliography of literary personages.” He should be warned, however, that “some of the questions referred to his attention will be trifling.” These would be the queries of “poetry ‘groups’” and “program makers”: “school girls, women’s clubs, catch-penny anthologists and talent

¹ T. S. Eliot, “The Social Function of Poetry” in *On Poetry and Poets* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2009), 8.

² Archer M. Huntington executed a deed of Trust providing perpetuity to the Library for the maintenance of a Chair of Poetry of the English Language in November 1936; Joseph Auslander was the first to hold the post in 1937. G. Forrest Butterworth, Jr. to Putnam, 19 November 1936, Library of Congress Trust Funds, 1928, 1936-44, 1956-59, 1971, 1985, William McGuire Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

³ David Mearns to Archibald MacLeish, “Duties of Allen Tate as Consultant in Poetry,” 27 April 1943, Archibald MacLeish Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

testers...novices too ponderous to be raised by Pegasus.” “Such work is part of the job; but it can be rather instructive and amusing.”⁴

Today, the “trifling” business of poetry “groups” and “programs” is the job itself. In the late 1980s, Poets Laureate increasingly led groups and programs at the Library; since the early 1990s, they have undertaken more ambitious cultural initiatives—poetry projects with national reach. The Library “keeps to a minimum the specific duties in order to afford incumbents maximum freedom”⁵ to pursue these projects, all of which limit national poets’ province to the genre of poetry. National poetry projects are funded by a network of private and state players—which typically include the National Endowment for the Arts; literary-professional organizations, most importantly since 2004 The Poetry Foundation; and educational institutions. The Library provides institutional centralization through the administrative resources of the Poetry Office and symbolic centralization through the figurehead of the Poet Laureate.

The transformation of the national poet from a library custodian to a public servant represents a broader shift in the cultural function of poetry—and the role of institutions in literary production—after WWII. This dissertation is not only a history of national poets, then, but also a history of the institutions that shaped the field of postwar verse.

This dissertation views the state as the silent center of poetic production in the United States after WWII. The state has had an increasingly important role as the central pivot between the institutional infrastructure of literary professionalism on the one hand, and that of higher education on the other. The history of the national poetry office is necessarily the history of the Library among four sets of players: 1) other federal

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ “The Poetry and Literature Center at the Library of Congress: About the Position of Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry,” Library of Congress, accessed May 2, 2015, http://www.loc.gov/poetry/about_laureate.html.

bodies (The Department of State, The Central Intelligence Agency, The Office of the President, The National Endowment for the Arts), which invested in the projects of 2) literary-professional organizations (The Poetry Society of America, *Poetry* magazine/Modern Poetry Association/The Poetry Foundation, The Academy of American Poets); collaboration between federal bodies and private cultural organizations is typically initiated or facilitated through 3) private patrons (Paul Mellon, Ruth Lilly). Finally, public-private-patron initiatives are carried out in 4) institutions of higher education, and especially since the 1990s, K-12 public schools. The cooperation of public and private interests is crucial to the development of what I call *state verse culture*—recognizable at the first National Poetry Festival in 1962, and dominant following the end of the Cold War in the 1990s-2000s.

The poetry office, then, is at the nexus of institutional actors in the field of postwar poetry—a lens through which to observe cultural transformations on a systemic level. But individuals are also important to my account. Occupants of the national poetry office—this study focuses on Robert Lowell, Elizabeth Bishop, Robert Frost, Gwendolyn Brooks and Billy Collins, among others—were strategic agents, who sometimes subtly and (in the case of Frost) sometimes momentarily affected institutional courses. Their various paper trails implicate other individual actors—arts administrators, government officials and secretaries—and their interested participation in wider agendas in turn. The story this dissertation tells plays out on both an institutional and granular level.

The institutional story links State Department missions during the Cold War to Poets Laureate projects today. This national project's model of poetic voice emphasized the expressive agency of the individual citizen, an ideology instrumental to the coherence of midcentury American nationalism and to the longer project of neoliberal identity formation. The state did not always have an active role in verse culture. In the years after

WWII, the federal government was wary of supporting the arts, especially after the Library's controversial awarding of the Bollingen Prize to the politically unsavory figure of Ezra Pound in 1949. Despite *Poetry* magazine's bid to take over its administration, the prize was relocated to Yale University—fittingly so, as poetic production meanwhile relocated to the flourishing new multiversity. The expandable disciplines of English and creative writing accommodated a disproportionate influx of veterans and baby boomers following the passage of the G.I. Bill and the Higher Education Act, respectively, and provided poets and writers with newly created teaching positions.

Under the Eisenhower and Kennedy Administrations, the state invested in the creative arts through universities at home and cultural missions abroad. If national poet Robert Frost exemplified the symbolically-vested domestic role of the poet in his delivery of the first inaugural poem at President Kennedy's inauguration in 1961, the uses of poetry as ideological weaponry in the Cold War were publicized by his "Mission to Moscow" the next year. One month later, when Paul Engle, director of the Iowa Writers Workshop, approached a State Department official about an international venture, he was met generously—the federal government supplied him with both overt and covert material support for the creation of Iowa's International Program.

In the Kennedy-Frost years an emergent state verse culture became visible at the first National Poetry Festival in 1962, which demonstrated that poetry had special use both at home and abroad, symbolizing values of individuality and freedom contra the totalitarian groupthink of the Soviet Union. In the creative writing workshop, phonocentric voice was emphasized over restrictions of metrical form; the dominant model was individual, expressive and narrative, and, as the material investments of industry leaders and the CIA suggest, a convincing proxy for the American citizen. The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), established in 1965 under President Johnson, modeled this conviction in its language: the artist sustains "a climate encouraging

freedom of thought,” and moreover “the world leadership of the United States” depended not only on military strength but creative expression in “the realm of ideas and of the spirit.”⁶

The professionalization of creative writing was initiated by the formation of the Associated Writers Program two years later, and Master of Fine Arts (MFA) degree-granting programs boomed alongside university enrollments and the arms race. By the mid-1980s, the workshop poem had calcified as a dominant model polemically opposed by avant-garde practitioners; Language Poets advanced a particularly coherent critique of Cold War-era expressive voice. In these years, poetry took on a more conflicted role in the domestic sphere: did the workshop’s “I” reflect the identities of a multicultural society? The state tried to answer this question affirmatively—not through increasing funding for minority voices, as the NEA budget was scaled back during the Reagan Administration, but by recasting the poetry office as nationally representative. In 1985 the Consultantship was renamed the “Poet Laureate,” and the Library of Congress appointed racist-recanter Robert Penn Warren and “portrayer of black urban life” Gwendolyn Brooks in its first two terms.⁷

The national poetry office, while in name still privately endowed, has since its 1985 rebranding received annual funds from the NEA to undertake public programming. True to the Kennedy-Frost vision of state arts with a capitalist spirit, the office centralizes not only private and NEA money, but in the 2000s and 2010s has collaborated with other organizations to undertake national poetry projects—most importantly The Poetry Foundation, which received a gift totaling over \$100 million from pharmaceutical heiress Ruth Lilly in 2002. National poetry projects are the best examples of contemporary state verse culture, in which institutions share common

⁶ National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965 (Pub. L. 89-209).

⁷ “Gwendolyn Brooks Is Named as Next Library Poetry Consultant,” *Library of Congress Information Bulletin*, May 20, 1985, 106.

cultural interests through their Cold War legacy. The representative poet, and no less the poetic speaker of the vast output of MFA program verse, remain, despite avant-garde critique, stubborn analogues for the agency of the individual citizen—and so too do the political and aesthetic debates that animate the current poetic field. Quasi-private organizations like The Poetry Foundation, allied to the national project(s), advance wide-ranging cultural missions, typically in the vocabulary of neoliberal multiculturalism. Because of the democratic generality of their discourse, the academy most visibly houses these debates.

This is a précis of the institutional story. However, many key events that shaped the narrative above were affected, sometimes crucially determined, by personal interests and interpersonal interactions. For example, at the end of WWII, the Bollingen Foundation supported *Poetry* magazine alongside the Library, but decided after the Pound scandal to relocate the Bollingen Prize to Yale University. This speaks to the expanding role of universities in the literary field—increasingly influential as cultural tastemakers in addition to canonical gatekeepers—but, as we will see, personal connections were important: James Babb, Yale’s Chief Librarian, and Ernest Brooks, Secretary of the Bollingen Trustees, belonged to the same country club. The day after *Poetry* editor Hayden Carruth wrote to Brooks offering “the facilities of the magazine to the Foundation for the administering of the prize”—it would “be appropriate for such an important prize for poetry to be awarded by the country’s most prominent magazine of poetry,”⁸ after all—Babb wrote in turn, smoothing his bid with social niceties: “Peg and I very much enjoyed meeting your wife at Biddeford Pool.”⁹ Whatever the role such

⁸ Hayden Carruth to Ernest Brooks, Jr., Secretary of the Bollingen Foundation, 26 August 1949, Bollingen Foundation Records, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

⁹ Yale University Librarian James T. Babb to Brooks, 30 August 1949, Bollingen Foundation Records.

niceties played, Brooks moved the prize not to the floundering magazine, whose interwar glory days seemed long past, but to the academy.

When The Poetry Foundation became the most important private institutional player in the field of postwar verse fifty years later, it was by way of an individual philanthropist. Had *Poetry* editor Daryl Hine not taken the time to hand-write his note of rejection to one slush pile hopeful in 1972, who submitted her poems under the pseudonym Guernsey van Riper, Jr., it is unlikely the magazine would ever have received, in 2002, the \$100+ million beneficence of Ruth Lilly, the Prozac heiress. Such contingent personal details, then, can sometimes function as the gearshifts driving larger structural movements. For that reason, throughout the dissertation I will at times observe the labor of arts administrators, secretaries and mid-level government officials in the work of cultural production. Robert Frost is a symbol of national culture in part thanks to Academy of American Poets founder Marie Bullock using her connections at the U.S. Post Office for the issuing of his commemorative Frost stamp; Phyllis Armstrong, longtime poetry office secretary, contributed far more to the nation's first poetry recording archive than any one of its official stewards; and as the Annual Report of Gwendolyn Brooks documents, many workers arrived hours before and stayed hours after Library events. Appointing a Poet Laureate, moreover, is in practice a different administrative process each year—involving the advice of former national poets, attendees of recent Library events, and on occasion the behests of proximate federal officials—leaving behind a paper trail witness to the complex negotiations of individual interests within the bureaucratic system.

The first chapter examines the postwar origins of the key institutional players in state verse culture today: the Library of Congress, the Lilly Endowment, and *Poetry* magazine. “State Verse Scandals: Views from Yaddo, St Elizabeths, and the Library of

Congress, 1945-1956” focuses on the two major controversies of the postwar Library: the awarding of the Bollingen Prize to known fascist Ezra Pound in 1949, and the McCarthyist red-baiting of William Carlos Williams out of the Poetry Chair several years later. Both scandals defined modernist experimenters as “enemies of good, old-fashioned poetry.” This chapter narrates the suspension of the Library’s literary prize program and the relocation of literary culture from national government to the university system. While the university emerged the institutional victor in the wake of the scandals—the newly codified locus of cultural authority in the poetic field—the Library of Congress, the State Department, and wealthy independent patrons of national arts programming hardly vanished. The moment the government *lost* the prize, in fact, marks a historical turn to a new centrality of the state in the administration of culture. Subsequent chapters trace how the state and patrons remobilized their agendas through the apparatus of higher education and public arts initiatives.

My second chapter, “Inaugurating National Poetry: Robert Frost and Cold War Arts, 1956-1965” examines the U.S. federal government’s investment in the creative arts during what I argue are the pivotal years 1956-1965. I tell this story through national poet Robert Frost, focusing on two periods of his career—the early development of his poetic theory (1912-1916), and his politically active late years (1956-1962). Frost’s poetics were rooted in notions of natural speech and expressive individuality, and, after his repatriation from London to the United States in 1915, they increasingly politicized questions of voice and form. His politicized poetics became important on the national stage later in his life: the chapter describes Frost’s largely unexplored relationship with President Kennedy. Through correspondence and policy measures, they expressed a

common vision of an American “golden age of poetry and power”¹⁰ in cultural competition with the Soviet Union. I argue that the Frost-Kennedy years transformed the function of poetry in national culture. Poetry, and particularly the phonocentric narrative poem—exemplified in Frost’s recitation of “The Gift Outright” at Kennedy’s inauguration—modeled the expressive agency of the artist-citizen to provide ideological weaponry in the global Cold War, and a blueprint for later national poets in the longer project of neoliberal identity formation.

Chapter 3, “The Politics of Voice: The Workshop Poet and Poet Laureate as the Expressive Subject, 1965-1993” argues that the rise of MFA programs was central to the development of state verse culture. The recentralization of poetic production in the academy after WWII is a phenomenon that cannot be understood without reference to federal bodies, which both funded the public education system responsible for the postwar expansion and disciplinary solidification of the English Department and saw the flagship creative writing program, Paul Engle’s Iowa Writers Workshop, as a training cell in the cultural front of the Cold War. This chapter argues that the academization of poetry is a twofold legacy: the poet-critic of the English Department and the MFA workshop poet constitute two distinct cultural roles for the poet in postwar America. In response to the mainstreaming of accessible, voice-centered verse by the MFA industry and Poets Laureate, experimental successors to first- and second-generation modernists, most importantly many Language poets, moved into English Departments and other non-MFA university teaching positions by the early 1990s.

My final chapter, “Civil versus Civic Verse: National Projects of U.S. Poets Laureate, 1991-2015,” describes the solidification of the poetic project by federal bodies, market presses, private patrons and educational institutions as a nationalist cultural

¹⁰ “‘Dedication,’ Robert Frost’s Presidential Inaugural Poem, 20 January 1961: Typescript with Frost’s Holograph Script Corrections in Ink and Stewart Udall’s Holograph Clarifications in Pencil on the Last Page,” Stewart L. Udall Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

program in the aftermath of MFA culture. In 2002, pharmaceutical heiress Ruth Lilly donated \$100 million dollars to *Poetry* magazine, reconstituting the Modern Poetry Association as The Poetry Foundation and crystallizing longstanding relationships of the institutional triumvirate this dissertation shows are key to postwar poetic production: *Poetry*, the National Endowment for the Arts and the Library of Congress. The Poetry Foundation—in a far cry from its anti-populist origins during the interwar period—is now, like the NEA, “committed to a vigorous presence for poetry in our culture,” seeking to “place it before the largest possible audience.”¹¹ It examines Poets Laureate initiatives funded through this nexus, including Robert Pinsky’s Favorite Poem Project, Ted Kooser’s American Life in Poetry and Billy Collins’ Poetry 180. I argue that these “civil verse” projects model the voice of the citizen in the speech-based narrative tradition of Robert Frost. I then point to alternative models of voice in contemporary verse, reading Claudia Rankine’s *Citizen: An American Lyric* (2014) as a counter to the representation of the subject-citizen in the discourse of state verse culture.

“State Verse Culture” is the first postwar history of the national poetry office. William McGuire’s *Poetry’s Catbird Seat* provides a history of the office from 1937-1986.¹² Commissioned by the Library to occasion its fiftieth anniversary, the existence of this history itself testifies to the transformation of the office, retitled the “Poet Laureate” by an act of Congress the same year. That study thus anticipates, but does not document, the expanded cultural role of U.S. Poets Laureate in the three decades to follow. Drawing on archival research at the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress and the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, this project traces the longer history of the national poetry office from 1945 to 2015.

¹¹ “History and Mission,” The Poetry Foundation, accessed March 2, 2015, <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/foundation/history-and-mission>.

¹² William McGuire, *Poetry’s Catbird Seat: The Consultanship in Poetry in the English Language at the Library of Congress, 1937-1987* (Washington: Library of Congress, 1988).

By placing the national poet at the center of institutional cultural production, I highlight competing aesthetic and material interests of the stakeholders in the poetic field, and dispense with the two-camp model of poetic affiliations that dominates literary histories of the era.¹³ I aim not to show that the “poetry wars”—i.e. between the raw and the cooked, avant-garde poetics and establishment verse—have been fictionalized, but rather that they are more accurately narrated by the institutions that produced their debates. For example, when Billy Collins was named Poet Laureate in 2001, one group protested with the election of an “anti-laureate.” The coherence of this group and its rhetorically civic gesture was made possible through the POETICS listserv and institutional support of the University of Buffalo. One methodological insistence, then, and the argument of the dissertation, is that *all* verse is establishment verse, even while complex position-taking occurs within and between multiply interested establishments. This dissertation contributes to a growing body of institutional and sociological approaches to U.S. literary production in the postwar era. Among this scholarship, critics like Alan Golding, Jed Rasula, and Christopher Beach focus on poetic production specifically; others including Jim English and Mark McGurl include poetry in fiction-dominated postwar literary histories.¹⁴ All describe the disassembly of the literary professional establishment and the absorption of literary production by the academy after WWII. This scholarship points to both the new centralizing force of the higher

¹³ Consider, for example, the legacy of dueling anthologies since 1960, when Donald Allen’s *New American Poetry* championed the “new avant-garde” against the traditional verse of mainstream collections such as Hall & Pack’s *New Poets of England and America* (1957). Even recent critical anthologies like *American Hybrid: A Norton Anthology of New Poetry* (2009) retain this division, here through the very promise to hybridize the two spheres of American postwar poetry.

¹⁴ Much of this literature follows the work of Eagleton, Culler, Fish, and Tompkins, where an institutional approach to literary study disrupts notions of literary individuation, e.g. intrinsic value and authorial genius. This dissertation follows studies that retain the notion of individual agency *within* the institution. Lawrence Buell, for example, holds that “at the heart of the Houghton Mifflin institutional juggernaut, the discretionary role of the (well-placed) individual actor was crucial” in the canonization of Thoreau, providing an institutional account of canon formation where individuals act not as passive functionaries but agentive and ideologically endowed actors. Buell, “Henry Thoreau Enters the American Canon” in *New Essays on Walden*, ed. Robert F. Sayre (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 37-8.

education industry, as well as to its proliferative effects and the social and formal diversification of poetic production in the nation writ large. Its narrative is useful, but by looking only at 1) the pre-1950 literary establishment of nationally circulated magazines, large trade presses and publishing houses, or 2) institutions of higher education, these studies also rewrite the opposition between establishment and avant-garde poetic production. While the dawn of what McGurl calls the creative writing “program era” is historically concurrent with Michael Davidson’s sociologically-inflected analysis of 1970s Bay Area poetries, for example, these two histories fail to interact, with no players, individual or institutional, in common.

This disjuncture is due in part to the divide between poetics criticism and literary sociologies—the former privileging one or several writing constituencies, the latter working from market-driven definitions of the center. Moreover, both narrate writers’ bids for patronage or independence—typically sought through academic or literary market institutions—in ways that often occlude the roles of private sponsorship and especially of state interest. For this project, state interest and cooperation with grant foundations and individual patrons are crucial to understanding postwar poetic production.

By highlighting the role of the state, this dissertation more fully contextualizes the role of institutions of higher education in the U.S. literary project after WWII. Booming university enrollments, the expansion of English Departments, and burgeoning creative writing degree-programs dominated mainstream postwar poetic production. While this dissertation does not oppose this persuasive and primary account of literary production of the era,¹⁵ it introduces new stakeholders to the field. Not only has criticism in cultural poetics forgotten Poets Laureate, but the Library of Congress has been

¹⁵ This study especially follows D.G. Myers, *The Elephants Teach: Creative Writing Since 1880* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006) and Mark McGurl, *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

disregarded. By introducing players operating outside the university system itself, I extend existing accounts of how the university laid claim to postwar literary production. Foregrounding the negotiation of aesthetic and material interests at the national center—represented through the lens of the national poetry office—this dissertation views the state as a central pivot between the institutional infrastructure of literary professionalism on the one hand and of higher education on the other.

By framing the poetry office as the national center, I attend to what Robert von Hallberg calls “centrist poetry,” or what Karl Shapiro—who took over editorship of *Poetry* after Carruth—called “culture poetry.”¹⁶ While I borrow Pierre Bourdieu’s language of “field” and “players,” my view rejects the model of the artist as necessarily an adversary to the culture at large. Placing the poet at the intersection of multiple social fields and modes of cultural capital is to insist that these intersections determine the whole of the poetic field as well: the poet in postwar American culture, far from belonging to an isolated domain where capital operates by the inverted or unique “rules of art,” is a multiply invested figure produced by and acting on competing interests. Rather than writing in a distinct cultural sphere as one type of professional work, the institutional commitments of Poets Laureate—and indeed the postwar poet—have required a politics of assimilation. Unfortunately, most critical treatments of poets at the center also advocate, as does von Hallberg, an Arnoldian position where the best poets occupy “themselves with the center of ideas in their time.” This is not an advocacy project, examining instead how postwar Poets Laureate performed strategically, and sometimes ambivalently, to gain “access to the cultural authority of a centralized culture.”¹⁷ Moreover, I am not principally concerned with finger-pointing where recent projects of U.S. Poets Laureate channel institutional agendas, i.e. that the Lilly-funded

¹⁶ Robert von Hallberg, *American Poetry and Culture, 1945-1980* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 2.

¹⁷ von Hallberg, *American Poetry and Culture*, 4.

Poetry Foundation signals “the consumerization of poetry,” as poet-critic Carol Muske-Dukes suggests, or like Stephen Yenser that the projects are “funded by drug money—literally—Lilly pharmaceutical!”¹⁸

Instead, the dissertation describes how the poetic field itself has articulated the problem, namely as one of representative voice. “Voice” has different entailments in different contexts. For instance, the Poet Laureate who elevates individualism to a heroic and transcendent status, much like what Language poets called “the dominant “self” (or workshop “I”)” of the academy, serves as the “vehicle for an aesthetic project in which the specifics of experience dissolve into the pseudo-intimacy of an overarching authorial ‘voice,’”¹⁹ in this case the voice of the model citizen. Robert Pinsky’s Favorite Poem Project (Poet Laureate 1997-2000), which instructs reader-citizens to recite a favorite poem for the national archive, inherits the national poetics with the longest shadow: Robert Frost’s phonocentric “ethics of personal and political sovereignty.”²⁰ Where civil verse poets like Frost, and as von Hallberg suggests, Laureates Pinsky, Hass and Glück, demonstrate the “flexibility, exactness, and vitality of standard American English as an artistic medium,” it follows for citizens that “if gorgeous or acute art can be made in this medium, one may have faith that just legislation, judicious litigation, and progressive social policy can also be crafted from this general social position.”²¹ These civil verse poets naturalize dominant national narratives and show that political agency is available to citizens who articulate themselves through legible identity positions. In this way, national poetry projects participate convincingly in the neoliberal state project.²²

¹⁸ Qtd. in Dana Goodyear, “The Moneyed Muse,” *The New Yorker*, February 19, 2007.

¹⁹ Ron Silliman, Carla Harryman, Lyn Hejinian, Steve Benson, Bob Perelman, and Barrett Watten, “Aesthetic Tendency and the Politics of Poetry: A Manifesto,” *Social Text* 19/20 (Autumn 1988), 265.

²⁰ Tyler Hoffman, *Robert Frost and the Politics of Poetry* (Hanover: Middlebury College Press, 2001), 44.

²¹ von Hallberg, *Lyric Powers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 90.

²² Yet even the Language poets, who posted the most coherent challenge to the representative voice of the national poetry project during the age of identity politics, leave difficulties

By understanding the history of state verse culture, we can better evaluate the uses of poetry in classrooms and public life. The Poet Laureate is not a merely symbolic position, but an institutional hub that represents the investments of taxpayer dollars, wealthy corporations, and public schools. Especially as national poetry projects are increasingly undertaken in K-12 public schools, my hope is that showing the Cold War legacy of national poetry projects and the discourse of state verse culture will help educators be mindful of the role poetry has in structuring conceptions of self, citizenship and national belonging.

unresolved. Their own movement-defining manifestos—as well as most recent literary-critical narratives of avant-garde practice—assert their “marginalization” in the American canon, staging a conflict between the institutional norm and the utopian open text. The practical transparency of voice in these narratives yields a fascinating aesthetic inconsistency, and testament to the pervasiveness of identity-based politics in the 1980s. Even the most radical poetics—where “the self as the central and final term of creative practice is being challenged and exploded”—adopts a visible, legible subject position to represent political demands. “Aesthetic Tendency and the Politics of Poetry: A Manifesto,” 263.

CHAPTER 1

State Verse Scandals:

Views from Yaddo, St Elizabeths, and the Library of Congress,

1945-1956

1. The Capitol and The Colony

On the Inauguration Day of President Truman in 1949, Elizabeth Bishop wrote to Robert Lowell about an employment opportunity. “Dearest Cal,” she scrawled from her remote hatch cabin in Key West, “If I get the Washington job—I don’t *have* necessarily to give a lot of “readings” do I? . . . I’ve always felt that I’ve written poetry more by *not* writing it than writing it, and now this Library business makes me really feel like the ‘poet by default.’”²³ Lowell had first written to Bishop about “this Library business” a month earlier, encouraging her to take up his former post as Consultant in Poetry at the Library of Congress—especially having so far failed to “lure you [Bishop] to Yaddo,” the artists’ colony where he then resided. As a former Consultant, Lowell sat on the committee of nomination for the post, the Fellows in American Letters at the Library, and had maneuvered on Bishop’s behalf²⁴—“you will be the next consultant unless you decline. You’d better keep this to yourself. The details of the selection are intriguing, but you’ve got to come here to hear them,” he wrote on December 18. “You see what pressure I’m putting on you.”²⁵ Lowell then preempted the official offer to Bishop—“on its way through the Library machinery to you”—with a personal appeal:

²³ Bishop to Lowell, 21 January 1949 in Thomas Travisano and Saskia Hamilton, eds., *Words in Air: The Complete Correspondence Between Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2008), 81-2 (70). Hereafter *WIA*.

²⁴ Other possibilities discussed at the November 19 meeting included Marianne Moore, Randall Jarrell, Delmore Schwartz, and Richard Eberhart. William McGuire Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

²⁵ Lowell to Bishop, 18 December 1948, *WIA* 70 (63). Bishop was second in line for the job after her mentor Marianne Moore. Bishop was invited when Moore refused. “Miss Moore has written

I don't want to force advice on you—one's dear friends can be so obtuse that way; but I think you would enjoy it. The salary is \$5700. You work five days a week and more or less have to be there; but what you actually have to do for the Library takes no more than 2 days. . . The duties are simple and untechnical—nothing you couldn't do better than I, except the meeting (you couldn't be more nervous than [current Consultant] Léonie). . .²⁶

"Library machinery" moved slowly to Key West, and Bishop worried during the time lag between private and institutional correspondence. By Inauguration Day she had considered and reconsidered Lowell's offer—"first I felt a little over-come and inclined to write you a frantic 'no,' but after having thought about it for a day or two I've concluded that it is something I *could* do (there isn't much, heavens knows)"—but having not heard from Washington, "of course I suspect that everyone has changed his mind & I am not breathing any of this to anyone and if they have changed their minds I hope you're not going to be embarrassed, etc."²⁷ Until "the thing is certain one way or another," Bishop would look into an alternative residency: "I think I'll write to Mrs. Ames [the director of Yaddo artists' colony] right now and ask about July."²⁸ Since they had met a year and a half earlier, Lowell alternately pestered Bishop about "Washington" and "Yaddo." During his 1947-8 term as Consultant, he wrote for her to visit and record for the new Archive of Recorded Poetry and Literature; now, to assume the Consultant post herself; and throughout to visit or apply for residency at Yaddo artists' colony in Saratoga Springs, New York. ("Now my refrain & ending from now on: / Do come to Yaddo next summer, / I miss you, / Cal.")²⁹ "I still haven't heard from Washington," Bishop wrote Lowell two weeks later, "[b]ut I did hear from Mrs. Ames and am hastening to fill out the forms. She says graciously that she thinks I need not send any manuscripts."³⁰

that 'she can't in conscience digress [from her current translation project],' as Léonie Adams quoted to Lowell, who in turn quoted Adams' Moore to Bishop, 14 January 1949, *WIA* 79 (69).

²⁶ Lowell to Bishop, 14 January 1949, *WIA* 79 (69).

²⁷ "They can't 'change their minds,' poor souls! Dr. Evans has to OK our choice, but he always does. Nor can we re-consider." Lowell to Bishop, 24 January 1949, *WIA* 83 (71).

²⁸ January 21, 1949, *WIA* 82 (70).

²⁹ December 24, 1948, *WIA* 72 (65).

³⁰ January 31, 1949, *WIA* 84-5 (72).

Before Bishop could secure either residency, scandals erupted at both the Capitol and the colony. She would not hear from Lowell, the Library, or Elizabeth Ames for months. At the same Fellows meeting at which Lowell had voted to nominate Bishop as Consultant, he had voted to select the winner of a new book award. Sponsored by the Paul Mellon Endowment and selected by the Fellows, the Bollingen Prize for the Best American Poetry of 1948 was the first-ever federal government-issued prize in literature. On February 20, the Library of Congress announced that the prize-winner was Ezra Pound—a poet infamously arrested for pro-fascist and anti-Semitic radio broadcasting in Italy during the war, tried for high treason three years earlier, and incarcerated a few miles away from the Library at St Elizabeths state psychiatric hospital. The \$1000 purse honored *The Pisan Cantos*, partially composed in a detention camp north of Pisa where Pound was held in 1943: “Pound, in Mental Clinic, Wins Prize for Poetry Penned in Treason Cell,” ran *The New York Times* headline.³¹

Since casting votes for Bishop and Pound in Washington, Lowell had retreated to Yaddo, working on *The Mills of the Kavanaghs* in his room above the driveway. He had also been writing back and forth with the Fellows, crafting a press release addendum defending the Bollingen Prize decision as proof that “poetry doesn’t have to pass a political test,” and thus an affirmation of “the validity of that objective perception of value on which any civilized society must rest.”³² The same week the press release was published, Lowell repeated this liberal defense of aesthetic autonomy—now in a hearing accusing Yaddo colony director Elizabeth Ames of sheltering communists. Lowell testified to the Yaddo board that Ames was “deeply and mysteriously involved in the political activities” of journalist Agnes Smedley, a recent colony resident and an accused

³¹ “Pound, in Mental Clinic, Wins Prize For Poetry Penned in Treason Cell: PRIZE VOTED POUND FOR PRISON POETRY,” *The New York Times*, February 20, 1949.

³² “The Pisan Cantos Wins for Ezra Pound First Award of Bollingen Prize in Poetry,” Library of Congress Press Release No. 542, February 20, 1949.

Soviet spy.³³ While poetry need not pass a political test, the same was not true of journalism. Lowell had read Smedley's work and judged it lacked "literary merit"—hence it deserved no ideological immunity. Yaddo was an artists-only political safehouse: "Would any of you object to the presence of a Communist here per se if he were a *genuine artist*?" Lowell asked the board. Lowell's sanctuary in remote upstate New York literalized the ideal of aesthetic inviolability, a quarantine against the Cold War politics of the outside world. In a letter to Pound, Lowell would call Yaddo "St Elizabeths without the bars."³⁴

Lowell would leave Yaddo after the trial in the midst of a manic break: he wrote his next letter to Bishop from Baldpate Hospital. Bishop meanwhile received an official invitation to serve as Consultant from Librarian of Congress Luther Evans in mid-April.³⁵ She would also hear back from Elizabeth Ames—the charges against her had been dismissed—and spend the summer of 1949 at Yaddo before moving to Washington in September.

As Middle Generation poets who served as Consultants in Poetry to the Library of Congress in the years immediately following World War II, Robert Lowell (1947-8) and Elizabeth Bishop (1949-50) offer a "view of the Capitol" that is both gripped with scandal and bureaucratic routine. In her Annual Report to the Librarian of Congress from the Chair of Poetry 1949-1950, Bishop itemizes the bureaucratic labor of "earning a living by poetry" for the state:

³³ Lowell to the Yaddo Board, 26 February 1949. On February 11, 1949, *The New York Times* reported that according to U.S. Army intelligence, former Yaddo writer-in-resident Agnes Smedley was in league with a Soviet spy ring. Three days later, FBI investigators arrived in Saratoga Springs. See Micki McGee, ed., *Yaddo: Making American Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); Hugh Stevens, "Confession, Autobiography and Resistance: Robert Lowell and the Politics of Privacy" in *American Cold War Culture*, ed. Douglas Field (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005); Carla Blumenkranz, "'Deeply and Mysteriously Implicated': Communist sympathies, FBI informants, and Robert Lowell at Yaddo" in *Poetry*, December 18, 2006.

³⁴ Qtd. in Paul Mariani, *Lost Puritan: A Life of Robert Lowell* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), 175.

³⁵ Luther Evans to Bishop, 19 April 1949, William McGuire Papers.

1946 general telephone calls
 1071 administrative calls
 88 reference replies by letter
 684 routine letters
 445 visitors seen and talked to
 120 readers given assistance. . .

A good many visitors brought in manuscripts and some were received by mail, and I have given suggestions and criticism to approximately twenty-five amateur poets. (I regret to say, however, that I have made no discoveries of new poetic talent whatever.)³⁶

Lowell and Bishop took office in a moment of federal government solidification³⁷ and expansion in spheres of cultural production. Although technically privately endowed, Lowell's salary, for example, reflected the 14% increase applied to all government employee salaries per congressional vote that year. The "view of the Capitol from the Library of Congress," to take the title of a poem Bishop wrote from her desk at the Library, is a historical view of postwar poetic production that recognizes the central role of the state. At the same time, Lowell and Bishop's "view of the Capitol" pans out to depict a rapidly widening field of state interest. In 1950, for example, the State Department asked Bishop to survey the "current national interest in poetry; the number of poetry magazines, poetry clubs, fellowships and awards."³⁸ The Consultant's view is that of a poet within the establishment—that is, within the central cultural institutions that supported postwar American poetry.³⁹ The national poet's small office in the Jefferson Building not only intersected with federal bodies—the legislature, the State Department—but also with the university system, literary trade institutions, private

³⁶ Elizabeth Bishop, "Annual Report to the Librarian of Congress from the Chair of Poetry 1949-1950," William McGuire Papers.

³⁷ The sheer number of government employees increased from 953,891 in 1939 to almost 3 million shortly after the war, for example; Pentagon expenditures quadrupled between 1948 and 1953. Field, *American Cold War Culture*, 5.

³⁸ "We would be grateful if you could supply us with the information we need or could suggest possible sources where it is obtainable." Tadd Fisher to Bishop, "Department of State Information Request: Survey of National Interest in American Poetry," August 17, 1950, William McGuire Papers.

³⁹ "With what I've saved from the Library and Yaddo and my Guggenheim, I can easily last two years before I have to think of teaching," Lowell wrote to the Tates after his year in Washington. Qtd. in William McGuire, *Poetry's Catbird Seat*, 107.

patrons and their trustees, and even seemingly remote sites of literary production like the artists' colony and the psychiatric hospital.

The scandals that erupted at the postwar Library of Congress illuminate its relationship with these players. Most crucially, the Bollingen Award shows the role of patrons in connecting the state with the literary establishment (*Poetry* magazine) and university system (Yale University). This chapter narrates, through a series of losses—the loss of the right to give prizes, of the Fellows, and of a Consultant from 1952-6 at the Library; and the loss of funding and editorial staff at *Poetry*—the relocation of poetic culture to the university system in the years after WWII.

2. The Bollingen Affair

The Bollingen Foundation was a reliable patron of the Library of Congress in the immediate postwar years, supporting the Archive of Recorded Poetry and Literature, the first national poetry sound archive. Paul and Mary Conover Mellon established the Foundation in 1945 principally to circulate the work of Carl Jung in the United States, subsidizing The Bollingen Series of translations published by Pantheon Books in New York.⁴⁰ Huntington Cairns, a Washington lawyer, secretary-treasurer of the National Gallery of Art, and a trustee of the new Foundation, rapidly led Mellon to issue two outside grants—one to the Library of Congress to support poetry recordings, and the other to the Modern Poetry Association of Chicago to support the publication of *Poetry* magazine. Former Consultant Allen Tate had met Cairns as a colleague on a radio

⁴⁰ Paul Mellon's wife, Mary Conover Mellon, named the Foundation for Carl Jung's country retreat, Bollingen Tower, in the eponymous Swiss village. Princeton University Press assumed the series in 1969, and today cites Mellon's vision for the now over 250-volume collection: "Jung might be considered the central core, the binding factor, not only of the Foundations' general direction but also of the ultimate intellectual temper of Bollingen Series as a whole." Mellon qtd. in "Bollingen Series (General)," Princeton University Press, accessed November 20, 2012, [http://press.princeton.edu/catalogs/series/bollingen-series-\(general\).html](http://press.princeton.edu/catalogs/series/bollingen-series-(general).html).

program, “Invitation to Learning,” and put Cairns in touch with Librarian of Congress Luther Evans.

“Mary and I have decided that the Library of Congress record project will be excellent for the Bollingen Foundation,” Paul Mellon wrote to Cairns in January 1946. “We wonder if we may add two names to their proposed list...”⁴¹ Only a month after the Foundation was officially established, the Trustees granted \$10,500 for the current Consultant, Louise Bogan, to prepare “five albums of twenty-five 78 r.p.m. records of twentieth century poetry in English.”⁴² Mellon’s proactive approach to Endowment projects is clear in his correspondence with Cairns. The Mellon-Cairns correspondence testifies to the powerful function of the patron as a cultural gatekeeper, directing the flow of contemporary (“twentieth century”) poetic production and preserving its canonical record in the national library. Most obviously, Mellon monitored and appended names to the Library’s recording catalogue, as in his letter to Cairns. More significantly than the patron’s power to include or exclude specific poets, i.e., to determine the *content* of the canon, though, was the power to determine the *form* of the canon. Mellon funded the preservation of voice: the first audio canon in U.S. poetry.⁴³ The Library of Congress Archive of Recorded Poetry and Literature aestheticized the individual speech act, moreover, while the heightened internationalism of the post-war period animated spoken American English as a tortured object of national identity.

The Mellon-Cairns correspondence also testifies to the powerful function of the administrator as a cultural gatekeeper. The Bollingen Foundation renewed the \$10,500 recording grant in 1947; the next year, Tate approached Cairns with another proposition. Tate had discussed establishing a national poetry prize at a meeting with the Fellows in

⁴¹ Mellon to Huntington Cairns, January 1946, Bollingen Foundation Records.

⁴² Qtd. in McGuire, *Poetry’s Catbird Seat*, 92-3.

⁴³ The Woodberry Poetry Room at Harvard University developed a collection in the 1930s, but early collaborative recordings made in conjunction with the British Council. The recordings did not project a national archive, as did the Library, which partnered with NBC to release high-production quality tapes for public consumption.

American Letters of the Library of Congress, a body he formed during his tenure as Consultant, constituted by former Consultants and Consultant-nominated literary advisors.⁴⁴ Poetry Office Secretary Phyllis Armstrong's meeting notes indicate that Willard Thorp proposed the idea of the prize, and the Fellows appointed Tate and Auden to sound out the Bollingen Foundation.⁴⁵ As Tate ultimately approached the grantor, literary histories⁴⁶ recall the prize as exclusively his enterprise. Jed Rasula writes that "[t]he decision to award a prize in poetry was made possible by the Bollingen Foundation, but the initiative was Tate's."⁴⁷ Phyllis Armstrong's dutiful minutes complicate this individualizing narrative. Reading the notes of administrators, and not only the letters of literary figures, here serves importantly—not to illuminate Willard Thorp in the stead of Tate as a key mover—but as a record of the fundamentally collaborative nature of the venture. To call the prize "Tate's initiative" obscures the precipitating conversation between Thorp, Tate, and other Fellows; and to say the prize was "made possible by the Bollingen Foundation" obscures the intermediary role of cultural administrators like Huntington Cairns, through whom Tate accessed the Mellon Endowment. Cairns proved an instrumental site of capital convergence in the poetry world in the post-war years. Several months before pitching the prize proposal to the Board of Trustees, he mobilized the Bollingen Foundation to help subsidize an international literary criticism symposium at Johns Hopkins University, where Allen Tate, John Crowe Ransom, and R.P. Blakmur lectured in the spring. In the course of this chapter, Cairns acts as a middleman between Paul Mellon and the Bollingen Foundation, the Library of Congress, *Poetry* magazine, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), Johns Hopkins and Yale—magnetizing diverse interests to support New Critical programming.

⁴⁴ The first organizational meetings were held on May 26-27, 1944. Bollingen Foundation Records.

⁴⁵ January 23, 1948. Bollingen Foundation Records.

⁴⁶ See Jed Rasula's account in *The American Poetry Wax Museum: Reality Effects, 1940-1990* (Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English, 1995), 101-2.

⁴⁷ Rasula, *The American Poetry Wax Museum*, 102.

The Trustees approved Cairns' proposal, and endowed \$1,000 to honor "the best book of verse published during the previous calendar year by an American author and citizen" for the next ten years. The Fellows would act as the jury of selection.⁴⁸ In 1948, the first award year, the Fellows composed fourteen members: current Consultant Léonie Adams; previous Consultants Allen Tate (1943-1944), Robert Penn Warren (1944-1945), Louise Bogan (1945-1946), Karl Shapiro (1946-1947), and Robert Lowell (1947-1948); Conrad Aiken, W.H. Auden, Katherine Garrison Chapin, T.S. Eliot, Theodore Spencer, Willard Thorp, Paul Green, and Katherine Anne Porter.

The Fellows set nominations for the Bollingen Prize during meetings on November 19 and 20, 1948. Verner Clapp, Acting Librarian of Congress for Luther Evans, instructed the Fellows on the 19th not "to be deflected by political considerations or other questions of expediency from a decision rendered strictly in terms of literary merit."⁴⁹ When the Fellows met again the next day, the prize nominations cohered around four contenders: Pound's *The Pisan Cantos*, Williams' *Paterson II*, Jarrell's *Losses*, and Muriel Rukeyser's *The Green Wave*. In a preliminary ballot, eight votes were cast for Pound and two for Williams; two members abstained and two were absent.⁵⁰ As more eligible poetry collections would be released in 1948, and the Fellows would not meet again until February, when the prize would be announced, Lowell, Karl Shapiro and Léonie Adams formed a committee for the procedure of the official vote by mail. In the next months, Lowell, Shapiro and Adams exchanged a flurry of letters with Tate and with Librarian of Congress Luther Evans.

⁴⁸ If a citizen from another country, the poet had to be born in the United States. He or she also could not have been a Fellow in American Letters, which would serve as the Committee of Award, in the previous two years: thus *Paterson* was considered—Léonie Adams adding it to the list of eligible nominations—only after Williams withdrew his intention to serve as Consultant. Williams was offered a position as a Fellow in December 1948, after the Fellows' ballot from the November meetings ran overwhelmingly in favor of *The Pisan Cantos*.

⁴⁹ Bollingen Foundation Records.

⁵⁰ It is unclear in archival documentation if this vote was recorded at the first (November 19) or second meeting. Bollingen Foundation Records.

Karl Shapiro, whose *Trial of a Poet* (1947) had taken Pound to court the year before with an ambivalent verdict, voted for *The Pisan Cantos* at the meeting in November, but “wrestl[ed] with his soul” through the next months. He wrote to Evans suggesting that the first Bollingen should be delayed a year, and the “highly compromising business of Pound be forgotten.” His plea ignored, Shapiro changed his vote in favor of Williams’ *Paterson* in late January. Tate tried to convince Shapiro to change his vote another time: “I simply don’t think that your point of view is sufficiently searching,” he argued. The objective critic necessarily divorces literary merit from person and politics: “I am not pro-Pound...I voted for the *Pisan Cantos* because it was the best book available.”⁵¹ When Shapiro did not relent, Tate held him to his ambivalence: “these public statements of yours are inconsistent with the views expressed [earlier & in letters]...Shall I accuse you of dishonesty?” Save Katherine Garrison Chapin, the wife of Attorney General Francis Biddle, who had indicted Pound for high treason in 1943, Shapiro was the lone dissenter. Shapiro would later declare that his “dissent from dissent” caused “the literary and cultural ‘Establishment’ [to] tur[n] its back on him.”⁵² In *Reports of My Death*, the second volume of his autobiography, Shapiro would maintain that his vote against Pound “cost him his standing among fellow poets, marking him forever as ‘just another refuser’ and a Jew.”⁵³

In fact Shapiro was not entirely alone in “great distress” and “confusion”⁵⁴ prior to the award announcement. In its wake, the Fellows unilaterally banded behind Tate as a spokesperson in the press, but an untitled memorandum in the archives records a late

⁵¹ Qtd. in McGuire, *Poetry’s Catbird Seat*, 112-3. Shapiro would not follow the liberal aesthetic of Tate’s “objective critic,” reasoning in *The Partisan Review*: “I am a Jew and I cannot honor anti-Semites”; and that Pound’s “moral and political philosophy ultimately vitiates the Cantos and lowers the literary quality of the work.” “The Question of the Pound Award,” May 1949, 518-9.

⁵² Andrew Gross, “Liberalism and Lyricism, or Karl Shapiro’s Elegy for Identity,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 34:3 (Spring 2011), 2. See Shapiro, *Reports of My Death* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 1990), 43.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ “I simply observe that you are in great distress, and the result is confusion.” Tate to Shapiro, qtd. in McGuire, *Poetry’s Catbird Seat*, 113.

ballot of seven votes for Pound (Adams, Lowell, Bogan, Tate, Eliot, Spencer, and Auden), four for Williams (Shapiro, Aiken, Chapin, and Thorp), with three Fellows not voting or absent (Warren, Green, Porter). Warren and Thorp, when interviewed decades later, could only recall voting for Pound.⁵⁵ These acts of faulty memory are telling: in the wake of the controversy, Pound would represent an aesthetic position for which Thorp and Warren stood. If they had not voted for *The Pisan Cantos*, the book, by private ballot, they voted for *The Pisan Cantos*, the symbol, after its public reading.

The final ballot was cast by mail in February: ten for Pound, two for Williams, one abstention (Paul Green).⁵⁶ “The Fellows [were] aware that objections may be made to awarding a prize to a man situated as is Mr. Pound,” and Tate, at the request of special committee members Lowell, Shapiro and Adams, drafted the statement attached to Library’s February 20 press release:⁵⁷

In their [the Fellows] view, however, the possibility of such objection did not alter the responsibility assumed by the Jury of Selection. This was to make a choice for the award among the eligible books, provided any one merited such recognition, according to the stated terms of the Bollingen Prize. To permit other considerations than that of poetic achievement to sway the decision would destroy the significance of the award and would in principle deny the validity of that objective perception of value on which any civilized society must rest.⁵⁸

Many press responses⁵⁹ echoed the sentiments of the Fellows’ statement: “This emphasis on an objective criterion of beauty and excellence, akin to belief in an objective truth, is

⁵⁵ Given what McGuire calls “profuse an often confusing convolutum of letters among the Fellows” in November 1948-February 1949, “the documentation to be found in the Library archives is not altogether clear” (*Poetry’s Catbird Seat*, 113). I agree.

⁵⁶ Theodore Spencer had passed away several weeks before, but as he had nominated *The Pisan Cantos* in November his vote counted for Pound.

⁵⁷ Rasula writes that the Fellows’ collectively signed rebuttal to *The Saturday Review* “sounds uncannily like the voice of Tate” (*American Poetry Wax Museum*, 106). His authorship is likely considering the special committee’s request that he write the original press release addendum; it is also implied in MacLeish’s exhortations to Tate on the eve of the statement’s publication in a letter of October 15, discussed in more depth shortly. Formally, the co-signatories were Adams, Bogan, Shapiro and Thorp.

⁵⁸ “The Pisan Cantos Wins for Ezra Pound First Award of Bollingen Prize in Poetry,” Library of Congress Press Release No. 542, February 20, 1949.

⁵⁹ See Al Filreis, *Counter-revolution of the Word: The Conservative Attack on Modern Poetry, 1945-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008) and Rasula for more comprehensive catalogues of “pro-Pound,” “anti-Pound,” or neutral publications. This chapter’s

fundamental to a free and rational society,” accorded one editorial in the *New York Herald Tribune*. Macdonald in *Politics* called the Bollingen Prize decision “the brightest political act in a dark period.” Meanwhile, a columnist in the *Daily Worker* declared a cabal in the United States Government: “the anti-Semites Eliot and Pound...giant Mellon industrial and financial interests.”⁶⁰ Robert Frost privately called the prize “an unendurable outrage,” the press release its “wild manifesto”:

In the list of names I saw at once the Chapin lady at the head...as Mrs. Francis Biddle, the wife of the former Attorney General the explanation of why Ezra had been protected by the New Deal from being tried for treason like poor friendless Axis Sally...I suppose Louise Bogan wrote the manifesto of the wild party. Well if her logic carries through it will say that we should admire Ezra for being a great poet in spite of being a great traitor, so we must condemn him for [being] a great traitor in spite of his being a great poet.⁶¹

Protests flooded the Library mail: “Why do we have such people as...the present Librarian of Congress in tax-paid Government positions?” demanded the Georgia superintendent of schools; the Contemporary Writers League wrote urging the Library to rescind “the most serious disgrace to American poetry.”⁶² The President of the Poetry Society of America, Robert Hillyer, reanimated headlines in an inflammatory double-issue segment for *The Saturday Review of Literature* in June. Hillyer printed excerpts from *The Pisan Cantos* and *The Waste Land*, conducting exposé close readings that revealed an institutional conspiracy: the Library of the Congress was linked to the Bollingen Foundation, which “through the generosity of Paul Mellon...supports the Pantheon Press, a publishing house which issues many outpourings of the new estheticism, the literary cult to whom T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound are gods,” and moreover

interest in the Bollingen Affair, however, is how it altered the relationship of the Library, *Poetry* magazine and their common patron, resulting in an administrative and aesthetic regime change at both institutions.

⁶⁰ Bollingen Foundation Records.

⁶¹ Frost in a memorandum to his secretary, Kay Morrison, qtd. in McGuire, *Poetry's Catbird Seat*, 115. Frost's reaction to the award is not well-known, as he would later famously assist in Pound's release. As Chapter 2 will discuss, Pound's release was symbolic in a new state investment in the arts to project a free and rational society during the Cold War.

⁶² Bollingen Foundation Records.

to Mellon's favored Jung—and Jung's "services to the Nazi cause."⁶³ On the one hand, Hillyer's claims were patently sensationalist, intended to attract mass audiences and sell papers. On the other, the Library took him seriously: Librarian of Congress Evans submitted an official reply printed in the next issue,⁶⁴ and the Library issued a press release on August 11th. Copies were sent by special delivery to *The Saturday Review*, and when the editors declined to reprint the statement, the Fellows revised it to a 72-page "counterattack." The Modern Poetry Association, the publisher of *Poetry* magazine, would print this as *The Case Against The Saturday Review of Literature*, aligning against Hillyer's Poetry Society of America as the steadfast commons of "honest American"⁶⁵ literary populism.

In the wake of the Bollingen Prize, New Criticism as an identifiable program acquired national prominence. Hillyer had previously attacked Eliot and Pound, but in *The Saturday Review* pieces, the poets serve as exemplars of the "new aestheticism" considered as an institutionally-located dogma. The "new aesthetes" achieved "where Oscar Wilde had failed," institutionalizing the ideology of art-for-art's-sake, or aesthetic autonomy, within the Library of Congress as well as "the Ivory Tower." For *The Saturday Review*'s editorial board and readership, the fact that the Fellows issued the prize decision under the auspices of the federal government—and not the private sphere of "the Ivory Tower"—was at the heart of the scandal. "[E]ven if all political aspects, pro and con, are brushed aside, the fact remains that 'The Pisan Cantos,' for the most part, seem to us to be less poetry than a series of word games and hidden allusions," wrote Norman Cousins and Harrison Smith for the editorial board, "hardly deserving of an

⁶³ Robert Hillyer, "Treason's Strange Fruit: The Case of Ezra Pound and the Bollingen Award" and "Poetry's New Priesthood," *The Saturday Review of Literature*, June 11 and 18, 1949.

⁶⁴ "A Letter from the Librarian of Congress," *SRL*, July 2, 1949, 20-1.

⁶⁵ Hillyer writes as president of the PSA, and yokes this affiliation to the "common man" and "common morality" ("Poetry's New Priesthood") of the American nation: "it is by my authority as a citizen that I protest!" "A terrible thing has been done in the name of my Library of Congress!" "Treason's Strange Fruit," *SRL*, 9.

award bearing the name of the United States Library of Congress.”⁶⁶ Yet the most “fundamental question” was the role of the government in the arts:

Government prizes do not fit in too well with democratic ideology, and the early laws of this country specifically discouraged donations to Government agencies by private individuals or organizations. Totalitarian states specialize in prizes...For a democracy, however, the danger, made explicit in this case, is that a single school might use the prestige of the Government for advancing its own idiom.⁶⁷

The Bollingen Prize was the first and last prize awarded by the U.S. government. Congressman James Patterson entered the articles and the Library’s responses into the Congressional Record on July 19, fulminating before the House: “Should we encourage the activities in literature of moral lepers?” Congressman Jacob K. Javits ordered an investigation of the Fellows’ award decision. Two months after *The Saturday Review* stormcloud, the Congressional Joint Committee on the Library of Congress resolved it was “bad policy for the government to give prizes and awards, especially in matters of taste.”⁶⁸ The Joint Committee would not approve the Library’s awarding of prizes for another forty years. In keeping with the congressional resolution, passed August 19, 1949, the Library also discontinued the Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Medal for eminent services to chamber music as well as three prizes endowing national exhibitions of prints.

In the wake of the prize’s discontinuation, the Library wanted to cleanse itself of the scandal associated with the Bollingen Prize name, but also to maintain rapport with the Bollingen Foundation as a patron. To trace the subsequent negotiations around the temporarily homeless purse—to trace the path of material capital, linked warily to its symbolic capital as a prize—is to trace the institutional relocation of poetic prestige in the years immediately following WWII.

⁶⁶ Cousins and Smith, “Editor’s Note,” *SRL*, June 18, 1949, 7.

⁶⁷ Cousins and Smith, “More on Pound,” *SRL*, July 30, 1949, 22.

⁶⁸ The committee’s chairman, Senator Theodore F. Green, of Rhode Island, in an announcement to the press, qtd. in McGuire, *Poetry’s Catbird Seat*, 121.

3. *Poetry* versus Yale

Poetry magazine had been in dire straits since the end of the war.⁶⁹ As we know, the Bollingen Foundation began supporting both the Library of Congress and *Poetry* in 1946.⁷⁰ Huntington Cairns facilitated both grants. In order to secure the Trustees' support of *Poetry*, as the secretary-treasurer at the National Museum of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Cairns helped the magazine acquire federal government tax-exemption. Correspondence among Huntington Cairns, Paul Mellon, *Poetry* magazine, and the IRS show how *Poetry* relied on Cairns' internal help in Washington. Then *Poetry* editor Lea wrote to Cairns on November 27, 1946, thanking him for his "many kindnesses in this matter": "Today we received the new ruling from the Bureau of Internal Revenue confirming our tax-exempt status. . . If, as we assume, this remarkable speed on the part of the bureau is the result of your prompt intercession – you are a genius."⁷¹ The same day, Cairns wrote to Paul Mellon: "The Bureau of Internal Revenue ruling *Poetry* has been pried loose and mailed to Chicago. It was favorable, which means that we will be able to make our grant at once."⁷²

If the Foundation's support of the Library and of *Poetry* were not publicly correlated aesthetic missions, they became as much when *Poetry* published the Fellows' "counterattack" as *The Case Against* The Saturday Review of Literature. The Bollingen Trustees had issued a \$15,000 check to *Poetry* in January, but in the wake of the prize controversy stalled the continuation of annual support.⁷³

⁶⁹ "In 1946, when it became evident that publication costs were rising very rapidly..." Hayden Carruth and Thomas C. Lea to J.K. Lilly, 11 November 1949, Bollingen Foundation Records.

⁷⁰ The Bollingen Foundation first donated to the Modern Poetry Association of Chicago to support *Poetry* in 1946; the continuing grant provided \$82,500 over eight years. "Bollingen Foundation Data Sheet For Contributions," Bollingen Foundation Records.

⁷¹ Lea to Huntington Cairns, 27 November 1946, Bollingen Foundation Records.

⁷² Cairns to Paul Mellon, 27 November 1946, Bollingen Foundation Records.

⁷³ "In recognition of the decision of your board to discontinue further financial help at present, we are hard at work searching for replacement funds, as without them, publications sometime in 1950 will be impossible. The spiraling costs of printing, paper, etc. these days make it very difficult for enterprises such as ours and our only hope is that we shall discover an individual or

When the editor of the magazine, Hayden Carruth, read the Library of Congress press release announcing the termination of the Bollingen Prize, he immediately and strategically wrote to the Bollingen Foundation's Secretary, Ernest Brooks. "I should like to express to you. . .my extreme misgiving for this unfortunate action. I believe that the Joint Congressional Committee on the Library has committed an exceedingly unwise act in depriving American artists of their only official recognition," he sympathized, moreover offering "the facilities of this magazine to the Foundation for the administering of the prize": "I believe it would be appropriate for such an important prize for poetry to be awarded through the country's most prominent magazine of poetry. I contemplate an award made upon the basis of judgment of a committee of writers very much like that comprised in the Fellows to the Library."⁷⁴

Carruth viewed the Bollingen Prize as an opportunity to help replenish the symbolic capital of the magazine, suggesting "[t]he announcement of the award would be made in the magazine." Carruth pitched the potential acquisition to Brooks, however, as a basically equitable exchange: it would be "appropriate for such an important prize for poetry to be awarded through the country's most prominent magazine of poetry," and *Poetry*, unlike the government, could brand the Bollingen Prize with "the mark of high literary distinction, which this country, unlike many others, has lacked for so long." More practically, he offered administrative support: *Poetry*'s staff "would handle administrative matters—nominating books, collecting votes, conducting correspondence, etc." Importantly, Carruth makes the bid for the prize based on an argument for the relocation of the prize to the *private* sphere: "A continuance of the prize would give very real moral support to serious American writers and editors, and it would demonstrate as well to the discriminating and reasonable members of the general public that hysterical

foundation, that, like the Bollingen Foundation, are vitally interested in the advancement of outstanding letters, in our time." Geraldine Udell to Brooks, 13 January 1949, Bollingen Foundation Records.

⁷⁴ Carruth to Brooks, 26 August 1949, Bollingen Foundation Records.

political action can be counteracted by *private stability and private judgment*" (emphasis mine).⁷⁵

Four days later, however, Yale's Chief Librarian James Babb wrote to Brooks in turn: "The Yale Library, through the Yale Collection of American Literature, could issue the prize." Babb, who was friends with Luther Evans, made the proposition in a markedly casual tone: Babb had happened to read about the controversy in the paper, and judged simply that Evans had been "forced" to give up prizes "because of pressure from Congress." Unlike Carruth's heavy-handed assessment of the Congressional decision's broader ideological stakes, Babb addressed the decision's effect not on society or even on the institutional entity of "the Library," but on the individual "Luther Evans"—against whom the "pressure from Congress" flattens into a political abstraction. As Babb demonstrates, the future of the prize is a question most comfortably posed within an interpersonal domain—he offers Brooks a close-quartered business proposal, disassociated from fist-thumping senators and squeamish *Saturday Review* editorialists. As if to avoid association with such journalistic argumentation, Babb writes without rhetorical excess. He performs only perfunctory flattery—the Bollingen "would be a distinguished thing for us here at Yale"—but unlike Carruth, Babb makes no attempt to guise the potential symbolic capital gain for the university: "it undoubtedly would indirectly help the Yale Collection of American Literature." The interest for the Bollingen Trustees, however, is Yale's relative disinterest in the prize. Donning the archetype of the curmudgeonly scholar, Babb assumes a posture of indifference:

Of course, as a cold-blooded librarian, I would rather have the \$1,000 a year to buy books of poetry. This would enable us to buy all the important current books and have a few hundred dollars a year to buy a good old book.

⁷⁵ This letter formalized a conversation Carruth apparently had with Brooks a few days earlier, and anticipated a visit in person to his offices in hopes of securing the prize. In an accompanying note, Carruth writes to Brooks: "Following your suggestion in our phone conversation the other day, I have prepared a letter containing my suggestions. Here it is; I hope it will receive favorable attention from the directors." Carruth to Brooks, 26 August 1949, Bollingen Foundation Records.

To the Bollingen Trustees, Babb's disinterest surely seemed a welcome palate cleanser. The "cold-blooded librarian" or dispassionate archivist would have seemed a far preferable cultural administrator to the headily desperate poets and journalists dueling it out in the news rags. "If my suggestions above are out of order, just throw this letter away," Babb insists. His disinterest was at least mostly genuine; unlike *Poetry*, Yale Library was not, after all, on the brink of collapse. "Peg and I very much enjoyed meeting your wife at Biddeford Pool. We also had a nice chat with her parents. They are an attractive, lively couple. Sorry you weren't around. . ."⁷⁶ A postscript redoubles Babb's effect of country club intimacy: "P.S. I should have to clear this poetry prize business with higher authorities here, but I cannot see that they would object in any way." In the formally tidy addendum, Babb relieves himself of explicit identification with institutional power, while simultaneously providing its assurances against any potential bureaucratic headache—thus ensuring the epistolary sanctity of the letter as a "chat around Biddeford Pool."

On December 21, Brooks reported in a memorandum after a phone call with James Babb that the Librarian had cleared Yale's sponsoring of the prize with the university's President Seymour. The university promised to reconstitute the Bollingen award name: "As to the name of the prize, Babb said that continuation of the name 'Bollingen' would be agreeable":

Babb said that he was conscious of the fact that some friends of the Yale Library might criticize Yale for carrying on the prize. However, he seemed to be thinking less of the Jung controversy and of Pound's politics than of the acrimony caused by the sharp division in the world of poetry between the traditionalists and the modernists. Among the good friends of Yale who he thought might be bothered were William Rose Benet, an editor of the *Saturday Review of Literature*, and Leonard Bacon. He said, however, that he understood that Benet had not

⁷⁶ James T. Babb to Brooks, 30 August 1949, Bollingen Foundation Records.

sympathized with SRL's attack on the Pound award. I assured him that Leonard Bacon felt the same way.⁷⁷

Moreover, Babb and other administrators felt "at least some of the Fellows of the Library of Congress in American Letters should serve on the jury. Cleanth Brooks feels that they all should be given the chance to serve."⁷⁸

Babb wrote the next day making their phone call official. "Dear Ernie, / I am very happy to say that the Yale University Library will be pleased and honored to have the opportunity to award annually the Bollingen Poetry Prize of \$1,000 to that volume of poetry published in the preceding year which was selected as the best poetical effort of the year by a Committee of Award which, in the future, will be appointed by the President of Yale University." Babb echoed the two politicized considerations—"I think that it should be called the Bollingen Prize, and I feel fairly certain that we should wish to ask all of the previous Committee to act again."⁷⁹

The Fellows would all serve again with the exception of Archibald MacLeish. Although MacLeish held that *The Pisan Cantos* was a text by turns "childish" and "ugly, intellectually and morally," he saw himself allied with the Fellows, and was defensive in positioning himself thus to Tate: "my quarrel is not with 'modern poetry' as your last letter would imply. I regard myself as a humble practioner [sic] in that orchard." MacLeish viewed Pound's *Pisan Cantos* as a betrayal of the movement he understood as "modern poetry," and held that "the fascist and anti-semitic stuff is far more prevalent

⁷⁷ Brooks, Memorandum "Re: Poetry Prize - Phone with Mr. Babb to Board of Trustees," December 21, 1949, Bollingen Foundation Records.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Babb to Brooks, 22 December 1949, Bollingen Foundation Records. The proposed Committee of Award was drawn up by the new Executive Committee, composed of James Babb as Chairman, Professor Cleanth Brooks, and Donald Gallup as Secretary. Yale President Charles Seymour sent sixteen letters of invitation to Léonie Adams, Conrad Aiken, W.H. Auden, Elizabeth Bishop, Louise Bogan, Katherine Garrison Chapin, T.S. Eliot, Robert Lowell, Archibald MacLeish, Katherine Anne Porter, Karl Shapiro, Willard Thorp, Robert Penn Warren, William Carlos Williams, Paul Green, and Allen Tate. Williams, MacLeish, and Bishop had become Fellows after the Pound ballot; Spencer had passed away. As signatories to the Fellows' statement against *The Saturday Review*, MacLeish and Williams were effectively added to the Jury of Selection in the court of public opinion.

than the Fellows, in their statement [drafted but not yet released], contend.” Yet his purpose in writing this to Tate in mid-October was not, principally, to assert this reading as an ethical position; the text in question was a prickly symptom—something he would “like to go over with [Tate] some time”—of an institutional crisis threatening the cultural authority of literary gatekeepers in their current balance. The point was diplomatic exigency. MacLeish urged Tate against publishing the Fellows’ counterattack in *The Case Against The Saturday Review*—to publish the statement would be to “accep[t] battle on the phoney terms Hillyer has mapped out,” and risk appearing “largely irrelevant and in some ways quite footling (indeed it provoked mirth in [s]ome quarters).” His concern was not with its content, but “whether the pamphlet will achieve a positive purpose” as a public relations management strategy. MacLeish wanted to avoid a “second round” of an adolescent brawl that could compromise “the Fellows’ position”—position not as their defense per se, but their stature as a cultural authority—and moreover the cultural authority of New Criticism and the Library of Congress. His pitch to Tate was the “freedom to reconsider tactics.”⁸⁰

MacLeish also worried the committee’s move to Yale could “be taken as critical of the administration at the Library of Congress.” It would have been “wiser all around to start out with new judges.” MacLeish was diplomatically protective of the Library, given his prior service as Librarian; although “critical of the actions which led to the loss by the Library of Congress of its right to give prizes,” he did not feel “the Library administration alone is to blame for the unhappy outcome.” MacLeish would finally affirm his commitment to Tate’s cause, figuring his loyalty to the Fellows through a battle scene: “You have probably been informed by those who were at the Poetry Society dinner that the guns have now been wheeled around to blast away at / yours ever affectionately. . .” MacLeish extends the language of warring poetry camps in ink hand, rephrasing “the

⁸⁰ MacLeish to Allen Tate, 15 October 1949, William McGuire Papers.

loss by the Library of Congress of its right to give prizes” with an asterisk aside: “* / * or rather, ‘surrender.’”⁸¹

For Babb and Brooks, MacLeish serving as a committee member would have been a coup. As former Librarian of Congress during WWII and a state official—he served as Director of the Office of Facts and Figures, and Assistant Secretary of State (1944-5)—MacLeish would have represented amity between Yale, the Bollingen Foundation, the Fellows and by extension the state. Yet MacLeish was the only Fellow to refuse his invitation. The Fellows as a body otherwise remained intact. MacLeish as a site of institutional collision—an employee of the U.S. Department of State who penned the New Critical slogan “A poem should not mean / But be”—proves instructive.⁸² In 1950, the Fellows existed as mirror images, save MacLeish, under the auspices of two institutions. But after 1952, the Fellows would never again meet at the Library, holding satellite meetings in New York. The Library could no longer procure funds for their travel expenses to Washington. By 1955, eight members’ seven-year terms had expired or the members had resigned. MacLeish wrote it would be “tragic if the country’s national library and the country’s writers drifted back into the condition of mutual disinterest which obtained fifteen years ago.”⁸³ The Library allowed its tastemaking authority “to die on the vine,” as Conrad Aiken lamented, but after all, the Library was to abstain in deciding “matters of taste.”⁸⁴

The Fellows were thus reassembled at Yale,⁸⁵ and good will established between the arts patron and the university: “Please tell Paul [Mellon] that I am delighted at the

⁸¹ MacLeish to Tate, 15 February 1950, William McGuire Papers.

⁸² MacLeish voiced his internal contestation not only in letters to Tate, but in the dialogic drama of *Poetry and Opinion: The Pisan Cantos of Ezra Pound, A Dialog on the Role of Poetry* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1950).

⁸³ “I feel that the failure of the relationship between Fellow and Library to work out is a disaster,” replied Lowell. Lowell to L. Quincy Mumford, 7 November 1955, William McGuire Papers.

⁸⁴ Aiken to Basler, April 1953, Bollingen Foundation Records.

⁸⁵ “In discussing with Babb the form of the letter to be sent by President Seymour to each individual invited to serve on the Committee of Award, I emphasized that the prize should be

outcome of all this,” Babb concluded to Brooks.⁸⁶ Babb and Yale University President Charles Seymour would collaborate with Brooks to carefully construct a proposal for the establishment of the prize, and a press release smoothing over politicized concerns:⁸⁷ chiefly, Babb “want[ed] to be sure that no impression is created in the minds of the public that Yale is taking the prize away from The Library of Congress, as Luther Evans is a good friend of his. There should be no difficulty on this score. Any announcement by Yale can make it clear that The Library of Congress discontinued the prize; and I have every reason to believe that Luther Evans will be glad to have the prize continued by Yale.”⁸⁸ While Babb drafted the primary material for the press release, Brooks would add a final paragraph: “The Library of Congress established a similar poetry prize in 1948, but subsequently all prize awards by the Library of Congress were discontinued. Yale University is very glad to have the opportunity of re-establishing this prize, the purpose of which is to encourage and afford recognition to outstanding achievement in the field of American poetry.” Brooks records in a memorandum for his personal files that he phoned Huntington Cairns to read “my draft suggesting material to be included in publicity release by Yale.” The addendum established for public record the goodwill between the institutions; Yale University, claiming the prize as an honor, restored the Bollingen Prize as a mark of prestige and by extension increased the symbolic prestige of the Foundation.⁸⁹

referred to as having been established by Yale University, not by [the] Bollingen Foundation.” Brooks, Memorandum “Re: Poetry Prize to Bollingen Foundation Board of Trustees,” January 19, 1950, Bollingen Foundation Records.

⁸⁶ Babb to Brooks, 22 December 1949, Bollingen Foundation Records.

⁸⁷ Brooks, “Publicity Release Draft Material,” January 19, 1950, Bollingen Foundation Records.

⁸⁸ Brooks, Memorandum “Re: Poetry Prize - Phone with Mr. Babb to Bollingen Foundation Board of Trustees,” December 21, 1949, Bollingen Foundation Records.

⁸⁹ The university siphoned off the symbolic value of the scandal. By reestablishing the prize, Yale granted its apolitical fresh start; still the prize came with value added, i.e. the cultural attention the scandal had magnetized.

Throughout the fall, Carruth meanwhile sought new sources of funding for *Poetry*. In the first weeks of September, Carruth traveled to the East Coast to meet personally with potential benefactors. He had taken a similar trip earlier that summer. After this second trip proved a failure, Carruth, increasingly frenetic, frequently implicated the Bollingen Trustees in his search despite their tenuous status as a continuing donor and silence on the question of the Prize. In November, Carruth wrote to Brooks excitedly with a new lead—the Lilly Endowment of Indianapolis, an organization he “had never heard of...until about two weeks ago.” In an unusual, and to Carruth’s mind promising, reply to a routine solicitation letter, Endowment Secretary Mr. J.K. Lilly had requested a more detailed picture of *Poetry*’s circulation and cultural affiliations, inquiring especially about the individuals or foundations interested in supporting the magazine. “In an enterprise of this sort it is the policy of the Endowment not to support the entire project, since it is felt that a broader base of support is healthier for the project itself.”⁹⁰

In the wake of the Bollingen Affair, Carruth had to worry that the institutional and cultural alliances of the magazine might alienate the Lilly Endowment. *Poetry*’s sole source of support and Lilly’s only potential funding partner had just become famous for honoring a fascist, anti-Semitic, mentally ill poet. But under Carruth, *Poetry* would remain an uncompromising ideological ally to the Fellows. “It may very well turn out that they [the trustees of the Lilly Endowment] are the Saturday Review sort of people who will lose interest when they learn more about the magazine,” he wrote to Brooks,

⁹⁰ Lilly in effect voices a philosophy of the enterprise of the literary journal or “little magazine” diametrically opposed to T.S. Eliot’s published in *Poetry* a few months later. For Eliot, a little magazine does and should *not* hold a “broa[d] base” of support, as its distinguishing characteristics are its short-lived subsistence under a single editor, and by extension subsistence under a singular guarantor or patron or guarantors and patrons singular in intention with the purpose of the project. A “little magazine” is ideally purposed as one project, and therefore *should* end abruptly before suffering symptoms of “decay.” Under multiple editors and patrons, thus straddling multiple reading publics and literary projects, “‘Poetry’, in fact, is not a little magazine but an INSTITUTION.” T.S. Eliot to Karl Shapiro, 6 March 1950, Bollingen Foundation Records.

“But I hope not. We can only wait and see what happens.” Carruth naturally viewed Brooks and the Bollingen Trustees as being of like minds with the Fellows against the “Saturday Review people.” In the very same letter to Brooks, Carruth mentions “the pamphlet”—it would, he promised, “be out on Monday. The first shipments of copies went today to the distributing agents in New York.”⁹¹ The “pamphlet,” which contained the statement MacLeish urged Tate not to print, would soon be notorious—hitting “virtually all of the literary establishment” in the coming weeks—as *The Case Against The Saturday Review of Literature*, presented as a collaboration by *Poetry* magazine and The Library Fellows.

In fact, the Bollingen Foundation would seek to distance itself from this pamphlet, later making clear that it was not directly involved in its funding. As the Bollingen Foundation sought a clean break from the stink of the Pound award, Carruth’s willingness for the magazine to hold court on the controversy, in forums like “the pamphlet,” provided one compelling reason to dissociate its name from *Poetry*.

Carruth, however, did not hesitate to tell Mr. Lilly about “the Bollingen Foundation’s interest in the magazine.” When enclosing “a copy of the letter we sent today to Mr. J.K. Lilly of Lilly Endowment, Inc” to Brooks, in fact, he sounded penitent: “I realize that perhaps my letter sounds as if the Trustees of the Bollingen Foundation had already made their decision to renew the grant [to *Poetry*].” Carruth had rhetorically maximized the Bollingen’s investment in the magazine:

I hope you will not think I have stated the case too strongly; it was certainly not my intention to obligate the Bollingen Foundation in any way to the Lilly Endowment... Every effort should be made to keep the Lilly Endowment interested. It will be easier to explain to them later, I think, exactly what the situation at Bollingen is when there are negotiations between Bollingen and Lilly.⁹²

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Carruth to Brooks, 11 November 1949, Bollingen Foundation Records.

Carruth's hopes that the Bollingen Foundation and Lilly Endowment would "come to an arrangement for the joint subsidy of the magazine"⁹³ were soon dashed. "It is my duty to tell you that the decision was not to offer a grant for this purpose (support of POETRY)," Lilly wrote to Carruth, who in turn quoted Lilly's refusal in a letter Carruth wrote to Brooks the day he received it. "The feeling was that this project is slightly outside the scope of activities of the Endowment since support of literary efforts in the past has been more for research and bibliography rather than [sic] than for publication of current material."⁹⁴ Whether the Bollingen Affair per se proved decisive in the Lilly Endowment's to fund *Poetry* is not clear. What is clear is that the Lilly Endowment's expressed agenda vis-à-vis literary cultural investment—a commitment to "research and bibliography" over "current material," contemporary literature, or what Carruth called "the state of American culture as it is right now"—parallels the Bollingen Foundation's realignment toward the university press and the library.

In a renewed appeal to Brooks for support, Carruth diagnoses the new era of the university stronghold: "Everyone is interested in scholarship, nobody in creative writing of the good kind."⁹⁵ The universities seem linked in with patronage in a way *Poetry* is not: "We have found that today charity—if literature can be called that—is an organized, big business, and we can't crack it." Despite having "written literally thousands of letters, hav[ing] applied to many foundations, and hav[ing] spok[en] with as many people as we could," Carruth found "the same old story: the poet's work is only recognized after he is dead or too old to profit from it." *Poetry* "can't compete with the universities in getting money, even though we are doing more for the state of American culture as it is right now than any university. The universities are safe and respectable, and there is a certain

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Lilly to the Modern Poetry Association qtd. by Carruth to Brooks, 10 December 1949, Bollingen Foundation Records.

⁹⁵ Carruth to Brooks, 10 December 1949, Bollingen Foundation Records.

amount of truth in the observation that creative writing, in order to be good, cannot be entirely safe and respectable.”⁹⁶

Denied the support of the Lilly Endowment and the prestige of the Bollingen Prize, Carruth was fired at the magazine’s next board meeting.⁹⁷ Carruth could never have predicted that the Lilly family—the very patron that helped guarantee his ousting—would reemerge to grant *Poetry* a windfall fifty years later, but he certainly predicted the fifty years ahead. As the Bollingen Prize moved to Yale, so too poetry moved to the academy. Like the Lilly Endowment, and the “many foundations” that refused Carruth’s appeal, the Bollingen Trustees felt safer stashing its symbolic capital with “cold-blooded librarians.”⁹⁸ If “the poet’s work is only recognized after he is dead,” better to ally with the archivist. Patronage in this sense was helping birth ‘the age of criticism’ and the solidification of literary prestige in the university.

The Bollingen Foundation; presciently, the Lilly Endowment; the Library of Congress; and the faltering *Poetry* magazine thus all emerge as key institutional players in the relocation of the poetry establishment—here, the Bollingen award committee, a coup of big hitter poets who were also literary critics⁹⁹—to the academy. On the one hand, the discontinuation of government prizes “in matters of taste” had offered a swift historical corrective to the Fellows’ decision, apparently settling “the values involved in th[e] cultural and political fight”¹⁰⁰ in favor of *The Saturday Review*’s affronted patriots. Yet by admitting the aesthetic prize to the “private sphere,” the federal government

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Carruth was fired at the general meeting of the Board of the Modern Poetry Association on January 9, 1950. Julia Bowe to Brooks, 11 January 1950; Carruth to Brooks, 10 January 1949 [sic 1950], Bollingen Foundation Records.

⁹⁸ Per Yale Librarian James Babb’s facetious self-characterization in his bid to administer the Bollingen Prize. Babb to Brooks, 30 August 1949, Bollingen Foundation Records.

⁹⁹ The Committee of Award during its first year at Yale included Léonie Adams, Conrad Aiken, W.H. Auden, Katherine Garrison Chapin, T.S. Eliot, Robert Lowell, Archibald MacLeish, Elizabeth Bishop, Katherine Anne Porter, Karl Shapiro, Willard Thorp, Robert Penn Warren, William Carlos Williams, Paul Green, and Allen Tate. Enclosure in Babb to Brooks, 14 May 1951, Bollingen Foundation Records.

¹⁰⁰ Cousins and Smith, “Ezra Pound and the Bollingen Award,” *SRL*, June 11, 1949, 20.

redoubled the Fellows' liberal state apology for the "objective perception of value": the university became a safehouse for politically inconvenient art like *The Pisan Cantos*, and meanwhile the Library could assume ideological neutrality (to the extent that poetry would be reconstituted as a de facto public good in educational and civic initiatives of the state arts and neoliberal-era Poets Laureate, as will be examined in subsequent chapters). The ascendant New Critical program at Yale quarantined the literary object to yet a narrower sphere of perceptual autonomy, adopting the regulative values of "objective perception" the Fellows defended in the context of national culture. For Jed Rasula, the Bollingen affair is straightforwardly "integral to the hegemony of New Criticism": desperate to contain and cure history, the Library of Congress absorbed a politically punishable act of treason "into the carceral apparatus of pedagogy at a time when heuristic protocol meant that Pound's poetry, not his life, would serve the curriculum."¹⁰¹ Yet to say the Bollingen Affair catalyzed the academic institutionalization of New Criticism eclipses the broader stakes of the Fellows' relocation to the university.¹⁰² Inasmuch as Pound and the high modernist project served academic and culturally elite curricula for the second half of the 20th-century, poetry was news that stayed news on the syllabus. But the relocation of the Fellows to Yale was not the only result of the Bollingen Affair.

The Library, having lost the prize and the cultural authority of the Fellows to disperse its capital, placed new emphasis on the remaining legacy of the Mellon

¹⁰¹ Rasula, *American Poetry Wax Museum*, 113-4.

¹⁰² Scandal also worked as a mechanism for the solidification of the ideological program. The Bollingen Affair, through public news media, magnetized aesthetic and social differences into party lines: genres of the poetic manifesto, post-war social criticism, and the book review were instrumentally entangled as the op-ed statement; a critic commandeered the byline and poets were rounded up as signatories. Rasula suggests how the affair might have productively proliferated discourse, but the complex of aesthetic and social concerns that the Bollingen initially animated settled into two balkanized party sides, e.g. for the purposes of institutional codification of an interpretive methodology in English Department classrooms; and a clean bifurcation of two modernist lineages in literary canon-formation. The pro-Pound Bollingen discourse would be a resource plumbed by both sides, however—as in the exemplary case of Frost's defense of Pound a decade later—in the service of Cold War nationalism (see Chapter 2).

Endowment: the Archive of Recorded Poetry and Literature. Unlike the prize, the archive would grow up unsullied by “matters of taste.” In later years, it could be activated as an ideologically unblemished tradition of American poetic voice.¹⁰³ Meanwhile, the Fellows’ dissenter, Karl Shapiro, had moved with the Fellows to Yale, but maintained his outlier view. The ambivalent strain of Shapiro’s dissent echoed throughout the literary trade establishment, and it was loud enough in the Modern Poetry Association boardroom to topple *Poetry*’s editorial regime.

4. *Poetry*’s Regime Change: Dissent from Dissent

The day after he was fired, Carruth wrote to Brooks, “feel[ing] obliged to tell you that, at a general meeting of the Board of the Modern Poetry Association yesterday, I was fired from the editorship of *Poetry*. This action was brought about largely through the influence of Marion Strobel.” “There is not very much I can add to that flat statement,” Carruth wrote. He had not been told the name of his successor. The purpose of the letter was less to inform Brooks about the termination of his editorship—he rightly “suppose[d] [Brooks would] be informed of such matters by the officials of the Modern Poetry Association or by somebody on the *Poetry* staff”—than to make one last bid for Bollingen Foundation support, this time on behalf of himself.

I wonder if you could tell me whether or not the Bollingen Foundation ever considers grants to individual[s] engaged in literary projects. And if there is the possibility of such a grant, what one must do to apply for it. Now that I am unemployed, I can begin again to turn my attention to my own work, and I have a number of projects in mind—some of them already begun. But I won’t be able to do much about them unless I can find some means of support.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ When in 1954 the recordings “came to a standstill with the depletion of the Bollingen Foundation grant which made this recording program possible,” the Library “reissued the T.S. Eliot and Robert Frost albums on long-playing records and is presently engaged in transferring the complete series of forty-two poets to long-playing records.” Roy P. Basler, “Annual Report of the Poetry Office for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1954,” excerpted from the Annual Report of the General Reference and Bibliography Division, Library of Congress, July 15, 1954, 2-3, William McGuire Papers.

¹⁰⁴ Carruth to Brooks, 10 January 1949 [sic 1950], Bollingen Foundation Records.

The Foundation did not; patron support to individuals tended to work on an informal and interpersonal basis. Institutionally formalized “grants to individuals engaged in literary projects” were uncommon. Individuals found institutional support for “independent projects” through university sabbaticals or occasionally as residents at artists’ colonies like Yaddo.¹⁰⁵

Brooks received the forewarned letter from “the officials” the next day, which recast Carruth’s firing at the hands of Marion Strobel as the non-renewal of his appointment by consideration of the board.¹⁰⁶ Karl Shapiro, who assumed “active control” as editor in February, would meanwhile refer to Carruth’s “resignation.”¹⁰⁷ Brooks thus heard three different versions of *Poetry* magazine’s regime change.¹⁰⁸

Shapiro, who the MPA Board apparently selected “unanimously,” is a notable choice in light of the Bollingen Prize scandal. Shapiro had, after all, been the only dissenter on the prize committee, save the Attorney General’s wife. His anti-Pound stance may have caused most of “the literary and cultural ‘Establishment’”—represented by the Fellows, now at Yale—to “tur[n] their back on him,” but to the MPA board it made

¹⁰⁵ There were not many at the time. In June 1958, the Poet’s House in New Harmony, Southern Indiana received a trust in memory of Robert Lee Blaffer, and five trustees oversaw applications for “temporary citizens” of the unique “living community,” dedicated to “reanimating in Mid-America the attributes of individual religious faith, intellect, imagination and creative industry that, together, have made and will sustain our national character.” Jane Blaffer Owen to Gustav Davidson, 17 September 1958, Gustav Davidson Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C. In the decades that followed, the number of university teaching positions, artists’ residencies, and other means of institutional support for poets proliferated dramatically.

¹⁰⁶ “At its annual meeting on January 9, the Board of Trustees of the Modern Poetry Association considered the reappointment of Mr. Hayden Carruth as editor of POETRY. The board very regretfully decided that it could not meet the conditions set by Mr. Carruth for his continued services. It was therefore unable to renew his appointment, which will end on February 1st.” Julia Bowe to Ernest Brooks, 11 January 1950, Bollingen Foundation Records.

¹⁰⁷ Karl Shapiro to Brooks, 22 February 1950, Bollingen Foundation Records.

¹⁰⁸ Today, The Poetry Foundation’s public history provides an altogether different account: “Carruth wanted to print more and longer works by established poets, reducing the number of new voices that appeared. He also continued to tilt the balance of the magazine toward prose, at one point going so far as to include only eight pages of poetry in an issue. Not surprisingly, perhaps, Carruth lasted only a year in the job.” “*Poetry: A History of the Magazine*,” The Poetry Foundation, accessed January 12, 2015, <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/history>.

him an antidote to Carruth.¹⁰⁹ Bowe preemptively corrected any political awkwardness between the new editor and the Bollingen Trustees: “Mr. Shapiro is aware that POETRY continues through the generosity of the Bollingen Foundation, and he will be happy to consult with you whenever there may be an occasion to do so.” For the MPA to go from defending Pound against *The Saturday Review* to appointing Shapiro marks a decisive shift in the cultural politics of the magazine.

Indeed, it necessitated an editorial overhaul. Upon assuming “active control” on February 1, Shapiro fired everyone at the magazine. “Except for Miss Udell, the Business Manager, there is no staff at present,” Shapiro wrote to Brooks. “The Trustees voluntarily granted me full editorial powers, including the prerogative of choosing a new staff and introducing whatever editorial policies I saw fit...I hope to develop a strong small staff and myself to formulate the policy of POETRY.”¹¹⁰ Shapiro changed the name of the magazine that year—dropping the subtitle from *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*.

The Bollingen Foundation would now comfortably reassign an annual endowment to *Poetry* under Shapiro’s moderate stead. Shapiro wrote to Brooks on February 22—a year since the Library of Congress had announced the Bollingen Prize—thanking him for the Trustees’ continued “generous assistance” for the upcoming year: “All of us connected with the Association are deeply cognizant of the fact that POETRY would be defunct today were it not for the Bollingen Foundation. We are also aware that your assistance cannot continue indefinitely, and that it is part of our responsibility to make the magazine financially independent.”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Andrew Gross, “Liberalism and Lyricism, or Karl Shapiro’s Elegy for Identity,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 34:3 (Spring 2011), 2. See Shapiro, *Reports of My Death* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 1990), 43.

¹¹⁰ Shapiro to Brooks, 22 February 1950, Bollingen Foundation Records.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

5. Reading for Red Tape:
 “Mumbling contentedly” for The Archive of Recorded Poetry and Literature

On the east steps the Air Force Band
 in uniforms of Air Force blue
 is playing hard and loud, but—queer—
 the music doesn't quite come through. . .

Great shades, edge over,
 give the music room.
 The gathered brasses want to go
boom—boom.

—Elizabeth Bishop, “View of the Capitol from the Library of Congress,” 1950¹¹²

Most of the day-to-day work has been connected with the leaflets that will occupy the [Archive of Recorded Poetry] records. Short biographies of each of the poets had to be written, as well as bibliographies, lists of references examined, and first publications checked. The results of this, when printed, appear rather slight; however, a great deal of time goes into them and since most of the poets send incomplete or incorrect information, or none at all, it means a good deal of checking and re-checking to be done. —Elizabeth Bishop, “Annual Report to the Librarian of Congress from the Chair of Poetry, 1949-1950”

After the Library of Congress lost the Bollingen Prize, if not the claim to modernist poetry the prize represented, to the academy, the Consultant in Poetry post sat vacant for the next four years. Meanwhile, the Fellows disbanded, further diminishing the Library’s mechanisms of literary authority.

The Library’s capacity to represent a poetic tradition now remained solely in the Bollingen Foundation’s original endowment: The Archive of Recorded Poetry and Literature. While in these middle decades of the 20th-century, the American university would systematically treat the poem as a textual object, as New Critical close reading techniques preferred documented evidence of the written lyric, the Archive of Recorded Poetry and Literature represents an alternate tradition of the phonocentric narrative poem. In Chapter 2, I examine how Robert Frost projects an ideology of national voice in

¹¹² “View of the Capitol from the Library of Congress” first appeared in print for the Fourth of July issue of *The New Yorker*, July 7, 1951.

the spontaneous recitation of 16 lines of blank verse from memory at President Kennedy's Inauguration; in later chapters, how more recent Poets Laureate have extended this phonocentric narrative tradition of "saying" poems into civic space. Robert Pinsky's Favorite Poem Project's audio and video recordings of "Americans saying their favorite poems out loud" constitute a recent substantial addition to the Archive of Recorded Poetry (Chapter 4). Following Frost, this archival tradition has been typically instrumentalized to model the expressive voice of the individual citizen and to project evolving ideologies of national identity.

Lowell and Bishop voiced critiques of this phonocentric narrative tradition by performing failed speech acts within a written archive that places itself self-consciously adjacent to the Archive of Recorded Poetry.¹¹³ In poems and correspondence where Lowell and Bishop represent proximity to the Capitol, i.e. through bibliographic codes, such as writing on Library of Congress stationary, or through indicating a "view of the dome" or "view of the Capitol from the Library of Congress," they also represent the disrupted or difficult act of producing recorded poetry, music, or expressive sound. Bishop characterized her "work for the year 1949-1950 [as] chiefly centered around the preparation of the second series of albums of recordings of Twentieth Century Poetry in English"; more specifically, "[m]ost of the day-to-day work has been connected with the leaflets that will occupy the records." Bishop is careful to defend the value of these leaflets: "when printed, [the material may] appear rather slight"; "however, a great deal of time goes into them." The written record that accompanies, explains, and understands itself in proximity to the recorded archive: this is Bishop's "day-to-day work"—the poet's

¹¹³ Lowell's letters referring to their own Librariness ("these bulky envelopes were the Library's idea, not mine") could be considered instances of what Michel de Certeau calls "an enunciative practice through which 'the worker's own work [is] disguised as work for his employer. . . La perruque may be as simple a matter as a secretary's writing a love letter on 'company time'" (*The Practice of Everyday Life*, 25). As *poets* for pay, however, Bishop and Lowell's expressions of resistance are necessarily more playful and complex than this example: writing a poem, e.g. "View of the Capitol from the Library of Congress," would not recuperate but be an appropriate use of "company time."

work—that she worries will be misrecognized or forgotten. Yet the leaflets authorize the value of the audio archive they accompany. One of the reasons the seemingly peripheral written record takes “a great deal of time” to construct is that “most of the poets send incomplete or incorrect information” about themselves. The leaflets correct fallacious self-characterizations of literary personas, lest the voices of the national archive also control the context in which their voices will be heard. Moreover, Bishop herself despised reading for live audiences or for tape, embodying the incapacity, or passive refusal, of the national poet to voice the phonocentric narrative poem of the archive. This was an aversion Lowell was keenly aware of—and to which he would frequently cater in letters.

Sent on Library of Congress stationary, Lowell claims “this is a dull letter,” the first installment of epistolary reportage to Bishop as a Consultant, “but I’ve just been on a tour to the library annex, had my teeth x-rayed, and when [I] look up I see the dome of our capitol.” The matter of bureaucratic necessity is announced immediately—“I’d like to have you record when you come here,” and undermined in turn: “You’ll be amused when you see the list of poets that the ‘fellows’ have provided me for the first album”; “So much for that...I hope you’ll really come here this fall & we can go to the galleries & see the otters”; “P.S. Of course you don’t have to be recorded, but I’d like to oust some of the monstrosities on my list, if you want to let me know a few days before your arrival, so I can...can [sic] get the red tape rolling.”¹¹⁴

Lowell’s pun on audio recording tape and “red” tape is jest at the expense of bureaucratic duty, but it is also designed to purchase confidence with Bishop as his interlocutor. The plotted ineptitude of the postscript’s ellipses—“I can...can”—refuses two forms of competence. It is first a refusal to ably get “the red tape rolling,” or Lowell’s reluctant capacity as a poet-bureaucrat—a performative haplessness as a government

¹¹⁴ WIA 8. Lowell refused to record Chapin, Brinnin, Spencer, Engle, or Meredith; he added Frost, Pound, Aiken, Sandburg and Bishop. Paul Engle recorded at the request of Paul Mellon.

administrator. It also imitates the verbal stutter, or failed oral delivery of the poem to be recorded on “red tape.” Lowell knew that Bishop dreaded reading for live audiences and recordings. “I’d like to see you, recordings or no,” Bishop replied. “Maybe you will send me a card about this so I’ll know whether to practice my vowels and consonants or just keep on mumbling contentedly until next year.”¹¹⁵

Lowell’s critique of the sound archive in letters to Bishop is not subtle—or perhaps ultimately very serious: “Today I record myself—the hangman with no one left to hang but himself.”¹¹⁶ Bishop’s critique, however, is systematically presented in her written record proximate to the archive—administrative reports, correspondence, as well as her poetry proper.

Bishop composed “View of the Capitol from the Library of Congress” in late 1950, at the same office desk where she prepared her Annual Report. “View of the Capitol” describes the Navy Band as “hard and loud, but—queer— / the music doesn’t quite come through.” First published in *The New Yorker*’s Fourth of July issue in 1951, Bishop qualifies the performance of sound for a national audience. “View of the Capitol,” like Bishop’s famous poem “One Art,” is a metered poem that stages a syntactic disruption in its penultimate and final lines. In “One Art,” this disruption occurs in the typographically demarcated, visual imperative to “(Write it!)”. In “View of the Capitol,” the Navy Band sounds “queer” and strained: the brasses “want” to pound out a baseline rhythm. Rather than render music through fluent language, Bishop renders noise through base onomatopoeia:

Great shades, edge over,
give the music room.
The gathered brasses want to go
boom—boom.

¹¹⁵ WIA 9. In another typographical intimation of mutual confidence, Lowell scare-quotes the “fellows,” i.e. the Fellows in American Letters of the Library of Congress, to signal critical distance from their bureaucratic officialdom.

¹¹⁶ Lowell to Bishop, WIA 11-12 (52).

The “*boom—boom*” is the sound of the state, yet the imperative to the trees that produce paper, the “shades” that stand as written pages, to “give the music room”—is issued by Bishop. The observer-poet is on the side of the Army band music, ventriloquizing the state command: “edge over.” Bishop’s willingness to ventriloquize this command provides a historical record of her “view,” her institutional position at the Library of Congress, doing poetry work for the state. While Lowell will confess his privileges and sins—and moreover catalogue his anti-establishment triumphs—throughout his poetic corpus, Bishop refuses confession to record her complicity within the national establishment. The poem’s geographical and institutional location decisively links speaker to author—but is evacuated of personal subjectivity. Bishop registers her resistance not by speaking out but by “mumbling” along, unwilling to perform voice where she only had a view.

While Lowell is eager to obscure through wit, or undermine the actuality of bureaucratic “day-to-day work”—“boredom” at an office job is a claim to his fundamentally literary persona—Bishop does not perform his “haplessness” in administrative labor, but competence. Administrative competence enables the recognition of other workers, in particular Phyllis Armstrong. “With Miss Armstrong’s help I edited these recordings and made the selections to be used for the albums,” Bishop notes on the first page of her Annual Report. Bishop explicitly acknowledges the presence of the Poetry Office Secretary, who she worked with on a daily basis, throughout the Annual Report—frequently recounting office labor using plural pronouns, e.g. “we were busy”; “our work”—and throughout the written record of her year in office.¹¹⁷ No other Consultant’s report exhibits a similar attention to

¹¹⁷“Reference work assigned to this office by the Library has gone on more or less continuously, by telephone and letter, and usually been taken care of either by Miss Armstrong or myself”; “From time to time...we have sent [letters of inquiry] on to be attended to by the General Reference and Bibliography Division”; “There was no stenographer at [the Fellows meeting of January 20, 1950], but from Miss Armstrong’s and my own notes I drew up a report of the proceedings.” Bishop,

administrators as collaborators (where, indeed, Poetry Consultants submitted reports that offered more than “incomplete or incorrect information” for posterity). Moreover, Bishop renders transparent and identifies with the administrative capacity of her position, signing a response to a State Department inquiry “Elizabeth Bishop / Chair of Poetry / General Reference and Bibliography Division.”¹¹⁸

Where Bishop performs incompetence, it is never in the written record of her administrative work with Phyllis Armstrong—only in the phonetic record of her individual expression. If “mumbling” her poems for the archive is a refusal to speak state power, she will not mumble where it would obscure extra-literary labor. The archive itself would otherwise conceal the work of those who “edit and select” the sound material, as with the Robert Frost recordings that occupied much of the Poetry Office’s time that year. Bishop and Armstrong’s reports detail the scheduling of a second recording session that would be more to his satisfaction. The sound record preserves voice, which leaves no written trace of this labor, for national posterity.

The Bollingen Prize controversy and Yaddo witch-hunt—or the Bollingen Affair and the Lowell Affair—display 1) a common discourse of aesthetic autonomy, or attempt to define the relationship of poetry to the U.S. state, and 2) the institutional location(s) of this discourse: both affairs illuminate the role of the national government and of private patronage in the discursive formation of aesthetic positions, which subsequently calcified as critical affiliations proper to the academy. In other words, what we now see as a properly academic debate, i.e. New Criticism as a disciplinary tradition of the English Department, was complexly institutionally entangled at the time, and its subsequent location in the academy is more properly its outcome. It may be accurate to call the

“Annual Report to the Librarian of Congress from the Chair of Poetry 1949-1950,” William McGuire Papers.

¹¹⁸ Bishop to Tadd Fisher, “Response to State Department Survey Request,” August 23, 1950, William McGuire Papers.

university the institutional victor post-1949—the newly codified locus of cultural authority vis-à-vis the arts—but it is shortsighted to imagine other institutional investments in cultural production, namely, the Library of Congress and the State Department; and wealthy independent patrons of national arts programming, simultaneously vanished. Indeed the moment the government *lost* the prize marks a historical turn toward its effective centrality in the administration of culture.¹¹⁹ The broader arc of this dissertation traces how the state and the patron remobilized their agendas, or restructured their investments, through and within the apparatus of higher education and public arts initiatives.

¹¹⁹ By formally disclaiming guardianship of taste or literary value proper, the state accomplished a kind of ideological sanitization project à la New Critical methodology, instrumentalizing the university as a vessel of potent if messy political judgments and cultural values. Of course, federal support, e.g. the G.I. Bill and later the Higher Education Act, supported the university's growth. Thus it could later use poetry as a "good" in and of itself to deploy as cultural weaponry in the global Cold War, and a commodity instrumental to the literary-cultural production of neoliberal discourses of identity.

CHAPTER 2

Inaugurating National Poetry: Robert Frost and Cold War Arts, 1956-1965

Knowing the pride of the Russian people in things Russian, R.F. [Robert Frost] was quick to explain that he, too, had a “nationalist” approach to art: “The first reason for a strong nation is to protect the language, to protect the poetry in it” he said, [sic] “it works both ways. A great nation makes great poetry, and great poetry makes a great nation.” —Stewart L. Udall, Secretary of the Interior, on Frost’s Mission to Moscow, April 1963¹²⁰

I don’t want to run for office, but I want to be a politician.
—Robert Frost, Consultant in Poetry, Library of Congress (1958-9)¹²¹

In December 1958, three months into his term as Consultant in Poetry at the Library of Congress, Robert Frost called a press conference to announce he had “come down here [to Washington, D.C.] on a misunderstanding.” Since taking office, he had been approached only three times by the White House, once by the Supreme Court, and not at all by Congress: “I thought I was to be poetry consultant...in everything—poetry, politics, religion, science. I’ll tackle anything.” He offered national educational policy advice, a field in which he considered himself the world’s “greatest living expert”: “A lot of people are being scared by the Russian Sputnik into wanting to harden up our education or speed it up. I am interested in toning it up, at the high school level...I have long thought that our high schools should be improved. Nobody should come into our high schools without examinations—not aptitude tests, but on reading, ’riting, and ’rithmetic. And that goes for black or white.”¹²²

Set in the context of domestic race relations and Cold War cultural competition with the Soviet Union, Frost emphasizes *tone* as a singularly powerful indicator of the health of the American education system and by extension the American state. The

¹²⁰ “Udall Report on Robert Frost Trip to USSR, April 1963,” April 10, 1963, President’s Office Files: Department of the Interior, Papers of John F. Kennedy, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

¹²¹ “Poetry Office Press Conference Transcript,” December 8, 1958, folder 44, Robert Frost Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹²² Ibid.

difference between “hardening” or “speeding up” and “toning up” curricula is no less the difference between Frost’s terms of “Spartanizing” or “democraticizing,” or the difference between Sparta and Athens, the Greek nation-states Frost frequently contrasted to analogize the Soviet Union and the United States. Rejecting Sparta as a social model of militaristic conformity—the hard, fast Spartan Sputnik—Frost championed Athenian conflicts of “opinion and personality,” democracy with “all risks taken.” America ought “rather perish as Athens than prevail as Sparta.” “The tone,” he said, “is Athens. The tone is freedom to the point of destruction.”¹²³

Poetry had an important part to play in the Athenian fight: “One reason I’m here is my ambition to get out of the small potatoes class,” he said of assuming the Poetry Chair. “Poetry can become too special, isolated and separate a thing.”¹²⁴ This conviction echoed his earliest articulations of a poetic theory—Frost first declared in 1913, then an unknown expatriate in London, that poetry was “a language absolutely unliterary.” “[T]he great fight of any poet is against the people who want him to write in a special language,” Frost wrote, “that has gradually separated from spoken language.” He determined his verse “would never use a word or combination of words that I hadn’t heard used in running speech.”¹²⁵ The poet’s faculty was not command of a “special language,” but of everyday speech: to capture the political pulse, here the Athenian tone, of American life.

Frost understood his role in relation to federal power, as evident in his rhetorical self-positioning vis-à-vis the three branches of government (enumerating solicitation by “the President, Supreme Court, Congress”). At the time he assumed the Consultancy, this

¹²³ Lawrance Thompson and R.H. Winnick. *Robert Frost, A Biography: The Authorized Life of the Poet Condensed into A Single Volume*, ed. Edward Connery Lathem (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981), 474-5. Hereafter TWL.

¹²⁴ “Poetry Office Press Conference Transcript,” December 8, 1958, folder 44, Robert Frost Papers.

¹²⁵ Frost to John T. Bartlett, Fourth of July [1913], Beaconsfield in Lawrance Thompson, ed., *The Selected Letters of Robert Frost* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), 80 (53). Hereafter SL.

understanding had considerable premise. His appointment followed a formally unrealized invitation earlier that year to act as a White House cultural advisor: “what we really need is a person who thinks about the arts,” Sherman Adams, the Assistant to President Eisenhower, wrote to Frost, addressing him “Dear Mr. Poet Laureate”: “Perhaps we need you on the White House staff. What think you?”¹²⁶ In the middle years of the Eisenhower Administration, Adams requested Frost’s membership on a reelection lobby, the Committee of Artists & Scientists for Eisenhower (CASE),¹²⁷ and assisted in State Department and Information Agency overtures to Frost as a cultural emissary, in one instance sending an official to his home in Ripton, Vermont, to request he showcase “American life” in short essays for foreign circulation.¹²⁸ The same year, 1957, Frost traveled to England on a goodwill mission as the “distinguished representative of the American cultural scene” for the Department of State.¹²⁹ Frost first determined “the behest [was] on a high enough level”—he wrote to the Secretary of State that he “wouldn’t want to be shot off like an unguided missile”¹³⁰—and was assured the importance of “the task of emphasizing the common Anglo-American heritage.”¹³¹ Upon his return, Frost dined with President Eisenhower;¹³² when Librarian of Congress L.

¹²⁶ Sherman Adams to Frost, 15 February 1958, *SL* 572.

¹²⁷ “Some of us think Eisenhower should continue to be President, and most of us are confident he will be able to. We thought you might like to lend your moral strength to a group which we call Committee of Artists & Scientists for Eisenhower, which you will see spelled CASE. You would not have to do any more than give it a blessing.” Adams to Frost, 3 July 1956, *SL* 559.

¹²⁸ *SL* 558 and TWL 460.

¹²⁹ When Frost uncharacteristically declined participation in the essay series, The Secretary of State reiterated the invitation, expressing “importance of such visits by prominent literary figures” in a letter that “help[ed] [Frost] to a decision.” John Foster Dulles to Frost, 12 February 1957; Frost to Dulles, 26 February 1957, *SL* 562. Frost likely saw the venture as “small potatoes class,” and indeed, more prestigious opportunities to export the values of American life would follow.

¹³⁰ Frost to Dulles, 26 February 1957, *SL* 562.

¹³¹ Harold E. Howland to Frost, 10 December 1956, *SL* 560.

¹³² Dwight D. Eisenhower to Robert Frost, Feb 16, 1958, 6.41 PM; Adams to Frost, 15 February 1958; Frost to Adams, 12 February 1958, *SL* 572-3.

Quincy Mumford wrote to Frost about the post, he understood Adams had already directly promised it to Frost.¹³³

In the context of his own ambitions during this period,¹³⁴ Frost's assertion that the purpose of the Consultant in Poetry was to make "politicians and statesmen more aware of their responsibility to the arts"¹³⁵ is unremarkable. In the history of the office, it was unprecedented.¹³⁶ Consultants previously acted as writers-in-residence and custodial stewards of the Library's Recording Archive. The vision of the office as a public platform is particularly startling following its four-term vacancy from 1952-1956. After the Bollingen Prize and the Williams red-baiting scandals (Chapter 1), the Library was wary of the politically sensitive labor of appointing another Consultant—not to mention of soliciting funds to support one. The Library's relations with its donors had been tenuous since the Bollingen affair. In 1954, the Library (Basler and Armstrong) prepared an appeal to Paul Mellon's Bollingen Foundation for renewed funding; the Foundation sat on the proposal. The recording project came to a standstill. During these years, the Library's modest poetry programming was supported by Gertrude Clarke Whittall.¹³⁷ In 1956, Congressman W. Sterling Cole of New York proposed legislation that would authorize the President to designate a "poet laureate." But the Library hastened to avoid

¹³³ Adams asked Mumford to appoint Frost; Mumford's letter was a formality: "our understanding [is] that you will make definite plans to be at the Library of Congress next October 13-18. . ." L. Quincy Mumford to Robert Frost, 2 May 1958, *SL* 578-9 (449-a).

¹³⁴ "I don't want to run for office, but I want to be a politician," Frost declared at the December Library of Congress press conference in December, half-jesting that he hoped "some good Senator would resign about six months before the end of his term and let me finish it out." "Poetry Office Press Conference Transcript," December 8, 1958,

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ "Within a few minutes, the scope of the Consultantship in Poetry at the Library of Congress had expanded beyond anything heretofore contemplated, by anyone other than Frost, at least. The questions, answers, and badinage continued for an hour, covering the Pound case [and] such divergent topics as socialism [and] the need for more study of humanities as opposed to science." Roy Basler, *The Muse and the Librarian* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1974), 59.

¹³⁷ "The Poetry Office has become increasingly concerned with the preparation and presentation of the programs under the Gertrude Clarke Whittall Poetry and Literature Funds. . . For the first time this year we have been unable to record new poets for the Library's archives due to lack of funds." Basler, "Annual Report of the Poetry Office for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1954," excerpted from the Annual Report of the General Reference and Bibliography Division, July 15, 1954, 1-2, William McGuire Papers.

the politicized business of promoting the arts, and the proposal never got out of committee. “I am thoroughly in accord with your objective of providing an incentive for creative effort in the field of poetry. I must confess, however, that I have doubts as to whether the arts, in a country such as ours, can successfully or indeed should be promoted by the Government through the creation of prizes and other similar distinctions,” Librarian of Congress Mumford wrote to Cole.¹³⁸ Mumford makes clear that the Library had not forgotten the lesson of *The Pisan Cantos*—“here at the Library of Congress we have had an unfortunate experience in the making of awards”—nor the congressional resolution that followed. The 1949 decision that it was “bad policy” for the government to play gatekeeper of the arts or affiliate in “matters of taste” is fastidiously elaborated:

In our cosmopolitan and democratic civilization the arts survive by their ability to establish themselves with relatively large groups[,] and few artistic styles or movements fail to secure adherents. For the Government to make a choice from among the practitioners of one or another school would, I believe, tend to discourage rather than encourage experimentation and artistic development by putting the Government’s imprimatur on one style as opposed to another.¹³⁹

Two years later, however, the Library’s “doubts” were scattered by Frost’s conviction that “the connection should be closer between Government and the arts.”¹⁴⁰ Pound may have been anti-laureate of Washington the last few decades, casting a long shadow from his cell at St Elizabeths—but in 1958 Frost arrived on the scene to secure his release. He met with Justice Department officials in February, following his dinner with Eisenhower. When the Federal District Court dropped charges against Pound in April, *The New York Times* reported: “[t]he person most responsible for today’s announcement. . . is Robert Frost, the poet, who has waged a persistent public and private campaign during the last

¹³⁸ Archival documentation suggests the letter was drafted by Basler, Adkinson and Clapp.

¹³⁹ McGuire, *Poetry’s Catbird Seat*, 197.

¹⁴⁰ “Robert Frost Appointment Press Conference, Wilson Room, Library of Congress,” transcript, May 21, 1958, Robert Frost Papers.

two years for Mr. Pound's release."¹⁴¹ Frost received the official invitation to serve as Consultant in Poetry just a few days later.¹⁴² Cast in the light of his "first raise on the Capital City"¹⁴³, Frost read the invitation as a summons to more political action.¹⁴⁴

The congressional mandate that it was "bad policy" for the Library or federal government to play gatekeeper in the arts issued in the wake of the Pound affair expired in the wake of Pound's release. Randall Jarrell had pursued his two terms in office with gusto, giving a number of talks on the poet's role in society and the nation. Unlike Frost, however, he did not express a strong desire to influence federal policymakers. "I would if I knew what they were," Frost replied when a reporter asked if he would, as his successor, "continue Mr. Jarrell's politics"—a comment met with laughter.¹⁴⁵ Frost's dismissive jest was also assurance that creative artists were politically disinterested civic

¹⁴¹ Anthony Lewis, "Court Drops Charge Against Ezra Pound," *The New York Times*, April 19, 1958. Frost was at the Poetry Center in New York City the day of the announcement: "This morning's paper said I took two years to get Ezra Pound out of jail, but the truth is, I did it all in just one week" (SL 575). Although Frost felt his role had been decisive, in fact Archibald MacLeish was at the "self-effacingly active" (SL 563) helm of the campaign for Pound's release, as Jed Rasula and Al Filreis have demonstrated. MacLeish did, however, invoke Frost's support strategically, "aware of the influence a conservative 'poet of the people' like Frost might wield" (SL 575). In February 1957, for example, MacLeish drafted an appeal to the Attorney General on letterhead of the American Academy of Arts and Letters—a Huntington-funded arts organization—and acquired three co-signatories "whose reputations were calculated to have a good deal of weight with the Republican Party members of the Eisenhower regime": Ernest Hemingway in Cuba, T.S. Eliot in England, and Frost in England (Herbert Brownell, Jr., to Robert Frost, February 28, 1957, Washington D.C., SL 563). Frost met MacLeish and agreed to the appeal during his State Department-sponsored goodwill mission in London, where he also met and discussed it with Eliot (Archibald MacLeish to Kathleen Morrison, 17 June 1957, SL 568). Back in Ripton, however, Frost would cite his "misgivings" about the "bad business" to MacLeish—"the affair might better wait until the Fall" when more influential government officials would be in Washington (Frost to MacLeish, 24 June 1957 [Transcribed from first draft of, typewritten, revised in ink, and unsigned], SL 569). Frost finally agreed unable to "bear that anyone's fate should hang too much on mine. . .you go ahead and make an appointment with the Department of Justice" (SL 563). After the announcement of Pound's release, however, Frost would clutch the symbolic figure of high literary modernism like an Oscar, claiming victory by way of extending "thanks...all you did to make simple and easy for me my first raise on the Capital City...Things are shaping up to turn me into something Washingtonian right now." SL 577.

¹⁴² Mumford to Robert Frost, May 2, 1958, SL 578-9 (4409-a).

¹⁴³ SL 577.

¹⁴⁴ "I wouldn't have much confidence in myself in that way [consulting in all matters of politics] if I hadn't been so successful in Washington lately in a law case. But, I surprised myself." "Robert Frost Conference, Wilson Room, Library of Congress," transcript, May 21, 1958, Robert Frost Papers.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

representatives. He and his predecessor were artists representing the “the clean and wholesome life of the ordinary man.”¹⁴⁶ During his Consultancy, and in his politically active late years, Frost sought to reactivate policymakers’ commitment to the creative arts. But rather than defining national arts support as the ethical imperative to protect aesthetic freedom, per the dominant rhetoric observed in the defense of Pound in Chapter 1, Frost saw a role for the artist as a model citizen, taking what he called the “middle” or “measured way.”¹⁴⁷ By the “measured” way, Frost referred to the assimilative discipline of his poetic practice—for example, where speech rhythm is contained by metrical law, a dialectical moderation he analogized with the checks and balances of democratic government—and by extension a social ideal of “chartered freedom.”¹⁴⁸

The uses of the creative artist—relocated from St Elizabeths to “the middle way,” but still representing the freedom of the “road less traveled”¹⁴⁹—appeared promising in the Cold War climate. The federal government and the artist forged a new alliance in the Cold War,¹⁵⁰ and the avant-garde visual artist and minor voice of the poet were particularly well positioned to symbolize the values of individuality and freedom. Serge Guilbaut’s study of *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, which describes how the CIA invested in abstract expressionist painting, is one compelling example of how

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Rose Feld, *The New York Times Book Review*, October 21, 1923 reprinted in Lathem and Thompson, eds., *The Robert Frost Reader: Poetry and Prose* (New York: Henry Holt, 1972), 330. Hereafter *RFR*.

¹⁴⁷ “I like the middle way, as I like to talk to the man who walks the middle way with me...I write blank verse. I must have the pulse beat of rhythm, I like to hear it beating under the things I write.” Interview with Feld, *RFR*, 331.

¹⁴⁸ Hoffman, *Robert Frost and the Politics of Poetry*, 10; 202.

¹⁴⁹ Frost’s poetics did not propose uncivil dissent that threatened social order, but provided a discourse of difference in the service of the politics of freedom during the Cold War. One of Frost’s most frequently anthologized poems, “The Road Not Taken,” in which the speaker “took the road less traveled by, / And that has made all the difference,” was used to analogize the American way contra Soviet conformity by the Secretary of the Interior during the Kennedy Administration. “Udall Report on Robert Frost Trip to USSR, April 1963,” Papers of John F. Kennedy.

¹⁵⁰ See Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983) on avant-garde painting; Peter Decherney, *Hollywood and the Culture Elite: How the Movies Became American* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005) on film.

U.S. national arts funding worked in cultural competition with the Soviet Union, promulgating the creative, individual voice of the American artist-as-citizen contra the collective groupthink of the communist threat. Frost's example shows how this cultural competition also played out in the field of postwar American poetry.

This chapter examines the U.S. federal government's investment in the creative arts in the pivotal years 1956-1965 through the lens of the Poetry Chair at the Library of Congress. The national poet figured crucially in the federal government's development of new cultural and arts programming during the Eisenhower and Kennedy Administrations, laying the groundwork for the creation of the National Endowment for the Arts under the Johnson Administration in 1965. After the Library's Pound and Williams scandals (Chapter 1), the Poetry Chair sat vacant for four terms (1952-1956). Randall Jarrell and Robert Frost occupied the office in 1956-8 and 1958-9, respectively. Frost remained active as the national poet subsequent to his official post as Consultant, proposing an alliance between "statesmen and poets" to advance a national arts "golden age."¹⁵¹ As this chapter will show, the proposal was taken quite seriously, and with lasting consequences. Though well documented, the relationship of Frost and Kennedy typically receives only anecdotal notice. This study directs explicit attention to Frost and Kennedy's political partnership, invested in a vision of American "poetry and power"¹⁵² in cultural competition with the Soviet Union.

This chapter focuses on two periods of Frost's career (1913-5 and 1956-62), beginning with his articulation of a speech-based, or phonocentric, theory of poetic composition in the early 1910s in London. It traces the development of Frost's poetics,

¹⁵¹ "'Dedication,' Robert Frost's Presidential Inaugural Poem, 20 January 1961: Typescript with Frost's Holograph Script Corrections in Ink and Stewart Udall's Holograph Clarifications in Pencil on the Last Page," Stewart L. Udall Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress. Also see Appendix III.

¹⁵² Ibid.

which increasingly politicized notions of voice and form after his repatriation to the United States in 1915. Natural speech and national identity evolved as core preoccupations of his poetics. By tracing this development we can better understand Frost's goals and legacy as a national poet in his politically active late years. Under Kennedy, poetry achieved a particularly important status among the cultural, or non-military tactics, used to compete with the Soviets for global prestige. The State Department sent Frost on goodwill trips to Israel and Greece two months after Kennedy's inauguration and a month before the Bay of Pigs, and to the Soviet Union in September 1962, where he would meet with Khrushchev at his private dacha in the weeks preceding the Cuban Missile Crisis.

This chapter argues that the Frost-Kennedy years transformed the function of poetry in national culture. It did so through both symbolic actions and policy changes. In the instance of his recitation from memory of "The Gift Outright" at Kennedy's inauguration, Frost symbolized the expressive agency of the individual citizen in relation to state power. Poetry provided a blueprint of citizenship—the individual convinced of his continuity with national history and agency in a national future—for the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations, who supported this model of expressive agency as ideological weaponry in the global Cold War through federal arts initiatives.

In the Frost-Kennedy national arts "golden age," the state acted as an increasingly central pivot between the infrastructure of literary-professional organizations and the rapidly expanding higher education industry. This is seen in the institutional collation of the first National Poetry Festival, celebrated in Washington in October 1962 as the Cuban Missile Crisis simultaneously unfolded. Held at the Library of Congress and funded by the Bollingen Foundation and the Poetry Society of America, the event occasioned *Poetry* magazine's 50th anniversary and Frost's last public reading. Paul Engle, the head of the Iowa Writers Workshop, was making the rounds, about

which we will learn more in Chapter 3. The Frost-Kennedy model of state-private institutional collusion articulated a national poetry project for the middle Cold War period, and transformed the structure of federal arts funding in the second half of the 20th-century.

1. Literary Customs: Enemies at Ellis Island and the Poetry Society of America

Another such review as the one in Poetry [Ezra Pound's "Modern Georgics"] and I shan't be admitted at Ellis Island. This is no joke. . . You can imagine the hot patriot I will have become by the time I get home. And then to be shut out!
Frost to Sidney Cox, January 2, 1915¹⁵³

Another experience I cant [sic] seem to get over is Ellis Island. I dreamed last night that I had to pass a written examination in order to pass the inspection there. There were two questions set me.

1. Who in Hell do you think you are?
2. How much do one and one make?

Frost to Nathan Haskell Dole, March 26, 1915¹⁵⁴

In December 1915, Robert Frost wrote to Louis Untermeyer that he was so "discouraged it would do my enemies (see roster of the Poetry Society of America) good to see me."¹⁵⁵ "You needn't tell anyone I am so down or I shall have everybody on top of me," Frost confided. "Sometime I will do as you tell me—write a little more poetry and a little prose too. Not now." Meanwhile Frost was writing letters. Since repatriating to the United States from England in February, the 40-year old newcomer to the New York literary establishment had launched an epistolary campaign disseminating "the story of how I see my own development and some of my theories of art"¹⁵⁶ to American poetry editors and critics. Frost had published his first two collections of poetry in London, where the second, *North of Boston*, found considerable acclaim. The British reviewer

¹⁵³ Frost to Sidney Cox, 2 January 1915 [The Gallows], *SL* 146-149.

¹⁵⁴ *SL* 162.

¹⁵⁵ Qtd. in TWL 224.

¹⁵⁶ *SL* 159.

Edward Garnett called Frost a “New American Poet” “destined to take a permanent place in American literature.”¹⁵⁷

But the critical approval Frost won in England translated uneasily at home. “When an American poet comes to us with an English reputation and prints upon his volume the English dictum that ‘his achievement is much finer, much more near to the ground, and much more national than anything that Whitman gave to the world,’ one is likely to be prejudiced, not to say antagonized, at the outset,” Jessie Rittenhouse wrote for *The New York Times*. Her review of *North of Boston* reacted to what she understood as English critics’ implicitly patronizing terms of praise: “Just why a made-in-England reputation is so coveted by the poets of this country is difficult to fathom, particularly as English poets look so anxiously to America for acceptance of their own work.”¹⁵⁸

Rittenhouse was the recording secretary and an influential co-founder of The Poetry Society of America. While Frost was developing his poetic theory in London, seeking approval from “the critical few who are supposed to know,” Rittenhouse had been meanwhile fighting for the Poetry Society’s secession from its parent organization, the London Society, determined to build the first “authentically American” poetry organization. “She had no right to imply of course that I desired or sought a British-made reputation,” Frost wrote to a friend after reading Rittenhouse’s review. “You know that it simply came to me after I had nearly given up any reputation at all.”¹⁵⁹

The day after Frost repatriated to the United States via Ellis Island, he attended a Poetry Society of America (PSA) banquet. It was an inauspicious literary homecoming. Rittenhouse would prove ringleader of what Frost called his “roster of enemies,” taunting his “made-in-England reputation” not only in reviews, but also, as he would later learn,

¹⁵⁷ Edward Garnett, “A New American Poet,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, August 1915.

¹⁵⁸ Jessie Rittenhouse, “North of Boston; Robert Frost’s Poems of New England Farm Life,” *The New York Times*, May 16, 1915.

¹⁵⁹ “The only nastiness in Jessie B’s article is the first part where she speaks of the English reviews as fulsome. There she speaks dishonestly out of complete ignorance—out of some sort of malice or envy I should infer. . .” Frost to Cox, 16 May 1915, *SL* 173.

at PSA meetings when he was not in attendance. “Someone writes to tell me that the Poetry Society had one of my poems to abuse in manuscript the other night. Absolutely without my knowledge and consent,” Frost fumed to Untermeyer. “Protest for me, will you? I wonder how in the world they got the manuscript.”¹⁶⁰ This particular humiliation prompted Frost to write to Amy Lowell, chief promoter of American Imagism, and a tenuous confidante at best, with a begrudged concession: “I shall hope to see you sometime a good deal sooner than I can promise to be at the Poetry Society to be reduced to the ranks.”¹⁶¹

Not only, however, would Frost eventually join his “roster of enemies,” but he would also serve as the Honorary President of the Poetry Society for over two decades,¹⁶² a reliable “honored guest at dinners given to celebrate [other] medals or award[s].”¹⁶³ He was among the first sponsors of “The College Poetry Society of America,”¹⁶⁴ and the PSA established its major prize, The Frost Medal, in his name. When Frost accepted a Gold Medal for Distinguished Service from the Society in 1958 President Eisenhower interrupted the banquet with a congratulatory telegram.¹⁶⁵ Frost’s initially fraught relationship with the PSA would outlast all other literary affiliations of his early career.

But in the fledgling years of the Poetry Society of America, founded in 1910, and the fledgling years of Frost’s career—his first publication was in 1912—Frost’s “made-in-England” reputation conflicted with Rittenhouse’s vision for a poetry society built along

¹⁶⁰ Qtd. in TWL 224.

¹⁶¹ Frost to Amy Lowell, May 14, 1916, *SL* 203.

¹⁶² Frost was announced as Honorary President in 1940, and ostensibly remained the masthead of the PSA until his death in 1963. I have found no record of a subsequent poet holding the title.

¹⁶³ *The Letters of Robert Frost to Louis Untermeyer* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963), 24.

¹⁶⁴ Rittenhouse, *My House of Life* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1934), 240. The College Poetry Society of America’s first president was Robert Hillyer, the author of *The Saturday Review* polemics against the awarding of the Bollingen Prize to Pound (Chapter 1). Hillyer was also president of the PSA during the Bollingen Affair.

¹⁶⁵ The Eisenhower telegram conveyed warm wishes to the Poetry Society of America, joining the national tribute to Frost: “It is fortunate that our Nation is blessed with citizens like Robert Frost who can express our innermost feelings and speak so clearly to us of our land and life.” January 16, 1958, *SL* 571.

“national lines.”¹⁶⁶ An influential player in a nascent New York poetry establishment, Frost would rapidly adapt his poetic persona to align with the institutional values of the Poetry Society of America. Yet cultivating a reputation as an “American” poet was only in part a reactionary answer to the PSA and review publications like *The New York Times*. His poetic theory had already developed a concern with national identity, animated by a rivalry with Pound in London. Abroad, he had come to understand himself as an American poet contra Pound and his cosmopolitan internationalism—an identity threatened and anxiously reclaimed during the traumatic event of repatriation. Frost’s nationalist strain was thus primed—by modernist contemporary Pound, gatekeepers like Rittenhouse, and officials at Ellis Island—before it cohered as a commercially strategic posture within the U.S. literary marketplace.

2. Declaring American Independence in London: Frost’s Early Poetic Theory

First, however, Frost sought to establish himself as an “English writer” during his England residence (1912-1915), by earning “success with the critical few who are supposed to know.”¹⁶⁷ Impressing himself upon the London literary-critical elite was instrumental to his careerist vision. Frost imagined success in London as a requisite step to securing a broad audience in America, and a defined theory of versification as a rite of passage before entering the marketplace: “...really to arrive where I can stand on my legs as a poet and nothing I must be outside that circle to the general reader who buys books in their thousands.”¹⁶⁸

“The critical few” were a complex set. Frost was the beneficiary of literary personages with diverse aesthetic commitments; both the London literary avant-garde and rural Georgian poets shaped his early poetic theory during his England residence.

¹⁶⁶ “[T]he Society...ought to be along national lines, and should meet in a public rather than a private place.” Rittenhouse, *House of Life*, 223.

¹⁶⁷ Frost to John T. Bartlett, c. 5 November 1913, *SL* 98.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

When he met his most important contact, F.S. Flint, at a bookstore opening, he found himself stationed at the nexus of a poetic battleground: Harold Monroe, who was opening the store, had just taken over *The Poetry Review* of the London Poetry Society with his incipient school of Georgians; Flint and T.E. Hulme were advocates of French symbolism and contemporary French poetry. Flint would facilitate Frost's meeting with fellow American Ezra Pound, who was influenced by Hulme in turn, albeit temporarily, commandeering the London avant-garde through successive doctrines of Imagism and Vorticism. Viewing the literary scene as a playing field, or, as he often called it, a "game," Frost initially accepted favor wherever it was offered; he was not shy to recommend himself ("You *know* I want you to use my poem in your catalogue")¹⁶⁹. At the same time, Frost resented feeling indebted to his advocates—particularly Pound.

Frost found in Pound a "bullying" advocate, and came to view himself the victim of a dictatorial mentorship.¹⁷⁰ After Flint spoke to Pound on behalf of Frost, Pound sent a calling card to Frost's residence at 10 Church Walk, Kensington: "At home—sometimes."¹⁷¹ The terse quasi-invitation anticipated what Frost would call a "quasi-friendship."¹⁷² At their first meeting, coincidentally the day Frost's first published work, *A Boy's Will*, came off the printers, Pound insisted they walk to the publisher. To Frost's horror, Pound held the first bound copy before he did.¹⁷³ Pound also lost no time reviewing it for *Poetry*: "I think we should print this notice at once as we ought to be first," he wrote to the editor, Harriet Monroe; his "booming" of *A Boy's Will* was "sure to make fuss enough to get quoted in N.Y."¹⁷⁴ Pound physically laying claim to Frost's first volume dramatically enacts the psychic power struggle described in Frost's

¹⁶⁹ Frost to Thomas B. Mosher, 17 July 1913, Beaconsfield in *SL* 83-4 (55). Emphasis original.

¹⁷⁰ "I suppose I am under obligations to him and I try to be grateful...He says I must write something much more like *vers libre* or he will let me perish of neglect." Ibid.

¹⁷¹ TWL 164.

¹⁷² Frost to John T. Bartlett, c. 5 November 1913, *SL* (98).

¹⁷³ TWL 165. Frost also tells this story in a *Paris Review* interview later in life.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

correspondence. The more he considered it, Frost found Pound's review an insulting depiction of him as "the untutored child."¹⁷⁵ Moreover, he had incurred a debt, which Pound demanded he pay, pedagogical interest due, in aesthetic allegiance:

You will be amused to hear that Pound has taken to bullying me on the strength of what he did for me by his review in *Poetry*. The fact that he discovered me gives him the right to see that I live up to his good opinion of me. He says I must write something much more like *vers libre* or he will let me perish of neglect. He really threatens. I suppose I am under obligations to him and I try to be grateful. But as for the review in *Poetry* (Chicago, May), if any but a great man had written it, I should have called it vulgar...The more I think of it the less I like the connection he sees between me and the Irishman who could sit on a kitchen-midden and dream stars. It is so stupidly wide of [sic] the mark. And then his inaccuracies about my family affairs! Still I think he meant to be generous.¹⁷⁶

Frost casts Pound as an oppressive pedagogue: the "great man" is the provider, a parent who "threatens" "neglect"; Frost must "live up" to his expectations and "try to be grateful." Frost would like to keep Pound's "good opinion" while simultaneously rejecting it as "inaccura[te]." Rather than a gift outright, Pound's "generosity" required an immediate and unequal return: not in an abstract condition of gratitude, but performed compliance of a student.

Frost would not be deemed "an untutored child" taught to write in *vers libre*. He sought to distance himself from Pound and the poetic principles of the London avant-garde—Frost described Pound as leading a band of "American literary refugees"—in a series of "declarations of independence" that month. He cast his own theory of versification as an American invention, first pronouncing it by letter on Independence Day, July 4, 1913. "To be perfectly frank with you I am one of the most notable craftsmen of my time," he wrote to John Bartlett. "I am possibly the only person going who works on any but a worn out theory (principle I had better say) of versification...I alone of

¹⁷⁵ "The more I think of it the less I like the connection he sees between me and the Irishman who could sit on a kitchen-midden and dream stars. It is so stupidly wide of the mark. And then his inaccuracies about my family affairs!" Frost to Thomas B. Mosher, 17 July 1913, Beaconsfield, *SL* 83-4 (55).

¹⁷⁶ Frost to Thomas B. Mosher, 17 July 1913, Beaconsfield, *SL* 83-4 (55).

English writers have consciously set myself to make music out of what I may call the sound of sense.”¹⁷⁷

Two weeks after announcing his theory of versification by letter to Bartlett, Frost drafted a free-verse satirical poem in a letter to Pound that he would never send. Despite its parodic use of open form, the poem is a remarkably self-disclosing narrative, equal parts confession and accusation: “I clung to you / As one clings to a group of insincere friends / For fear they shall turn their thoughts against him / The moment he is out of hearing.”¹⁷⁸ The proximity of these two compositions—Frost’s poetic theory written on Independence Day, and his declaration of independence from Pound—is telling. Frost’s rivalry with Pound helped motivate, and moreover usefully highlights, the nationalist gesture of his July 4 date-stamped poetic theory. To refuse his domineering “expatriate” mentor, Frost became an American “patriot”—indeed a “hot patriot,” as he asserted in a letter to Sidney Cox.

In between his declarations of American Independence, Frost petitioned Mosher to be connected to different, decidedly non-vers libre literary ilk: “I wish sometime if you know [Edwin Arlington] Robinson you could put me in the way of knowing him too.”¹⁷⁹ Notably, Frost pursues affiliation with the populist poetic sensibility of Robinson in the same letter in which he refuses to be taken as an “untutored child.” Frost’s aesthetic identification with Robinson, an American “people’s poet,” was forged in reaction to Pound. Moreover, impugning Pound’s “merit for caviar” made Frost in the next breath a “poet for all sorts and kinds” and a “People’s Poet” in letters to Bartlett and Monroe.¹⁸⁰

Frost’s declarations of American Independence were not wholly successful. When he sent his parody of Pound to Flint, the savvy moderator pacified Frost, casting Pound

¹⁷⁷ Frost to John T. Bartlett, Fourth of July [1913], Beaconsfield, *SL* 79.

¹⁷⁸ Frost to Ezra Pound, [c. 20 July 1913 Beaconsfield], *SL* 85-6 (57).

¹⁷⁹ Frost to Thomas B. Mosher, 17 July 1913, Beaconsfield, *SL* 83-4 (55).

¹⁸⁰ Frost to John T. Bartlett, c. 5 November 1913, *SL* 98; “Now who will have the better claim to the title of People’s Poet?” Frost to Harold Monroe, December 1914 [The Gallows], *SL* 142 (94).

in the role of the misbehaving child: “We mustn’t be too hard on E.P...Your ‘poem’ is very amusing!...You know I think his bark is much worse than his bite...All the same he irritates; and we mustn’t allow ourselves to be irritated, don’t you think? Don’t you feel it as a weakness?”¹⁸¹ Frost did not send the poem to Pound, nor would he express his irritation to Flint directly again—even when Pound’s review of his second book enraged him.

After the publication of *North of Boston*, Frost had sent Garnett’s and other favorable British reviews, in self-made press kit style, as clippings in letters to editors and reviewers in America. But when the first long review of *North of Boston* appeared in the States, two months before his planned departure, Frost realized this might have been a tactical mistake. The review was written by Pound: “It is a sinister thing that so American, I might even say so parochial, a talent as that of Robert Frost should have to be exported before it can find due encouragement and recognition.”¹⁸² For Pound, *North of Boston* was instrumental to a wider polemic about American literary culture. Frost, like any talent (although his is “parochial”), must publish abroad:

It is natural and proper that I should have to come abroad to get printed, or that ‘H. D.’—with her clear-cut derivations and her revivifications of Greece—should have to come abroad; or that Fletcher—with his tic and his discords and his contrariety and extended knowledge of everything—should have to come abroad. One need not censure the country; it is easier for us to emigrate than for America to change her civilization fast enough to please us. But why, IF there are serious people in America, desiring literature of America, literature accepting present conditions, rendering American life with sober fidelity, why, in heaven’s name, is this book of New England eclogues given us under a foreign imprint?¹⁸³

Frost understood the implications of being labeled an “export.” “I fear I am going to suffer a good deal at home by the support of Pound,” he wrote to Sidney Cox. “Another such review as the one in Poetry [Pound’s “Modern Georgics” in December 1914] and I

¹⁸¹ Frank S. Flint to Frost [26 July 1913] [London], *SL* 86-87 (57a).

¹⁸² Pound, “Modern Georgics,” *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse* (December 1914), 127. Other reviews of *North of Boston* referred to Frost’s theory of the sound of sense as he had advertised it through correspondence: Abercrombie in *The Nation*; Gibson in *The Bookman*; Thomas in *The English Review*; Monro in *Poetry and Drama*.

¹⁸³ Pound, “Modern Georgics,” 129.

shan't be admitted at Ellis Island. This is no joke. . ."¹⁸⁴ Their personal relationship had also soured—"we quarreled in six weeks," and Pound was "doing his best to put me in the wrong light...Nothing could be more unfair, nothing better calculated to make me an exile for life." Frost determined to now publicly define himself against Pound's London-based "party of American literary refugees." To Cox, he issued a breathless request: "I dont [sic] see that it is possible to do anything publicly to disassociate myself from Pound but do you think it would be a discreet thing for you to say a word to [Stuart P.] Sherman or perhaps (what do you think?) even write a short letter to the Sun or The Times or both saying that you have reason to know that I would have no pleasure in that part of Pound's article in Poetry that represented me as an American literary refugee in London with a grievance against Amer[ican] editors." A few paragraphs later, Frost reconsidered: "P.S. We won't stir the Pound matter up I think...but what I have written in the body of the letter you could use should I be attacked when Holt sends out copies for review. Of course it is quite possible that I exaggerate the importance of Pound's article. Let's hope so."¹⁸⁵ Frost's composure waned, and he subsequently wrote Harcourt, his publisher in America, with a similar request.¹⁸⁶

Frost's fear of being perceived as insufficiently loyal to the American poetry establishment leaves a striking, even compulsive, paper trail, but it was not unfounded. As Rittenhouse's *NYT* review bears out, Frost would experience backlash at home for his success abroad, though less thanks to the review by Pound than that by Garnett.

¹⁸⁴ *SL* 149.

¹⁸⁵ Frost to Sidney Cox, 2 January 1915 [The Gallows], *SL* 146-149 (97).

¹⁸⁶ Harcourt wrote an editorial for *The New York Times* in turn: "That Mr. Frost's volume of poems, 'North of Boston,' made its first appearance under the imprint of an English instead of an American publisher has disturbed some of our reviewers. . .But now Mr. Frost comes to the rescue with the explanation the simplicity of which should allay at once nay international jealousies or suspicions...he happened to be in England when the idea came to him of collecting his poetry manuscripts into a volume...He declares he 'didn't cross the water seeking a British publisher.' The thing 'just happened.' And, so, there is not 'another case of American inappreciation' to record." *TWL* 220.

Moreover, Frost's seemingly hyperbolic paranoia that he would not be "admitted at Ellis Island" in fact turned out to be "no joke."

3. Literary Repatriation: Trouble at Ellis Island

The day after his repatriation to the United States, Frost met two trials he would later refer to as a singular trauma—Ellis Island. After three years abroad, Frost made his homecoming accompanied by an underage British citizen, 13-year old Mervyn Thomas. Immigration officers stopped Frost at customs. No alien under sixteen could enter the United States without a suitable sponsor able to prove his financial means prevented the alien from becoming a public charge. The next morning, the poet stood trial. He held no teaching position; how, then, "would he be able to support himself, his family, and this boy on the earnings from his poetry?"¹⁸⁷ A panel of three immigration officers questioned an "infuriated" Frost, who yelled to Thomas: "Tell them you wouldn't stay in a country where they treat people like this!"¹⁸⁸ Frost found his status as a professional poet on trial at U.S. customs.

Meanwhile Frost had to smuggle "a British-made reputation" through the customs of the nascent New York poetry establishment. The evening of his customs trial, Frost made his first homeland literary appearance: Harcourt, his publisher, hoped the Poetry Society of America banquet would provide a warm welcome to the American poetry scene.¹⁸⁹ Instead, Frost found himself surrounded by a "roster of enemies" led by the aggressive national vision of recording secretary Jessie Rittenhouse. Frost expected to return home to some degree of repute: he hoped to farm and find a respectable

¹⁸⁷ TWL 199.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Harcourt knew about the incident at Ellis Island, and sent Robert Haven Schauffler, author of "Scum o' the Earth"—a widely praised poem celebrating the plight of industrious immigrants—to escort Frost to the PSA meeting (TWL 199). This was an ill-conceived match; Schauffler had criticized Frost's poetry at the previous PSA meeting.

teaching position, the latter “on account of his successes with prosody in England.”¹⁹⁰ Instead, during his first days back in America, Frost was questioned by gatekeepers of the nation and gatekeepers of the New York poetry establishment. The overlap of these ordeals cohered Ellis Island as a site of trauma—the troubled threshold to literary-national acceptance. It was a symbol producing nightmarish anxiety in the months to follow.¹⁹¹ This conflation of national and poetic gatekeepers during repatriation heightened Frost’s sensitivity to questions of national belonging, bearing crucially on the development of his poetic theory and self-styling of his literary persona.

4. The Poetry Society of America: Salon versus Nation

The Poetry Society of America, “the nation’s oldest poetry organization,” formed in 1910, and its mission evolved in contradistinction to transatlantic modernist literary experimentation. Rittenhouse, the recording secretary during the organization’s first decade, shepherded a high society couple’s salon into a public-minded institution with an explicitly national project. The first meeting, at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Isaac L. Rice in the Ansonia Hotel, was a mid-winter New York social event: “a colorful painting” assembling poets, painters, musicians, novelists and actors “to consider the possibility of an organization for the appreciation of poetry,” as Rittenhouse describes in her autobiography.¹⁹² The Rice event imagined the PSA as a group of poetry writers “united largely through the hospitality of [its] hosts” at individual members’ apartments, “founded upon the salon idea.” However “pleasant” a monthly meeting with “associations of wealth and hospitality,” Rittenhouse rejected the salon model for its

¹⁹⁰ Frost would give a talk on his prosodic theory at the annual Poetry Society dinner in winter 1916; his solemnity fell flat, followed by Untermeyer’s parody of his and other contemporary poetic polemics.

¹⁹¹ “Another experience I cant [sic] seem to get over is Ellis Island. I dreamed last night that I had to pass a written examination in order to pass the inspection there. . .” *SL* 162.

¹⁹² Rittenhouse, *House of Life*, 222.

clubbish tendency to “degenerate into a social affair,” preferring the “stable basis” of “an organization in the formal sense of the word”:

When, after much enthusiastic speech-making, a committee was appointed to retire and discuss the details, I had no hesitancy in saying—though at the risk of seeming ungrateful to our hosts—that it was much too big an idea to be narrowed down to a social function, into which it would inevitably deteriorate, and if the Society were developed at all, it ought to be along national lines, and should meet in a public rather than a private place.¹⁹³

Rittenhouse understood the governing values of artistic assembly through a series of oppositions—hospitality versus bureaucracy; private versus public; and society versus nation.¹⁹⁴ Rittenhouse’s preference for a bureaucratically formalized, public organization was motivated less by a populist vision—the PSA would remain itself clubbish at least through the 1960s, with a highly exclusive membership list—than a nascent literary nationalism. When the Poetry Society of England sought to incorporate the group, she stood firmly against affiliating as a degraded subset:

In vain we explained to Mr. Browne [of the Poetry Society of England] that we had banded together on wholly different lines, that our objective was entirely the appreciation and encouragement of living poets, *whereas the English Society operated almost as a university extension*, having centres throughout the country where the classic as well as contemporary poets were studied.¹⁹⁵

On the one hand, Rittenhouse did not want the PSA to resemble the clubbish enclaves of American literary experimenters in London. On the other, she sought wanted to resist the bureaucratic hierarchies of academia. While the “English Society” operated as an extension of the university, as a static limb, the Poetry Society of America would be a living body that refused parental affiliation: “Here was a chance to found in a few months

¹⁹³ Rittenhouse, *House of Life*, 223.

¹⁹⁴ In her autobiography, Rittenhouse dramatizes these ideological tensions through their interpersonal stakes. Peter Viereck, as a close friend of the Rices, was “placed in a somewhat difficult position” by the proposal to depart from the salon. Ultimately he was convinced it was for “the good of the movement” to articulate a mission on a national scale, but his decision was agonized. When the committee proposed the relocation of the society to a public venue at a party hosted by the Rices, the hosts were “affronted” in what Rittenhouse describes as an “embarrassing moment.” While Rittenhouse included the Rices on the charter membership list, “henceforth they withdrew from it and never, so far as I know, attended a meeting of the Society.” Rittenhouse, *House of Life*, 225.

¹⁹⁵ Rittenhouse, *House of Life*, 226-7; emphasis mine.

a powerful body functioning from a parent centre throughout the whole of America, and we were content to remain a handful of ineffectual dreamers taking years to do what could so soon have been accomplished by an expert.”¹⁹⁶ “Never was there a more disgusted man than Mr. Browne nor one more disillusioned,” Rittenhouse wrote, “as to American enterprise.” For Rittenhouse, refusing parental expertise of British affiliation demonstrated self-determination as a national value.

Rittenhouse described the American poetry scene as “an army with banners, and each insurgent poet has a different brand of revolution...you will find imagism, on another vers libre or free verse, cubism, futurism, and a dozen other things.”¹⁹⁷ Amidst this bannered chaos of the “modern phase in literature,” Robert Frost appeared by summer 1916 “American to the core.” In her address to the Annual Meeting of the American Library Association, “The New Poetry and Democracy,” Rittenhouse urged librarians to the task of “bringing [democracy] to the public” through literature; two “new American” masters, Edgar Lee Masters and Robert Frost, prevailed:

Robert Frost is democratic to the core; he is American to the core, and the types Robert Frost writes of are strictly out of America...You know Robert Frost is a farmer...he had a little farm up in the New England hills, and had a very difficult time to keep the farm going...He sold it and went to England. He coined his soul and his last dollar to bring out his book, and with this book he is buying back another farm! . . .He is a beautiful character with the face of Christ.¹⁹⁸

Rittenhouse, the ringleader of his “roster of enemies” only a year earlier, now found in Frost an exemplary mythos. Although he had “coined his soul” by moving to England, this Faustian deal had been undone by buying another stony hill lot in New England; he had been redeemed through his renewed commitment to the admirably “barren” but “ground up” American way. Frost had become palatable, even praiseworthy to Rittenhouse, against the growing influence of “eccentric” Amy Lowell and “ragbag”

¹⁹⁶ Rittenhouse, *House of Life*, 227.

¹⁹⁷ Rittenhouse, “The New Poetry and Democracy,” stenographic report of an extemporaneous address at the Asbury Park Conference, Annual Meeting of the American Library Association (July 1916), 137.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 142.

Ezra Pound; along with Masters, he promised “an assimilation.” The democratic American type did not write “absolutely free verse,” representing a kind of compromise where poetry’s new forms would “modify the old forms” for “a certain freedom within the law”¹⁹⁹—or what Frost called the “middle way.”²⁰⁰

This chapter has argued that Frost had won rapport and respect in London’s literary circles, and wanted to carry his hard-won international cultural capital back to the U.S.—without being read as international. Yet cultivating his patriotic persona was not merely strategic²⁰¹—his relationship with Pound had already made national identity a source of professional self-definition. Pronouncing his first poetic theory on Independence Day was not a pitch to an American audience, but a private gesture of liberation. Finally, the traumatic coherence of literary and national gatekeepers in New York during his repatriation animated Frost’s attention to and eagerness to claim an American reputation.

5. Saying “Iamb” to the Listening Public: Phonocentric Populism

In ‘North of Boston’ you are to see me performing in a language absolutely unliterary. What I would like is to get so I would never use a word or combination of words that I hadn’t heard used in running speech. I bar words and expressions I have merely seen. You do it on your ear. Of course I allow expressions I make myself. . .

Frost to John T. Bartlett, 8 December 1913²⁰²

I must be outside that circle to the general reader who buys books in their thousands... I want to be a poet for all sorts and kinds. I would never make a merit of being caviare [sic] to the crowd the way my quasi-friend Pound does.

Frost to John Bartlett, c. 5 November 1913²⁰³

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 143.

²⁰⁰ Interview with Feld, *RFR*, 331.

²⁰¹ Frost was cunning about presenting his loyalties—desperate to disaffiliate from Pound’s “party of London refugees” in view of New York publishers, he would meanwhile call England “half my native land” privately in a goodbye letter to Monro: “England the victorious. Good friends I have had here and hope to keep.” Frost to Harold Monro, [c. 13 February 1915] [Liverpool] 152 (100).

²⁰² Frost to John T. Bartlett, 8 December 1913 *SL* 102 (67).

²⁰³ Frost to John T. Bartlett, c. 5 November 1913, *SL* (98).

Frost's major poetic theory, what he called the "sound of sense," advances a way of composing poetry according to the "ear," following the "natural" rhythms of American speech. Frost's discovery was poetry as "a language absolutely unliterary," a non-specialized discourse that reached "the crowd." Preferring the sense of the ear over the eye, and enchanted by the "audial imagination," Frost's theory privileged aural experience over semantic content: "It is the abstract vitality of our speech. It is pure sound—pure form. One who concerns himself with it more than the subject is an artist."²⁰⁴ Frost rejected the process of making or constructing the poem on the visual field of the page: "Of course the great fight of any poet is against the people who want him to write in a special language that has gradually separated from spoken language by this 'making' process."²⁰⁵ This fight was against Pound's "special language" that privileged the eye—enough, he wrote to Bartlett in his Fourth of July letter, has been said about the eye already. "Time we said something about the hearing ear—the ear that calls up vivid sentence forms." Once confined to a separate and specialized domain of paper, a word or sentence lost its vital, "natural" capacity: "I bar words and expressions I have merely seen. You do it on your ear." Frost's poetic principle valued sound over sight, speech over the written, and blank verse over vers libre.

If the phonocentric principle of Frost's poetic theory was polarized in contradistinction to Pound, his belief that "sound-sense" could communicate the natural or essential quality of the individual spirit was influenced by other thinkers in London. William James and Henri Bergson's discussions of "the stream of consciousness" contributed to Frost's notion of a "natural" experience and "natural sound-sense" in language.²⁰⁶ But while James and Bergson understood "the stream of consciousness" as

²⁰⁴ Frost to John T. Bartlett, Fourth of July [1913], Beaconsfield, *SL* 79-81: 80 (53).

²⁰⁵ *SL* 141.

²⁰⁶ Principally through conversations with T.E. Hulme. Frost would later own a copy of Bergson's "Theory of Art" published in *Speculations* in 1924. Poirier and Hoffman have also noted the

experience prior to analytic discrimination, Frost rejected the mediation of stream-of-consciousness experience through technologies of writing, i.e. automatic writing. The *sound* of words, deprived of semantic content, was a more unmediated expression of the “rhythms of life and the centre of our minds.”²⁰⁷ “The best place to get the abstract sound of sense is from voices behind a door that cuts off the words. Ask yourself how these sentences would sound without the words in which they are embodied,” he explained in his Fourth of July letter.²⁰⁸ The exercise of listening to voices behind a door activates what Frost would later call the “audile [audial] imagination.”

“Sound-sense” and “audial imagination” are importantly connected to the notion of individual spirit. Tyler Hoffman argues that Frost promotes an “ethics of personal and political sovereignty” and “political belief in the dignity and value of the individual”; Bergson and James’ vocabulary secures the “scientific backing [in the language of this aesthetic theory] that will help him achieve literary success.”²⁰⁹ Extending Hoffman’s observation, an appreciation of the rhythms of the mind, or spiritual center of the self, affirms the sovereignty of the individual through the form of the spoken sentence. “[U]nless we are in an imaginative mood it is no use trying to make them [sentences]. We can only write the dreary kind of grammatical prose known as professorial,”²¹⁰ Frost wrote on the eve of his departure back to the United States, a period of prolific and urgent theorizing. Linking the notion of audial imagination to the sentence unit, Frost developed a distinction between “the grammatical sentence” and “the vital sentence.” The grammatical sentence is read by the eye, uninspired and academic; the vital is heard by the ear, summoned naturally from a spiritual wellspring of creative energy:

influence of James on Frost’s conceptions of personal and political sovereignty. Hoffman, *Robert Frost and the Politics of Poetry*, 238.

²⁰⁷ *The Collected Writings of T.E. Hulme*, ed. Karen Csengeri (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 163.

²⁰⁸ Frost to John T. Bartlett, Fourth of July [1913], Beaconsfield. *SL* 80 (53).

²⁰⁹ Hoffman, *Robert Frost and the Politics of Poetry*, 7; 44.

²¹⁰ Frost to Sidney Cox, December 1914 [The Gallows], *SL* 140 (93).

The grammatical sentence is merely accessory to the other and chiefly valuable as a furnishing clue to the other . . . Just so many sentence sounds belong to man as just so many vocal runs belong to one kind of bird. We come into the world with them and create none of them. What we feel as creation is only selection and grouping. We summon them from Heaven knows where under excitement with the audile [audial] imagination.²¹¹

Unlike the sentence that is written or read, the sentence that is said and heard is both a more natural and divinely sourced language.

In the initial development of his poetic theory, Frost cleaves to an audial language of the ear more than he emphasizes the voice or orality, yet I refer to Frost's poetic theory as "phonocentric." Frost cast his poetic theory in letters to other poets as a *compositional* guide or practicum. The poet takes inspiration from what is heard, and writes to record this inspiration to subsequently "speak" or "say" it. Poetry on the page is only a record of what is more primarily, in its natural form, speech. A phonocentric poetics appeals to the listener over the reader.

North of Boston, the collection most closely contemporaneous with Frost's articulation of his poetic theory, was by his account its test-case—an attempt to "perfor[m] a language absolutely unliterary."²¹² Frost claimed to have used only words and word combinations he had himself overheard, "bar[ring] words and expressions I have merely seen."²¹³ Nearly every poem contains a quoted speech act, usually between two interlocutors. Pound compared *North of Boston* with recent experiments in short fiction: "He is quite consciously and definitely putting New England rural life into verse."²¹⁴ *North of Boston* strives to be as "absolutely unliterary" as a phonograph, where Frost acts as the omnipresent narrator recording a regionally spoken American English. At the Inauguration of Kennedy in 1961, when Frost put aside the page he brought to the

²¹¹ Frost to Sidney Cox, December 1914 [The Gallows], *SL* 140-2 (93).

²¹² Frost to John T. Bartlett, 8 December 1913, *SL* 102 (67).

²¹³ *Ibid.*

²¹⁴ "Mr. Frost has dared to write, and for the most part with success, in the natural speech of New England; in natural spoken speech, which is very different from the "natural" speech of the newspapers, and of many professors." Pound, "Modern Georgics," 127-8.

podium and recited a poem from memory, he would project the contents of this archive as the voice of the individual citizen.

On the one hand, then, Frost's poetic theory connects natural "speech rhythm" to the individual spirit, understanding spoken voice as the most natural expressive vehicle of the willful subject. On the other, speech rhythm is necessarily ordered by metrical form: "Tell them Iamb, Jehovah said, and meant it."²¹⁵ While the iambic rhythm of blank verse was "honest"—the rhythm at the center of the mind, and north of Boston—free verse poets displayed an unnatural "desire...to play always on the insane fringe of things. Their interest is only in the abnormal...When a man sets out consciously to tear up forms and rhythms and measures, then he is not interested in giving you poetry," Frost said. "He just wants to perform; he wants to show you his tricks." The inspiration for blank verse, however, "lies in the clean and wholesome life of the ordinary man": Frost persistently associated the laws of meter with the laws of social propriety and the state.²¹⁶ The containment of speech rhythm by meter worked as Frost's personal mythology for the healthy checks and balances of democratic government—or "'chartered' freedom."²¹⁷ Iambic poetry, such as the blank verse "The Gift Outright," which Frost recited at Kennedy's inauguration, emblemizes this dialectical relation between individual expression (speech rhythm) and state order (metrical form). Frost viewed "the measured way" and "the middle way" as overlapping prosodic and social ideals:²¹⁸ the responsibility

²¹⁵ "How Hard It Is to Keep Being King," *Robert Frost: Collected Poems, Prose & Plays*, eds. Richard Poirier and Mark Richardson (New York: The Library of America, 1995), 469. Hereafter *CPPP*.

²¹⁶ Interview with Feld, *RFR*, 336. In "How Hard It Is," he who "writes free verse...He'll tell you about Freedom," where it turns out "Freedom is slavery." Metrical form as a stay against social chaos appears throughout Frost's writings and poetry—"Let chaos storm! / Let cloud shapes swarm! / I wait for form." "Pertinax" (1936), *CPPP* 281. In "Dedication," composed for Kennedy's inauguration, "how seriously the races swarm / In their attempts at sovereignty and form." See Appendix III.

²¹⁷ Hoffman, *Robert Frost and the Politics of Poetry*, 10; 202.

²¹⁸ "I like the middle way, as I like to talk to the man who walks the middle way with me...Men have told me, and perhaps they are right, that I have no 'straddle.' That is the term they use: I have no straddle. That means that I cannot spread out far enough to live in filth and write in the

of the poet is to maintain the middle path in poetic and by extension social expression, thus modeling self-regulatory creative practice in parallel function to the state.

In a “fiction of form,”²¹⁹ fictionalization is the analogizing leap between the figural and social. In this case, Frost’s speech rhythms symbolize “rational control” for Katherine Kearns,²²⁰ or “blank verse stands for self-reliance and democracy, and free verse for self-surrender and socialism”²²¹ for Hoffman. Here, I want to emphatically redirect attention to Frost, rather than later critics, as the author of his own “fiction” whereby rhythm and meter stand for self and state. This is a worthwhile distinction, as this chapter subsequently demonstrates how Frost’s politicization of poetic form was also importantly *non-fictional*: Frost’s blank verse was not just imaginatively imbued with democratic ideology, but broadcast as a live event at Kennedy’s inauguration; Frost expressed the synchronicity of his poetic and political vision not only in letters regarding prosody but also in conversations with Eisenhower, Kennedy and Khrushchev; and thousands of American youth would recite Frost’s poems in classrooms under the curricula of citizenship training.

6. Frost in Washington and Moscow

I CAN ACCEPT IT FOR MY CAUSE—THE ARTS, POETRY, NOW FOR THE FIRST TIME TAKEN INTO THE AFFAIRS OF STATESMEN.

—Frost to Kennedy, accepting his invitation to read at the 1961 Inaugural Ceremony²²²

treetops. I can’t...I write blank verse. I must have the pulse beat of rhythm, I like to hear it beating under the things I write.” Interview with Feld, *RFR*, 331; 336.

²¹⁹ Stephen Cushman’s term for “an imaginative creation that imbues aesthetic ideology with a sense of national significance,” qtd. in Hoffman, *Robert Frost and the Politics of Poetry*, 171.

²²⁰ Katherine Kearns, *Robert Frost and a Poetics of Appetite* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 138.

²²¹ Hoffman, *Robert Frost and the Politics of Poetry*, 190.

²²² Telegram, 14 December 1960, Special Correspondence: Robert Frost, May 1961-April 1962, Papers of John F. Kennedy, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

Khrushchev saw him [Frost], and under very fascinating circumstances because Khrushchev was moving the cuban [sic] missiles in and was making a lot of other moves at that time. No one knew that. This was the first week in September.

—Stewart L. Udall, Secretary of the Interior 1961-1969, Oral History Interview, March 12, 1970²²³

As his politics of poetic form suggests, Frost viewed poetry and the creative arts as deeply relevant to the health of U.S. democratic ideology. Especially after 1949, Frost considered himself a political and social commentator: “[M]y specialty is talking ideas and reading my own poetry,”²²⁴ Frost wrote to the Secretary of State on the eve of his trip to England, his second “good will” mission abroad. Frost traveled as a delegate to the World Congress of Writers (Sao Paulo, Brazil) and as a cultural emissary to South America in 1954; the State Department would later underwrite trips to Israel, Athens, Greece (March 1961), and to the Soviet Union (September 1962), where he would meet with Khrushchev in the weeks preceding the Cuban Missile Crisis. Frost “began playfully but half-seriously to boast that he might become one of the ‘unacknowledged legislators of the world.’”²²⁵

In other words, he was an active player in the cultural program developed by the Truman and Eisenhower Administrations to effectively legitimize American leadership on the world stage, championing the discourse of artistic freedom against totalitarian cultural economies of the Soviet bloc, or part of a worldwide Marshall Plan in the field of ideas. Frost is a useful figure to understand the relationship of the Marshall Plan under Truman and Eisenhower to the national arts initiatives undertaken by the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations.

During the Eisenhower Administration, Assistant to the President Sherman Adams was a key figure in recognizing the potential uses of the creative artist in the Cold

²²³ Stewart L. Udall Oral History Interview by W.W. Moss, March 12, 1970, John F. Kennedy Oral History Collection.

²²⁴ Frost to John Foster Dulles, 26 February 1957, *SL* 562 (436).

²²⁵ *SL* 536.

War state project. While he was still the Governor of New Hampshire (1949-1953), Adams had met Frost at the St. Botolph Club, and quoted to him from his poem “New Hampshire”: the two would become close, and Adams facilitated many of Frost’s connections in Washington. Adams managed Conger Reynolds at the U.S. Information Agency (U.S.I.A.), for example, who solicited artists’ work for international circulation, and had him visit Frost in Ripton. When he visited Frost, Reynolds “described various areas around the world where American prestige was threatened and various ways...to defend the nation’s image abroad.” One of the most effective of these was to have public figures write pieces about American life for international audiences.²²⁶ Adams also connected Frost to Eisenhower, pitching that he serve as goodwill ambassador to England.²²⁷

Adams prompted Eisenhower to send a telegram—one he likely also drafted—to Frost at the annual Poetry Society of America banquet in January 1958, where the poet was being presented with a Gold Medal for Distinguished Service.²²⁸ Frost “[o]f course [sic] saw your hand in it [the “splendid telegram” from Eisenhower]”—that is, the hand of Adams, who he flattered:

You have a great influence up there. Few in your position have ever thought of the arts at all. Some day it seems as if you might want to have me meet the President to thank him in person at a meal or something, so that it needn’t go down in history that the great statesman and soldier never dined socially with any but big shots, and these preferably statesmen, warriors, and Holly woodsmen [sic]. I read in today’s paper that you are sending Bob Hope and Bing Crosby to represent us in the arts at the World’s Fair in Brussels. And when I say this half seriously it is not just for myself that I am speaking.²²⁹

²²⁶ “May I suggest that possibly the best thing *you* could do for the cause would be to keep on magnifying me the way you have been ever since you descended in state on us that night at the St. Botolph Club,” Frost wrote to Adams after the meeting. Frost to Sherman Adams, 21 June 1956, 558-9 (443).

²²⁷ *SL* 558 and *TWL* 460.

²²⁸ “It is fortunate that our Nation is blessed with citizens like Robert Frost who can express our innermost feelings and speak so clearly to us of our land and life. It is a pleasure to join in tribute to the great gifts of Robert Frost.” Qtd in *SL* 571.

²²⁹ Frost to Sherman Adams, 12 February 1958 South Miami, *SL* 571-2 (443).

In these few lines, Frost appeals to Adams' interest in Eisenhower's standing 1) in posterity ("it needn't go down in history" that Eisenhower was a snob, refusing contact with the little people); 2) in the eyes of the domestic populace (strategically crouched among the general populace contra "the big shots," Frost is able to speak "not just for [him]self"); and 3) on the international stage (questioning the Administration's ability to choose artists equipped to "represent us" at the World's Fair). Perhaps this was not a subtle ploy to get a dinner invitation, but it worked. Adams secured the meeting with Eisenhower.²³⁰ He also suggested that Frost act as cultural advisor to the administration, and meanwhile asked Mumford to appoint Frost as Consultant in Poetry.²³¹

From the term of his Consultancy until his death, Frost remained active in Washington and as a cultural missionary abroad. As Basler summarizes, in these years Frost "lent considerable impetus to the movement culminating in the establishment of the Kennedy Center and the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities; helped bring about the continuing series of Cabinet and White House sponsored literary and performing arts presentations in the State Department Auditorium; and the White House receptions, dinners, awards presentations, and festivals honoring prominent figures in the arts and humanities which became...something of an established pattern in the national capital."²³² After his term as Consultant in Poetry, a position was created for

²³⁰ Eisenhower called Frost to an "INFORMAL STAG DINNER AT WHITE HOUSE" almost certainly at the behest of Adams ("I understand that through some circuitous means you have been invited to come and spend the evening with the President," Adams wrote to Frost a day before Frost received the President's invitation by telegram) given Frost's wheedling. Lawrance Thompson has described Frost's "epistolary tactics" (158) with literary notables in his early career; this chapter bears out his reading, showing that Frost applied these same tactics with political notables in his late career. Dwight D. Eisenhower to Frost, 16 Feb 1958, 6.41 PM, *SL* 572-3 (443-b); Adams to Frost, 15 February 1958, *SL* 572 (443-a).

²³¹ See more on Adams and the Eisenhower Administration's political investment in Frost in Thomas Smith, "Robert Frost, Stewart Udall, and the 'Last Go-Down,'" *The New England Quarterly* 70:1 (March 1997): 3-32.

²³² "Not many lobbyists have ever achieved more for whatever cause, and none, so far as I know, has ever achieved a comparable national public image in the process. It is no denigration of the cause of the arts and the humanities at large, in my book at least, to recognize that Frost's ego was his primary motivation." Roy Basler, *The Muse and the Librarian* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1974), 76-7.

Frost to serve as Honorary Consultant in the Humanities.²³³ In May 1960 he visited Washington to lecture as Consultant in the Humanities in Washington, and to testify for a bill to establish a National Academy of Culture before a Senate subcommittee. Frost told the Senators poetry should be considered an equal to business, science, and scholarship by the state:

Last night I had a real consultation with some Members of Congress. . . We talked about poetry in relation to other things. I was not defending or even talking particularly about poetry. . . We discussed politics and the affairs of the nation. Poetry can become too special, isolated and separate a thing. The connection should be closer between Government and the arts. Wouldn't it be wonderful if there could be something for the arts like the Morrill Act was for education in establishing the Land Grant colleges?. . . Congressmen should personally be interested in this Consultanship. The Consultant must have a broad vision for Congressmen and take an interest in what they think. The Consultant should be something the Government consults as part of the Government.²³⁴

The Eisenhower Administration honored Frost in turn for his contribution to the national arts agenda. In March 1959, a Senate resolution observed Frost's eighty-fifth birthday; Eisenhower signed a "Robert Frost Medal" bill "in recognition of his poetry, which has enriched the culture of the United States and the philosophy of the world" on Sept 13, 1960.²³⁵ The occasion also initiated his relationship with Kennedy. While celebrating the event at the Waldorf Astoria, hosted by Henry Holt and Company, Frost gave an "endorsement" of the young Senator via regionalist pride. "Somebody said to me that New England's in decay," he said to a reporter. "But I said the next President is going to be from Boston . . . Can't you figure it out? It's a Puritan named Kennedy." This prompted their first correspondence.²³⁶

The Kennedy years set forth "the mission of founding a federal arts agency" which passed to the Johnson Administration after Kennedy's assassination.²³⁷ In

²³³ TWL 478.

²³⁴ Frost with Armstrong, Dubster and Land, May 21, 1960, Robert Frost Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

²³⁵ TWL 475.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 477.

September 1961, Kennedy appointed Roger L. Stevens as Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the National Cultural Center. In March 1962, Kennedy appointed August Heckscher as his Special Consultant on the Arts, asking him to prepare a report on the relationship between the arts and the federal government. Heckscher completed the report, “The Arts and the National Government” in May 1963, and submitted it to Congress and the President six months before his death. That report would lead to the creation of the President’s Advisory Council on the Arts, or what is today the National Council on the Arts.²³⁸

Little domestic legislation passed under Kennedy’s “New Frontier”—the work of cultural and arts initiatives would come to fruition under Johnson. Instead, Kennedy created precedents for later policy changes, and relied on the representative function of exemplary figures in culture and the arts to champion American values. For example, cellist Pablo Casals, who refused to return to his native Catalonia, under the dictatorship of Francisco Franco, performed at the White House in 1961. “An artist must be a freeman,” Kennedy trumpeted as the message of the event.²³⁹ The first use of an inaugural poem is another example discussed in the following section of this chapter.

The most significant legacy of the Frost-Kennedy national arts “golden age” was the creation of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in 1965 under Johnson. State Department cultural missions, or acts of non-military defense—and not New Deal programming—were the policy scaffolding for the NEA. Unlike job-creating initiatives like the Federal Writers Project, the NEA responded not to a domestic economic imperative, but followed the precedent of nation-building through demonstrations of artistic leadership and cultural diplomacy on the global stage. In the Frost-Kennedy national arts “golden age,” the artist was viewed as vital to expressing the nation’s

²³⁷ Mark Bauerlein and Ellen Grantham, eds., *National Endowment for the Arts: A History, 1965-2008* (Washington, D.C.: National Endowment for the Arts, 2008), 13.

²³⁸ Bauerlein and Grantham, *National Endowment for the Arts: A History*, 7.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

strength and global authority. The act establishing the NEA and NEH records this view; the nation's global political leadership and cultural leadership are effectively intertwined in its language: "The world leadership of the US...is dependent on the respect for its cultural and artistic output," reads section 8 of the Public Law. The nation-state could gain "worldwide respect" through military power but also in "the realm of ideas and of the spirit."²⁴⁰

Abroad, Kennedy extended the goodwill missions the Department of State had increasingly sponsored under Eisenhower, establishing the Peace Corps and the Alliance for Progress in Latin America. Frost favored discussing this aspect of the American mission in letters with Kennedy: "I see us [the US and USSR] becoming the two great powers of the modern world in noble rivalry while a third power of United Germany, France, and Italy, the common market, looks on as an expanded polyglot Switzerland," he wrote in 1962. "Forgive the long letter. I don't write letters but you have stirred my imagination and I have been interested in Russia as a power ever since Rurik came to Novgood":

...these are my credentials. I could go on with them like this to make the picture complete: about the English-speaking world of England, Ireland, Canada, and Australia, New Zealand and Us versus the Russian-speaking world for the next century or so, mostly a stand-off but now and then a showdown to test our mettle. The rest of the world would be Asia and Africa more or less negligible for the time being though it needn't be too openly declared. Much of this would be the better for not being declared openly but kept always in the back of our minds in all our diplomatic and other relations. I am describing not so much what ought to be but what is and will be — reporting and prophesying. This is the way we are one world, as you put it, of independent nations interdependent. — The separateness of the parts as important as the connection of the parts.

Great times to be alive, aren't they ?²⁴¹

Frost's final goodwill mission under the auspices of the State Department was a mission to Moscow.²⁴² "I shall be reading poems chiefly over there [the Soviet Union] but you

²⁴⁰ National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965 (Pub. L. 89-209).

²⁴¹ Frost to John F. Kennedy, 25 July 1962, Special Correspondence: Robert Frost, May 1961-April 1962, Papers of John F. Kennedy.

may be sure I won't be talking just literature."²⁴³ During the trip, which was part of a cultural exchange through which Alexander Tvardovsky, "leader of the movement for freedom of expression in Soviet art"²⁴⁴ also visited the States, Frost was invited to meet with the Soviet Premier at his private dacha at the Black Sea.

Frost was unwell, and the meeting took place at the poet's bedside. Frost wanted to convey to Premier Khrushchev that he viewed the Soviet and U.S. systems as "rivals in magnanimity." Frost saw competition as the "main dynamo" of life, and the nations were "laid out for rivalry all the time – in sports, in art, in science."²⁴⁵ According to Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall, who accompanied Frost on the trip, the "kernel" of his "big message" to Khrushchev posed a model of Hegelian dialectics—a dualist battle romanticized against the possibility of synthesis where "coexistence is negative and sterile."²⁴⁶ He expressed to Khrushchev that "Over the long haul...the mettle of the two systems would be tested by the nobility of the thinkers and leaders each produced." At the conclusion of the meeting, Frost gave the Soviet leader a book of his poems inscribed "From his rival in friendship."²⁴⁷

"'Art,' as President Kennedy said recently, 'is political in the most profound sense,'" Udall reflected.²⁴⁸ Udall's report reflects the symbolic significance of the meeting, enshrining Frost as an independent citizen and artist—free to take the "less traveled" path:

The roads they had taken to the year 1962 could scarcely had [sic] been more divergent. The younger man had walked the harsh road of social revolution; the

²⁴² Frost was accompanied by Professor Franklin Reeve of Wesleyan University, Fred Adams of NYC's Morgan Library, and the Secretary of the Interior. See Reeve's account of the trip in *Robert Frost in Russia* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1963).

²⁴³ Frost to Kennedy, 24 July 1962, Papers of John F. Kennedy.

²⁴⁴ "Udall Report on Robert Frost Trip to USSR, April 1963," Papers of John F. Kennedy.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 14. "Let's hope we can take it out in sports, science, arts, business, and politics before ever we have to take it out in the bloody politics of war." Frost qtd. in Reeve, *Robert Frost in Russia*, 123.

²⁴⁶ "Udall Report on Robert Frost Trip to USSR, April 1963," 14, Papers of John F. Kennedy.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 16.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 20.

older had, by choice, taken a 'less traveled' private path. The Premier was a shrewd master of a totalitarian political system; the only "government" familiar to the poet was the kingdom of the individual.²⁴⁹

7. Broadcasting American Voice: The Kennedy Inaugural Recitation, or Poetry at the "Hour of Maximum Danger"

On January 20, 1961, Frost delivered the first inaugural poem in United States history. Frost had planned to read the seventy-two-line "Dedication," written the day before the ceremony during a Georgetown snowstorm. The strictly occasional poem would have followed the British model of the Poet Laureate's inaugural contribution, praising the president-elect for "Summoning artists to participate / In the august occasions of the state."²⁵⁰ In the glare of the sun and snow, however, Frost struggled to read from the pages he had brought to the podium. After stuttering out the first lines, he abandoned the written script and recited a different poem from memory.

This poem, "The Gift Outright,"²⁵¹ proved a more effective service to the US nation-state than the poem he intended to deliver. Broadcast live in living rooms across America, Frost's spontaneous recitation was almost instantly mythologized as a triumph of human memory and of individual voice. Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall would recall that Frost's "faltering... added a special note of human warmth to the occasion."²⁵² The rejection of the failed technologies of writing and eyesight in favor of oral authenticity "ca[ught] the hearts" of the American public. Rather than honorifics

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 13.

²⁵⁰ Kay Morrison described "Dedication" as "rather editorial in tone"; Louis Untermeyer, Consultant in Poetry 1960-1, would call it "the worst thing he ever wrote." See Morrison, undated, handwritten letter to Udall and Untermeyer qtd. in Udall, "Robert Frost, Kennedy, and Khrushchev," *Shenandoah* 26 (1975), 55.

²⁵¹ Frost delivered his first public reading of the poem at Phi Beta Kappa annual meeting at College of William and Mary on December 5, 1941, two days before Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor that prompted the entrance of the US in WWII, US entrance to the war (TWL 417). He would also read it on his trip to the USSR, calling it "his most patriotic poem." Reeve, *Robert Frost in Russia*, 18.

²⁵² Stewart L. Udall Oral History Interview by W.W. Moss, March 12, 1970, John F. Kennedy Oral History Collection.

“editorial in tone,” Frost provided a national history that could be extemporaneously recalled—the “sound-sense” of speech more natural and authentic than its written record. Frost’s recitation of “The Gift Outright” can be understood as an extension of the work of the Archive of Recorded Poetry and Literature into mass culture, hailing a listening public.

In what Frost understood as the “measured” way of blank verse, “The Gift Outright” naturalizes a national history of the colonial possession of land:

The land was ours before we were the land’s.
 She was our land more than a hundred years
 Before we were her people. She was ours
 In Massachusetts, in Virginia,
 But we were England’s, still colonials,
 Possessing what we still were unpossessed by,
 Possessed by what we now no more possessed.²⁵³

Proposing an ahistorical temporality—“the land was ours before we were the land’s”—the poem naturalizes the relationship of English immigrants and land possession.²⁵⁴ Frost’s recitation from memory also served to naturalize the narrative, suggesting its “natural” quality as embodied knowledge.

Since its publication in *The Witness Tree* (1942), the last lines of the poem had referred to the expansion of the land “westward, / But still unstoried, artless, unenhanced, / Such as she was, such as she would become.” On this occasion, Frost read “would” as “will.” The territorial expansion of the U.S. state is so natural that the poet as representative citizen can go off script and tell it in his own words—he knows it ‘by heart.’ The poem’s national history and projected future (with the “will become” in the last line) acquired, in effect, the authenticity of its extemporaneous utterance.

²⁵³ See Appendix III.

²⁵⁴ “People do me the honor to say that I am truly a poet of America. They point to my New England background, to the fact that my paternal ancestor came here some time in the sixteen hundreds...my mother was an immigrant. She came to these shores from Edinburgh in an old vessel that docked at Philadelphia. But she felt the spirit of America and became part of it before she even set her foot off the boat.” Interview with Feld, *RFR*, 334.

More basically than naturalize an ideology of nation, however, inner voice and capacity for authenticity as features of modern liberal identity—or capable self-expression of that which is ostensibly “true to oneself”²⁵⁵—projected a model of citizenship. Here, Frost as a representative citizen is able to voice “will” despite conditional limitations, and in proximity to state power. This performance stages not merely the individual voice of the citizen, but the self-determination and capacity of the citizen with voice as a proxy for individuality. In this way, the first inaugural poem provided expressive agency as a convincing description of American citizenship.

Earlier Poets Laureate, e.g. in the United Kingdom, historically functioned at inaugural occasions to tender public faith in state authority, but did not provide a model of citizenship. Due to the ceremonially quarantined role of the laureate as one who honors a head of state, the poet represented the state itself rather than contact *with* the state. Thus the inaugural poem did not present an instance of the individual in contact with the nation-state so as to instrumentally document or model an instance or expression of citizenship. By contrast, Frost stood as a “distinguished guest in the arts” and representative citizen.

The majority of Americans watching the ceremony would hear this description of citizenship echoed by Kennedy a few minutes later. Kennedy’s inaugural address was itself historically exceptional, focusing almost entirely on international affairs.²⁵⁶ Rather than emphasize the moment as an extension of the peacetime after World War II, with Eisenhower having ended the conflict in Korea, the President emphasized the United States as a new world leader charged to protect democratic values abroad. Declaring “freedom at the hour of maximum danger,” Kennedy famously impelled citizens to reflect on their responsibility to the state: “And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what

²⁵⁵ See Charles Taylor in Amy Gutmann, ed., *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

²⁵⁶ Joshua Freeman, *American Empire: The Rise of a Global Power, the Democratic Revolution At Home 1945-2000* (New York: Viking, 2012), 163.

your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.” This rhetoric derives its power from antithesis, or the dramatic reversal of terms in the burden of care. This neoliberal ethic followed persuasively upon Frost’s emblematic performance of the citizen’s expressive capacity and self-sufficient resourcefulness in explicit relation to state power. In the inaugural ceremony, Frost assists not only in the transfer of power to the new president, but the transfer of agency to the individual citizen.

8. The National Poetry Festival: “America’s outstanding poets” in Cold Wartime

No one could have foreseen that this gathering [the National Poetry Festival, October 22-24, 1962] would have fallen in the same weeks as the Cuban crisis, and no one would have planned it that way. But now that it is over, we can all feel that these readings and discussions by America’s outstanding poets reminded us of the real meaning of the struggle being carried on at other levels.

—August Heckscher to Quincy Mumford²⁵⁷

The first National Poetry Festival, held October 22-24, 1962 in Washington, displayed a new institutional coherence in the field of American poetry. The event marks the emergence of a new *state verse culture*. The National Poetry Festival collated key institutional and individual players in the production of postwar verse: the event was sponsored by the Bollingen Foundation, held at the Library of Congress, and celebrated the 50th anniversary of *Poetry* magazine. Frost gave his last public reading at the event, having just returned from his Mission to Moscow, and would pass away three months later. Paul Engle, the ambitious director of the young Writers Workshop at Iowa, was also in attendance. He would use the trip as an opportunity to meet with State Department officials about his international vision for the American creative writing workshop. Indeed, his weekend at the Festival would lay the groundwork for the creation of the International Writing Program at Iowa five years later.

²⁵⁷ Qtd. in McGuire, *Poetry’s Catbird Seat*, 247.

Gertrude Clark Whittall, the patron who dictated Library of Congress poetry programming during the early 1950s, attended as an invited guest; she reportedly grumbled throughout the lectures and readings, fiddling with her hearing aid in the front row.²⁵⁸ With the increasingly robust cooperation between private organizations and the state, individual philanthropists had much less power as gatekeepers. Whittall, like Paul Mellon through the Bollingen Trust, could support organizations whose taste she sought to promote, but she could no longer singlehandedly dictate the Library's program of readers by pulling \$100,000 in bonds out of her hatbox.²⁵⁹ The expanded scope of interested players bureaucratized the support for decision-making in matters of literary taste. Co-sponsorships for poetry programming between the Library of Congress and private literary organizations, notably the Modern Poetry Association and *Poetry* magazine, the Poetry Society of America, and public and private universities and primary schools—as in the exemplary case of the two-day program of the National Poetry Festival—rendered 'hatbox patronage' increasingly obsolete.²⁶⁰

The National Poetry Festival assembled the canonical figures²⁶¹ in postwar verse, moreover, at a crucial historical moment—the very days the Cuban Missile Crisis came to a head. “Looking back upon the past week with all its great and fearful events in the public scene, I remember the National Poetry Festival as a bright and. . .fitting

²⁵⁸ McGuire, *Poetry's Catbird Seat*, 236.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 139-40.

²⁶⁰ Here, my term for the bureaucratically unmediated power of a patron as tastemaker, e.g. control over the literary content of supported programming. Independent wealthy patrons will reemerge importantly in our story, but the new state arts imperative phased out hatbox patronage-style philanthropy. In the case of Ruth Lilly's donation to *Poetry* magazine in Chapter 4, a considerable number of public and private organizations determined the uses of the gift.

²⁶¹ Cultural institutions now did more than anthologies to bring together the canon: “As a veteran anthologist, I had brought many of these poets together between the covers of a book. I had never seen s many of them in flesh at one time—a living anthology, an extraordinary collection...a rapport between the poets and the public was quickly established...It was a refutation of the oft-repeated charge that the modern poet was only writing for himself and a few other poets.” Untermeyer qtd. in McGuire, *Poetry's Catbird Seat*, 246-7.

interlude,” Heckscher wrote to the Librarian of Congress.²⁶² As a geopolitically charged event, the National Poetry Festival drew on the recently established role of poetry in national discourse. “America’s outstanding poets,” as Heckscher observed, proved useful as ideological reinforcements during the Cuban Missile Crisis, “remind[ing] us of the real meaning of the struggle being carried on at other levels.” The “real meaning” of an anti-communist world order was exemplified in the expressive voice of the individual citizen-poet. Robert Frost’s reading of a group of poems that included “The Gift Outright” provided the reigning example.²⁶³

Only six years earlier, “doubtful” that the government of a “free society” could ethically intervene in the private domain of the arts, the Library of Congress had rejected the proposal to institute a poet laureateship. Now, poets were “America’s,” and “reminders” of the ideological values of a free society. They spoke at presidential inaugurations; they shared bedside chats with world leaders. Presenting a Presidential Medal of Honor to Robert Frost the same year, in March of 1962, Kennedy called the poet “distinctively American,” whose “wholeness as a man and artist somehow symbolize the inner strength of our people—and summarize our heritage.”²⁶⁴ In turn, “The Library of Congress no longer held its unwanted distinction of being a very modest literary and musical oasis in the federal cultural desert,” as Basler put it.²⁶⁵ The National Poetry Festival marked a new era of federal interest in poetic production and made visible an emergent state verse culture.

²⁶² Qtd. in McGuire, *Poetry’s Catbird Seat*, 247; emphasis mine.

²⁶³ “If anyone present [at the National Poetry Festival] held doubts that Frost was *the national poet*, his talk and reading on the night of October 24, in the midst of the Cuban Crisis, dispelled those doubts in a moment.” Basler, “Yankee Vergil—Robert Frost in Washington,” *The Muse and the Librarian*, 76. Frost concluded his reading with “Provide, Provide,” which former Soviet citizen Joseph Brodsky would also recite from memory at the press conference where he took office as Poet Laureate in 1991. See Chapter 4.

²⁶⁴ “Remarks Upon Presenting a Congressional Award to Robert Frost, 26 March 1962,” White House Audio Recordings, 1961-1963, White House Audio Collection.

²⁶⁵ Basler, *The Muse and the Librarian*, 76-7.

CHAPTER 3

The Politics of Voice:

The Workshop Poet and Poet Laureate as the Expressive Subject, 1965-1993

So now his thought's gone, buried his body dead. . .
 will they set up a tumult in his praise
 will assistant professors become associates
 by working on his works?
 —John Berryman, *Song* 373²⁶⁶

“[W]ill assistant professors become associates / by working on his works?” asks Henry House, the narrator of John Berryman’s *Dream Songs* (1969). Here the poet’s age-old anxiety over literary posterity finds its quintessentially postwar American expression. In the years Berryman composed the spasmodic tunes of his American epic, between 1960 and 1969, U.S. post-secondary school enrollments more than doubled. More professors were hired than had been in the 325 years before. Since the war, two million veterans had taken up the 48 months of free tuition provided by the G.I. Bill; the Higher Education Act of 1965 offered millions more secure federal grants and loans for college. This influx resulted in the postwar expansion and disciplinary solidification of the English Department, and by 1967—the year the first professional association of academic creative writers, the Associated Writing Programs (AWP), formed—a surge in creative writing degree programs.

When Berryman accepted a National Book Award for *The Dream Songs* in 1969, the creative writing “workshop poem” was not quite yet a fixture in literary culture, but his occupation as a poet-professor, or poet-critic, was enough of a fixture in the English Department for him to stage literary posterity as a question of departmental politics. Already in 1953, “[t]he poet as the sentimental professional rebel ha[d] vanished; in his

²⁶⁶ John Berryman, *The Dream Songs* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1969), 395, 3: 1, 4-6.

place was the young instructor of English in privately endowed colleges wearing a Brooks Brothers uniform.”²⁶⁷ Postwar poets were stuck in the decidedly non-transcendental “muck, administration [and] toil”²⁶⁸ of careerist jockeying.

The concentration of poetic production in the academy in the second half of the 20th-century is a phenomenon that cannot be understood without reference to federal bodies. The postwar state underwrote the transformation of the university system, and capacitated an institutional role for the creative writer as the expressive voice of the new multiversity. Under the guidance of influential industry leaders like Paul Engle, MFA-granting creative writing programs developed as privileged training grounds in the ideology of sovereign individuality. In the prototypical workshop poem, a coherent, expressive “I” acted as the democratic assertion of the individual against communist groupthink. Workshop pedagogy emphasizing the personal experience of the individual evolved to embrace the unique details of personal experience as markers of identity, reflecting the values of a pluralistic society, during the 1970s-80s.

The creative writing workshop would become the most important outlet of the new state verse culture observed at the inaugural National Poetry Festival of 1962. In Chapter 2, Robert Frost successfully conflated poetic voice, the speaker of the phonocentric narrative, with political voice, the agential will of the individual, on the national stage. This model of voice was disseminated through the creative writing industry, as well as civic projects proper undertaken by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) after 1965, and especially after 1985, when the missions of the NEA and the national poetry office were formally linked. NEA legislation retitled the national poet the “Poet Laureate,” and designated funds for the Library to undertake a new annual poetry

²⁶⁷ Horace Gregory, “The Postwar Generation in Arts and Letters: Poetry,” *The Saturday Review*, March 1953. The poet-in-uniform took his place within a broader class of “professional creative” types or “creative laborers” that emerged after WWII. See Alan McKinlay and Chris Smith, eds., *Creative Labour: Working in the Creative Industries* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

²⁶⁸ Berryman, “Dream Song 354,” *The Dream Songs*, 376, 1:3.

program cooperatively with the agency.²⁶⁹ No longer a custodial position or librarianship, the Poet Laureate assumed an explicitly activist civic charge. The mid-1980s, like the immediate postwar years, saw poetry “pressed into the service of national identity formation”²⁷⁰ during a cultural climate of American political and economic expansion. The rebranding of the national poetry office marks the consolidation of state verse culture, through the cooperation of the NEA and other national federal bodies with supportive private patrons, literary professional organizations, and most importantly, educational institutions.

In the still-consolidating state verse culture of the late 1960s, the agenda of the poet-critic already appeared as distinct from the national agenda for poetry. “A Kennedy-sponsored bill for the protection of poets from long poems will benefit the culture / and do no harm to that kind Lady, Mrs Johnson,” Berryman writes in *Dream Song* 354 (10-12). After all, “The only happy people in the world / are those who do not have to write long poems” (1-2). Berryman’s Henry still resigns himself to work on his long poem—*The Dream Songs*—alongside “‘The Care and Feeding of Long Poems’ . . . his next essay.” In Berryman’s account, the long poem is allied with the essay, or criticism, and distinct from the workshop poem supported by the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. “He would have gone to the White House & consulted the President / during his 10 seconds in the receiving line / on the problems of long poems,” but “Mr Johnson has never written one.”²⁷¹

²⁶⁹ An Act to amend the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965, and for other purposes (Pub. L. 99-194, Title VI, Sec. 601, Dec. 20, 1985, 99 Stat. 1347).

²⁷⁰ Maria Damon, “Poetic Canons: Generative Oxymoron or Stalled-out Dialectic?” *Contemporary Literature* 39 (Autumn 1998), 468. “Poetry, as any quick survey of literary nationalism will reveal, is far more easily pressed into the service of national identity formation than other forms of writing and seems to carry a symbolic weight in the national Imaginary that makes such civic service important. Almost every era and nation has a national poet, a representative poet, a poet laureate, et cetera, whether by popular acclaim, self-appointment, or official decree; no such office, formal or informal, exists for more narrative forms of imaginative writing, though the latter is far more often studied in such contexts.”

²⁷¹ Berryman, “Dream Song 354,” 376, 7-8; 13-16.

This chapter argues that the movement of poetry into the academy is a twofold legacy: the academic poet-critic (housed in the English Department) is a distinct historical phenomenon from the academic poet of the creative writing industry (MFA programs). While the workshop poem allied with the cultural missions of the Cold War state—a legacy borne out in present day national poetry programming discussed in Chapter 4—poet-critics adopted a more restive poetics. Berryman’s late work of the *Dream Songs* troubled the model of speaking voice of the creative writing workshop; his career signaled an uneasy shift in the institutional tradition of the poet-critic—in close proximity to, but increasingly distinct from, the workshop poet—in the academy. Experimental successors to first- and second-generation modernists, most importantly many Language poets who challenged program era voice, moved into university teaching positions by the early 1990s.

This chapter looks at 1) the movement of poetry into the academy, specifically the rise of the creative program industry and the evolving role of the poet-critic; and 2) the increasingly public charge to the national poetry office. Both civic projects sought to promote the discourse of sovereign individuality and democratic pluralism during the Cold War.²⁷²

²⁷² This reading follows Serge Guilbaut’s study of the Cold War state’s appropriation of Abstract Expressionism as an image of the cultural leadership of American democracy, where “[e]xpressionism stood for the difference between a free society and a totalitarian one.” *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 201. Expressive voice-based poetry, like avant-garde visual art, “helped forge a native image of American art that responded to the cultural needs of the new United States that emerged from World War II.” Abstract Expressionism elaborated a “third way” that preserved a sense of “social ‘commitment’” on the one hand, “while eschewing the art of propaganda and illustration” on the other (2) to embody the political ideal of “freedom.” The “political apoliticism” of the avant-garde was the increasingly dominant ideology of the new left, e.g. as articulated in Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.’s *The Vital Center*. In the literary field, poetry de facto occupies the position of minor, marginal, or avant-garde vis-à-vis the social commitment of more narrative generic forms of the essay or novel. Expressive poetic voice, like abstract expressionist painting, symbolized the freedom and creativity of the individual in American democracy.

I. Pedagogy as Patron: The Workshop Poet (1967-1993)

In Cold War America, creative writing programs grew at pace with the arms race. When Frost delivered his last public reading at the National Poetry Festival in 1962, there were five creative writing programs in the United States.²⁷³ By 1970, 44 programs in the U.S. offered master's degrees in creative writing or in English with a creative thesis;²⁷⁴ by 1980, over 100.²⁷⁵ Programs multiplied to meet the demand of growing enrollments: between 1971 and 1989 the number of creative writing degrees awarded tripled from 345 to 1107.²⁷⁶ When the Associated Writers Program was founded in 1967, it consisted of twelve member colleges and universities. In 1986, as Robert Penn Warren assumed the inaugural Poet Laureateship, the Associated Writing Programs claimed 150 member institutions.²⁷⁷ The expanded Association of Writers & Writing Programs boasts over 500 today.²⁷⁸

The rise of the creative writing program is central to the history of postwar literary production in the United States. Mark McGurl calls it “the most important event” of 20th-century American literary history, the second half of which we might now consider “the program era” in keeping with the terms of his pioneering study,²⁷⁹ which

²⁷³ The first writing programs were created at the University of Iowa, Stanford University, Johns Hopkins University, the University of Denver, and Cornell University.

²⁷⁴ Donald Sears, ed., *Directory of Creative Writing Programs* (Fullerton: College English Association, 1970). Notably, 42% of these were *new* institutions, established during or just after the war—and as such generally fleet rather than flagship state universities: land-grant institutions, new campus branches, commuter schools, and former teachers colleges. D.G. Myers, *The Elephants Teach: Creative Writing Since 1880* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 164.

²⁷⁵ Myers, *The Elephants Teach*, 163.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 166.

²⁷⁷ The AWP apparently consisted of thirteen programs at twelve member institutions: “AWP was established as a nonprofit organization in 1967 by fifteen writers representing thirteen creative writing programs”; “From twelve member colleges and universities in 1967 to over 500 today, AWP’s membership has grown with the expansion of creative writing programs and with AWP’s growing number of partnerships with allied literary organizations.” “Our History and the Growth of Creative Writing Programs,” Association of Writers & Writing Programs, accessed February 9, 2015, https://www.awpwriter.org/about/our_history_overview.

²⁷⁸ See Appendix II.

²⁷⁹ The rise of the postwar creative writing industry was virtually unacknowledged until McGurl’s study, save Eric Bennett’s dissertation of the same year, “Creative Writing and the Cold War”

contributes to a growing body of institutional and sociological approaches to postwar literary history. This scholarship highlights the centralizing force of the higher education industry after WWII. Accounts of postwar fiction, including those of McGurl, Evan Watkins, J.A. Sutherland, and James English; and of postwar poetry, including those of Alan Golding, Jed Rasula, and Christopher Beach, narrate the disassembly of the literary-professional establishment and the absorption of literary production by the academy after WWII.

The effects of this absorption were more profound for poetry than fiction. While fiction has always had closer ties to the traditional market economy via literary publishing industries, poetry relied on patronage to survive. In the absence of patronage, historically the poet has established an alternate professional identity—either a) outside of the literary field, or b) as a writer of a more dominant genre form within the literary field to sustain verse as a marginal or secondary pursuit. The figure of the poet-professor—neither quite a nor b—thus comes from older elements, but in new arrangements during the latter half of the 20th-century. The development of a national system for professionalizing the writing and teaching of poetry was historically unprecedented. In postwar America, booming university enrollments, the expansion of English Departments, and burgeoning creative writing degree-programs institutionalized mainstream poetic production.

The narrative this scholarship provides is useful, but by looking only at 1) the pre-1950 literary establishment of nationally circulated magazines, large trade presses and publishing houses, or 2) institutions of higher education, these studies also rewrite the opposition between establishment and avant-garde poetic production. While the dawn of McGurl's "program era" is historically concurrent with Michael Davidson's

(Harvard University, 2009). Earlier studies, such as D.G. Myers' *Elephants Teach*, did not seek to place the creative writing within the broader field of American literature.

sociologically-inflected analysis of 1970s Bay Area poetries, for example, these two histories fail to interact, with no players, individual or institutional, in common. This disjuncture is due in part to the divide between poetics criticism and literary sociologies—the former privileges one or several writing constituencies; the latter works from market-driven definitions of the center. Both narrate writers’ bids for patronage or independence, however—as typically sought through academic or literary market institutions—in ways that often occlude the roles of private sponsorship and more emphatically of state interest. This study holds that state interest and cooperation with grant foundations and individual patrons are crucial to understanding postwar poetic production. While it does not oppose the persuasive and primary account of this period as the program era, it brings into view institutional players operating outside of the university system itself—influential patrons, and most importantly federal bodies—to explain how this system laid claim to poetry production. As Chapters 1-2 have shown, the postwar state operated as a central pivot between the infrastructure of literary professionalism on the one hand and of higher education on the other. In this capacity, the state supported the second wave (mid-1960s) growth of creative writing as a Cold War cultural mission.

While McGurl calls the program era a period of “systemic creativity”—in his account, fiction workshops produced three dominant novelistic forms²⁸⁰—these heuristics emerge from what is simultaneously the “systemic excellence” of a complex surfeit of literary expression. This dissertation likewise understands the institutionalization of poetry through its both programmatic and proliferative effects.

²⁸⁰ Namely lower-middle-class modernism, high cultural pluralism, and technomodernism. As this chapter will later discuss, in the poetry workshop’s dominant model of the subject, the speaking voice stood for 1) expressive individuality in a democratic society; and 2) personal identity in a plural society. As voice evolved to advance identity over individuality, the “ethic of raw particularity,” or the use of sensory details to authenticate narratives of the self, increasingly functioned as cultural markers signifying the values of a pluralistic society. The voice-based model of 1) and 2) was countered by 3) formal experiments of poet-critics.

Unmistakably, the era witnessed immense social and formal diversification of poetic production in the United States. At the same time, this tremendous output has culturally coagulated into what poetic histories typically call two dominant strains—i.e. the raw and the cooked, avant-garde poetics and establishment verse.²⁸¹ The disciplinary history of traditional literary study on the one hand, and creative writing on the other, is today perhaps the starkest, if least often explicitly acknowledged, dividing line of these so-called “poetry wars.”²⁸²

The Association of Writers & Writing Programs, founded as the Associated Writing Programs in 1967, reflects the two-camp discourse. Today, the AWP asserts a division between academic (specialized) poetry versus public (populist) poetry, not unlike the division between New Critical and populist verse in the discourse that surrounded the Bollingen Prize in Chapter 1. In fact, the divide is not “between work in academe and work in “the real world.”²⁸³ In the balkanized sides of the so-called “poetry wars,” *both* claim the university as base camp.

While both surged in numbers to represent new norms in poetic occupation, the “creative writer” of MFA-granting creative writing programs emerged as a distinct phenomenon from the poet-professor or “poet-critic” typically housed in the English Department. Thus, when the AWP points to the weaknesses of “academe”—such as the “tendency to reward those with the most academic connections, and this sometimes

²⁸¹ Consider, for example, the legacy of dueling anthologies since 1960, when Donald Allen’s *New American Poetry* opposed the “new avant-garde” against the traditional verse of prominent anthologies like Hall & Pack’s *New Poets of England and America* (1957). Even recent critical anthologies like *American Hybrid: A Norton Anthology of New Poetry* (2009) retain this division, here through the very promise to hybridize the two spheres of American postwar poetry. Notably, Allen’s anthology, included both poetry and criticism, Hall & Pack’s did not. This would persist as a dividing line in the anthology wars, reflecting the distinction this chapter makes between the MFA workshop poet and the poet-critic.

²⁸² Indeed, the cultural sensitivity animating this divide—particularly given the institutional intimacy of the professional practices—is a significant reason scholarship has not accounted for the historical development of creative writing industry vis-à-vis the English Department. Instead, critics have frequently adopted a more shrilly polemical pro- or anti-MFA rhetoric, such as Anis Shivani in *Against the Workshop: Provocations, Polemics, Controversies* (Huntsville: Texas Review Press, 2011).

²⁸³ “Our History and the Growth of Creative Writing Programs.”

tends to make intellectual endeavors more specialized, in a domain remote from the public,” as AWP director David Fenza assessed in his 2013 Annual Report—“academe” implicitly refers to the poet-critics, but not the MFA poets who work at academic institutions. The AWP understands full well that many MFA poets are, in fact, professors, or “teachers”: “One of AWP’s achievements is its promotion of those teachers who connect with the public—writers who teach and publish works that attract large general audiences.”²⁸⁴ By equating civic relevance (“teachers who connect with the public”) with commercial relevance (“works that attract large general audiences”), the AWP defines MFA poets contra “academe.”

AWP discourse that pits academic against “real world” poetry thus obfuscates the position of the MFA poet, although distinct from the poet-critic, *within* the academy. It is more broadly misleading about the relationship of the university to poetic production. In the second half of the twentieth century, the so-called “academization of poetry” did not mean that poetry became less accessible to the general public: the academization of poetry meant that it became *more* accessible, with more people writing, publishing and reading poetry.

To understand the origins of AWP discourse, we will first have to understand the origins of creative writing itself. The next chapter section traces the early history of the discipline through its flagship program.

Professionalizing Poetry: Iowa Writers’ Workshop, 1939-1967

“It is conceivable that by the end of the twentieth century the American university will have proved a more understanding and helpful aid to literature than ever the old families of Europe,” Paul Engle, long-time director of the Iowa Writers’ Workshop, said

²⁸⁴ David Fenza, “From Our Executive Director,” Association of Writers & Writing Programs 2013 Annual Report, 5.

in 1961. If “the old families of Europe” long offered literary patronage, in Cold War America, the university offered literary professions.

The first creative writing programs in the United States were established in the years following World War II.²⁸⁵ Iowa, the early exception, introduced courses in creative writing in its 1939-40 course catalog, and with the appointment of Paul Engle as Writers’ Workshop director in 1942 assumed a prototypical stature in the industry. Elliott Coleman founded the Johns Hopkins Writing Seminars in 1946. In 1947, Stanford began a fellowship program in writing. The University of Denver opened a writing program the same year; Cornell established one in 1948. The early postwar years saw the consolidation of creative writing as a discipline that reflected the ideals of universal high culture. Progenitors of the discipline, specifically Coleman, Wallace Stegner, Alan Swallow, and Baxter Hathaway, sought “to bring the teaching of literature more closely in line with the ways in which (they believed) literature is genuinely created,” as D.G. Myers has summarized; “to impart the *understanding* of literature through the *use* of it.”²⁸⁶ The *use* value of creative writing, however, meant something different to the teacher-writers of the age of criticism—the literary climate of the 1940s and 50s—than it would to the second generation of creative writing program founders during the 1960s and 70s,²⁸⁷ and different than what it means to the AWP today. The originating disciplinary conception of creative writing sought to bridge the gap between literary knowledge and literary practice: between philology, literary history, and critical theory on the one hand; and cultural studies, rhetoric, business English, and composition on the

²⁸⁵ On the longer history of rhetoric, composition, literary study as disciplinary formations, see Myers, who traces their evolution from the mid-19th-century to the birth of “New English” and “English composition” in the 1880s and 1890s and to the 20th-century debates from which creative writing emerged. Also see Evan Watkins, *Work Time: English Departments and the Circulation of Cultural Value* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), which argues that the disciplinary entangling of composition and literary study functioned to endow students with increasingly compound skill-sets as managerial workers in a post-industrial economy.

²⁸⁶ Myers, *The Elephants Teach*, 8.

²⁸⁷ Both Myers and Bennett use the two-generation timeline.

other. Creative writing forged a “third way”²⁸⁸—it provided an alternative to producing literary criticism “as a branch of science” à la New Criticism, but did not provide professional training for a career as a creative writer. Norman Foerster, mentor to program founders Stegner and Engle and the director of Iowa’s School of Letters from 1930-1944, was instrumental in the vision of creative writing as a methodological “third way,” establishing “Imaginative Writing” as a field of graduate study in literature in 1931.²⁸⁹ Ph.D. candidates were expected to have familiarity in language, literary history, literary criticism, and imaginative writing as sub-fields of literary study; a specialist in the latter submitted a poem, play, or other work of art instead of the typical dissertation. Foerster emphasized that his project was “to give all types of literary students a rigorous and appropriate discipline,” rather than to “establish a vocational school for authors and critics.”²⁹⁰ “Imaginative critical” writing was a pursuit within literary study, not a source of livelihood.²⁹¹ Creative writing began not as a populist impulse toward socially engaged art, but as “an effort to systemize and transmit the knowledge required to enjoy the

²⁸⁸ Myers, *The Elephants Teach*, 6-7.

²⁸⁹ When courses in creative writing—“Writing Fiction” and “Writing Poetry”—were first introduced under the “Writers’ Workshop” heading in the 1939-40 University of Iowa *Catalogue*, Foerster’s term “Imaginative Writing” was dropped as a prefix to course titles. Stephen Wilbers, *The Iowa Writers’ Workshop: Origins, Emergence, and Growth* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1980), 52. Some histories date the birth of creative writing at Iowa from the formalization of “Imaginative Writing” as field of literary study in 1931. Although I prefer to mark the emergence of workshop writing from the appearance of “creative writing” in Iowa’s course catalogue, it is worth noting that University President Walter Jessup also successfully urged Foerster to organize the first national “Conference on Creative Writing” in order to bring publicity to Iowa’s innovative doctoral program in 1931.

²⁹⁰ “Iowa’s School of Letters Admits Imaginative, Critical Writing for Ph.D. Thesis,” *Daily Iowan*, March 26, 1931.

²⁹¹ In the next years, Foerster sponsored a series of readings by nationally recognized writers on campus. Tellingly, “[he] proposed Robert Frost as the first visitor, remembering his long service in various institutions, especially Amherst.” Letter to John Gerber, qtd. in Wilbers, *The Iowa Writers’ Workshop*, 47. Frost and Engle were the headliners at the Summer Workshop of 1941, Iowa’s last major prewar event. During the war, the Workshop would scale back its activities. Wilbers, *The Iowa Writers’ Workshop*, 53.

vertical compensations of art rather than satisfying the horizontal demands of a great public.”²⁹²

However, this disciplinary ideal sought to articulate itself at the very moment that the American university—in size, shape, and social role—was wholly transfigured. After the war, a newly centralized and powerful federal government assumed increased state control of academic institutions. While federal aid had been distributed during the Depression, this was no precedent for the postwar growth of state funding of higher education.²⁹³ The G.I. Bill, or the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, allotted veterans 48 months of free education at the college or university of their choice. The Veterans Affairs administrator predicted only 700,000 would take advantage of the program; in fact, 2,232,000 veterans entered colleges and universities. More than a million enrolled during AY 1947-8 alone.²⁹⁴ In the new multiversity, Clark Kerr’s term for the cultural flowering of the university that plays on Karl Polanyi’s 1944 description of the emergence of a market economy, creative writing held a special role. It was an expandable discipline. As the postwar university grew, so did the need for teachers, and writers met this demand more readily than professionals in hard-skill fields. Moreover, creative writing programs could exist within already established English Departments. They did not require new facilities or equipment, but could still function as independent programs, bringing in federal dollars via tuition for each student who enrolled.

²⁹² Myers, *The Elephants Teach*, 148. Also see Eric Bennett’s dissertation chapter “Creative Writing and The New Humanism: Teaching the Soul,” which describes how New Humanist conceptions of “integrated individuality” and personal responsibility, espoused most influentially by Irving Babbitt, Paul Elmer More, and Norman Foerster, laid the philosophical foundations for creative writing pedagogy in the 1940s. Bennett’s telling is more continuous genealogy, where Foerster’s pupils, notably Wilbur Schramm, Paul Engle and Wallace Stegner, formed “a visionary conviction that literature mattered not only to the academy but to the nation and the world” (28). In both Bennett and Myers’ accounts, early creative writing develops as a rejection of New Critical autonomy of the literary object. Creative writing program founders, like Frost, grew increasingly convicted of the civic responsibility of literature.

²⁹³ Between 1933 and 1941, 620,000 students received federal support for college education through the Federal Emergency Relief Administration and National Youth Administration. At the end of WWII, half of American college students were in private colleges; subsequently, private colleges lost 1% enrollment annually. Myers, *The Elephants Teach*, 165.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 160-1.

In Myers' account, the originating disciplinary ideal of creative writing was more or less lost in the noise of the rapid expansion of higher education. He argues that the "three-way split in English departments" collapsed, if messily, when creative writing split off from English Departments proper; the idea of creative writing put forward by its progenitors failed when it became a fully autonomous branch of curricula. But Eric Bennett identifies several influential founders, namely Wallace Stegner and Paul Engle, as key agents in the ideological development of the project. Engle, in particular, successfully adapted values of his New Humanist training to fit the cultural priorities of the Cold War.²⁹⁵ He became a savvy fundraiser who guided creative writing's flagship program toward a more socially ambitious mission, where the creative writer was the beacon of individual self-expression against the threat of totalitarianism. With Engle at its helm, Iowa acquired the support of private funders, most significantly the Rockefeller Foundation, in the 1950s. In the early 1960s, moreover, Engle tapped into the emergent state verse culture observed at the inaugural National Poetry Festival in Washington (Chapter 2). Iowa became an important participant in the national arts agenda. Iowa was a blueprint for the creative writing programs that followed—more than half of the approximately 50 second-wave programs were founded by its graduates, in what Donald Justice called "a kind of pyramid scheme, it seems now [in 1984], looking back."²⁹⁶ A complex of state and private funding supported the expansion and professionalization of creative writing into an industry in the 1960s-70s.

²⁹⁵ Wilbers is reluctant to overestimate Engle's influence in the development of creative writing. "Although the emphasis of the program under Engle's direction changed from treating creative writing as part of a broader scholarly discipline to viewing scholarship as an activity beneficial to the writer, the basic premise was the same: the creation of literature is academically as respectable and important as the study of literature." *The Iowa Writers' Workshop*, 83. Engle's correspondence, however, casts creative writing as antithetical to scholarship proper. While Engle perhaps strategically emphasized this division to potential funders, it was nonetheless operative in Iowa's rise to national eminence.

²⁹⁶ "Those who went through Iowa went out and took part in other writing programs—a kind of pyramid scheme, it seems now, looking back." Donald Justice in 1984, "An Interview with Donald Justice," qtd. in Myers, *The Elephants Teach*, 164.

For the first two decades after the war, Iowa was supported by private gifts and contributions. Creative writing workshops, at least to their funders, were not spaces where students went to “enjoy the vertical compensations of art,” but where citizens expressed widely held national values. Moreover, the creative writer had civic utility the scholar did not. In his first appeals to the Rockefeller Foundation, Engle pitted the productive capacity of the creative writer against the futile close readings of the scholar: “How much longer can the body of English and American literature go on supporting thousands of presumed scholars without their production descending to the merely trivial? . . . In another 75 years what can this lead to but a glossing of every stanza of poetry and chapter of novel and act of play?”²⁹⁷

Eric Bennett’s archival study of Engle-Rockefeller correspondence helps to “correct the lingering overestimation of the role that the New Criticism played in the rise of creative writing programs.”²⁹⁸ While an organization like the Bollingen Foundation sought to support New Critical ventures proper—pulling its prize money from the Library of Congress when it became contaminated with postwar American state politics, and relocating it to Yale, a veritable bastion of New Criticism (see Chapter 1)—the Rockefeller Foundation did not shy away from the civic uses of literature. Engle’s letters to the Rockefellers and other potential funders reflect the influence of his mentor Foerster, whose New Humanist conceptions of “integrated individuality” and personal

²⁹⁷ Engle to the Rockefeller Foundation, 19 February 1952, qtd. in Bennett, “Creative Writing and the Cold War,” 97.

²⁹⁸ Paul Dawson has baldly contended that “the [creative writing] workshop developed because of the influence of the New Criticism,” for example (Bennett 99-100). McGurl likewise calls the success of the creative writing workshop “the achievement of the New Critics,” based on their prominence in the postwar university—New Criticism was “lodged at the core of American literary studies in the postwar period. In this [New Critics’ ideas] can be taken as emblematic of American writers more broadly”—and retroactively drawn discursive homologies: “the practice of close reading of literary texts in the classroom would harmonize conspicuously well with the obsessive concern for “craft” that began to define writing programs at roughly the same time” (22-23). This dissertation aligns with Bennett’s corrective. As Chapter 1 observed, New Critical discourse valued the aesthetic autonomy of the literary object, even in the case of *The Pisan Cantos*; workshop founders, by contrast, championed the civic responsibility of creative expression.

responsibility helped form Engle's "visionary conviction that literature mattered not only to the academy but to the nation and the world."²⁹⁹ Stevens, a director of The Humanities Division at the Rockefeller Foundation, praised Engle's Foerster for "work[ing] against old methods of graduate teaching in English" in *The Changing Humanities: An Appraisal of Old Values and New Uses* (1953), a volume that details the philosophy behind the foundation's postwar funding decisions. Allied and often sharing personnel with the CIA and the State Department, the Rockefeller Foundation "put its money behind ideas larger than both the waning New Humanism and the waxing New Criticism...its munificence subsumed them more and more."³⁰⁰ The Foundation supported a broader vision of American new liberalism, holding sacred the values of "secular humanism, democratic individuality, and the living voice of the artist as social glue"³⁰¹ in a world torn between democratic and communist rule.³⁰² The Rockefeller Foundation did not support the limited ends of New Criticism at Yale, then, but the broader vision of creative writing at Iowa—granting Engle \$40,000 between 1953 and 1956.³⁰³

Engle appealed to the Rockefeller Foundation and other corporate and individual donors as generals in the battle of ideas, promising Iowa's creative writing students as their soldiers. Engle regularly highlighted the role of universities in the fight against

²⁹⁹ Bennett, "Creative Writing and the Cold War," 28.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 97-9.

³⁰¹ Ibid., 84.

³⁰² The Rockefeller Foundation, working in conjunction with the State Department and other intelligence agencies, supported ideologically motivated projects across artistic fields. As Peter Decherney has shown in the case of film, the Foundation focused on "educational, documentary films and their potential use in advancing democratic societies." "The Politics of Patronage," *Hollywood and the Culture Elite: How the Movies Became American* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 168.

³⁰³ Bennett, "Creative Writing and the Cold War," 96. The foundation pledged \$40,000 to support three years of fellowships (four to be awarded each year) in fiction, poetry and drama, selected by a committee of Karl Shapiro, Robert Lowell, Charles Shattuck, Hansford Martin, and Thomas Mabry. Moreover, the Rockefeller Foundation had vested interest in the field of creative writing since 1944: *The Kenyon Review*, *The Sewanee Review*, *The Hudson Review*, *The Partisan Review* and the State University of Iowa, which in total had received \$385,300 from the Foundation between 1947-1957, in turn provided fellowships to 58 writers—many of whom were graduates of Iowa, and many of whom were among the first set of NEA grantees in 1967.

communism. “I trust you have seen the recent announcement that the Soviet Union is founding a University at Moscow for students coming from outside the country,” Engle wrote the Foundation. “[T]housands of young people of intelligence, many of whom could never get University training in their own countries, will receive education [and] the expected ideological indoctrination.”³⁰⁴ Creative writing programs, meanwhile, stood against communist and totalitarian ideas. The creative writer was a beacon of individual expression. The creative writer, like the Abstract Expressionist painter, stood for the values of an open society, and provided an image of American cultural leadership abroad.

A more regionalist strain of this ethos helped sell the value of the creative writer to Midwestern investors. Much like Frost cultivated his brand as a national poet by emphasizing his roots in *North of Boston*, Engle pitched articles to generalist readerships throughout the 1950s that helped cohere his persona, the face of institutionalized creative writing, as a regionalist and thereby all-American brand. He composed a handful of holiday specials for *Better Homes & Gardens*, and pieces such as “Poetry, People, Pigs” for *The Iowan*.³⁰⁵ Media relationships assisted Iowa in turn. Publishing mogul Henry Luce of *Time* and *Life*, and Gardner Cowles Jr., who published *Look* and several newspapers in the Midwest, “loved to feature Iowa: its embodiment of literary individualism, its celebration of self-expression, its cornfields.”³⁰⁶

³⁰⁴ Bennett, “The Pyramid Scheme” in *MFA vs. NYC: The Two Cultures of American Fiction*, ed. Chad Harbach (n + 1/Faber and Faber, 2014), 51.

³⁰⁵ Engle also wrote copy for Hallmark, slogans for Nissen and a trampoline manufacturer, and Hall of Fame Christmas operas on NBC (Bennett 133-4), not unlike poet Dana Gioia, an important actor in Chapter 4, who at General Foods reversed an over 20-year sales decline with his alliterative “Jell-O Jigglers” campaign before acting as NEA Chairman (2002-2009). Gioia, “A Poet in the Supermarket,” *The New York Times*, October 28, 2007.

³⁰⁶ Bennett, “The Pyramid Scheme,” 53.

Rejecting the experimental modernist abroad, or the writer “alienated from his country,” Engle admired Frost’s model of the writer as citizen.³⁰⁷ “One of the powerful themes of literature in the twentieth century has been the alienation of the writer from his times and his country because he felt that he had no home there,” Engle wrote in the opening of his 1964 collection *On Creative Writing*, dedicating it to the “heartening variety of individuals, foundations, and corporations who have refused to believe that this must be true.”³⁰⁸ Also like Frost, Engle understood the role of the writer as a unique but representative citizen: “The young writer is not merely a student. Far more than any other person of talent, he creates an image by which a country sees itself, and the image by which other countries also see it,” Engle stated in the 1959 publicity materials accompanying “Proposal for Founding the Iowa Industries Fellowships in Writing at the State University of Iowa.” The student writer as the image of the nation: this was the persuasive ethos of the creative writing workshop. Previous and ongoing funders were convinced.³⁰⁹ Howard Hall of the Iowa Manufacturing Company in Cedar Rapids, for instance, explained why funders should consider Iowa’s international students a national priority: “Their presence here means that they will later act as cultural missionaries,

³⁰⁷ In Engle’s “To Praise a Man,” Frost is “Unhurried, free, with steady gait / He is our greatest, final state. / In him these crooked times provide / A straight astonishment of pride / In such a country, when it can / Bear such a poet, such a man.” “Paeon for a Poet by a Poet,” *LIFE* Magazine, June 15, 1959, 65.

³⁰⁸ Engle, “Dedication,” *On Creative Writing* (New York: Dutton, 1964), vii.

³⁰⁹ “In an open society such as ours, writer, businessman and university can join to make an environment which is useful to the writer, friendly for the businessman, and healthy for the university. The following believed this: Northern Natural Gas Company of Omaha; Reader’s Digest Foundation; The Fisher Foundation of Marshalltown, Iowa; W. Averell Harriman of Washington, D.C.; The Maytag Co. Foundation, Newton, Iowa; U.S. Steel Foundation; the John D. Rockefeller III Fund; Time Inc.; The Louis W. and Maud Hill Family Foundation of St. Paul; The Cowles Charitable Trust; The New York Foundation; The Fred Maytag Family Foundation; Quaker Oats Co.; Amana Refrigeration; Gardner Cowles, Jr.; Miss Lillian Gish; H.J. Sobloff, New York; Mrs. John P. Marquand, *Esquire*; J. Patrick Lannan, Chicago; The Robert R. McCormick Foundation; Mrs. Loyal L. Minor, Mason City, Iowa; Mr. Joseph Rosenfield, Mr. Ed Burchette, and Iowa Power and Light Co., all of Des Moines; WMT-TV and Radio, Iowa Electric Light and Power Co., Iowa Manufacturing Co., Merchants National Bank, Iowa Steel and Iron Works, May Drug Co., John B. Turner and Sons, and Iowa National Mutual Insurance Co., all of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, that remarkable city.” Engle, “Dedication,” *On Creative Writing* (New York: Dutton, 1964), vii-viii.

taking the name of Iowa around the Free World.” The Iowa ethos was also endorsed by Henry Rago, the current editor of *Poetry* magazine: “Paul Engle’s plan is valuable not only for this region, and for the country as a whole, but to all that part of the world which still believes in the free individual and the free artist.”³¹⁰

To expand the imperial vision of the Iowa Workshop to other “parts of the world,” Engle would need more than the support of Midwestern businessmen. Iowa had “attained national eminence by capitalizing on the fears and hopes of the [C]old [W]ar”³¹¹ with private funders; it would pursue international ventures, culminating in the founding of an International Writing Program in 1967, with the overt and covert aid of the state. The formation of the Associated Writing Programs established creative writing as a professional industry at home the same year. The second generation of creative writing—the transition from the disciplinary consolidation to the professionalization of creative writing, or from the high culture of the university to the cultural flowering of the multiversity—should also be understood as the transition from private to state support.

In June 1962, a USIS contact encouraged Engle to “write the White House, since the welcome mat is supposed to be out for new ideas these days.”³¹² This “welcome mat” had in part been laid out by Frost, the national poet who, as shown in Chapter 2, worked instrumentally with President Kennedy and his administration to secure a privileged role for the individual artist in projects of Cold War cultural imperialism. While Engle argued for the geopolitical stakes of the creative writer to Iowa shareholders, Frost had been making the same case to the White House—here a more difficult one. State-sponsored arts sounded suspiciously like the propaganda of the USSR. By conceiving of national arts as a cooperative venture with private industry, as well as a “volunteer effort” of the

³¹⁰ Bennett, “Creative Writing and the Cold War,” 136-7.

³¹¹ Bennett, “The Pyramid Scheme,” 54.

³¹² McCarthy, 2 July 1962 qtd. in Bennett, “Creative Writing and the Cold War,” 150.

free-willed citizen (“ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country”), the Kennedy and subsequent Cold War administrations effectively distinguished the national arts programs from those of a socialist state. If a government-supported arts initiative was also supported by an industry giant like Rockefeller, after all, it could hardly seem anti-capitalist. State investment in creative writing during the mid-1960s was not provided through any one single fund, then, but followed Kennedy’s model of state arts with a capitalist spirit.

Engle’s appointment to the Advisory Committee on the Arts was instrumental in securing the eventual state support for creative writing. Congressional legislation had formally created the Board of Trustees for a National Cultural Center in 1958, but the Center was not effectively mobilized until Kennedy took office, and an Advisory Committee on the Arts was assembled to plan and fundraise for the Center in January 1962. Engle was appointed.³¹³ Encouraged by the national arts “welcome mat,” Engle contacted the Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs, Lucius D. Battle, regarding his work in Asia. This was the first of many fruitful exchanges that would lead to state support of Iowa’s International Writing Program.

In his capacity as an Advisory Committee member, Engle communicated with the Cultural Center’s Chairman, Roger L. Stevens. He also had cause to follow up with State Department officials during visits to Washington. In October 1962, Engle made a key trip to attend the National Poetry Festival. In Eric Bennett’s telling, Engle attended “a poetry conference at the Library of Congress, an event overshadowed by the Cuban Missile crisis.” A *Washington Post* article described attendees—Robert Frost, Randall Jarrell, Marianne Moore, as the whole “living anthology”; there was “[n]o mention of Engle, but Engle was both at the conference and making the rounds.” At the Festival, Engle found a long-time network of state and private endowments convening to celebrate the national

³¹³ Reardon to Engle, 11 January 1962 qtd. in Bennett, “Creative Writing and the Cold War,” 151.

poetry office at the Library of Congress and *Poetry* magazine's 50th anniversary—a fortuitous atmosphere in which Engle could make a case for the state support of Iowa. Though indeed “overshadowed” by the missile scare, the resulting political tension in Washington animated the festival's nationalist strands (Chapter 2). During this visit, Engle met with Stevens, invited Mrs. Kennedy to serve on the University of Iowa's Arts Council, and followed up in-person with Battle at the State Department to solicit support for Iowa's Asia venture. Here, he was referred to specialized State Department staff “much interested in exploring with you the possibilities for collaboration” on the project Schlesinger meanwhile deemed “promising.”³¹⁴

Engle spent half of 1963 on a “world recruiting tour” supported by the Rockefeller Foundation and the State Department. Bennett describes Engle's letters from his six months abroad as effusive political appraisals; sometimes they “verged on treatises, letters having little to do with literature.”³¹⁵ He felt himself “an important emissary.” More often than his thoughts on international politics proper, however, Engle recorded observational travelogues. To the Rockefeller Foundation from India: “I have been places no American had been before, in the chawls of Bombay where the smell of urine was the same color as the cup of tea I looked at grimly, in open drain paths of Calcutta where I saw on a pad cross-legged on the floor and discussed the social novel with a man who looked like Buddha.”³¹⁶

Such letters provide an instructive view of the workshop director's own narrative voice. In the travelogues, experiences of cultural difference serve as the chief claim to narrative authority, or as here the narrator's exemplary status: “*I have been places no*

³¹⁴ Bennett, “Creative Writing and the Cold War,” 150-2.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 153-4.

³¹⁶ “The obvious Chinese efforts to encircle India, by the Pakistan treaty, which means that unfriendly troops are east as well as west of India, added to the Chinese on the north, and the steadily left-pushing actions of Burma and Ceylon (nationalization of banks in Burma of oil in Ceylon, are all a part of a pattern...The doctrinaire quality of Nehru's utterances are quaint but dangerous...Yet the private industrialist seems corrupt as the government enterprises (I have materials on this).” 22 March 1963, qtd. in Bennett, “Creative Writing and the Cold War,” 153-4.

American had been before, in the chawls.” In the letters’ accounts of economic and cultural difference, difference is understood 1) through stark, dualistic contrasts, e.g. between wealth and poverty; and 2) through sensory details. For example: “the filthy water next day splashed over the faces of old women from lovely brass jugs at one of the Khali temples.”³¹⁷ “[T]he filthy water” and “lovely brass jugs,” moreover, is a contrast Engle composed months after his return home to Cedar Rapids. In this context, cultural difference is reduced to sensory details of smell, e.g. “crisp stench of flesh and wood burning” or image, e.g. “Untouchables pushing heads and legs back into the fire,” that contrast with the cultural position of the speaker. Details thus endow the speaker with the value of difference, or unique personal experience, and at the same time stabilize the speaker’s position as American. These letters anticipate the workshop industry’s dominant model of voice discussed in the subsequent chapter section, where sensory details authenticate narratives of personal experience, increasingly in the 1970s and 80s as markers of cultural identity.

This trip solidified Engle’s international vision for Iowa’s future. The success of the Program in Creative Writing at the University of Iowa “suggested that, in an open society such as ours, writer, businessman, and university can join to make an environment which is useful to the writer, friendly for the businessman, and healthy for the university”—and an international Iowa would model the values of an open society to the world, where “young writers from all regions of the USA and many areas of the earth could come here and make an international community of the imagination.”³¹⁸ When they returned home, moreover, “[i]nternational creative writers were presumed to be unmediated agents of change in their native countries.”³¹⁹ The state agreed that creative writing was a potent tool to spread values of individualism and democracy both at home

³¹⁷ Engle to the Rockefeller Foundation, 9 October 1963. Ibid.

³¹⁸ Engle, *On Creative Writing*, vii.

³¹⁹ Bennett, “Creative Writing and the Cold War,” 156.

and abroad. The State Department rather than the Rockefeller Foundation would fund Engle's next international mission.

Engle's activities in 1965, when Iowa's enrollment reached a new peak of 250 students, show the Kennedy-Frost national arts agenda coming to fruition. President Johnson appointed Engle to the National Council on the Arts in February.³²⁰ Over the summer, the council worked to help draft the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act, which established the National Endowment for the Arts as an independent agency of the federal government: "The world leadership which has come to the United States...must be solidly founded upon worldwide respect and admiration for the Nation's high qualities as a leader in the realm of ideas and of the spirit," the act declared. Hence "national progress and scholarship in the humanities and the arts, while primarily a matter for private and local initiative, are also appropriate matters of concern to the Federal Government...While no government can call a great artist or scholar into existence," it could avoid breeding "unthinking servants" by "help[ing] create and sustain not only a climate encouraging freedom of thought, imagination, and inquiry but also the material conditions facilitating the release of this creative talent."³²¹ Engle's first useful state contact, former Chairman of the National Culture Center Roger L. Stevens, was appointed the first Chairman of the NEA. While in Washington for Johnson's ceremonial signing of the bill on September 29,³²² Engle planned the details of his next trip abroad.

³²⁰ In September 1964, the passage of the National Arts and Cultural Development Act (NCA) established a council with 24 members to "recommend ways to maintain and increase the cultural resources of the nation and to encourage and develop greater appreciation and enjoyment of the arts by its citizens." A \$50,000 budget was approved in October; Paul Engle was chosen as the council's representative from the field of poetry. Bauerlein and Grantham, *National Endowment for the Arts: A History, 1965-2008*, 15-6.

³²¹ National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965 (Pub. L. 89-209).

³²² Also in 1965, the Higher Education Act (Pub. L. 89-329) offered millions secure federal grants and loans for college; and the National Defense Education Act of 1958 (Pub. L. 85-864) was expanded to include English and the social sciences. The successful launching of Sputnik 1 by the USSR in October 1957 helped to catalyze the passage of the NDEA, which provided funding to reform the national educational system to meet national defense priorities. See *What Ivan Knows That Johnny Doesn't* (1961).

He would deliver lectures on American poetry in Norway, Denmark, Ireland, Sweden and Germany later that fall.³²³

Two years later, Engle's work on scouting trips abroad was realized in the founding of an International Writing Program at Iowa. The International Writing Program was subsidized by the State Department, The Asia Foundation³²⁴ and The Fairfield Foundation.³²⁵ As Bennett has demonstrated, The Fairfield Foundation operated as a CIA front, funding "cultural operations" through the Congress for Cultural Freedom. The combination of covert support through the Fairfield Foundation and explicit state support of Iowa provides an instructive example of how the participation of formally private enterprises secured the national arts agenda as distinct from Soviet propaganda.

The NEA also made its first complete series of grants the in fiscal year of 1967. None of the awardees had applied for NEA support; the new agency had not yet developed a system for applications. The first series of grants in literature, totaling \$737,010, were awarded to 23 creative writers, including Maxine Kumin, who would serve as the national poet in 1981-2; Iowa graduate Mona Van Duyn, who later became the first female Poet Laureate in 1992; former *Poetry* editor Hayden Carruth (see Chapter 1), Robert Duncan, and Kenneth Patchen. It also provided grants to nine literary organizations. These organizations, such as the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines, were instrumental to the shaping of state verse culture, providing publication and career advice to aspiring creative writers, many of whom were Iowa graduates as well as providing funds to the publications, including *Poetry*, *The Hudson Review*, *Kenyon Review*, *Southern Review*, and *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, that would

³²³ Bennett, "Creative Writing and the Cold War," 164.

³²⁴ According to Bennett, this was another channel for CIA money.

³²⁵ Bennett, "Creative Writing and the Cold War University," *A Companion to Creative Writing* (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 382.

publish these Iowa graduates in turn.³²⁶ The same year, the Associated Writing Programs was founded, formalizing creative writing as a national industry.³²⁷

Iowa's institutional biography reflects the consolidation of the national arts agenda in the mid-1960s. Initially underwritten by anti-communist businessmen, the creative writing industry's flagship program increasingly developed relationships with official and unofficial organs of state support. State support of Iowa occurred concomitantly with wide-ranging legislative changes, namely the creation of the NEA and the passage of the Higher Education Act in 1965, so as to appropriate and programmatically reproduce the creative writing project of expressive voice within the mainstream ideology of the nation-state.

Stating the Self: The Creative Writing Industry's Project of Poetic Voice

I have always laughed
when someone spoke of
"finding his voice." I took it
literally: had he lost his voice?
Had he thrown it and had it
not returned? Or perhaps they
were referring to his newspaper
the *Village Voice*? He's trying

³²⁶ Bauerlein and Grantham, *National Endowment for the Arts: A History, 1965-2008*, 25-6.

³²⁷ The spread of the workshop as a cultural phenomenon can be observed in The Poetry Society of America's 1966 bulletin announcing its first Round Table Workshop: "(Group limited to 10 members (enrollees)...Each to pay \$15 for 10 sessions)." Entrepreneurial executive secretary Gustav Davidson was excited by the moneymaking opportunities of the workshop format: "Some months ago I offered 3 proposals to the Board by way of putting PSA back on the poetic map. One of those [sic] 3 proposals was a live, roundtable Poetry Workshop, which became a reality recently with 10 weekly evening sessions operating from this Library. The Workshop proved extremely successful. . .I am therefore encouraged to revive mention of my 2nd proposal—which was, and is, the launching under PSA sponsorship and support of a Poetry Quarterly. . .a first-class typographer. . .might sell at \$1.00 or \$1.25 the copy and by annual subscription. As a further source of income it might run paid advertisements pertaining to poetry. I figure that the cost of the venture, for the first 5 years, could be borne by the cash reserves we have built up in the di Castagnola Trust Fund." Davidson understood that the business of poetry was growing: "the Society can ill afford to be constantly lagging behind because of inaction or inertia. That is why other poetry organizations have taken the lead out of our hands. I say, let's get started!" "Proposal submitted by Gustav Davidson to the PSA Governing Board," February 6, 1967, Gustav Davidson Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

to find his *Voice*.

What isn't
funny is that so many young writers
seem to have found this notion
credible: they set off in search
of their voice, as if it were
a single thing, a treasure
difficult to find but worth
the effort. I never thought
such a thing existed. Until
recently. Now I know it does.
I hope I never find mine. I
wish to remain a phony the rest of my life.

—Ron Padgett, “Voice”³²⁸

Workshop

I might as well begin by saying how much I like the title.
It gets me right away because I'm in a workshop now
so immediately the poem has my attention,
like the Ancient Mariner grabbing me by the sleeve.

And I like the first couple of stanzas,
the way they establish this mode of self-pointing
that runs through the whole poem
and tells us that words are food thrown down
on the ground for other words to eat. . .

But what I'm not sure about is the voice,
which sounds in places very casual, very blue jeans,
but other times seems standoffish,
professorial in the worst sense of the word
like the poem is blowing pipe smoke in my face.
But maybe that's just what it wants to do.

—Billy Collins, from “Workshop”³²⁹

Write what you know. Show, don't tell. Find your voice. Describing what he calls
“the subjective turn in postwar American aesthetics,” Fredric Jameson recalls these three
injunctions—the tripartite doctrine of the postwar creative writing workshop—as a
“precious clue for exploration both of the new postwar society and economy, and of the

³²⁸ Ron Padgett, *Collected Poems* (Coffee House Press, 2013), 167. Originally appeared in *Toujours L'Amour* (1976).

³²⁹ Billy Collins, *Sailing Alone Around the Room: New and Selected Poems* (Random House, 2001), 65. Originally appeared in *The Art of Drowning* (1995).

evolution of that subjectivity so often loosely identified as individualism.”³³⁰ Like the poems and short stories they shaped, the pedagogical dicta of the creative writing workshop are symptomatic reflections of a wider cultural ethos. Significantly, the pedagogues themselves understood this. We must read Engle’s command to students to “find your voice” alongside his assertion that a “young writer” is “not merely a student, but the image of the nation,” i.e. a citizen. As his correspondence and prose show, Engle was mindful that crafting the psychology of the “I” was not only the crafting of the “I” of the student, but the “I” of the citizen-subject.

The national value of individualism, in the context of creative writing programs, was articulated through what Bennett calls a “kind of ethic of raw particularity.”³³¹ Bennett points to Engle and Warren Carrier’s didactic interpretation of Archibald MacLeish’s “Ars Poetica,” which argues that “expressing significance in poetry demands sharp, specific *detail*. The concrete symbols, the things in this world as we know it—these are the invariable stuff of poetry...Poetry must operate through such concrete symbols.”³³² Bennett writes: “this was the vision of a poetry of concrete symbols—of symbols so particular that they issue from and return to a single mind—and no longer of doves and roses and serpents, no longer the old public symbolism, but instead William Carlos Williams’s red wheelbarrow glazed with rainwater beside the white chickens.”³³³ While it is true that Engle “concentrated on particulars in his poetry, his teaching, and his occasional work as a critic and educator,” these were not the concrete details of imagism, but the concrete details of personal experience.³³⁴ In creative writing pedagogy,

³³⁰ Jameson, “Dirty Little Secret” in *MFA vs. NYC: The Two Cultures of American Fiction*, ed. Harchbach, 271.

³³¹ Bennett, “Creative Writing and the Cold War University,” 386.

³³² Engle and Warren Carrier, *Reading Modern Poetry* (Glenview: Scott, Foresman, 1968), 75.

³³³ Bennett, “Creative Writing and the Cold War University,” 387.

³³⁴ The concrete particular or sensory detail is an important thread through 20th-century American poetics, from William Carlos Williams’ “no ideas but in things” (“Paterson,” 1927) and Louis Zukofsky’s “the detail, not the mirage of seeing” (“An Objective”) to Allen Ginsberg’s “What

the particular establishes the authenticity of the individual. That is, the ethic of raw particularity reflects the imperative to “show, don’t tell,” but perhaps equally to “write what you know”—where details provide the evidence of difference, or the unique value, of personal experience. The unique detail as a marker of difference would also hold an important role in creative writing ethos in the age of identity politics. The individualism of the 1950s would evolve to accommodate a new national priority to embrace demographic pluralism in the late 1960s and multiculturalism in the 1970s. As creative writing workshop voice evolved to advance identity over individuality, the details authenticating narratives of personal experience increasingly functioned as markers of identity.

In his account of program era fiction, McGurl defines three dominant genres, or autopoietic processes, reflecting on the conditions of their production: 1) lower-middle-class modernism, 2) high cultural pluralism, and 3) technomodernism. In poetry three correlate developments unfold more or less chronologically: 1) individual voice that stands for expressive, democratic values; 2) increasingly in the 1970s and 80s, unique identities of a plural society; and 3) the formal experiments of poet-critics.

The speaking subject of “high cultural pluralism” bears most in common with 2), established as a model of poetic voice by the mid-1980s. “The high cultural pluralist writer is additionally called upon to speak from the point of view of one or another hyphenated population, synthesizing the particularity of the ethnic—or analogously marked—voice with the elevated idiom of literary modernism.”³³⁵ In the workshop poem of the identity politics era, markers of cultural difference authenticate the voice of the

did I notice? Particulars!” (“Wales Visitation”). The writing workshop blended these formulations: the detail now served chiefly to authenticate the voice of the individual speaking voice.

³³⁵ “High cultural pluralism enacts a layering of positively marked differences: in the modernist tradition, it understands its self-consciously crafted and/or intellectually substantial products as importantly distinct from mass culture or genre fiction, although in practice...[e.g.] when Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987) is read by Oprah’s Book Club—this distinction is often blurred or intentionally put at risk.” McGurl, *The Program Era*, 57.

speaker. Unique or sensory details, as well as the appearance of semantic contrast, frequently serve as markers of difference: e.g. ethnic food, a non-European proper name, an untranslated adjective or other simulation of local color, provide evidence of otherness—but do not threaten to challenge the poem’s intelligibility in narrative standard American English. Robert Blanco’s 2013 inaugural poem provides an exemplary instance of this operation in Chapter 4.

The unique detail serves to authenticate the speaker as author. A fundamental operation of high cultural pluralism is to “associat[e] the individual writer with a group from which she draws a claim to personal literary distinction.”³³⁶ Moreover, the narrator or primary character is associated with the author in the novel form. One principal literary device used to achieve this conflation is the appearance of voice, and often phonocentric voice. Portnoy in Philip Roth’s *Portnoy’s Complaint* (1969) is the emblematic symptom of a “*phonocentric* literary historical moment” (emphasis original). Portnoy “mim[es] the emotional, improvisational rhythms of a *spoken* voice, which is also necessarily an *embodied* voice and in this case a distinctly Jewish-American voice.” The presence of phonocentric voice worked so effectively that “some of [Roth’s] readers became convinced that the fictional character Portnoy was speaking for—or perhaps simply was—his author.”³³⁷

While the individual represented the anti-totalitarian values of a democratic society, the unique identity of the individual represented the values of a pluralistic society. Creative writing programs “help[ed] to affirm the messy peopleness of people,

³³⁶ Ibid., 58-9.

³³⁷ Ibid., 229-30. “[The] reflexive staging or quotation of the act of storytelling, even as it might mask the identity of the actual author, or induce readers to confuse him with his narrator, was one way of folding some of higher-dimensional vivacity of oral performance back into the very medium thought to have killed off oral traditions” (233). The easy conflation of speaker and author is a hallmark of confessional poetry, a label applied to Lowell and Berryman. Notably, Berryman’s *Dream Songs* emphasize oral performance of *multiple* speakers. While phonocentrism serves to stabilize the speaker as author in confessional workshop poem, its use in *Songs* destabilizes this identification.

their difference from each other, and the value of respecting such differences.”³³⁸

Increasingly, the creative writer’s voice was not a megaphone of the multiversity, but—where creative writing programs understood themselves as anti-academic, connected to public and not university life—of a multicultural society. Indeed, today “creative writing depends on and affirms difference in content. Everybody has a story to share, and the value of a story is its uniqueness.” In the 2013 Annual Report of the Association of Writers & Writing Programs, Executive Director David Fenza affirms this vision: “Walter Lippmann wrote, ‘The great social adventure of America is no longer the conquest of the wilderness but the absorption of fifty different peoples.’ It’s the job of writers, of course, to help with that adventure of embracing so many others—narrating their lives, making sympathies among like and unlike characters, illuminating our world.”³³⁹

While MFA program writers display multiple and contradictory formulations of voice as writerly identity, i.e. multicultural identity, these identities provide a fairly uniform formulation of the voice as citizen. At the end of the chapter, I turn to poetic expression that responded to the workshop poem with alternate formulations of voice and citizenship.

II. The Poet Laureate as the Expressive Subject (1965-1988)

Lines off his line became smoother
And smoother and more and more
Know-how came in the window
And verses rolled out the door.

Now everyone in the market
Knows his new works are sure
To be just as the country wants them:
Uniform, safe, and pure.
—Reed Whittemore, “The Lines of an American Poet”³⁴⁰

³³⁸ Bennett, “Creative Writing and the Cold War University,” 383.

³³⁹ Fenza, “From Our Executive Director,” 5.

³⁴⁰ *The Feel of Rock: Poems of Three Decades* (Takoma Park: Dryad Press, 1982). Originally appeared in *An American Takes a Walk* (1956).

In “The Lines of an American Poet,” Whittemore compares the “creative” labor of writing poetry to assembly-line production: “His very first verses were cleverly / Built, and the market boomed / Some of the world’s most critical / Consumers looked, and consumed.” The comedy is self-suspicious: “the smooth lines” describe the “lines off *his* line.” Whittemore satirizes the poetry industry’s production of uniform commodities. While wary of writing for readers as consumers, he is meanwhile worried that the slower production of the poet-critic refuses its responsibility to “the country.” In “Notes on a Certain Terribly Critical Piece,” Whittemore positions himself not as the assembly-line poet, but as the poet-critic:

I have been busy writing a terribly critical
Piece on the nature of poetry.
Poets should never do this. They should look out,
Not in. They should be terribly
Vital, as I understand it, not as my piece
Is, lethal. God forbid. All the same
I have been writing my piece and when I have finished
I shall rest a few days, then revise and revise it.³⁴¹

The divided pursuits of the poet-critic retard the process of “rolling verse the door.” Critical labor demands “rest” and “revision.” However, this rest is likened to death—more “lethal” than “vital,” and less connected to its audience. The poet-critic turns in rather than “looking out.” Whittemore’s several layers of self-conscious irony digest the fraught new implications the role of the poet-critic, and as he understands it, a division between poets who “look out” and “look in.”

When Whittemore assumed the national poetry office in 1964, the post’s role was still described as a librarianship:

[T]he Library’s consultant in Poetry gives advice on improving the literary collections; recommends new material for purchase; assists in acquiring manuscripts and books through authors and collectors; and advises on bibliographic and reference work in his field. He also meets with scholars and

³⁴¹ Whittemore, *The Self-Made Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1959).

poets using the Library's facilities, and he gives editorial supervision to the Library's program to tape-record contemporary poets in readings of their works.³⁴²

At least on paper, the job description had not changed much since the Library defined the duties in 1943, save for the addition of the Recorded Poetry Archive. The perception of the office, however, had changed since Frost's occupancy. Whittemore assumed the motto of "The Useful Arts," and "set out to stir up a cultural storm...and became convinced that all poetry consultants hereafter should do the same." Like Frost, who saw a natural collaboration between the poet and politician, Whittemore was eager to use his language in service of the state. The poet was "a master of language," and "[t]he language of Washington...could use poets." He arranged two informal meetings with "officials in various governmental agencies" to address the role of artists and writers in government.³⁴³

In a practical simulation of the "useful arts," Whittemore wrote the text of the Thomas Jefferson Memorial pamphlet for the National Park Service. "[T]he core of the experiment" was to see if he could "reinstate the writer as author"—activate the appearance of the individual speaking voice—in the typically anonymous, diffuse expository field of bureaucratic prose.³⁴⁴ The "use" of the poet was to perform expressive voice as "the language of Washington"—to proclaim the first person singular in the service of the state.

Whittemore also saw his position as implicated on the geopolitical stage. As national poet, he served on an "International Cooperation Year (ICY)" planning committee, a United Nations project commemorating the twentieth anniversary of its founding. A White House Conference on International Cooperation was planned to take place in November and December of 1966. "The difficulties of sponsoring a significant

³⁴² "Consultant in Poetry Named for 1964-5," *Library of Congress Information Bulletin*, May 4, 1965, 200-1.

³⁴³ McGuire, *Poetry's Catbird Seat*, 279.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

effort in international cooperation while our government deploys and employs military forces all over the world seem very great,” he observed. Later that month, Mumford wrote to Stephen Spender to make the first international appointment to the poetry office: “Perhaps the time has come to consider the possibility of inviting a distinguished English poet, especially if he could be one who has become almost as much ‘at home’ in the American scenes as one of our own. It would be particularly appropriate during International Cooperation Year,” he wrote. “[I]t seemed appropriate to appoint a citizen of the nation which has been our longtime friend and ally”³⁴⁵ to the role of the national poetry office, emphasizing the American voice as the international leader in democratic cooperation. Meanwhile, the Library could still claim the poet’s apoliticism: when members of Congress protested the appointment of Spender as an “importation of a minor poet with dubious political sentiments,” Mumford replied: “the post is not supported by appropriated funds.”³⁴⁶

Debates about state support for the arts were topical on the eve of the passage of the National Endowment for the Arts. “My own private feelings are that...no government program encouraging things as they are would serve any purpose not now being served by private funds,” Whittemore reflected after attending a two-day conference titled “What To Do with the New Government Foundation for the Arts and Humanities.” Unlike Frost, who advocated for federal support of the arts, Whittemore felt that private support reflected the values of an open society, and that “any program encouraging radical changes in the teaching and general promulgation of our humanistic culture would be met with cries of dictatorship.” The Association of Literary Magazines of America (ALMA) also witnessed heated debates. Karl Shapiro reminded the symposium of the lesson of the Bollingen Prize:

³⁴⁵ McGuire, *Poetry’s Catbird Seat*, 291.

³⁴⁶ Ibid. Archival records suggest Basler drafted the letter.

Institutions, whether the newspaper, the university, the foundation, or the government, can only deaden or paralyze art. . .No academy should ever be put in the position of having to arbitrate and establish the values of works of art. This great and glorious Library had its knuckles rapped many years ago when it started to give out poetry prizes. And a good thing, too.³⁴⁷

Allen Tate, as ALMA honorary president, spoke in favor of foundation subsidies for little magazines. He did, however, “warn against the legislative powers of foundations, excusing the Guggenheim and Bollingen foundations from that vice.” The international focus of the poetry office in the mid-1960s mirrored that of the creative writing industry. Appointed a year before the founding of the International Writing Program at Iowa, and serving during International Cooperation Year, Spender in fact served to highlight the national image of America as an international leader. Spender called himself “unconsciously American,” reflecting that he had “acquired rather quickly an American point of view” during the time he spent in the States after the war; he had recorded his poetry for Lowell in 1948 and lectured twice at the Library (1959 and 1962). The vision of the national poetry office, like Iowa, expanded to the political world stage. In the footsteps of Frost, Spender proposed a conference on translation: “Behind the Iron Curtain a new generation of poets is emerging who attach more importance to the appearance of their poems, translated, in other countries than in their own countries, where the intellectual climate is so oppressive and conformist, and there is no vital discussion of poetry except along the lines of whether it is political or anti-political.”³⁴⁸ American poetry, however, was a safe haven for individual expression, supported by the state’s ‘apolitical’ ideology of freedom. “The question of translating...has become a very

³⁴⁷ The symposium was held April 2-3, 1965. *The Little Magazine and Contemporary Literature, A Symposium held at the Library of Congress* (published for the Reference Department at the Library of Congress by the Modern Language Association of America, 1966), 20.

³⁴⁸ McGuire, *Poetry’s Catbird Seat*, 280.

living and urgent problem to writers in other languages,”³⁴⁹ Spender wrote in his proposal, which notably describes a conference on “the translators and the translated,” a designation that structures act of translation as an intervention rather than exchange, or indeed as a form of global aid work, in which the poets in “oppressive and conformist” states are rescued by the Western translators. The project’s premise that writers from other countries “attach more importance to the appearance of their poems, translated” reflects Engle’s claim to American universalism via internationalism.

Spender’s proposal did not result in a conference during his term, but instead planted the seed for an International Poetry Festival held two years later. At the White House Conference on International Cooperation, moreover, the Department of State made rare use of the Consultant as a Laureate, requesting that Spender write an occasional poem: “we all think that a poem written and read by you will adorn the occasion.” Spender read “Poem for a Public Occasion” during the opening program of the conference.

“Men Walk on the Moon: Astronauts Land on Plain; Collect Rocks, Plant Flag,” celebrating the success of the Apollo Program, was perhaps the most important national occasional poem since the one Frost failed to read at Kennedy’s inauguration (Chapter 2). On July 20, 1969, United States’ Apollo 11 made the first crewed moon landing, a conquest in the Space Race symbolizing geopolitical dominance over the USSR. The front page of *The New York Times*—“Men Walk on the Moon: Astronauts Land on Plain; Collect Rocks, Plant Flag”—featured three images of the two Americans on the lunar surface; the headline story, “Voice From Moon: ‘Eagle Has Landed’; and “Voyage to the Moon” by Archibald MacLeish. President Nixon had asked MacLeish to write for the

³⁴⁹ The project evolved from a conversation with Russian poet Anna Akhmatova, who had told Spender several years earlier while visiting London that she found English translations of her poem “Requiem” inaccurate, but her interpreter’s accurate translation publishable.

occasion.³⁵⁰ It was more fitting for MacLeish than current national poet William Jay Smith to write a poem commemorating the event. As the wartime Librarian of Congress (1939-1944), MacLeish was the key actor in establishing the Poetry Office as a national institution: he instituted the first national public poetry readings, appointed Allen Tate as the national poet, and formed the Fellows. MacLeish was instrumental in solidifying a national canon for poetry by providing institutional centrality through the Library.

“Presence among us / wanderer in our skies, /...and we have touched you! // From the first of time, before the first of time, before the / first men tasted time, we thought of you.” Like “the land that was ours before we were the land’s,” the moon was cast as territory that men “thought of before the first of time,” “Now / our hands have touched you” and made destiny manifest.

The National Poet and Identity Politics

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Library of Congress became increasingly concerned with the ethnic and gender identity of its poetry chair occupants. The Library’s interest in the identifications of its occupants is reflected in the correspondence of Daniel Boorstin, who was especially proactive in soliciting nomination advice for the 1978 post after a “Consultant’s Reunion” on March 6. 13 of the 24 poets who had served as Consultants attended the reunion: “In the morning, the poets [met] privately to discuss...the present state of poetry, the role of the library in contemporary literature, and the special role of the poetry consultant,” and in the evening they gave a public reading.³⁵¹ “When you asked my advice about whom to appoint as the next Consultant in poetry, I failed to mention someone who would be an excellent but perhaps unexpected choice,” William Jay Smith wrote to Boorstin a week after the reunion. “I refer to N.

³⁵⁰ Archibald MacLeish Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

³⁵¹ “News Information Office from the Library of Congress Press Release,” March 2, 1978, William McGuire Papers.

Scott Momaday, a Professor at Stanford University. He would an excellent choice because his poetry, based largely on the tradition of his Kiowa forebears (he is three-quarters Kiowa), is superb, but unexpected because he is better known as a novelist (his *The Way to Rainy Mountain* won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1969). But Mr. Momaday's work is truly poetry in the deepest sense. ...My friend Colonel William F. Odom, the Military Assistant to Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski at the White House, knew Mr. Momaday some years ago in Moscow and was very impressed by him."³⁵² Two phrases are circled in red pencil: "N. Scott Momaday" and "three-quarters Kiowa."

Boorstin had also solicited suggestions from Richard Eberhart. After suggesting a few names, Eberhart considered: "Then there is the quasi-political idea of ethnic groups. I am delighted, as is everybody with Robert and I would not mind seeing him followed by Gwendolyn Brooks, who is I suppose our major black woman poet. I was at Dartmouth last fall, we saw a good bit of her, she is delightful and charming. She would grace the office, but then I thought of Michael Harper, who teaches at Brown and was at the reading, a huge man and old friend, certainly one of the best younger black poets."³⁵³ Gwendolyn Brooks would not assume the office until 1985. In the meantime, Boorstin would take the advice of Daniel Hoffman, Director of The Writing Program at the University of Pennsylvania, who had been in Washington for the Consultants reunion reading: "We all looked forward to a stimulating day, but few foresaw that monster turn-out in the evening, or the cheers for the biggest serial poetry reading on record. That crown certainly have proof that the public in our most political city really appreciates the poetry programs made available to them over the years by The Library of Congress."

³⁵² William Jay Smith to Daniel Boorstin, 16 March 1978, William McGuire Papers.

³⁵³ Richard Eberhart to Boorstin, 13 March 1978, William McGuire Papers. Along with Brooks, Eberhart suggested James Wright, Donald Hall, Maxine Kumin in a ranked list of 22 suggestions: "You realize of course that in naming names it is all a matter of taste...I wouldn't mind seeing Allen Ginsberg in the office. Unlike at least one of my colleagues at the meeting, I think his poetry is historical and important. He is 52. I think of the work of Anthony Hecht, 55, an opposite kind of a poet, lapidary [circled in red pencil], perfectionist."

Hoffman proposed William Meredith, invoking the posthumous support of Frost:

“Robert Frost knew him well and proposed him years ago, when he was unable to take a year or two off, but that impediment no longer obtains.” Hoffman also emphasized that Meredith was well-equipped for the Consultantship as a *public* role: “Meredith makes a good public appearance—he’d be a first-rate Consultant in Poetry.”³⁵⁴

Meredith suggested the subsequent appointment of Maxine Kumin (1981-2), who would call the Library a “gentility-ridden, traditional, hidebound place.”³⁵⁵ Kumin has been noted for diversifying the reading series, inviting black lesbian feminist Audre Lorde, Marge Piercy, Richard Shelton from Arizona, and the Pueblo poet Leslie Marmon Silko. Adrienne Rich, who had turned down six previous invitations to appear at the Library, accepted Kumin’s summons and met an at-capacity crowd in the Coolidge Auditorium in April 1981. Kumin held the most politically active consultancy to date: she spoke out against increased military spending and was attacked by the conservative Heritage Foundation. She also held one of the first “project” posts, hosting brownbag luncheons for women poets. Kumin has written that she was accused by Daniel J. Boorstin, the Librarian of Congress, of “abusing the hospitality of the Library.”³⁵⁶ Kumin’s term, moreover, changed the way the uses of the office were understood: the lesson from Kumin’s consultancy was that the politics of identity would prove an important step in the evolution of the office’s project of voice, but must subsequently be

³⁵⁴ Hoffman to Boorstin, 20 March 1978, William McGuire Papers. One week later, Boorstin wrote to Elizabeth Bishop, who despised public readings, not to solicit advice for the next appointment but to thank her for her attendance at the recent Poetry Consultants’ Reunion. During the reunion roundtable, which focused on the recording archive and literacy initiatives in schools, she contributed to the discussion only once, and at the prodding of the moderator: “Oh. . . I’m rather out of it. I don’t like video tapes and recordings. More important to sit home and read a book or write a poem than see any of these things in the classroom. . . I can’t stop progress whatever that is.” Bishop’s attitude shows how the emphasis on the “public appearance” of the national poetry office had evolved since her appointment in 1949. “Poetry Consultants’ Reunion Transcript Notes,” March 6, 1978, William McGuire Papers.

³⁵⁵ The passing of the torch from Meredith to Kumin is perhaps surprising genealogy, demonstrating the importance of interpersonal connections within and against slower-moving institutional trends.

³⁵⁶ Dan Vera, “The Library and its Laureates: The Examples of Auslander, Williams, Dickey & Kumin,” *Beltway Poetry Quarterly*, Fall 2009.

appropriated as “hospitable” to the Library and the state. The rebranding of the Laureateship in 1985-6 acknowledged a new representative social charge for the position. The scope of “projects” of subsequent poets, moreover, would reflect a wider national agenda rather than an advocacy project of the occupant.

Rebranding the National Poetry Office: The Creation of the Poet Laureateship

On December 20, 1985, the United States Congress renamed the Poetry Chair the Poet Laureate Consultant to the Library of Congress. President Reagan—who in March would publicly recite from memory Robert Service’s “The Cremation of Sam McGee”—signed the act, declaring the Laureate’s “position of prominence in the life of the Nation,” encouraging “each department and office of the Federal Government to make use of the services of the Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry for ceremonial and other occasions of celebration,” and announcing an annual poetry program in cooperation with the National Endowment for the Arts.³⁵⁷

Senator Spark M. Matsunaga, a Democrat from Hawaii, was influential in the retitling of the poetry office. In 1963, a year after the National Poetry Festival, Matsunaga had proposed legislation to establish the office of Poet Laureate of the United States. Unsuccessful, he reintroduced the legislation to each subsequent Congress.³⁵⁸ Finally, in January 1985, when legislation to reauthorize funding for the NEA and NEH through the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Act came up for a vote, Matsunaga added his bill as an amendment. In the original draft of S.213, the Poet Laureate would have a clearer relationship to federal power: the Laureate would be appointed by the President of the United States. The President would also determine the Laureate’s salary, “not to exceed sixty per cent of the salary of a Federal district court

³⁵⁷ An Act to amend the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965, and for other purposes (Pub. L. 99-194, Title VI, Sec. 601, Dec. 20, 1985, 99 Stat. 1347), effective January 3, 1986.

³⁵⁸ McGuire, *Poetry’s Catbird Seat*, 425-6.

judge.” Librarian of Congress Boorstin requested a revision of the amendment, so that the Laureate would continue to be appointed by him. He also revised the title to bear more continuity with the history of the office: the national poet would be called the “Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry.”

The congressional act did not function merely ceremonially, encouraging “each department and office of the Federal Government to make use of the services of the Poet Laureate...for ceremonial and other occasions of celebration.” The third section (c) of Public Law 99-194 formalized a partnership between the NEA and the national poetry office at the Library of Congress. When the amendment was discussed by the Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources, of which Matsunaga was a member, the Committee authorized the NEA Chairperson to sponsor an annual “Poetry program” in cooperation with the Library’s Poet Laureate and under the guidance of the Chairperson of the National Endowment for the Arts, with the advice of the National Council on the Arts, “at which the Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry will present a major work or the work of other distinguished poets.”³⁵⁹ Funds for the program were authorized for fiscal years 1987-1990.

The congressional rebranding of the Library of Congress Consultant in Poetry as the Poet Laureate participated in the conscious effort of state arts administrators and politicians to renew the prominence of national poetry in the civic sphere.³⁶⁰ As Chapters 1 and 2 have shown, the Library’s poetry office had always been imbricated in the

³⁵⁹ “Poetry program / (1) The Chairperson of the National Endowment for the Arts, with the advice of the National Council on the Arts, shall annually sponsor a program at which the Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry will present a major work or the work of other distinguished poets. (2) There are authorized to be appropriated to the National Endowment for the Arts \$10,000 for the fiscal year 1987 and for each succeeding fiscal year ending prior to October 1, 1990, for the purpose of carrying out this subsection.” Pub. L. 99-194, title VI, Sec. 601, Dec. 20, 1985, 99 Stat. 1347.

³⁶⁰ The Library was in a timely position to rebrand the office on the eve of its fiftieth anniversary. While Matsunaga was pitching his act, “The Library of Congress—specifically, John Broderick—has commissioned [William McGuire] to write a book about the Consultantship in Poetry, which will be fifty years old in 1986 or 1987, the dates respectively of the endowment and the first appointment.” McGuire to D’Alessandro, 25 March 1985, William McGuire Papers.

functions of the federal government. But it could no longer claim, as Luther Evans did to angry patriots during the Bollingen Affair, or to Adrienne Rich when she first refused invitations to read with the Library, that its activities were “paid for by private funds.” The state’s renewed interest in the uses of the poetry office is reflected not only in the rebranding of the Laureateship tying it to NEA programming, but in the increasingly regular collaboration of the Library of Congress with private-sector cultural institutions, 501(c)(3) literary organizations that would also increasingly undertake “poetry projects,” in particular the Poetry Society of America and the Academy for American Poets; and later The Poetry Foundation. At the same time, poetry appeared in federal and state legislation with new frequency, e.g. in the form of regionalist designations of official cultural poems. These more symbolic installments functioned similarly to the “ceremonial use” of the Poet Laureate, whose more consequential national service was through the projects—carried out in book clubs, writers’ houses, and most importantly, in classrooms. These projects are the subject of Chapter 4.

Gwendolyn Brooks and Robert Penn Warren are, at first glance, an odd pair to represent the redefinition of the poetry office. Brooks was the last poet and first black woman to hold the title of Consultant in Poetry in 1985-6. Her successor and the first poet to hold the title of Poet Laureate was Robert Penn Warren, who had also held the Consultant in Poetry forty years earlier in 1944-5. The Library press release announcing Brooks’ appointment celebrated her as the “Pulitzer Prize-winning portrayer of black urban life.”³⁶¹ As Consultant, Brooks sponsored poetry competitions in elementary and high schools. Like Kumin’s brown bag lunch program for women writers in 1981-2, Brooks’ term anticipated the new public responsibilities of the office.

³⁶¹ “Gwendolyn Brooks Is Named as Next Library Poetry Consultant,” *Library of Congress Information Bulletin*, May 20, 1985, 106.

Penn Warren was a fitting successor to Brooks as the first black female appointee because of his own high profile as a social commentator who recanted his racist views during the Civil Rights movement.³⁶² In the press release announcing his appointment, Librarian of Congress Daniel Boorstin declared him a “characteristically American man of letters...If there is any person today whose work unites our America in its splendid variety, that person is Robert Penn Warren.” Penn Warren’s 1944 appointment announcement bore no trace of his “characteristically American” qualifications.³⁶³ Moreover, the Library of Congress Bulletin announcement of his first term as Poet Laureate emphasized his “numerous books of biography and social commentary” over his “essays and books on literary topics.”³⁶⁴ Penn Warren was not qualified for a second term as a New Critic or Tate’s former Fugitive affiliate—but as a purposefully anachronistic national representative. Penn Warren served a counterweight to the national identity represented by Gwendolyn Brooks; together they represented a multicultural society.

The representative demands placed upon the office in the mid-1980s anticipate the Poet Laureateship’s project of voice as marked by legible identity. The Poet Laureate was newly tasked to stand in for and reach out to identity-based constituencies. This is

³⁶²Penn Warren, famously the co-author of New Critical cornerstones—*An Approach to Literature* (1938) with Cleanth Brooks and John Thibaut Purser, *Understanding Poetry* (1939) with Cleanth Brooks—also contributed to the Southern Agrarian manifesto *I’ll Take My Stand*’s defense of racial segregation (“The Briar Patch,” 1930). Penn Warren recanted his views in the an article in *LIFE* magazine—“Divided South Searches Its Soul” (July 9, 1956), subsequently a public proponent of racial integration. Penn Warren reissued an extended version of the article as a small book, *Segregation: The Inner Conflict in the South* (1956), and published an interview collection with Civil Rights movement leaders including Malcolm X and Martin Luther King in *Who Speaks for the Negro?* in 1965. In 1974, Penn Warren was selected to give the National Endowment for the Humanities’ Jefferson Lecture, the federal government’s “highest honor for achievement in the humanities,” and received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1980.

³⁶³ Special Order No. 102, “Appointment of Robert Penn Warren as the Library of Congress Consultant in Poetry and editor of the Quarterly Journal of Current Acquisitions for 1944-45,” Office of the Librarian, Library of Congress, May 9, 1944, container 953, Archibald MacLeish Papers.

³⁶⁴ “Robert Penn Warren Is Named First Poet Laureate, Poetry Consultant,” *Library of Congress Information Bulletin*, March 10, 1986, 78-9.

reflected in the rising trend of civic-minded poetry projects undertaken by the national poets during the 1990s.

“Back to that delicious question: “What does the Consultant in poetry do?”³⁶⁵: Voicing of Poetic Labor

Brooks’ “Annual Report of the Poetry Office” performs expressive voice in the context of administrative labor for the state. Its emphatic opening line, “What does the Consultant in poetry do?”, recalls the report of Robert Hayden, the first African American writer to hold the Consultantship (1976-8): “What does the Consultant in Poetry *do*?” his report had likewise opened. Brooks’ report signals the continuation of Hayden’s voice in the state record, where the double-underline acts as a typographical echo of his question.

Brooks’ statement, in other respects, departs from prior Annual Reports. Reports were typically provided in business letter format; hers is written in hand, in large, loose script on unconventionally sized paper. It stands in stark contrast to Elizabeth Bishop’s systematic enumeration of duties (see Chap 1). Bishop is anti-expressive in her adherence to generic normalization, as if to emphasize the performative mastery of an administrative voice—the inverse project of Whittemore’s attempt to express voice within bureaucratic National State Park brochures. Brooks’ Report, meanwhile, is expressive via individualizing narrative and unique stylistic features. Bishop and Brooks’ respective unorthodoxies are functionally strategic, especially where both assert a relationship to secretarial labor that is absent from other Annual Reports. Bishop explicitly and repeatedly refers to the Poetry Office secretary Phyllis Armstrong in her Annual Report, acknowledging her labor through the narrative use of “we” in tallying the

³⁶⁵ Gwendolyn Brooks, “Annual Report to the Librarian of Congress from the Chair of Poetry,” 5, William McGuire Papers.

duties completed during the appointment. Brooks, by handwriting her report, forgoes secretarial labor altogether. Likewise, Bishop documented her own labor through generically standardized features such as the enumerative catalogue, minimizing the perception of subjective interference while verifying the labor as objective and quantifiable fact. Brooks takes an opposite approach:

Well, I have never worked so hard in my life! I have never been so exhausted, but gloriously exhausted, at the end of a day. (Or [double-underlined], at the end of a night, since some [double-underlined] days have been nine a.m. to eleven thirty p.m. “days” If you’re puzzled!—some Mondays and Tuesdays I’ve stayed in my office on the Third Floor until time for a Coolidge Auditorium poet-presentation, meanwhile answering letters, planning my little programs, sorting files, etc. After that 8pm. reading or lecture there is, as you know, a reception, from which Nancy, Jenny, myself, Security and the servers are the last to leave.

The Report is an opportunity to acknowledge “Security and the servers” as the “last to leave” the working day, but it is equally an opportunity to punch out alongside them on the Library’s record. Moreover, while her labor is not officially quantified, e.g. in an hourly wage, Brooks suggests ways in which her “flexible” schedule obscures the labor she performed. While she was given “choice” about what days she would work and officially only served two days a week, both what appear to be “choice” and a 2-day work week turn out not to be:

I mentioned Mondays and Tuesdays: those are the working days I was allowed to choose [double-underlined]. I myself threw in Wednesdays 9 a.m. to 3:30 pm. because otherwise I could not have handled the enormous mail that had to be answered nor the many many [double-underlined] visitors, local and foreign, I was pleased to receive. (There have been exceptions, of course: on certain pre-arranged dates I have been out of the office because of campus-visiting in other states.)

Time “out of the office,” too, turns out to be Library work. “I found that a Consultant is left pretty much alone—encouraged to develop a personal direction,” Brooks continues, voicing another passive expectation and capacity of the position fulfilled. While Bishop’s

Report expresses no affective connection to the office, however, Brooks' work is persistently "delicious" and a "pleasure."³⁶⁶

III. Manifestos Against Manifest Destiny: Language Poetics vs. The National Voice Industry

The same year Robert Penn Warren served as the first official Poet Laureate, Ron Silliman's *In the American Tree*, an anthology of Language writing, was published (1986).³⁶⁷ This anthology rejected the voice-based poem of the 1970s-80s state verse culture, if not, as in Marjorie Perloff's provocation, the entire tradition of lyric poetry: "For if, as Paul de Man puts it, 'The principle of intelligibility, lyric poetry, depends on the phenomenalization of the poetic voice,' what do we make of those poems like Lyn Hejinian's or Charles Bernstein's, whose appropriation of found objects—snippets of advertising slogans, newspaper headlines, media cliché, textbook writing, or citation from other poets—works precisely to deconstruct the possibility of the formation of a coherent or consistently lyrical voice, a transcendental ego?"³⁶⁸ While the anthology constituted a radical departure from the dominant aesthetic values of state verse culture, its publication by the National Poetry Foundation, affiliated with the University of Maine (Orono), suggests its project was not anti-institutional or anti-establishment—as many critics have assumed—but an institutionally situated claim to an alternate national tradition.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁶ Brooks, "Annual Report to the Librarian of Congress from the Chair of Poetry," William McGuire Papers.

³⁶⁷ Ron Silliman, ed., *In the American Tree: Language, Realism, Poetry* (Orono: National Poetry Foundation, 1986).

³⁶⁸ Marjorie Perloff, "Ca(n)non to the Right of Us, Ca(n)non to the Left of Us: A Plea for Difference," *New Literary History* 18:3 (Spring 1987): 633-656.

³⁶⁹ "Established in 1971 by Carroll F. Terrell (1917-2003) as a center for Pound scholarship, our mission was expanded by Burton Hatlen (director from 1990 until his death in 2008) to include the entire tradition of innovative poetry from modernism to the present day." "About Us," National Poetry Foundation, accessed May 12, 2015, <http://www.nationalpoetryfoundation.org/about-us/>.

The anthology did not mean to be neatly retrospective. Two years later, Ron Silliman, Carla Harryman, Lyn Hejinian, Steven Benson, Bob Perelman, and Barrett Watten's co-authored manifesto, "Aesthetic Tendency and the Politics of Poetry: A Manifesto," appeared in *Social Text*. Locating their work as "a body of writing, predominately poetry, in what might be called the experimental or avant-garde tradition," the manifesto asserts continued "consequential stakes" in the "antagonism between the status quo and work that does not share the canonical norm."³⁷⁰

The writers situate this body within a U.S.-based poetic lineage: around 1970, a number of writers, adopting the experimental techniques of Gertrude Stein and Louis Zukofsky, began "writing in ways that questioned the norms of persona-centered, 'expressive' poetry." Many of these writers came into contact and dialogue with one another in New York and San Francisco, especially outside of universities; "interaction with others...was exciting and affected the work of all." Silliman et al. compare their collective activity to that of San Francisco Renaissance, Black Mountain and New York school poets. However, they argue, while recent movements in the visual arts have been met with a largely tolerant response—enjoying gallery patronage, if not rapid integration into institutional frames—the reaction to a literary avant-garde has been less embracing:

The narrowness and provincialism of mainstream literary norms have been maintained over the last twenty years in a stultifyingly steady state in which the personal, 'expressive' lyric has been held up as the canonical poetic form. On analogy to the visual arts, where the 'avant-garde' is felt to be a virtual commonplace, the situation of poetry is as if the entire history of radical modernism...had been replaced by a league of suburban landscape painters.³⁷¹

Language poets did not restrict their critique of "I"-centered verse to the historically privileged subject. In the creative writing workshop of the 1980s, the individual voice was used to articulate socially marginalized class, race and gender

³⁷⁰ Ron Silliman, Carla Harryman, Lyn Hejinian, Steve Benson, Bob Perelman, and Barrett Watten, "Aesthetic Tendency and the Politics of Poetry: A Manifesto," *Social Text* 19/20 (Autumn 1988): 262.

³⁷¹ "Aesthetic Tendency and the Politics of Poetry: A Manifesto," 261-2.

positions, but with delimiting formal qualifications: poems written from the voice-based subject position still lacked the privilege of formal experimentation, and were often viewed as primarily political projects with the implicit obligation to identify the individual self as a marginal subject position. “Details of raw particularity” served not merely to authenticate the experience of the individual speaker, but now as evidence for an identity label.

As such, the political imperative to enlist marginalized subjects in the project of identity-based voice was resisted by many theorists and in the practice of much Language poetry, including the seminal Language text Hejinian’s *My Life*. Although commonly read as feminist discourse, *My Life* rejects a politically efficacious stable subjectivity in favor of a non-phonocentric, non-narrative, and unstable “I.” The text, as reflected in the title, purports autobiographical intent—but refuses the autobiographical speaker’s conventional rhetoric of self-restoration and -promotion via chronological progression. *My Life* instead follows a procedural pattern: the first edition, published when Hejinian was 37 years of age, consists of 37 chapters of 37 sentences; the second edition, published eight years later, reflects a life ongoing in 45 chapters—adding 8 new chapters and 8 new sentences to the first 37.³⁷² *My Life* opens:

A pause, a rose, something on paper A moment yellow, just as four years later, when my father returned home from the war, the moment of greeting him, as he stood at the bottom of the stairs, younger, thinner than when he had left, was purple – though moments are no longer so colored. Somewhere, in the background, rooms share a pattern of small roses. Pretty is as pretty does. In certain families, the meaning of necessity is at one with the sentiment of pre-necessity. The better things were gathered in a pen. The windows were narrowed by white gauze curtains which were never loosened. Here I refer to irrelevance, that rigidity which never intrudes. Hence, repetitions, free from all ambition.

“I” is free from all narrative ambition. The first year of life already includes “four years later,” rejecting a linear chronology that will narrate the progress of a life. Here, Hejinian’s sudden jumps from reminiscent detail to expository abstraction—already

³⁷² Here I refer to the latter edition. Lyn Hejinian, *My Life* (Providence: Sun & Moon Press, 1987).

exhibited in sentences 1-3—are unmediated by transitional links from sentence to sentence, or indeed from clause to clause. Its “raw particulars” form a catalogue, rather than authenticate a narrative, of the subject.

The opening line of *My Life*, “A pause, a rose, something on paper,” importantly recalls Gertrude Stein’s iconic “rose is a rose is a rose is a rose” (1913). Hejinian’s “rose” as a commercialized trope of femininity and romantic love is displaced by her professed aesthetic forbearer’s signature exercise in repetition.³⁷³ Just as Stein’s “rose” asks to be repeated infinitely, the phrase “A pause, a rose, something on paper” is repeated throughout *My Life*. While this repetition acts as an ordering device, orienting the reader around a familiar phrase, so too it de-ritualizes and disorients meaning—each distinct context bears with it a new set of semantic associations, releasing writer and reader from narrative and interpretive authority. The repetition of “I” throughout the text and across editions of *My Life* achieves a similar effect, but if the repetition of “A pause, a rose, something on paper” records the unfixable nature of language, “I” foregrounds the unfixable nature of identity.

“I,” moreover, performs perhaps the only singular feature of the poem’s subjectivity. Unlike a conventional autobiography, *My Life* lacks specific descriptions of its subject’s physical person. While photographs documenting the subject often occupy the middle pages of autobiographies, this centralizing aesthetic representation of identity is absent in Hejinian’s text,³⁷⁴ avoiding immediate readerly assumptions regarding

³⁷³ Through repetition, Stein demonstrates the multiplicity of meanings that a singular word can produce. “Rose” can connote a flower, an action (“to rise”) or a proper feminine name; when verbally uttered, it suggests “rows,” adding a second, discreet semantic category with its own set of possible significations. Moreover, the geometric, structural connotation of “rows” would act as a foil to the archetype of the soft, pliant bloom of a “rose.” The combinatory possibilities further reveal a “rose” is never just a “rose.” Notably, Stein also appears in “Aesthetic Tendency and The Politics of Poetry: A Manifesto,” which writes Language poetry within a progressive literary genealogy. While *My Life* recalls Stein repeatedly and variously, “The Politics of Poetry” invokes Stein as a birthmother in a linearly unfolding project.

³⁷⁴ Unlike the 1980 edition published by Burning Deck, the 1987 edition features a photographic portrait of Hejinian on its cover. This reprint, issued by Sun & Moon Press, raises a new set of

authorial identity; for example, the poem does not ascribe a singular race or gender to its subject. Hejinian notes the non-assignment of gender, especially, as a self-conscious effort: “As such, a person on paper, I am androgynous.”³⁷⁵ For Hejinian, however, androgyny does not exist in the neutral, genderless pronoun “it.” Rather than avoid gendered representations altogether, she genders her persona multiply: Throughout the poem, the phrase “I wanted to be” commonly serves as a uniting anaphora: “I wanted to be both the farmer and his horse when I was a child, and I tossed my head and stamped with one foot as if I were pawing the ground before a long gallop” (29); “I wanted to be a brave child, a girl with guts” (32); “If I couldn’t be a cowboy, I wanted to be a sailor” (46).

In naming multiple occupational ambitions, Hejinian names multiple gender performances. While she refers to wanting to be “a girl with guts,” for instance, the notion of femininity is here doubly undermined: being “brave” and “with guts” are stereotypically masculine qualities; the structure of the sentence, phrased as “I wanted to be” could be posed by either a male or female persona regardless of the specified “want,” and the clausal juxtaposition of “child” against “girl” gender neutralizes the latter. The pastoral trope of “the farmer and his horse” is echoed in a subsequent section: “The horse, too, is a farmer” (34). This statement, by grafting the identity of “the horse” onto “the farmer,” the latter of which becomes an independent subject in section eight, questions the application of occupational labels, an investigation furthered in Hejinian’s musing that “[i]f I couldn’t be a cowboy, I wanted to be a sailor” (46). Together, the sentences conflate the roles of the “child,” “farmer” and “horse.” Hejinian probes not only occupational labels, but categories of human and non-human (“child” and “farmer”

questions: Does the cover photograph foreground the disparity between author and persona? Or does this new legibility compromise the anti-generic or anti-identitarian project? To my mind, the photograph works cooperatively with the title to recall the conventional autobiography, demarcating a sharper, perhaps more ironic contrast between readerly expectations dictated by genre and the text itself.

³⁷⁵ Hejinian, *My Life*, 105. Additionally, in an early version of “The Rejection of Closure,” Hejinian posits language as inherently genderless: “[T]he desire that is stirred by language seems to be located more interestingly within language, and hence it is androgynous.” *Writing/Talks*, 283.

versus “horse”), implicitly gendered and non-gendered (“farmer” is implicitly gendered masculine, while “child” and “horse” remain neutral). Furthermore, by suggesting that she would like to be either “a cowboy” or “a sailor,” Hejinian highlights the non-essentiality, even arbitrariness, of occupational labels, and in turn asks us to question the essentiality of other categories troubled in the text (gender, human). Imagining herself as both a “farmer” and a “horse”—indeed, performing the physical habits of the latter—as well as “a cowboy” and “a sailor,” Hejinian performs identity as both non-essential and various.

By complicating the identification of speaker and author through the category of female voice, *My Life* shows theoretical affinity with contemporaneous critiques of gender in the age of identity politics.³⁷⁶ In Judith Butler’s view, “releasing the category of women from a fixed referent”—as seen with Hejinian’s troubled subject position—allows “something like ‘agency’” to become possible.³⁷⁷ The multiple subjectivity of *My Life* worries with Butler, Wendy Brown and other critics of identity politics that uncomplicated access to a stable subject position (i.e., woman) precludes agency by reinforcing the exclusions and normalizations that necessarily constitute its stability. Like the workshop poem, the Language text understands that “I” functions as a representative citizen—where the agency of the speaker is an analogue for the political agency of the author or reader.³⁷⁸ However, by complicating readerly access to the “I” speaker of *My Life*, the text rejects a politics that would seemingly achieve its demands through essentialized representations of its assumed beneficiaries.

³⁷⁶ This literature argues that by participating in the discourse of representation governed by identity politics, feminism undercuts its own emancipatory project; the construction of woman as a stable subject reifies the structures of power that feminism would seek to dismantle. See, for example, Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

³⁷⁷ Butler, “Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of the ‘Postmodern’” in *Feminists Theorize the Political* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 19.

³⁷⁸ In “The Rejection of Closure,” the text that rejects the authority of the writer over the reader “thus, by analogy, [rejects] the authority implicit in other (social, economic, cultural) hierarchies.” Hejinian, *The Language of Inquiry* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 134.

Silliman et al. in “The Politics of Poetry” are also preoccupied with the problems with labeling the manifesto’s subject:

While we are flagrantly writing this article as a group, the perceptive reader will already have noticed that until this point neither the “Language School” nor “Language Poetry” have been named. This is no accident; the politics of group identity are a problem (and challenge) particularly for those alternately identified within and without it.³⁷⁹

Indeed, voicing an aesthetic politics *against* voice poses problems—especially in the genre form of a manifesto.³⁸⁰ The genre form typically exercises “wide intelligibility...[the manifesto] appears to say only what it means, and to mean only what it says,” historically relying on a reductive language of dichotomy to forward a transparent public expression of will. The manifesto tends to refuse dialogue or conciliation, instead declaring a position that appears “univocal, unilateral, single-minded.”³⁸¹ Complicating the most reductive reading of the genre, here the authors nod to those language-oriented writers not subsumed in the “we” and its narrative trajectory, exposing the subject of the manifesto as something less than unified and monolithic. Yet an explicitly named and primary subject position has nonetheless been fixed, where individuals identify “within” or “without” the category of Language Poets. The authors invoke the genre form’s signature subject position “we” to ultimately adopt a “rhetoric of exclusivity,” even if betraying cognizance of the subject’s exclusionary consequences. Against the work of a text like *My Life*, the manifesto promulgates a fixed subject position for the sake of political intelligibility.

³⁷⁹ “Aesthetic Tendency and the Politics of Poetry: A Manifesto,” 272-3.

³⁸⁰ Interestingly, *Social Text* suggested the addition of the subtitle “A Manifesto” to the article (Perelman, conversation with the author). This editorial addition helped to legibly define, if also delimit, Language writing as an aesthetic practice.

³⁸¹ Janet Lyon, *Manifestoes: Provocations of the Modern* (Cornell University Press, 1999), 9.

From Salon to Seminar: Language Poetics of the Poet-Critic (1990s—)

“What is a poet-critic, or critic-poet, or professor-poet-critic?; which comes first and how can you tell?; do the administrative and adjudicative roles of a professor mark the sell-out of the poet?; does critical thinking mar creativity, as so many of the articles in the Associated Writing Program newsletter insist? Can poets and scholars share responsibilities for teaching literature and cultural studies or must poets continue to be relegated to, or is it protected by, creative writing workshops, where, alone in the postmodern university, the expressive self survives?”
—Charles Bernstein, “Revenge of the Poet-Critic”³⁸²

“Aesthetic Tendency and the Politics of Poetry: A Manifesto” insisted that the aesthetic project of Language poetics was not based in an institution of higher education. Opposing the mainstream to avant-garde poetic traditions, the manifesto seemed to assume that the avant-garde has a necessarily limited relationship to institutions—or, rather, a relationship where institutions serve the project as sites against which to articulate a speaking position. In this context, the move of many prominent Language writers into academic positions in the years following the manifesto’s publication might be surprising, or read as a repudiation of earlier radical aesthetics. Hence Bernstein’s question: “do the administrative and adjudicative roles of a professor mark the sell-out of the poet?” Ron Silliman, for example, would accuse former affiliates like Perelman of complicity in an academic regime “constitutively hostile to the polysemous presence of radical poetry.”³⁸³ If his accusation, however, can be seen as performative, i.e. the public staging of a dialogue between poet-critics who share mutual values, the movement of the Language Poets into the academy was the movement of their poetics outward—a refusal of the coterie enclave, but not of the aesthetic possibilities it had sheltered.

Framed in the wider field of state verse culture, Language poetics acquired a more complex set of strategies within academic institutions.³⁸⁴ As we have seen, by

³⁸² Bernstein, “Revenge of the Poet-Critic,” *My Way: Speeches and Poems*, 5.

³⁸³ Libbie Rifkin, *Career Moves: Olson, Creeley, Zukofsky, Berrigan, and the American Avant-Garde* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), 140.

³⁸⁴ For example, the institutional strategies of hybrid poetry-criticism or “talk.” What McGurl calls more widely “autopoetics” is a means to objectify the institutional frame governing the production

emerging as the most coherent challenge to workshop voice in the mid-1980s, Language poetry at the same time encountered the problem of its own coherence. Stylistically distinct individual texts were more successful than statements of poetics like “A Manifesto,” which purported to reject officialdom through the vehicle of an academic journal; or indeed than admiring critical histories that paradoxically enshrined Language poetry as a voice against voice. Language poetics of the 1990s abandoned reactionary voice against, in favor of ventriloquization within, the academy.

This dissertation argues that in postwar America, all verse is establishment verse—but not all verse belongs to “official verse culture.”³⁸⁵ Just as creative writing-era fiction presents marginal voices that managed not to be absorbed into the multiculturalist discourse of marginality—take, for example, Octavia Butler’s achievement of disruptive power by writing within the generic system³⁸⁶—so too creative

of poetry and academic criticism for the poet-critic in the English Department. In *Career Moves*, Libbie Rifkin reads Bob Perelman’s staging of a “‘double personage’ [sic] as avant-garde participant and academic professional”—“the stance of being both inside and outside” (Perelman, “Counter-Response,” 43)—as the central tension of *The Marginalization of Poetry: Language Writing and Literary History* (1996). The “double personage” was also performed at an event staged in response to the book in an “East Village performance space on March 22, 1997, and published two months later as an installment in *The Impercipient Lecture Series*,” where Perelman’s “talk” recalled “Olson’s on-air crisis at Berkeley...in both theme and social context.” While deploying “talk” as an “institutional strategy,” Perelman departed from the “vatic singularity” of Olson’s declaration that “I am now publishing tonight...because I’m talking writing’...Whereas Olson’s performance worked to collapse realms of individual impulse and institutional codification into a single revolutionary event, *The Impercipient* event and publication suggest that at least one branch of the avant-garde is...replacing the hero-poet with a more diversified cadre of players” (*Career Moves*, 141). See Perelman, “A Counter-Response,” *The Impercipient Lecture Series*, 1:4 (May 1997), reprinted in *Jacket 2*.

³⁸⁵ “Let me be specific as to what I mean by ‘official verse culture’—I am referring to the poetry publishing and reviewing practices of *The New York Times*, *The Nation*, *American Poetry Review*, *The New York Review of Books*, *The New Yorker*, *Poetry* (Chicago), *Antaeus*, *Parnassus*, *Atheneum Press*, all the major trade publishers, the poetry series of almost all of the major university presses (the university of California Press being a significant exception at present). . . .” Bernstein, “The Academy in Peril,” *Content’s Dream: Essays 1975-1984* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 247.

³⁸⁶ While “high cultural pluralist” fiction reductively voiced identity positions through the programmatic norming of multiculturalist sensibilities, there are many breakout acts of literary diversity. For McGurl, Octavia Butler provides an instructive instance: as a graduate of the Clarion Workshop (The Clarion Workshops do not occupy the regular academic calendar year, structurally embedding the “liminal status of creative writing as a scholarly pursuit”), she was “well placed to perceive how the formation of our individuality in and by the otherness of institutional relations could easily be radicalized in our relation to the truly alien.” Her

writing-era poetics offered modes of resistance. Because of poetry's historically more dependent relationship to the university, the divide between the programmatic norm and experimental alternatives in poetic production has remained—visibly so since the early 1990s—within the university. In the 1990s-2000s, the production of Language poetics within the university provided an alternative to the production of workshop voice within the state discourse of multiculturalism and identity politics.

Chapter 2 followed Frost as a central player in an emerging state verse culture, which consolidated the Cold War ideology of poetic voice at the National Poetry Festival in 1962. This chapter has shown how this ideology found its most effective and wide-ranging expression in the programmatic workshop norms of the postwar creative writing industry. As this voice evolved to advance identity over individuality, the details authenticating narratives of personal experience increasingly functioned as markers of identity to represent the values of a pluralistic society. *My Life* rejected precisely this demand for narrative intelligibility peppered with voice-authenticating markers of difference. The field of Language writing posed figures of alienated or complicated poetic voice resistant not only to the expressive individual, but also to the tokenizing politics of identity governing the workshop poem.

Xenogenesis trilogy of the 1980s, collected in *Lilith's Brood* (2000), presents a heroine who "overcomes her nostalgia for the old wholeness and her disgust for the new hybrid on behalf of a paradoxically posthuman human survival through the Ooloi. . . This, seen through the visionary magnifying glass of genre fiction, is what it really means to accept the necessity of the otherness of institutionality and of system." McGurl, *The Program Era*, 396-7.

CHAPTER 4

Civil Versus Civic Verse:

National Projects of U.S. Poets Laureate, 1991-2015

Civil poets do not expect to summon sticks, stones, and beasts to a new order. Their language fulfills the idioms shared by contemporary citizens in social, political, economic, legal circumstances; their poems imply not only legitimacy but even hope for the survival of existing social institutions. These poets encourage one to appreciate honest engagement with the medium in which we actually live. Rather than art from the edge, one may prefer poems that engage life at some distance from boundary conditions. The objective, as Arnold said, is to see life steadily and whole. Or is it to change life? —Robert von Hallberg, *Lyric Powers*³⁸⁷

I. Civil Verse: National Projects of U.S. Poets Laureate

In the 1990s and 2000s, Poets Laureate undertook large-scale poetry projects “to increase the visibility and appreciation of poetry in the United States.”³⁸⁸ Several national poets had undertaken “outreach projects” previously—Maxine Kumin facilitated brownbag luncheons, a series of poetry workshops for women during her term in 1981-2. Gwendolyn Brooks managed popular lunchtime poetry readings and “and actively brought poetry classes and contests to young people in the inner city”³⁸⁹ (1985-6), and Howard Nemerov led poetry seminars for visiting high school classes (1988-1990). With the exception of Brooks, these programs were all held at on-site at the Poetry and Literature Center at the Library of Congress. Joseph Brodsky, who assumed the laureateship after Nemerov, introduced a more ambitious vision for poetry office programming: poetry projects with a “national reach.”³⁹⁰

³⁸⁷ von Hallberg, *Lyric Powers*, 233.

³⁸⁸ “The Poetry and Literature Center at the Library of Congress: Poetry Resources,” Library of Congress, accessed February 1, 2015, <http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/lcpoetry/poetry.html>.

³⁸⁹ “The Poetry and Literature Center at the Library of Congress: Past Poets Laureate: 1981-1990,” Library of Congress, accessed February 1, 2015, <http://www.loc.gov/poetry/laureate-1981-1990.html>.

³⁹⁰ “Since 1991, following the lead of Joseph Brodsky, the Poets Laureate have frequently designed programs with a national reach.” “The Poetry and Literature Center at the Library of Congress: About The Poetry and Literature Center,” Library of Congress, accessed February 1, 2015, <http://www.loc.gov/poetry/about.html>.

A former Soviet citizen, Brodsky assumed his term three months before the dissolution of the USSR in December 1991. In his first public lecture at the Capitol in October 1991, Brodsky lamented the lack of popular access to poetry in the United States, “the supreme form of locution in any culture,” and proposed distributing books of poetry in public places such as airports, supermarkets, and hotel rooms. “There is now an opportunity to turn the nation into an enlightened democracy,” Brodsky pronounced. *The Library of Congress Gazette* reported that the new laureate, who had been “sentenced to hard labor in an Arctic gulag for ‘social parasitism’ and ‘decadent poetry’ by his government” and immigrated to the United States in 1977, opened the 1991-2 literary season with “a stinging attack on the token publishing of poetry and the tepid response of literate people to it.” Brodsky “praise[d] the English language” but “warned that America is on the verge of a tremendous cultural backslide.” Brodsky’s former Soviet citizenship and imprisonment made for a compelling platform—indeed, a geopolitical stage—from which to comment on the function of poetry in national culture. Moreover, Brodsky’s rhetoric was provocative: “No other language accumulates so much as does English. To be born into it or to arrive in it is the best boon a human can come across. To prevent its keepers from full access to it is an anthropological crime, and that’s what the present system of distribution of poetry boils down to. I don’t know what’s worse—banning books or not reading them.”³⁹¹

In the lecture, Brodsky said he “took the job in the spirit of public service...Maybe I fancied myself as a sort of surgeon general and just wanted to slap a label onto the current packaging of poetry—something like ‘This Way of Doing Business Is Dangerous to National Health.’” Brodsky’s estimation of the office as a “public service” position alongside elected policymakers recalls Frost’s term in the office, and not by coincidence.

³⁹¹ Edward Ohnemus, “Brodsky Urges Publishers to Distribute Poetry to the Masses,” *Library of Congress Gazette*, October 11, 1991, 9.

He quoted from Frost frequently during his lecture, and concluded with the story of his first encounter with Frost's poetry. Finally, he closed the lecture by reciting two poems from memory. The first was Frost's "Provide Provide."³⁹²

Frost's vision of national poetry—which took him from Kennedy's inauguration to a "Mission to Moscow"—found a fitting inheritor in Brodsky. As national poets, both Frost and Brodsky believed that poetry had a unique and consequential role in national culture. Both emphasized the special capacities of the English language; and phonocentrism emblemized by the act of recitation, wherein knowing and saying an English language poem "by heart" demonstrates its values have been incorporated into the speaking subject. Finally, both professed a populist mission. Brodsky's ideas "for getting poetry into the hands of literate Americans 'age 15 and up'" did not formally coalesce as a national project until after his time in office, when he founded the American Poetry & Literacy Project with Andrew Carroll. The organization produced and distributed a low-cost anthology, *101 Great American Poems*, published by Dover Thrift Editions, but its endeavors were short-lived. Brodsky's explicit linking of poetry to national values, especially where his former Soviet citizenship made him a mouthpiece for America in the ideological contest of the Cold War, was, however, impactful. The wider reach of Brodsky's vision laid the groundwork for the national poetry projects that would come out of the office during the mid-1990s.

Poet Laureate Robert Pinsky's (1997-2000) "Favorite Poem Project" was the first of this new breed. The "Favorite Poem Project: Americans Saying Poems They Love" invited Americans to "say aloud" a favorite poem at a series of poetry readings, and subsequently for national audio and video archives. Billy Collins' (2001-2003) "Poetry 180: A Poem a Day for American High Schools" project provided a website-based curriculum of 180 poems "designed to make it easy for students to hear or read a poem

³⁹² Ibid.

on each of the 180 days of the school year.”³⁹³ Ted Kooser’s (2004-2006) “American Life in Poetry” project “provide[d] newspapers and online publications with a free weekly column featuring contemporary American poems.”³⁹⁴

These national projects are representative of a broader shift in the civic function of poetry in the 1990s and 2000s. The national poets who led them, moreover, represent a category of cultural producers Robert von Hallberg has termed contemporary American “civil verse poets” or “civil poets.” For civil poets, verse has a socially affirmative function: “their poems imply not only legitimacy but even hope for the survival of existing social institutions.”³⁹⁵

Civil verse poets “craft their art from the medium that effectively represents the nation,” typically a speech-based or phonocentric medium. By “imitat[ing] speech,” a poem “derive[s] the authority...from that of a social class, and beyond that from the premise that civil, secular values properly govern cultural life.” Civil verse poets “hold to the controversial notion that poetic language is not properly separate from ordinary language”—as Frost insisted—to show that “value is to be found within the constraints of recognizable contemporary linguistic and social practice.”³⁹⁶ By elevating “ordinary speech” to an urbane style that appeals to the “the college-educated, northern, metropolitan class of the intelligentsia [that] asserts its authority to explain the world,” moreover, the poet affirms this social class and the values that govern it.³⁹⁷ The work of

³⁹³ “Poetry 180: A Poem A Day for American High Schools,” Library of Congress, accessed March 2, 2015, <http://www.loc.gov/poetry/180/>.

³⁹⁴ “American Life in Poetry,” American Life in Poetry: A Project for Newspapers by Ted Kooser, Poet Laureate of the United States 2004-2006, accessed March 2, 2015, <http://www.americanlifeinpoetry.org/>.

³⁹⁵ von Hallberg, *Lyric Powers*, 233.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 103.

³⁹⁷ von Hallberg argues that the authority of the lyric has three sources: “first, traditions of religious affirmation; second, the social status of those who speak the idioms from which particular poems are made; third, extraordinary cognition produced by the formal, and in particular musical, resources of some poems” (*Lyric Powers* 7). He also draws a broader distinction between *orphanic* (vatic) versus *rhetorical* (speech-based) poetics, calling these two “rival families” of poetry in U.S. literary culture (1-2). In his reading, “civil poets” Pinsky, Hass,

Robert Hass, Robert Pinsky, Jorie Graham and Louise Glück are von Hallberg's chief examples of this project. Their poems "demonstrate the flexibility, exactness, and vitality of standard American English as an artistic medium. If gorgeous or acute art can be made in this medium, one may have faith that just legislation, judicious litigation, and progressive social policy can also be crafted from this general social position."³⁹⁸ Hass, Pinsky and Glück all served as Poets Laureate in the late 1990s and 2000s. Like Frost and Brodsky, Pinsky and other national poets discussed in this chapter fully appreciate the civic function of verse—promoting "standard American English as an artistic medium" and the social order it affirms not only through their own poetry, but through poetry projects.

This chapter argues that national poetry projects of civil verse poets in the 1990s-2000s draw from Frost's poetics the values of phonocentrism and populist accessibility. National poetry projects of the 1990s-2000s shared Frost's view of poetry as a tool to shape civic society. This conviction animated post-Cold War state verse culture more broadly: the Library of Congress administered its first poetry prize since 1949; presidential inaugurations made use of inaugural poems for the first time since 1961; and the NEA and literary and educational organizations invested in National Poetry Month and other ventures premised on the culturally edifying function of civil verse. A

Graham, Glück fall into the second category in both breakdowns as rhetoricians who "ground their art in the imitation of speech often derive the authority of their poems from that of a social class, and beyond that from the premise that civil, secular values properly govern cultural life." However, von Hallberg does not account for the ways in which civil poets also draw from a "musicality that seems mysterious, or seems to symbolize a transcendent order." In civil verse projects, most notably Pinsky's Favorite Poem Project, orphic power helps to authorize the speech idioms of a social class, and to impute transcendent significance to those "secular values [that] properly govern cultural life." In short, civil poets who are rhetorical, "who ground their art in the imitation of speech" also draw on the orphic (vatic) tradition, where the authority of "social class" and the authority of "religious belief or experience" are rendered indistinguishable through the speech-act of the poem to elevate the values of the managerial elite. We will see this in Pinsky's language of transcendence—the way something beyond "ordinary life" happens when one recites a poem written in "ordinary language." "About the Favorite Poem Project: Founding Principles: Giving Voice to the American Audience," Favorite Poem Project: Americans Saying Poems They Love, accessed March 12, 2015, <http://www.favoritepoem.org/about.html>.

³⁹⁸ von Hallberg, *Lyric Powers*, 90.

surprising act of patronage transformed one of these organizations, *Poetry* magazine, in 2002. The magazine's parent organization, The Modern Poetry Association, was reborn as The Poetry Foundation, a key—perhaps the most influential—player in state verse culture of the late 2000s and 2010s.

I use “civil verse” as a way to link the nationalist priority of Frost's poetics (Chapter 2) and the voice-based model of the workshop poem (Chapter 3) allied with the national project. Robert Blanco's inaugural poem provides an exemplary instance of the coherence of these two models. Finally, the chapter looks at representative alternatives to civil verse within state verse culture. The Language poetics tradition described in Chapter 3, for example, has interpreted what Pinsky calls “the responsibilities of the poet” not to affirm, but interrogate—even “attack,” in the case of Charles Bernstein's *Attack of the Difficult Poems*—existing social order or civic discourse. Rather than represent the voice of the citizen, civic verse models alienated figures of voice to consider the non-citizen or alien other. In Frost's politics of poetic form, the checks and balances of a formal order govern the willful speaker. In the Language tradition, too, form and voice are analogues for social structure and the representational agency of the citizen-subject. But rather than represent or affirm the existing social order, the disruption of form and phonocentric voice represents the incoherence or political illegibility of subjects in the discourse of identity politics.

1. State Verse Culture after the Cold War: National Poetry Projects in Context

National poetry projects are the most dominant expressions of a broader shift in the civic function of poetry in post-Cold War America. As Brodsky's “poetry for the masses” rhetoric indexes, the early 1990s observed a second wave of the Frost-Kennedy era national arts vision. Maya Angelou's performance of “On the Pulse of Morning” at the 1993 presidential inauguration of Bill Clinton was the first inaugural poem since Frost's

“The Gift Outright” in 1961. Inaugural poetry became more common after with the performances of Miller Williams at the second inaugural of Clinton in 1997; and Elizabeth Alexander and Richard Blanco at the 2009 and 2013 inaugurals of Barack Obama, respectively.³⁹⁹ The state also became less wary about asserting artistic judgment via prizes. In 1990, the Library of Congress awarded the \$10,000 biennial Rebekah Johnson Bobbitt National Prize for Poetry to James Merrill. This was the first award the Library had made since the spectacular fiasco of Pound’s Bollingen Award in 1949, discussed in Chapter 1. Through the Library, NEA, and Office of the President, the post-Cold War state has increased visible collaborations with and private organizations to promote the place of poetry in national culture. On April 1, 1996, President Clinton announced the celebration of the first annual “National Poetry Month”:

National Poetry Month offers us a welcome opportunity to celebrate not only the unsurpassed body of literature produced by our poets in the past, but also the vitality and diversity of voices reflected in the works of today’s American poppy... Their creativity and wealth of language enrich our culture and inspire a new generation of Americans to learn the power of reading and writing at its best.⁴⁰⁰

Introduced by The Academy of American Poets, National Poetry Month—like Pinsky, Collins, Kooser and other laureate-initiated projects through the national poetry office—demonstrates the cooperation of various private and public organizations to define the “vital place” of poetry in American culture. While “National Poetry Month is a trademark of the Academy of American Poets,” the AAP “enlisted a variety of government agencies and officials, educational leaders, publishers, sponsors, poets, and arts organizations to help.” National Poetry Month partners in 2015 included 826 National, the American Booksellers Association, American Library Association, National Council of Teachers of English, National Endowment for the Arts, New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, New York State Council on the Arts, and Random House, Inc.; sponsors included

³⁹⁹ “National Poetry Month: About the Celebration,” The Academy of American Poets, accessed March 2, 2015, <http://www.poets.org/national-poetry-month/about-celebration>.

⁴⁰⁰ “National Poetry Month: Proclamations,” The Academy of American Poets, accessed March 2, 2015, <http://www.poets.org/national-poetry-month/national-poetry-month-proclamations>.

Graywolf Press, Papyrus Greeting Cards, The Poetry Foundation, and Random House Children's Books and Scholastic, Inc.⁴⁰¹ National Poetry Month calls itself "the largest literary celebration in the world."⁴⁰²

The Academy of American Poets provides an instructive proxy for the evolution of the national poetry agenda, as the trajectory of its cultural ambitions parallel that of the poetry office at the Library of Congress. It was incorporated as a nonprofit organization in 1936, the same year the Consultant position was endowed at the Library. Marie Bullock, who admired the work of Edwin Arlington Robinson and Robert Frost, founded the organization, inspired by the first Consultant in Poetry Joseph Auslander.⁴⁰³ She would remain president for the rest of her life: with Bullock at the helm, the AAP was a regular presence and supporter of Library programs. The celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the AAP was the Library's "starriest poetic event" save the National Poetry Festival in 1962,⁴⁰⁴ demonstrating the close relationship of the AAP with the Library. It supported many Consultants through prizes and fellowships. At the time of Bullock's death, its fellowship for poetic achievement, for example, had honored Consultants including Frost, Williams, Aiken, Bogan, Adams (twice), Tate, Bishop, Kunitz, Eberhart, Hecht, Nemerov, and Hayden.⁴⁰⁵ AAP programming also paralleled the rise of MFA

⁴⁰¹ This list reflects the primary supporters of the 2015 National Poetry Month. Contributors that year included Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.; Hamline University; Houghton Mifflin Harcourt; Penguin Books; W. W. Norton & Company; supporters include Columbia University School of the Arts; Consortium Book Sales & Distribution; Copper Canyon Press; Farrar, Straus & Giroux; HarperCollins Publishers; Marsh Hawk Press; Milkweed Editions; The Graduate Center at Seattle Pacific University; University of Notre Dame Press; Wake Forest University Press and Wayne State University Press. "National Poetry Month: Sponsors and Partners," The Academy of American Poets, accessed March 10, 2015, <http://www.poets.org/national-poetry-month/sponsors-partners>.

⁴⁰² "National Poetry Month: About the Celebration."

⁴⁰³ Bullock attended Auslander's lectures at Harvard. The figure of a winged horse, which honors Auslander's history of poetry *The Winged Horse* (1927) and *Winged Horse Anthology* (1929), remains the logo of the AAP today. The AAP was founded in 1934 in New York and incorporated as a non-profit in 1936.

⁴⁰⁴ McGuire, *Poetry's Catbird Seat*, 404.

⁴⁰⁵ The AAP was key in promoting "prize culture" (see James English, *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value*, Harvard UP 2005) in the field of postwar American poetry. From 1954-1985, the AAP expended \$200,000 in sponsoring annual \$100

programs, launching a “Poetry-in-the-Schools” program in 1966. Bullock supported Library efforts in informal ways, too—in 1973, for example, she helped Consultant in Poetry Daniel Hoffman lobby the United State Post Office to issue a commemorative stamp honoring Robert Frost.⁴⁰⁶ Anthony Hecht would say that Bullock did “more for the art of poetry and individual poets over the years than any institution whatever.”⁴⁰⁷ She died in 1986, the year the title of the national office was changed from the Consultant in Poetry to the Poet Laureate. The rebranding of the office was a fitting bookend for the lifelong patron of national poetry: Bullock was instrumental in establishing administrative connections, and a shared value of literary populism, between the AAP and the Library’s poetry office over fifty years’ time.

National Poetry Month is not only the legacy of an individual patron, but also of NEA efforts to deepen and extend links between public institutions and private industry.⁴⁰⁸ From its inception, the NEA understood itself as a “complement” to “private support of culture.” The United States’ “system of arts support is different from that of other nations, most of whom rely on government as the primary patron,” Chairman Hodsoll affirmed in 1984.⁴⁰⁹ NEA leaders, especially during the Reagan years, emphasized private giving to the arts as “an American tradition.” While August Heckschler, Kennedy’s original arts consultant, envisaged a more “European model” of federal arts programming, where the central government supported national theaters,

poetry prizes at 130 colleges and universities and issuing anthologies of winning poems. With the help of A.W. Mellon Foundation grants, the AAP invited poetry societies nationwide to become AAP-affiliates.

⁴⁰⁶ McGuire, *Poetry’s Catbird Seat*, 338.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., 405-6.

⁴⁰⁸ Early state arts councils and business initiatives helped forge these relationships in previous decades. In the fall of 1967, David Rockefeller and corporate leaders formed the Business Committee for the Arts to devise “strategies to bring the business and arts communities into partnerships and more effective forms of mutual support.” Bauerlein and Grantham, *National Endowment for the Arts: A History*, 17.

⁴⁰⁹ Francis S.M. Hodsoll, “Supporting the Arts in the Eighties: The View from the National Endowment for the Arts,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 471 (January 1984), 85.

museums, cinema, dance companies, and literary arts academies, the second NEA Chairman Nancy Hanks (1969-77) “preferred to forge numerous partnerships with nonprofit arts organizations, rather than underwrite the budgets of official state-sponsored arts groups.”⁴¹⁰ The Hanks Era developed the infrastructure to channel government funding into private organizations; subsequently Chairman Biddle (1977-81) sought to relocate the material and civic impetus for arts organizations more squarely within the private sphere. His threefold provisions for the future of arts funding maintained that 1) “responsibility should be primarily based on private and local initiatives”; 2) “a comprehensive restriction on federal interference in the determination of NEA grantees,” which Biddle defined as “a provision basic to freedom of expression and the creative spirit of the arts” should be in place; and 3) “The Endowment must be guided by a council of private citizens.”⁴¹¹ When Biddle’s successor Hodsoll (1981-1989) began his term, The Presidential Task Force on the Arts and the Humanities could assess that “[t]here is no other nation in the world in which the principle of private giving to sustain cultural institutions is so deeply ingrained.”⁴¹²

The federal arts mission of the Reagan era, whereby corporate relationships and individual patronage were “complement[ed]” by federal funds,⁴¹³ persists into the present. Large-scale arts projects undertaken by U.S. Poets Laureate, like many projects underwritten by the NEA, are primarily funded and administrated by private organizations. Indeed, National Poetry Month was established the same year as the infamous NEA budget cut. That the NEA budget would be slashed at the same time as it helped a “national poetry” discourse develop is telling. The federal state maintains a vested symbolic interest in the arts, just one that it manages via satellite bodies.

⁴¹⁰ Bauerlein and Grantham, *National Endowment for the Arts: A History*, 36.

⁴¹¹ Ibid., 55.

⁴¹² Presidential Task Force on the Arts and the Humanities, Report to the President (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1981), 3, qtd. in Hodsoll, “Supporting the Arts in the Eighties,” 85.

⁴¹³ Hodsoll, “Supporting the Arts in the Eighties,” 85.

Rather than enable diverse aesthetic agendas or a diverse range of programming, then, privately sponsored poetry projects are normed through state involvement. That is, while only complemented by NEA dollars, they are made possible through the agency's bureaucratic reach, and centralized by the institutional singularity and minor symbolic capital of the national poetry office. This results in a fairly uniform, and broad, articulation of the cultural uses of poetry in national discourse. The Poetry Office at the Library of Congress, The Poetry Foundation, and poetry-affiliated projects of the National Endowment for the Arts all advocate for a central role for poetry in American culture: National Poetry Month "celebrat[es] poetry's vital place in our culture"; "The Favorite Poem Project is dedicated to celebrating, documenting and encouraging poetry's role in Americans' lives"⁴¹⁴; "The sole mission of this project is to promote poetry: American Life in Poetry seeks to create a vigorous presence for poetry in our culture";⁴¹⁵ "Welcome to Poetry 180. Poetry can and should be an important part of our daily lives."⁴¹⁶ What does it mean to promote "poetry"? In the context of these organizations' discourse, "poetry" typically acts as a proxy for a set of loosely defined national values. As most of these projects target K-12 public school classrooms as their mission or a subset of their mission,⁴¹⁷ promoting poetry means promoting those national values. In the case of Pinsky's "Favorite Poem Project," for example, poetry is understood to "reflec[t], perhaps concentrate[e], the American idea of individualism"⁴¹⁸;

⁴¹⁴ "About the Favorite Poem Project."

⁴¹⁵ "American Life in Poetry."

⁴¹⁶ "Poetry 180: A Poem A Day for American High Schools."

⁴¹⁷ The Academy of American Poets, for example, offers lesson plans and instructional articles and guides "on teaching poetry" in connection with National Poetry Month: "[The AAP] presents lesson plans most of which align with Common Core State Standards, and all of which have been reviewed by our Educator in Residence with an eye toward developing skills of perception and imagination. We hope they will inspire the educators in our community to bring even more poems into your classrooms!" "Lesson Plans," The Academy of American Poets, accessed March 11, 2015, <http://www.poets.org/poetsorg/lesson-plans>.

⁴¹⁸ Robert Pinsky, *Democracy, Culture, and the Voice of Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 18.

to submit a favorite poem to the Favorite Poem Project is to participate affirmatively in the American idea of individualism.

While National Poetry Month systematizes the far-reaching interests of the NEA and corporate benefactors through the AAP, national poetry projects unite institutional players through the office of the Poet Laureate at the Library of Congress. Pinsky's Favorite Poem Project is a partnership between the Library, The Poetry Foundation, and Boston University, with original funding from the National Endowment for the Arts.⁴¹⁹ Random House published Collins' Poetry 180's web-based anthology through the Library as a print anthology, *Poetry 180: A Turning Back to Poetry*.⁴²⁰ Kooser's American Life in Poetry is a partnership of The Poetry Foundation and the Library of Congress, with administrative assistance from the University of Nebraska. The most common supporters of National Poetry Month and laureate-sponsored poetry projects include the NEA and—most importantly since 2004—The Poetry Foundation.

2. Poetry and Prozac: The Lilly Donation and the Birth of The Poetry Foundation

In November 2002, *Poetry* magazine announced it had received a gift totaling over \$100 million⁴²¹ from reclusive pharmaceutical heiress Ruth Lilly.⁴²² The donation came as a shock to the magazine. Ruth Lilly's relationship with *Poetry* began in the 1970s, when she submitted poems to the magazine under the pseudonym Guernsey van

⁴¹⁹ "About the Favorite Poem Project."

⁴²⁰ Billy Collins, ed., *Poetry 180: A Turning Back to Poetry* (New York: Random House, 2003). A second anthology sought to widen the project's audience, exposing not only high school students but "readers of all ages to the best of today's poetry." *180 More: Extraordinary Poems for Every Day* (Random House, 2005), dust jacket.

⁴²¹ The amount of the donation is contested, and has been reported as ranging from \$100 million to \$200 million. Between January and December 2002, 3.8 million shares of Lilly stock declined in value by 36%; Americans for the Arts and *Poetry* later sued National City Bank of Indiana for negligence and breach of fiduciary duty after a "botched" sell-off of the stock. See Evans, "Free (Market) Verse," 27 and Juliana Spahr, "Contemporary U.S. Poetry and Its Nationalisms," *Contemporary Literature* 52.4 (Winter 2011), 684-715.

⁴²² Editor Joseph Parisi announced the gift at *Poetry*'s 90th-anniversary dinner on November 15, 2002 (Stephen Kinzer, "Lilly Heir Makes \$100 Million Bequest to Poetry Magazine," *The New York Times*, November 19, 2002), but the magazine learned of the gift the fall of 2001 (Goodyear, "The Moneyed Muse," *The New Yorker*, February 19, 2007).

Riper, Jr. The poems had been turned down with handwritten notes from the editor. While she had previously endowed a \$100,000 poetry prize and two fellowships through the magazine,⁴²³ Lilly had not been in contact with *Poetry* or members of its parent organization, the Modern Poetry Association, to suggest a subsequent donation, let alone one of such largesse. Significant institutional restructuring of the magazine occurred in the wake of the mega-gift. Indeed, organizational management literature has used the Lilly donation as a case study to understand the impact of large gifts on small non-profit organizations, “because of the rareness of the event”—mega-gifts are typically given to large organizations. In addition, no restrictions were placed on the gift’s use.⁴²⁴ Joseph Parisi, editor of the magazine for two decades, resigned shortly after the donation was announced—first as editor, appointing Christian Wiman as his successor, in order to lead a newly established foundation overseeing the MPA board; and a few months later from the foundation. “Money changes everything,” he said.⁴²⁵

The Modern Poetry Association became The Poetry Foundation, an independent, 501(c)(3) Chicago-based literary organization and publisher of *Poetry* magazine. John Barr, an investment banker and author of six books of poetry, was appointed its first president in 2004. Barr, who had previously served on the board of the Poetry Society of America and taught in MFA programs,⁴²⁶ pronounced a populist vision for the Foundation—rather than a grant-providing organization, post-Lilly *Poetry* would invest

⁴²³ Lilly’s relationship with *Poetry* began in the 1970s, when she submitted poems to the magazine under the pseudonym Guernsey van Riper, Jr. The poems had been turned down with handwritten notes from the editor.

⁴²⁴ Max Stephenson, Jr., Marcy Schnitzer, and Verónica Arroyave, “Nonprofit Governance, Management, and Organizational Learning: Exploring the Implications of One ‘Mega-Gift,’” *The American Review of Public Administration* 39.1 (January 2009), 43. A “mega-gift” (Panas 1984) refers to a gift of \$1 million or more to a single entity.

⁴²⁵ Judy Valente with Parisi, “The Well-Endowed ‘Poetry’ Magazine,” *National Public Radio*, May 22, 2005.

⁴²⁶ Barr had been on the boards of the Poetry Society of America, Bennington College, and Yaddo, and had taught for three terms in the MFA program at Sarah Lawrence. Barr’s individual trajectory from The Poetry Society of America to the creative writing workshop to The Poetry Foundation usefully highlights the trajectory of aesthetic values through institutions.

in joint ventures with other organizations to expand the audience for the genre. “Poetry’s golden age will come when it is front of a general audience,” Barr declared; “by growing the universe of readers who will buy books of poetry, the Foundation hopes to bring economic as well as artistic life to the business of writing poetry.”⁴²⁷ Barr’s first visible symbolic action as president was the institution of a new prize, the Mark Twain Award for humor, carrying a \$25,000 purse; the inaugural winner was the then best-selling poet in America, Billy Collins, who had been Poet Laureate at the time the Lilly gift was announced. The Foundation subsequently embarked on a series of initiatives, including the opening of the Harriet Monroe Poetry Institute, which partnered with the Aspen Institute to “identify ways of strengthening poetry and expanding its audience.”⁴²⁸ The website was restructured and *Poetry*’s mission statement was redrafted, emphasizing a public-minded appeal to wider audiences, mainstream media, and primary school classrooms: “The Poetry Foundation works to raise poetry to a more visible and influential position in American culture...In the long term, the Foundation aspires to alter the perception that poetry is a marginal art, and to make it directly relevant to the American public.”⁴²⁹

Ted Kooser, Poet Laureate in 2004-2006, led the first national project to benefit from the new wealth and populist mission of post-Lilly *Poetry*. The American Life in Poetry project, ongoing in 2015, is supported by a partnership of The Library of Congress with The Poetry Foundation, and receives administrative support from the English Department of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. “It is an honor,” said Barr, “to be allied with the Library of Congress. Through the office of Poet Laureate, the Library has done much to celebrate the best poetry and enlarge its audience. We are natural partners

⁴²⁷ “Foundation Release Letter from John Barr, President,” The Poetry Foundation, September 2004, accessed July 8, 2015, http://www.poetryfoundation.org/foundation/release_letter.html.

⁴²⁸ Foundation spokesperson Annie Halsey qtd. in Julia Klein, “A Windfall Illuminates the Poetry Field, and Its Fights,” *The New York Times*, November 12, 2007, 8.

⁴²⁹ “History and Mission,” The Poetry Foundation, accessed March 2, 2015, <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/foundation/history-and-mission>.

in the American Life in Poetry project, which will help get good poetry back into the mainstream.”⁴³⁰

The Poetry Foundation also found a fast ally in the NEA. Then-chairman Dana Gioia, who had met Barr when they both served on the board of the Poetry Society of America, applauded The Poetry Foundation for “reaching millions of people with poetry.”⁴³¹ Barr called himself and the NEA chairman “kindred spirits” because of their shared business background: “we could both read balance sheets and had this love for poetry.”⁴³² The Poetry Foundation rapidly joined the NEA in supporting the continuation of Poet Laureate projects, including Pinsky’s Favorite Poem Project; and the two would coordinate a series of initiatives, beginning with Poetry Out Loud, a recitation contest for high school students, in subsequent years.

There were some vocal critiques of The Poetry Foundation’s handling of the Lilly windfall. Despite the Foundation’s statement that “*Poetry* has always been independent, unaffiliated with any institution or university—or with any single poetic or critical movement or aesthetic school,”⁴³³ Stephen Yenser’s indignant charge “They’re funded by drug money—literally—Lilly pharmaceutical!”⁴³⁴ points to at least one major affiliation. Critics including Juliana Spahr and Steve Evans have suggested that it is an affiliation with consequential bearing on the “aesthetic school” favored by the magazine, and, moreover, partisan stakes in national economic policy. Evans went so far as to call the Lilly donation a well-timed prop to disguise the collusion of the Bush administration and the pharmaceutical industry. During the same months Lilly made her donation, Evans notes, The Homeland Security Bill under consideration in Congress was revised to exempt the Lilly Company, a “long-standing supporter of Republican politicians as well

⁴³⁰ “Project Description,” American Life in Poetry: A Project for Newspapers.

⁴³¹ Klein, “A Windfall.”

⁴³² Heidi Benson, “Poet Wants to Write Verse into Everyone’s Daily Requirements,” *San Francisco Gate*, June 27, 2004.

⁴³³ “History and Mission.”

⁴³⁴ Qtd. in Goodyear, “The Moneyed Muse.”

as an indirect backer, through the Lilly Endowment, of the usual conservative causes,” including lawsuits “related to the manufacture of Thimerosal, a preservative added to vaccines and thought by some to be a cause of autism.” Evans maintains “the heartwarming story of Ruth Lilly’s handout to *Poetry* magazine was at least in part timed to draw attention away from the scandalous political payoff that had been snuck into the Homeland Security Bill and hurriedly signed into law by Bush.”⁴³⁵ To Evans, the relationship between Chairman Dana Gioia at the NEA, President John Barr at The Poetry Foundation and Poet Laureate Kooser at the Library of Congress—“the businessmen poets” or “Poets for Bush”—is a powerful club conspiring “to prescribe Prozac poems”⁴³⁶ in the service of a broader political agenda.

Whether or not one is persuaded by Yenser’s accusation or Evans’ incendiary exposé, the NEA, Library of Congress and The Poetry Foundation are indeed the key nexus among the private and state interests that support contemporary national poetry projects. *Poetry*’s relationship with the Library and private donors, however—including the Lilly family—is nothing new. Despite the controversy surrounding the Lilly donation, no journalist, critic or other cultural commentator noted the longer history of cooperation between *Poetry* and the Library of Congress as mediated by common patrons, nor *Poetry*’s history with the Lilly family specifically. In 1949, and with increasing urgency in the wake of the Bollingen prize scandal, *Poetry* editor Hayden Carruth repeatedly implored the Lillies to support the faltering magazine—he was denied, and shortly thereafter fired. As Chapter 1 describes, his ousting initiated an overhaul of the editorial staff at the magazine. This would be a minor transition, however, compared to transformation of the magazine that occurred when the Lillies, fifty years later, finally granted Carruth’s request.

⁴³⁵ Evans, “Free (Market) Verse,” 26-7.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

Yet that the donation would finally come unsolicited—with considerable interest—is not the greatest irony of the Lilly patronage. The donation secured the death of the Modern Poetry Association; in its place The Poetry Foundation and the Harriet Monroe Institute revised *Poetry*'s mission nearly wholesale. It is unlikely the Harriet Monroe Institute's namesake, the founding publisher of the magazine, would have approved of The Poetry Foundation's redirection toward a wider national audience. John Barr's "American Poetry in the New Century," something of a manifesto on the state of poetry in America published in the magazine in September 2006, the same year the Institute's first major study was released,⁴³⁷ laments that "a century ago our newspapers commonly ran poems in their pages," but "[t]oday one almost never sees a poem in a newspaper."⁴³⁸ In 1922, Harriet Monroe also published an editorial in the magazine that addressed the state of poetry in American culture. She deplored newspaper verse: "These syndicated rhymers, like the movie-producers, are learning that 'it pays to be good,' that

⁴³⁷ *Poetry in America: Review of the Findings* echoes the language and cultural ambitions of The Poetry Foundation's mission statement and of financially allied institutional players. To diagnose the current "state of poetry in America," the Foundation commissioned the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago to determine poetry's current audiences, factors that contribute to ongoing participation with poetry, perceptions of poetry, poets and poetry readers, obstacles to engagement with poetry, and recommendations for broadening the audience for poetry in the United States. The report is less valuable for its findings than for its stated objectives, motivating assumptions, operational definitions, and the extent to which the ideological vision these summarize is institutionally unique or similar to other national poetry projects. For instance, the report sets out a working "definition" of poetry to all survey respondents: "Poetry is unique because it uses rhythm and language in verses to create images in the mind of the reader. Sometimes poetry rhymes, but not always...the words 'poetry' or 'poems' refer to verses intended to be understood as poems, not as part of something else such as rap, song lyrics, Bible verses, or greeting card messages." The report explicitly assumes poetry's social function ("poetry and other literary forms serve important purposes—they celebrate our culture, create economic opportunities, educate our citizenry, and enhance our lives"), and implicitly assumes poetry as an inherent good a priori of form, content and affiliation—that is, poetry is a genre with quasi-spiritual value, i.e. the power to humanize and edify. *Poetry in America: Review of the Findings*, prepared by Lisa K. Schwartz, Ph.D., Lisbeth Goble, Ned English, and Robert F. Bailey at the National Opinion Research Center (Chicago: The Poetry Foundation and the National Organization for Research at the University of Chicago, January 2006).

⁴³⁸ Barr, "American Poetry in the New Century," 434.

one ‘gets by by giving the people the emotions of virtue, simplicity and goodness, with this program paying at the box-office.’”⁴³⁹

Monroe and Barr agree that in both 1922 and 2006, respectively, “poetry in this country is ready for something new.”⁴⁴⁰ For Barr, however, the “new” frontier is not aesthetic experimentation as it was for Monroe: “I believe the next era of poetry will come not from further innovations of form, but from an evolution of the sensibility based on lived experience.” The “golden age” of poetry celebrates newspaper verse, e.g. Ted Kooser’s “American Life in Poetry,” and honors its Mark Twains, e.g. Billy Collins’ humor prize. Poets must “find their public,” reclaiming their position as “unacknowledged legislators of the world” and poetry as a “moral act.”⁴⁴¹

The Lilly donation enabled a new level of coordination of national arts ideology through poetry-based initiatives. As the historical arc of this dissertation has shown, the missions of the Library and *Poetry* have been allied and mediated through common patrons since the postwar period. Just as the Mellon Endowment divided support between *Poetry* magazine and the Library of Congress in 1946, Lilly’s 2002 bequest was divided between *Poetry* magazine and the Washington-based arts education and lobbying group today called Americans for the Arts. Unlike the Mellon Endowment, however, the Lilly windfall illuminated an already coherent *state* verse culture. The Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Library of Congress triangulate through common individuals, mission statement language, and often cooperatively undertaken national outreach projects. The balance of this triangle, however, shifted in the wake of the Lilly windfall—The Poetry Foundation acquired unprecedented capital to determine the shape of state verse culture. Since The Poetry Foundation unfurled the bulk of its new programming in the late 2000s, the national

⁴³⁹ Harriet Monroe, “Newspaper Verse,” *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse* 19:6 (March 1922): 329.

⁴⁴⁰ Barr, “American Poetry in the New Century,” 433.

⁴⁴¹ Barr echoes the term “golden age” from Frost’s inaugural poem for President Kennedy, “Dedication,” which describes a “golden age of poetry and power” (see Appendix III). *Ibid.*, 438.

poetry office has been occupied by less “activist laureates,”⁴⁴² and the Library of Congress has had a less central role in the institutional coordination of national projects like those of the late 1990s and early 2000s that are the subject of this chapter. However, The Poetry Foundation has adopted—even exaggerated—many of the priorities these national projects articulated. While Brodsky advocated for the dissemination of poetry books, Barr more aggressively held that “poets should be imperialists” and “importers” of experience.⁴⁴³ Today, The Poetry Foundation dominates as the key player in the cultural production of civil verse.

3. Robert Pinsky (1997-2000)’s Favorite Poem Project

Poetry reflects, perhaps concentrates, the American idea of independence...the art of poetry by its nature operates on a level as profoundly individual as a human voice.
—Robert Pinsky, *Democracy, Culture, and the Voice of Poetry*⁴⁴⁴

Robert Pinsky launched the Favorite Poem Project in April 1998, in concert with the third annual National Poetry Month. He was in the first of an unprecedented three terms as U.S. Poet Laureate (1997-2000). The “Favorite Poem Project: Americans Saying Poems They Love” invited “Americans from all walks of life, including school children and prominent civic figures” to read, or as Pinsky prefers, to “*say aloud*” a favorite poem at a series of poetry readings, and subsequently for a national audio and video archive.

⁴⁴² When asked what he wanted his role as Poet Laureate to be given the models of recent predecessors—“Billy Collins tried to bring poems into high school classrooms. Ted Kooser wrote a weekly column for newspapers. What do you think you might do?”—recent Laureate Charles Wright asserted, “Well, I’ll probably stay here at home and think about things. I will not be an activist laureate, I don’t think...certainly not the way Billy Collins was or Bob Hass or Rita Dove or Robert Pinsky. You know, they had programs I have no program. I have been deprogrammed, as it were.” “New Poet Laureate: ‘The Meaning Has Always Stayed The Same,’” *National Public Radio*, June 12, 2014.

⁴⁴³ “Poetry and Investment Banking: It’s All About Risk,” Knowledge@Wharton, January 26, 2005, accessed July 8, 2015, <http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article/poetry-and-investment-banking-its-all-about-risk/>.

⁴⁴⁴ Pinsky, *Democracy, Culture, and the Voice of Poetry*, 18.

Pinsky offers the most developed and ambitious civic pedagogy of the national poetry projects. He is also the clearest inheritor of Frost's phonocentric poetics. Memorizing and "saying aloud" a poem, Pinsky explains, "schools us in the shapes of meaning."⁴⁴⁵ "[S]chools" is no accidental verb choice. If Frost's poetics, emblemized in his inaugural recitation, extended 19th- and early 20th-century curricular traditions of memorization and recitation beyond the classroom, Pinsky's Favorite Poem Project returns his phonocentric nationalism to the classroom proper.

Pinsky introduced the project with five public poetry readings in New York, Washington, Boston, St. Louis, Los Angeles, and at the White House. In Boston, the President of the Massachusetts State Senate read Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress," a fifth grade public school student read Theodore Roethke's "The Sloth," and "a homeless man" read Robert Frost's "Nothing Gold Can Stay"⁴⁴⁶; at the White House, Pinsky, former laureates Robert Hass and Rita Dove read works of "great American poets" Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, Edward Arlington Robinson, Langston Hughes and Wallace Stevens, and President Clinton read Ralph Waldo Emerson and Octavio Paz.⁴⁴⁷ The success of the reading series prompted Pinsky to extend the project, "invit[ing] Americans to submit the title and author of a poem they admired enough to say aloud for the national audio and video archive, and to write a few sentences about the poem's personal importance or significance."⁴⁴⁸ Something of a franchise developed out of the response—over 18,000 entries were received in the first year of open call for submissions—including three anthologies; Pinsky's statement of poetics reflecting on the role of poetry in democratic culture, *Democracy, Culture and the Voice of Poetry*

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., 48.

⁴⁴⁶ The Boston reading (April 8, 1998) was sponsored by The Library of Congress, The Boston Public Library, and Boston University. The New York reading (April 1, 1998) was hosted by The Academy of the American Poets and sponsored by *The New York Times* advertising department.

⁴⁴⁷ "About the Favorite Poem Project."

⁴⁴⁸ Pinsky, *Democracy, Culture, and the Voice of Poetry*, 49.

(2002); and a series of Summer Poetry Institutes and curricula guides ongoing as of 2015.

While the Favorite Poem Project's archives in bulk—original letters and printed e-mail submissions; raw and edited versions of audio and video recordings—are housed by Boston University's Mugar Library at the Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, the core of the project—50 of the original 18,000 Favorite Poem Project videos—was given a permanent home in the Library of Congress archive of Recorded Poetry and Literature. With the selection and addition of "The Favorite Poem Project Videos" to the Recorded Literature archive, Pinsky assumed the role of earlier national poets as archival guardian.

He also redefined the function of the archive. Video recordings of "individual Americans reading and speaking personally about poems they love" disrupted the traditional archival content of audio recordings. Moreover, the archive created by Mellon in 1946 supported contemporary, living poets. In Chapter 1, we saw how poets like Lowell and Bishop exploited the possibilities for individual and collaborative aesthetic decision-making in the process of canon-formation. The recitation of poems by citizens recalls Frost's recitation of "The Gift Outright" on national television more so than previous archival content.

The addition of the video documentaries of "everyday Americans" is initially striking as a populist or democratizing gesture. The videos offer an expanded interpretation of the archival speaker—including citizens who "say," not just poets who read, in the national canon. In other ways, however, the archive describes more limited sources of literary authority in national life. While some Favorite Poem Project videos include poems of contemporary authors, they typically reify the status of literary figures from the existing anglophone (typically England and the U.S.) poetry canon. Rather than Bishop and Lowell reading to one another, Americans read Marvell, Roethke and Frost

for the national camera. Where the project premises that “there are many people for whom particular poems have profound, personal meaning,” it shows that these poems are not typically authored by contemporary writers. Moreover, where the project claims to champion poetry’s “vigorous presence in American life,” it reveals this as the presence of the canonical past.

While an author from the literary canon supplies the archival content, the symbolic status of that author supplies the source of agency for the archival speaker. Pinsky describes the act of reading a poem as a transformative experience that provides a sense of increased personal agency—one is lifted into “a different state.” In the context of the Favorite Poem Project, the source of agency is located outside of the speaker’s body or historical time. The archive does not build a canon, but rather uses an existing canon to articulate national values.

In the Favorite Poem Project, the transformative speech-act of the poem by an individual is a performance of American citizenship. The Favorite Poem Project reflects the values of Pinsky’s poetics, which, like Frost’s poetics, develops an account of poetic voice as expressive of American cultural identity. Pinsky also shares with Frost the values of 1) phonocentrism and 2) individualism, emphasizing emotional restraint and discursive rationality. The next section explores the development of these values in the project’s “Founding Principles” and *Democracy, Culture and the Voice of Poetry*.

4. Pinsky’s Poetics: Founding Principles of the Favorite Poem Project

The Favorite Poem Project is a significant touchstone in the development of Pinsky’s poetics. The project’s “Founding Principles” echo principles of his poetic theory advanced in *Poetry and the World* and *The Sounds of Poetry*. The Project motivated⁴⁴⁹ a

⁴⁴⁹ *The Voice of Poetry* is the published version of four Tanner Lectures delivered at the Princeton University Center for Human Values, “approach[ing] its subject partly through the Favorite Poem

third work, *Democracy, Culture and the Voice of Poetry*. Dedicated “To my colleagues and helpers at / The Favorite Poem Project / Boston University,” the slim volume meditates on the place of poetic voice in the “pluralistic, omnivorous, syncretic” culture of American democracy.⁴⁵⁰

The project’s “Founding Principles” are effectively threefold: first, and most fundamentally, that poetry is a *vocal* art. “In more than thirty years of teaching poetry, Pinsky has emphasized the bodily, vocal experience of poetry. ‘If a poem is written well, it was written with a poet’s voice and for a voice,’ [Pinsky] says.”⁴⁵¹ The project’s principle of vocality echoes Pinsky in *The Sounds of Poetry*: “The theory of this guide is that poetry is a vocal, which is to say a bodily, art. The medium of poetry is a human body: the column of air inside the chest, shaped into signifying sounds in the larynx and the mouth. In this sense, poetry is just as physical or bodily an art as dancing.”⁴⁵² In the project’s “Founding Principles,” this analogy is recast to emphasize speaking and hearing: “‘Reading a poem silently instead of saying a poem is like the difference between staring at sheet music or actually humming or playing the music on an instrument.’” The project is secondly committed to the *transformative* power of vocal poetry in individual experience:

[Pinsky] long ago found that when he asks students to read aloud and talk about a poem they love *something remarkable happens* — a *discernable change* in their faces and voices that demonstrates their connection to the poem. The Favorite Poem Project grew out of that discovery.

...
 ‘There is a *special comfort and excitement* people get from saying aloud words with a certain sound, in a certain order,’ says Pinsky. ‘By reading poems we love aloud, we can learn how much pleasure there can be in the sounds of words. It’s

Project, which has depended upon the vision and support provided by Boston University, the Carnegie Education Foundation, and The National Endowment for the Arts.” Pinsky, *Voice of Poetry*, ix.

⁴⁵⁰ Pinsky, *Democracy, Culture and the Voice of Poetry*, 15.

⁴⁵¹ “About the Favorite Poem Project: Founding Principles.”

⁴⁵² While “[o]ther conceptions of poetry might include flamboyantly expressive vocal delivery, accompanied by impressive physical presence, by the poet or performer; or the typographical, graphic appearance of the words in itself,” those conceptions “are not part of this book’s conception.” Pinsky, *The Sounds of Poetry*, 8.

as though *saying the words of a poem aloud make one feel more able, more capable than in ordinary life*. You can concentrate on the physical sounds of the words to a point where they give you an *emotional or an intellectual relief*. You *enter a different state*.’⁴⁵³ (emphases mine)

The language italicized above describes a kind of mystical exaltation of the subject. For Pinsky, vocalizing a poem is the gateway to the “remarkable” and “special,” a domain outside the bounds of “ordinary” experience. The “discernable change” to the physical body of the reader reflects an inner transformation: a sense of renewed personal agency, that he or she is “more able, more capable than in ordinary life.” The hyper-attention to the sounds of words—as in the ritual power of prayer—brings “emotional or intellectual relief” or catharsis. Saying a poem aloud is finally an act of conversion, a quasi-spiritual transformation of the subject: “You enter a different state.”

Pinsky and Frost’s speech-based poetics emphasize the power of *individual* vocalization—as opposed to a collective vocalization, e.g. group chant, prayer, song, rally—to afford the experience of civic union. Collective uses of oral verse have long knit individuals into a common framework of national community, from Confederate broadside verse during the Civil War to the poetry and song of the Civil Rights movement. Here, however, the power of the human voice lies principally in its demonstrative recognition of the individual. Yet an individual saying a poem is also a social act with political consequence. For Frost, the poet’s speaking voice functioned as a proxy for the American citizen contra Soviet collectivism. With Pinsky, too, the individual voice in poetry is inextricably yoked to individual voice in civic society. He writes that the voice is an index of the nature of both “the art of poetry” and of the American nation. Hence, “[p]oetry reflects, perhaps concentrates, the American idea of

⁴⁵³ “About the Favorite Poem Project: Founding Principles.”

individualism as it encounters the American experience of the mass—because the art of poetry by its nature operates on a level as profoundly individual as a human voice.”⁴⁵⁴

Pinsky notes that The Favorite Poem Project has been described as an effort to “promote” or “advance” poetry in the United States, to which he offers a modest corrective: “in fact the main idea was in a sense more passive, and in my opinion more profound: to reflect some of the social presence of poetry in the lives of Americans—implicitly, in relation to our cultural anxieties.”⁴⁵⁵ Because the speaking voice is at the heart of both the art of poetry and the American nation, “poetry and our ideas about it may offer ways to inspect characteristic dramas of our national life.”⁴⁵⁶ Like Pinsky’s book-length poem *An Explanation of America*, The Favorite Poem Project attempts to forge “a common American majority culture and common American identity.”⁴⁵⁷ “The poet risks speaking for us all here,” as Frost biographer Jay Parini wrote of Pinsky’s *America*.⁴⁵⁸

5. Poetry 180: A Curricula “Absolutely Unliterary”

“Poetry 180: A Poem a Day for American High Schools” was founded by Billy Collins (Poet Laureate 2001-2003) in 2001 to promote poetry in schools. “The idea behind Poetry 180 is simple: to have a poem read each day to the students of American high schools across the country.” In essence, Poetry 180 is an anthology project: a selection of 180 poems Collins selected with high school-aged readers in mind. On the project site, the full-length project description is addressed “to the high school teachers

⁴⁵⁴ Pinsky, *Democracy, Culture, and the Voice of Poetry*, 17-18.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., 49-50.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid., 16.

⁴⁵⁷ “[*An Explanation of America*] is an ideal poem for a national poet to have written, and the very stuff of which laureateships are made.” Pinsky read from this poem—“The Founders made / A Union mystic yet rational”—at a news conference shortly after taking office as Poet Laureate in October 1997. Robert Archambeau, *Laureates and Heretics: Six Careers in American Poetry: Yvor Winters, Robert Pinsky, James McMichael, Robert Hass, John Matthias, John Peck* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 66-7.

⁴⁵⁸ Qtd. in Archambeau, *Laureates and Heretics*, 81.

of America.” Participating in the project is “easy”; for a school to participate in Poetry 180, a poem should be printed out from the website and “read to the school in a public forum, such as at the end of the day’s announcements.”⁴⁵⁹ The only requirement is that the poems not be incorporated into academic curricula proper: “Unless students really want to discuss the poem, there is no need to do so. The most important thing is that the poems be read and listened to without any academic requirements.”⁴⁶⁰ Collins explains: “I wanted teachers to refrain from commenting on the poems or asking students ‘literary’ questions about them. No discussion, no explication, no quiz, no midterm, no seven-page paper—just listen to a poem every morning and off you go to your first class.”⁴⁶¹ The project of Poetry 180 thus follows 1) the phonocentric priority of Frost and Pinsky’s poetics, where “poems [should] be read and listened to”—“you do it on your ear.”⁴⁶² Moreover, Collins insists on 2) the accessibility of poetic language, where poetry is not a “‘literary’” question—but non-specialized discourse, or as Frost called it, a language “absolutely unliterary.”⁴⁶³ Finally, Collins, like Frost and Pinsky, hold that poetry has an important role in 3) civic education.

a. Phonocentrism. Like Pinsky, Collins describes the speech-act of the poem by an individual as a performance in public space, “read to the school in a public forum, such as at the end of the day’s announcements.” The poems are “intended to be listened to, and I suggest that all members of the school community be included as readers.”⁴⁶⁴

b. Accessibility. Collins is less invested than Pinsky in the speech act of the poem as an experience of transcendence or agency by the individual. In the context of Poetry

⁴⁵⁹ “Poetry 180: More About This Program,” Library of Congress, accessed March 2, 2015, <http://www.loc.gov/poetry/180/p180-more.html>.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁶¹ Collins, *Poetry 180: A Turning Back*, xvi.

⁴⁶² “In ‘North of Boston’ you are to see me performing in a language absolutely unliterary. What I would like is to get so I would never use a word or combination of words that I hadn’t heard used in running speech...You do it on your ear.” Frost to John T. Bartlett, 8 December 1913, *SL* 102. See more on Frost’s poetics in Chapter 2.

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁴ “Poetry 180: A Poem A Day for American High Schools.”

180, orality is more primarily a means to clarity and popular accessibility. Under the “Mount Rushmore of modernism,” that is, poets including Pound, Eliot, Stevens, and Crane, “difficulty became a criterion for appraising poetic value.” Collins links modernist difficulty to the use of the visual field of the page: these poets exploited meaning from “the typographical, graphic appearance of the words in itself, apart from the indication of sound.”⁴⁶⁵ Reading a poem aloud is a way to avoid ambiguity and “difficulty”: “Clarity is a real risk in poetry. To be clear means opening yourself up to judgment. The willfully obscure poem is a hiding place where the poet can elude the reader and thus make appraisal impossible, irrelevant—a bourgeois intrusion upon the poem. Which is why much of the commentary on obscure poetry produces the same kind of headache as the poems themselves.”⁴⁶⁶ Where difficulty is a bourgeois intrusion upon the poem, clarity implies a democratic accessibility, and moreover the liberal value of “opening yourself up to judgment” in a pluralistic society.

Collins wants to avoid “knotty poems” that invite “the hunt for Meaning” but “kill the poetry spirit.”⁴⁶⁷ Adapting the web-based anthology to the domain of the printed page, he takes time in the introduction of the Random House anthology to make the clarity point clear: “The idea behind the printed collection, which is a version of the Library of Congress ‘180’ website, was to assemble a generous selection of short, clear, contemporary poems which any listener can basically ‘get’ on first hearing—poems whose injection of pleasure is immediate.”⁴⁶⁸

c. *Civic Education*. While Poetry 180 is premised on the educational system, in that the very structure of the anthology is dictated by the school year calendar, its goal is that poetry “will become a part of the daily life of students” *separately* from “literary”

⁴⁶⁵ Collins, *Poetry 180: A Turning Back to Poetry*, xviii.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid., xix.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., xvi.

subjects or any other “subject that is part of the school curriculum.”⁴⁶⁹ As such, Collins likens the website anthology to the fun of a jukebox: “The website itself has movable parts; it is a kind of poetry jukebox where the songs can be changed and updated to keep the offerings fresh”⁴⁷⁰; and the print edition of the catalogue to a deck of cards: “I know every one is an ace, or at least a face card, because I personally rigged the deck.”

Poetry does not so much educate as edify. Poetry is both pleasure and “injection,” or an otherwise medicinal intervention: “...with *Poetry 180*, there is something to be said for starting at the beginning and reading just a poem or two each day. Like pills, for the head and the heart.”⁴⁷¹ In other words, a little bit of sugar (injection of pleasure) makes the medicine (cultural education) go down. While poetry need not be considered a literary question or academic subject, it does have an edifying or salubrious effect; hence it can be considered an educational project—not an academic subject, but a civics lesson.

Poetry 180 is not about critically analyzing a poem or learning its history, but about moving poetry off of the curricula and into the daily habits of students as citizens-in-training. von Hallberg says civil verse poets “teach us manners.” As Collins puts it, the anthology models “taste”: “Apart from any educational value the ‘180’ collections may have, they can be viewed more simply as expressions of my taste in poetry”; the anthology provides the right “menu.”⁴⁷²

What civic values will “reading just a poem or two each day” help to cultivate? Collins suggests liberalism and tolerance: “I like poems that have a speculative feel to them rather than poems that seem to have their minds already made up.” He also suggests emotional restraint or ease, prizing poems that feel “light-handed” and begin as “naturally as a conversation.”⁴⁷³ These poems do not model a civic society in which the

⁴⁶⁹ “Poetry 180: More About This Program.”

⁴⁷⁰ Collins, *Poetry 180: A Turning Back to Poetry*, xxii.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., xxiii.

⁴⁷² Collins, *180 More: Extraordinary Poems for Every Day*, xix; xviii.

⁴⁷³ Ibid., xx.

speaker-citizen is disruptive, uncomfortable or makes demands. Moreover, it excludes “unnatural” speech acts, which might mean, given the content of the anthology, language other than standard American English.

6. American Life in Poetry: Ted Kooser (2004-2006)’s Everyman Column

Ted Kooser was appointed the thirteenth Poet Laureate in 2004. Kooser, a retired insurance executive from the Great Plains, launched the “American Life in Poetry: A Project for Newspapers” project in April 2005 to coincide with National Poetry Month. A partnership between the Library and The Poetry Foundation, American Life in Poetry provided newspapers and online publications with a free weekly column featuring contemporary American poems. Kooser’s project was not the first collaboration of the Library of Congress and The Poetry Foundation, but it was one of the first in name: the Modern Poetry Association had just been overhauled in the creation of The Poetry Foundation following Lilly’s donation. Post-Lilly *Poetry*’s recalibrated mission statement allied with Kooser’s vision for the project: “The sole mission of this project is to promote poetry: American Life in Poetry seeks to create a vigorous presence for poetry in our culture.”⁴⁷⁴

When Kooser was appointed in August 2004, Librarian of Congress Billington highlighted the representational charge to the office, whereby the national poet represents a component cultural identity within a pluralistic society. In Kooser’s case, this identity was his regional heritage: “the first Poet Laureate chosen from the Great Plains.” Kooser is “a major poetic voice for rural and small-town America...His verse reaches beyond his native region to touch on universal themes in accessible ways.”⁴⁷⁵ Billington’s statement also exploits the connection between rural regional identity and

⁴⁷⁴ “American Life in Poetry.”

⁴⁷⁵ Qtd. in “The Poetry Foundation and the Library of Congress Cosponsor Poet Laureate’s Newspaper Project,” Library of Congress Press Release 05-052, March 24, 2005.

national values observed in Robert Frost's literary persona and Paul Engle's fundraising campaign for the Iowa Writers Workshop and International Workshop. In the cases of Frost, Engle and Kooser, a rural, pastoral, or small-town geographical region symbolizes "American" and moreover "universal" themes or values.

Kooser's project, too, capitalized on this discursive tradition. The homepage of the website features a solitary image of Kooser, who stands, grimly smiling, in front of a wooden shed flanked by rusted tools (saws, chains, etc.).⁴⁷⁶ The American poet conveys rugged individualism through a regionalist idiom, where the toolshed stands in for the writing workshop. Here, poetic expression is cast as productive labor accomplished through individual acts of will. This do-it-yourself ethos is reflected also in Kooser's instructional guide to writing poetry, *The Poetry Home Repair Manual: Practical Advice for Beginning Poets*, which opens "You'll never be able to make a living writing poems."⁴⁷⁷ Notably, this instructional guide stresses the use of judicious "detail" (see Chapter 3).

While Pinsky's *Democracy, Culture, and the Voice of Poetry* represented the urbane style of "the college-educated, *northern*, metropolitan class of the intelligentsia [that] asserts its authority to explain the world," Kooser's *The Poetry Home Repair Manual* represents the "honest, ordinary" rhetoric Frost exploited to cultivate his image as a rural-national poet. Kooser's project prioritizes "everyday speech" to the exclusion of phonocentrism. As The Poetry Foundation holds that "'poetry' or 'poems' refer to verses intended to be understood as poems, not as part of something else such as rap, song lyrics, Bible verses, or greeting card messages," American Life in Poetry requires the printed page, in a way the Favorite Poem Project and Poetry 180 do not, to solidify the generic purity of its content. "Saying aloud" a poem in the idiom of the northern

⁴⁷⁶ "American Life in Poetry."

⁴⁷⁷ Ted Kooser, *The Poetry Home Repair Manual: Practical Advice for Beginning Poets* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 1.

managerial elite stages the accessibility and universality of the values of the social class it represents. For Kooser, the visual domain of newspaper verse circumvents the misrecognition of “poetry as ordinary speech” as simply “ordinary speech.”

While all three projects promote the “present vitality” of poetry as an art form in American culture, all also refer to a national past as the source of this vitality. With Barr, Kooser and Collins, this takes the form of a revivalist narrative of bringing poetry “back into the mainstream.” Given the increased readership and increased numbers of self-identified poets in the 20th- and 21st-century America, this is a notable—indeed, surprising—discursive coherence. Most plainly, The Project for Newspapers provides a nostalgic mission, the attempt to revive a form that “was long a popular staple in the daily press” against changing reading habits of “recent years.”⁴⁷⁸ Poetry 180 also casts poetry more abstractly as a retrospective engagement. The 180-poem list offers a poem for every day of the approximately 180-day school year, but “there is another reason [Collins] chose that name. A 180-degree turn implies a turning back—in this case, to poetry.”⁴⁷⁹ While Collins’ endeavors include contemporary poems—“textbooks and anthologies typically lag behind the times”—Collins suggests the difficulty he experienced selecting over 100 poems for the first anthology likely reflected “the limited store of smart, clear, contemporary poems.”⁴⁸⁰ The Favorite Poem Project videos meanwhile turn back to the authority of the historical canon within a recording archive previously purposed for contemporary poets.

Moreover, all three draw from elements of Frost’s poetics, prioritizing the expressive voice of the poetic speaker—this is phonocentrism for Pinsky, accessibility for Collins, and populism for Kooser. All share a civic charge: poetry as category of cultural production is uniquely tasked to perform national identity. The poem as object—

⁴⁷⁸ “The Poetry Foundation and the Library of Congress Cosponsor Poet Laureate’s Newspaper Project.”

⁴⁷⁹ “Poetry 180: More About This Program.”

⁴⁸⁰ Collins, *Poetry 180: A Turning Back*, xxiii.

stowed away in the archive or bounded as a newspaper column—acts as a repository for American values; saying or speaking the poem expresses them. While for these projects, the voice of the citizen-poet is rooted in a national past, the civic poetics I briefly describe at the end of this chapter imagine alternative models of voice to reflect the present and speculate about the future.

7. Inaugural Poetry from Frost to Blanco (1961-2013)

Hear: squeaky playground swings, trains whistling,
or whispers across café tables, Hear: the doors we open
for each other all day, saying: hello, shalom,
buon giorno, howdy, namaste, or buenos días
in the language my mother taught me—in every language
spoken into one wind carrying our lives
without prejudice, as these words break from my lips.
—Richard Blanco, “One Today”⁴⁸¹

The most recent U.S. inaugural poem, delivered by Cuban American Richard Blanco, accompanied the second inauguration of Barack Obama in 2013. Blanco was the fourth poet to read at a presidential inauguration since Frost spontaneously recited “The Gift Outright” from memory at Kennedy’s inauguration in 1961. As Chapter 2 argued, the performance staged the voice of the poet as the expressive agency of the individual citizen. This model of voice served instrumentally in the project of midcentury American nationalism, and as inherited by Blanco, in the longer project of neoliberal identity formation.

Blanco’s inaugural poem restaged the expressive agency of the individual citizen-subject of the 1961 inauguration. Like Frost, Blanco provided the poetic speaker as an individual convinced of his continuity with history and agency with respect to a national future. Importantly, unlike Frost, Blanco also claimed to speak on behalf of marginalized

⁴⁸¹ See Appendix III.

subjects. His poem “One Today” celebrated “diverse individual histories and cultural backgrounds,” and “reconfirmed the collective identity” of the American nation.⁴⁸² In “One Today,” markers of multicultural identity authenticate, rather than disrupt, the speaking subject of the voice-based workshop poem, and in the context of a presidential inauguration, the expressive agency of the model citizen. Blanco is a telling point of intersection, modeling voice as the national poet (Chapter 2) and voice as the workshop poet (Chapter 3). His reading demonstrates how the workshop model of voice allies with the interests of the national poetry office—an exemplary instance of “civil verse.”

The Cold War legacy of both models of voice demands a critical evaluation of the role Blanco was positioned to play as a voice for the nation in January 2013. Blanco was born in Spain to Cuban parents who fled the Castro regime. The choice of Blanco was celebrated by many precisely because of exceptional features of his identity, as “the youngest,” “the first Latino,” “the first immigrant” and “the first openly gay man” to serve as an inaugural poet.⁴⁸³ Blanco is fond of saying that he was “made in Cuba, assembled in Spain and imported to the USA.”⁴⁸⁴ If in Blanco’s self-objectification as a commodity (“made, assembled, imported”) we hear a trace of satire about the categories of identity he might feel compelled to represent, this satire is absent from his inaugural poem.

⁴⁸² The Poetry Office at the Library of Congress praised the poem using terms of plural inclusivity: “‘One Today’ was and is a celebration of the shared American experience, an experience made possible not despite but because of our diverse individual histories and cultural backgrounds.” Peter Armenti, “Richard Blanco’s Inaugural Poem: ‘One Today,’” *From the Catbird Seat: Poetry & Literature at the Library of Congress*, January 28, 2013. Mainstream media coverage received Blanco warmly; I am not aware of sustained critical appraisals of Blanco’s inaugural poem to date.

⁴⁸³ “At 44, Blanco is the youngest poet, as well as the first Latino and the first openly gay poet to take part in an inaugural ceremony.” “Richard Blanco Will Be First Latino Inaugural Poet,” *National Public Radio*, January 9, 2013; “...the youngest, first Latino, immigrant, and openly gay writer to hold the honor.” “Poets & Poems: Richard Blanco,” The Poetry Foundation, accessed May 4, 2015, <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/richard-blanco>.

⁴⁸⁴ “Richard Blanco: Bio,” Richard Blanco, 2015, accessed May 4, 2015, <http://richard-blanco.com/bio/>.

“One Today” is grounded in the first-person “I.” The singular pronoun slips in and out of the plural “one” and “all,” staging the individual speaker as universal. The poem opens with a description of land as a blank canvas: “One sun rose on us today, kindled over our shores, / peeking over the Smokies, greeting the faces / of the Great Lakes, spreading a simple truth / across the Great Plains, then charging across the Rockies...” (1:1-4). While Frost’s land is always already American through a temporal paradox—“the land was ours before we were the land’s” in “The Gift Outright”—Blanco’s American geography has no past. All nine stanzas (69 lines) unfold in the eternal present tense of an ahistorical “one today.”

“One Today” departs from the model of “The Gift Outright,” however, by featuring habits of a dominant model of the workshop poem, in which the multicultural identity of the speaker represents the values of a plural society. Chapter 3 described how cultural identity is often represented through 1) sensory detail and/or, as in the case of “One Today,” 2) limited departures from standard American English via proper names or signifiers, and how markers of cultural identity authenticate the speaking voice of the poem. Here, Blanco’s use of multilingualism in the sixth stanza provides an exemplary case. The catalogue of greetings, “hello, shalom, buon giorno, howdy, namaste or buenos días” (6: 3-4), ostensibly represents the diverse language traditions in American society.

The egalitarian possibility of “every language,” however, is refused by “one” language of neoliberal multiculturalism. The anglophone “hello” functions as the ur-greeting, the generative template for subsequent translations—rendering non-anglophone greetings comprehensible to monolingual American English speakers. All non-anglophone variants that follow “hello,” the governing signifier, moreover, are substitutable as synonyms: rather than stand for a specific language tradition, each greeting stands in for difference. That is, nothing else in the poem depends on the semantic distinction between “shalom” and “buon giorno”; “buon giorno” could have

been replaced with “bonjour.” The catalogue stages the notion of linguistic diversity without actually achieving differential linguistic signification. The inclusion of “howdy”—a regional variant of the standard American English hello—makes this point yet more starkly. If Frost’s blank verse models democracy’s “checks and balances,” Blanco’s catalogue models a neoliberal logic of substitution—reducing difference to the adjectival color of standard American English.

“One Today” does not pursue other ways in which poetry’s formal and discursive resources could have been activated. The use of multilingualism, for example, functions differently in a *civic* poetic project. A poetics that does not reduce multiple language traditions to a singular signifying practice, i.e. through tokenizing lexical appropriation or otherwise, might revise the poem to include an entire stanza in Spanish that is not a translation of a preceding stanza in English. At the very least, it would perhaps include a single word that is not a synonym or subsidiary to its anglophone precedent. This would, of course, risk unintelligibility to a monolingual anglophone audience.

The risk of representing marginality is to appropriate marginal experience into legible claims of dominant state interest. Performing uncertain intelligibility, then, seems an ethical response to the representational project of the inaugural poem. Unintelligibility represents non- or failed representation; words that are not understood through standard American English would index the exclusions and innate opacities of a poem that speaks for “all Americans.” “One Today” asserts that expressive agency, figured as “every language / spoken,” is distributed “without prejudice” (6: 5-7). By performing an uncertain or conditionally intelligible speaking voice, the poem would have instead questioned the presumed distributive equality of expressive agency.⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁸⁵ Other models of uncertain intelligibility on the national stage include Frost’s inaugural poem: not “The Gift Outright,” but “Dedication.” Frost’s inability to read his own script and failure to speak clearly in the context of state power seems finally a more instructive, or accurately representational gesture, than the expressive fluency of Blanco’s “One Today.” Also see the

Precisely by “giving a voice” to disenfranchised constituencies, Blanco’s poem risks attributing agency where it may not exist—obscuring the ongoing deprivations of those subjects it does not identify; and representing, for those subjects it does identify, a false fulfillment of their political resources by the state.

II. Civic Verse: Anti-Laureates

This chapter section reviews critiques of national poetry projects, and considers limitations of these critiques. It also describes alternatives to the civil verse promoted by national poetry projects, i.e. “civic verse”—here, verse that assumes a civic charge by explicitly engaging in a language of citizenship and nation, but which uses strategies other than phonocentric voice. Claudia Rankine’s *Citizen: An American Lyric* (2014) provides an interesting case, as it offers a stable speaking voice—but the speaking voice is “you.”

By making a generic claim with its title, Lyn Hejinian’s *My Life*, discussed in Chapter 3, called attention to the construction of subjectivity in the autobiographical form. Similarly, *Citizen: An American Lyric* probes the generic category of the lyric—the text is a series of second-person narrative vignettes or prose poems. Moreover, the title implicates “lyric” in the categories of “citizen” and “American”—suggesting that the disruption of one of the categories will mean the disruption of the others, too. In this way, Rankine makes a reader-directive link between aesthetic and social form. (In the case of *My Life*, the disruption of the autobiographical subject is “by extension/analogue”⁴⁸⁶ also an attempt to destabilize the subject in society.) The title is

discussion of Bishop’s depiction of failed speech acts and state song in “View of the Capitol from the Library of Congress” and her own resistance to reading for the national archive in Chapter 1.
⁴⁸⁶ In “The Rejection of Closure,” the text that rejects the authority of the writer over the reader “thus, by analogy, [rejects] he authority implicit in other (social, economic, cultural) hierarchies.” Lyn Hejinian, *The Language of Inquiry* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 134.

reader-directive in other ways, too. While *My Life* purports to tell the reader about the life of Lyn Hejinian, and then disrupts the reader's expectations of speaking voice and narrative chronology, Rankine's title dispenses with a possessive or otherwise pronoun—"citizen" hails anyone who belongs or relates to this category. And indeed, the speaking voice is the narrative second person "you." *Citizen* is a claim to speak for "you."

Citizen's second person confrontationally stages the voice of Blanco's "One Today" or other civil verse poems that also claim to speak for citizens who are not the authorial speaker. But while Blanco uses this representative capacity to perform "your" agency and sense of national belonging, Rankine adopts the second-person address "you" form to impel readers into potentially alienating modes of identification. Indeed, "[y]ou think maybe this is an experiment and you are being tested":

You are in the dark, in the car, watching the black-tarred street being swallowed by speed; he tells you his dean is making him hire a person of color when there are so many great writers out there.

You think maybe this is an experiment and you are being tested or retroactively insulted or you have done something that communicates this is an okay conversation to be having.

Why do you feel okay saying this to me? You wish the light would turn red or a police siren would go off so you could slam on the brakes, slam into the car ahead of you, be propelled forward so quickly both your faces would suddenly be exposed to the wind.⁴⁸⁷

The passage describes multicultural representation as an imperative. Here, the imperative occurs in the form of a requisite diversity hire at a university. "You," the speaking subject, are implicated in this imperative—"is this a test?"—but the ability to respond, i.e. make the hire, belongs not to you but to your interlocutor. The imperative is also uncomfortable—the interlocutor should not necessarily "feel okay saying this to me." Multicultural representation does not resolve as "one," because not everyone is the same:

⁴⁸⁷ Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2014), 1.

some writers are better than others, and there is an expressed but unclear relationship between perceived professional merit and ethnic identity. This is not a link that the conversation, or poem, will resolve.

Although “you” would rather not be implicated in the conversation, the car—a postwar symbol of economic productivity and individual mobility—will not stop moving. As the driver, you presumably have the power to stop the car, but in fact remain captive unless the systems governing the movement of the car, and the exchange within it, change. The kind of change “you” desire is not, moreover, positive, but staged in a language of pause, negation and reversal—the “light would turn red or a police siren would go off and you could slam on the brakes.” “You” do not act on it but stage it as a passive and unarticulated desire: “As usual you drive straight through the moment with the expected backing off of what was previously said” (4:1).

Much as the second person of the poem is compelled to engage in an uncomfortable conversation, the “you” of the poem impels the engagement of the reader. While Hejinian “liberate[s] hierarchies between author and reader,” Rankine assumes agency as the writer to tell “you” how to feel. Both disrupt an easy identification of speaker with author: various gendered and occupational identifications inhabit the subject of *My Life*; Rankine’s second-person subject asks the reader to interrogate their assumption that the lyric “I” expresses authorial gender, ethnicity or experience. Indeed, “you” are the one who is uncomfortable. It may even be that “you are being tested or retroactively insulted.”

The excerpt of *Citizen* discussed above is accessible on The Poetry Foundation’s website, along with an audio recording of the author reading the passage.⁴⁸⁸ While The Poetry Foundation is cooperative in the production of civil verse through national poetry

⁴⁸⁸ Rankine, ““You are in the dark, in the car. . .’ from *Citizen*,” The Poetry Foundation, 2014.

projects, the organization also participates in the circulation of verse that falls outside of this category: the poetic traditions, institutions and audiences it attempts to represent are broad and often internally contradictory. The same is true of the individual poets, if less so the initiatives, who have historically received NEA support. The Poetry Foundation holds the edifying cultural value of verse in common with national poetry projects, whose values are otherwise narrower, as this chapter has argued, prizing phonocentrism, individuality, and accessibility.

Most critiques of national poetry projects, the office of the Poet Laureate, and National Poetry Month receive criticism for diluting Poundian “caviar”: “[T]he creation of the poet laureateship of the United States is a comical insult to a serious enterprise, and one which ought properly to be mocked every chance one gets,” Joseph Epstein wrote in *Poetry* magazine in September 2004. “Poetry is caviar—an acquired taste, and not for most people, not even for some highly intelligent people—and I happen to believe it demeans it to sell it as if it were hot dogs. Many of the poets laureate have, I fear, seen the job as calling for slapping on the mustard while moving the dogs along. . . [while] the laureates’ ‘projects’ usually have had to do with efforts to widen the readership of poetry, the business of the poet is to write as well as possible and leave the job of promoting poetry in a manner sure to vulgarize, if not utterly trivialize, it alone.”⁴⁸⁹

The debate, however, is not properly between caviar and hot dogs. It is closer to what Charles Bernstein calls “safe” and “difficult”:

National Poetry Month is about making poetry safe for readers by promoting examples of the art form at its most bland and its most morally “positive.” The message is: Poetry is good for you. But, unfortunately, promoting poetry as if it were an “easy listening” station just reinforces the idea that poetry is culturally irrelevant and has done a disservice not only to poetry deemed too controversial or difficult to promote but also to the poetry it puts forward in this way. “Accessibility” has become a kind of Moral Imperative based on the

⁴⁸⁹ Joseph Epstein, “Thank You, No,” *Poetry* 184 (September 2004), 373-4.

condescending notion that readers are intellectually challenged, and mustn't be presented with anything but Safe Poetry.⁴⁹⁰

The language of “moral imperative” and edification (“poetry is good for you”) that Bernstein named in 1999, three years after the creation of National Poetry Month, persists in NPM programming and national poetry projects of Poets Laureate today. The assertion that the poems themselves are “examples of the art form at its most bland,” however, like Epstein’s division between “caviar” and “hot dogs,” takes the limitations of “poems” as the objects of critique—but it would perhaps more accurately be the discursive limitations of the projects through which these poems circulate. National Poetry Month does not so much promote “Safe Poems” as define poetry as “safe,” or as a mode of cultural production that expresses the broad values of a complex of private and public players. Indeed, in the introduction to the *180 More* anthology, Collins reviews highlights of the selections to follow after a lengthy preamble on “the scarlet A-word,” accessibility, and describes the ongoing success of the Poetry 180 project.⁴⁹¹ He excerpted only one poem at length, explaining he was “seduced by” its “mischief.” It was Bernstein’s “Warrant.”⁴⁹²

The anthology is an example of how national poetry projects ably yoke disparate aesthetic traditions into a common cultural priority. As such, this dissertation has not attempted to describe the genealogies of different aesthetic traditions, or present a history of individual poets and schools within the field of postwar verse. Instead, it has examined the postwar origins, Cold War project and contemporary appearance of state verse culture, which has been increasingly successful at absorbing poetic production into an institutional and discursive system. This is not to say all poetic production it unites is “pro-state” or nationalist. Precisely the success of state verse culture is its ability to link

⁴⁹⁰ Charles Bernstein, “Against National Poetry Month As Such” in *My Way: Speeches and Poems* (The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 28.

⁴⁹¹ Collins, *180 More*, xvii.

⁴⁹² *Ibid.*, xx-xxi.

diverse public and private interests through patron endowments and legislation. Consider the lineages of voice-based workshop poetry and Language poetics discussed in Chapter 3. While the former shares the value of phonocentrism prized by most national poetry projects, such values are already emphasized in the structure of the projects themselves. For example, the Favorite Poem Project instructs participants to “say aloud” a favorite poem. Even if a participant selected a poem that exploited typography and spatial arrangement to produce meaning, such textual and material features would be deemphasized or obscured to meet the phonocentric priority of an oral performance. In this sense, the poems are secondary to the language of the project in which they participate.

The language of national poetry projects, then, is crucially important. This chapter, and dissertation, has suggested how poetic voice is particularly important in shaping notions of subjectivity and agency in relation to state power. It has also shown that state verse culture increasingly understands poetry as a civic tool—particularly in K-12 schools. It is important to critically evaluate the dominant model of voice in “official verse culture,” and moreover important to examine poems—representative of official verse culture or otherwise—circulated through national poetry projects. It is equally or more important, however, to examine the model of voice inherent in the pedagogical structure and discourse of the projects, which mediate their reception. How does an expressive, voice-based poem written in standard American English shape conceptions of self, citizenship, and national belonging in K-12 classrooms? How might the inclusion of nonstandard and innovative uses of American English in poetry- and verse-related educational initiatives revise these conceptions? The voice of state verse culture has much greater stakes than the voice of official verse culture.

APPENDIX I | OCCUPANTS OF THE U.S. NATIONAL POETRY OFFICE

1. Poet Laureate Consultants in Poetry to the Library of Congress (1986-2015)

Charles Wright (2014-present)
 Natasha Trethewey (2012-2014)
 Philip Levine (2011-2012)
 W.S. Merwin (2010-2011)
 Kay Ryan (2008-2010)
 Charles Simic (2007-2008)
 Donald Hall (2006-2007)
 Ted Kooser (2004-2006)
 Louise Glück (2003-2004)
 Billy Collins (2001-2003)
 Stanley Kunitz (2000-2001)
 Special Bicentennial Consultants (1999-2000)
 Rita Dove
 Louise Glück
 W.S. Merwin
 Robert Pinsky (1997-2000)
 Robert Hass (1995-1997)
 Rita Dove (1993-1995)
 Mona Van Duyn (1992-1993)
 Joseph Brodsky (1991-1992)
 Mark Strand (1990-1991)
 Howard Nemerov (1988-1990)
 Richard Wilbur (1987-1988)
 Robert Penn Warren (1986-1987)

2. Consultants in Poetry to the Library of Congress (1937-1985)

Gwendolyn Brooks (1985-1986)
 Reed Whittemore (Interim Consultant in Poetry, 1984-1985)
 Robert Fitzgerald (1984-1985)
 Anthony Hecht (1982-1984)
 Maxine Kumin (1980-1982)
 William Meredith (1978-1980)
 Robert Hayden (1976-1978)
 Stanley Kunitz (1974-1976)
 Daniel Hoffman (1973-1974)
 Josephine Jacobsen (1971-1973)
 William Stafford (1970-1971)
 William Jay Smith (1968-1970)
 James Dickey (1966-1968)
 Stephen Spender (1965-1966)
 Reed Whittemore (1964-1965)
 Howard Nemerov (1963-1964)
 Louis Untermeyer (1961-1963)
 Richard Eberhart (1959-1961)
 Robert Frost (1958-1959)

Randall Jarrell (1956-1958)
William Carlos Williams (appointed in 1952 but did not serve)
Conrad Aiken (1950-1952)
Elizabeth Bishop (1949-1950)
Leonie Adams (1948-1949)
Robert Lowell (1947-1948)
Karl Shapiro (1946-1947)
Louise Bogan (1945-1946)
Robert Penn Warren (1944-1945)
Allen Tate (1943-1944)
Joseph Auslander (1937-1941)

APPENDIX II | THE ASSOCIATION OF WRITERS & WRITING PROGRAMS (AWP)
MEMBER INSTITUTIONS: CREATIVE WRITING PROGRAMS, 2013

1. AWP National Member Institutions: Creative Writing Programs, 2013

Adams State College
Adelphi University
Adirondack Community College
Albertus Magnus College
Albion College
Alice James Books
Allegheny College
American International College
American University
Anoka-Ramsey Community College
Antioch University at Los Angeles
Antioch University Midwest
Arapahoe Community College
Arcadia University
Arizona State University
Arkansas Tech University
Armstrong Atlantic State University
Ashland University
Auburn University
Augsburg College
Augustana College
Austin Community College
Austin Peay State University
Azusa Pacific University
Baldwin-Wallace College
Ball State University
Baylor University
Belhaven University
Beloit College
Bemidji State University
Benedictine University at Springfield
Bennington College
Berry College
Binghamton University
Bloomfield College
Bloomsburg University
Boise State University
Borough of Manhattan Community College
Boston College
Bowie State University
Bowling Green State University
Bradley University
Brewton-Parker College
Bridgewater State University
Brigham Young University
Brookdale Community College

Brown University
Bucknell University
Buffalo State College
Butler University
California College of the Arts
California Institute of Integral Studies
California Institute of the Arts (Cal Arts)
California Polytechnic State University
California State Long Beach
California State University at Chico
California State University at Fresno
California State University at Los Angeles
California State University at Northridge
California State University, Channel Islands
Calumet College of St. Joseph
Cameron University
Canisius College
Cardinal Stritch University
Carlow University
Carnegie Mellon University
Case Western Reserve University
Cedar Crest College
Centenary College
Central Connecticut State University
Central Michigan University
Chapman University
Chatham University
Chicago State University
Christopher Newport University
City College of New York
Claremont Graduate University
Clayton State University
Cleveland State University
Coe College
College of Charleston
College of Southern Nevada
College of Wooster
Colorado College
Colorado Mesa University
Colorado State University
Columbia College of Chicago
Columbia University School of the Arts
Columbus State University
Community College of Philadelphia
Concordia College
Connecticut College
Converse College
Corcoran College of Art & Design
Cornell College
Cornell University
Creighton University

Davidson College
Delaware Technical
Community College
Delta College
Denison University
DePaul University
DePauw University
Dickinson College
Drew University
Drexel University
Duquesne University
East Carolina University
Eastern Connecticut State University
Eastern Illinois University
Eastern Kentucky University
Eastern Michigan University
Eastern Nazarene College
Eastern Oregon University
Eastern Washington University
Edinboro University
Elmira College
Elms College
Elon University
Emerson College
Emory University
Emporia State University
Everett Community College
Fairfield University
Fairleigh Dickinson University
Fairmont State University
Finger Lakes Community College
Florida Atlantic University
Florida International University
Florida State University
Fordham University
Franklin & Marshall College
Frostburg State University
George Mason University
George Washington University
Georgetown University
Georgia College & State University
Georgia Perimeter College
Georgia Southern University
Georgia State University
Gettysburg College
Glendale Community College
Glimmer Train Press
Goddard College
Gonzaga University
Goucher College
Grand Valley State University

Hamilton College
Hamline University
Hampden-Sydney College
Hardin-Simmons University
Harvard University, Barker Center
Haskell Indian Nations University
Hendrix College
High Point Regional High School
Hiram College
Hobart and William Smith Colleges
Hofstra University
Hollins University
Hope College
Houston Community College, Northwest
Hunter College
Idyllwild Arts Academy
Illinois State University
Illinois Wesleyan University
Indiana University
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Indiana University-Purdue
University (IUPUI)
Institute of American Indian Arts
Institutional Members, 2012-2013
Iowa State University
Ithaca College
Johns Hopkins University
Joliet Junior College
Kansas City Art Institute
Kansas State University
Kennesaw State University
Kent State
Kenyon College
Kenyon Review
Klamath Community College
Knox College
Kutztown University
Lafayette College
Lake Superior State University
Lakeland College Writing
Lebanon College
Lebanon Valley College
Lesley University
Lewis University
Lincoln Park Performing Arts
Charter School
Lindenwood University
Linfield College
Literature for all of Us
Lock Haven University of Pennsylvania
Long Beach City College

Long Island University
Longwood University
Louisiana State University
Loyola Marymount University
Loyola University Maryland
Loyola University New Orleans
Lusher Charter School
Lycoming College
Lynchburg College
Lyon College
Madison Area Technical College
Malone University
Marian University in Wisconsin
Marian University of Indianapolis
Marquette University
Marshall University
Marylhurst University
Marymount University
Massachusetts Institute of
Technology (MIT)
McDaniel College
McNeese State University
Medaille College
Medgar Evers College
Mercer University
Metropolitan Community College
Miami University of Ohio
Michigan State University
Middle Georgia State College
Mills College
Minnesota State University at Mankato
Minnesota State University at Moorhead
Mississippi State University
Mississippi University for Women
Missouri State University
Missouri Western State University
Monmouth University
Monroe Community College
Montana State University, Billings
Monterey Peninsula College
Montgomery College,
Potomac Review
Morehead State University
Mount Mary College
Muhlenberg College
Murray State University
Naropa University
Nassau Community College
National University
Neumann University
New England College

New Hampshire Institute of Art
New Mexico Highlands University
New Mexico School for the Arts
New Mexico State University
New Orleans Center for Creative Arts
New York University, Lillian Vernon House
New York University, Low-Residency Program in Paris
New York University, SCE,
McGhee Division
Normandale Community College
North Carolina State
University at Raleigh
North Greenville University
North Hennepin Community College
Northeast Ohio Consortium (NEOMFA)
Northern Arizona University
Northern Kentucky University
Northern Michigan University
Northwest Institute of Literary Arts
Northwestern University
Oakland University
Oberlin College
Ohio Northern University
Ohio State University
Ohio University
Oklahoma City University
Oklahoma State University
Old Dominion University
Oregon State University
Oregon State University, Cascades
Otis College of Art and Design
Otterbein University
Pace University
Pacific Lutheran University
Pacific University
Paradise Valley Community College
Penn State Abington
Penn State Altoona
Penn State Erie, The Behrend College
Pennsylvania State University
Pepperdine University
Phoenix College
Pine Manor College
Pitt Community College
Pittsburg State University
Point Loma Nazarene University
Polyphony H.S. Writing & Literary Magazine
Pomona College
Portland State University
Pulaski Technical College
Purdue University

Queens College
Queens University of Charlotte
Randolph College
Rhode Island College
Rhode Island School of Design
Rhodes College
Rice University
River Valley Community College
Roanoke College
Robeson Community College
Roger Williams University
Rogers State University
Roosevelt University
Rosemont College
Rowan University
Rutgers University Camden
Rutgers University Newark
Saint Joseph's University
Saint Joseph's College
Saint Lawrence University
Saint Leo University
Saint Mary's College of California
Saint Olaf College
Salem College
Salem State University
Salisbury State University
Sam Houston State University
San Diego State University
San Francisco State University
San Jose State University
San Juan College
Santa Clara University
Santa Fe University of Art and Design
Sarah Lawrence College SCAD
School of the Art Institute of Chicago
School of Visual Arts
Seattle Pacific University
Seton Hill University
Sierra Nevada College
Simmons College
Skidmore College
Slippery Rock University
Smith College
Southeast Missouri State University
Southern Connecticut State University
Southern Illinois University
Southern Illinois University of Edwardsville
Southern Methodist University
Southern New Hampshire University
Southern Oregon University
Southern Polytechnic State University

Southern Utah University
Southwest Minnesota State University
Spalding University
St. Ambrose University
St. Catherine University
Stanford University
State University of New York at Albany
State University of New York at Buffalo
State University of New York at Oswego
Stephen F. Austin State University
Stephens College
Sterling College
Stetson University
Stonecoast MFA, Univ. of Southern Maine
Stony Brook Southampton
Suffolk County Community College
Suffolk University
Sul Ross State University
SUNY Canton
SUNY Geneseo
SUNY Potsdam
SUNY Purchase
SUNY Rockland Community College
Susquehanna University
Sweet Briar College
Syracuse University
Taylor University
Temple University
Terra Community College
Texas A&M International University
Texas A&M University
Texas Christian University
Texas State University
Texas Tech University
The College of Saint Rose
The New School
The Northwest School
The University of Mississippi
The University of the Arts
Towson University
Truman State University
Tulane University
Tusculum College
University of Alabama at Birmingham
University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa
University of Alaska at Anchorage
University of Alaska at Fairbanks
University of Arizona
University of Arkansas at Fayetteville
University of Arkansas at Little Rock
University of Arkansas at Monticello

University of Baltimore
University of California at Davis
University of California at Riverside
University of California Riverside, Palm Desert
University of California, Irvine
University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)
University of California, San Diego
University of Central Arkansas
University of Central Florida
University of Central Missouri
University of Central Oklahoma
University of Chicago
University of Cincinnati
University of Cincinnati, Clermont College
University of Colorado, Boulder
University of Colorado, Denver
University of Connecticut
University of Denver
University of Evansville
University of Florida
University of Georgia
University of Hartford
University of Hawaii at Manoa
University of Houston
University of Houston--Downtown
University of Idaho
University of Illinois at Chicago
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
University of Indianapolis
University of Iowa Nonfiction
University of Iowa Writers' Workshop
University of Kansas
University of Kentucky
University of La Verne
University of Louisiana at Lafayette
University of Louisville
University of Maine at Farmington
University of Maine at Orono
University of Mary Hardin-Baylor
University of Mary Washington
University of Maryland
University of Massachusetts at Amherst
University of Massachusetts at Boston
University of Memphis
University of Miami
University of Michigan
University of Minnesota at Minneapolis
University of Missouri at Columbia
University of Missouri at Kansas City
University of Missouri at St. Louis
University of Montana

University of Nebraska – LowRes MFA in Writing
 University of Nebraska at Lincoln
 University of Nebraska at Omaha BFA
 University of Nebraska at Omaha, English Dept.
 University of Nevada, Las Vegas
 University of Nevada, Reno
 University of New Hampshire
 University of New Mexico
 University of New Orleans
 University of North Alabama
 University of North Carolina at Asheville
 University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
 University of North Carolina at Greensboro
 University of North Carolina at Wilmington
 University of North Dakota
 University of North Georgia
 University of North Texas Department of English
 University of Notre Dame
 University of Oklahoma
 University of Oregon
 University of Pennsylvania
 University of Pittsburgh
 University of Pittsburgh at Bradford
 University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg
 University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown
 University of Redlands
 University of Saint Thomas
 University of San Francisco
 University of Scranton
 University of South Carolina
 University of South Carolina, Upstate
 University of South Dakota, Vermillion
 University of South Florida
 University of Southern California PhD in Creative Writing and Literature
 University of Southern California, Masters of Professional Writing Program
 University of Southern Mississippi
 University of Tampa
 University of Tennessee, Chattanooga
 University of Tennessee, Knoxville
 University of Tennessee, Martin
 University of Texas at Austin
 University of Texas at El Paso
 University of Texas at San Antonio
 University of Texas at Tyler
 University of Texas Dallas
 University of Texas Michener Center
 University of Texas, Pan-American
 University of Toledo
 University of Tulsa
 University of Utah
 University of Virginia

University of Washington
University of Washington, Bothell
University of Washington, Tacoma
University of West Georgia
University of Wisconsin at Madison
University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee
University of Wyoming
Upper Iowa University
Ursinus College
Utah State University
Utica College
Valdosta State University
Valparaiso University
Vanderbilt University
Vermont College of Fine Arts
Virginia Commonwealth University
Virginia Tech
VMI – Virginia Military Institute
Wabash College
Wake Forest University
Walla Walla University
Walnut Hill School for the Arts
Warren County Community College
Warren Wilson College
Washington & Jefferson College
Washington and Lee University
Washington College
Washington State University
Washington University in St. Louis
Wayne State College
Waynesburg University
Weber State University
Webster University
West Essex Senior High School
West Virginia University
West Virginia Wesleyan College
Western Carolina University
Western Connecticut State University
Western Kentucky University
Western Michigan University
Western New England University
Western State Colorado
Western Washington University
Western Wyoming Community College
Westminster College of Salt Lake City
Wheaton College of Illinois
Wheaton College of
Massachusetts
Wichita State University
Widener University
Wilkes University

William Paterson University
Winona State University
Writopia Lab
Xavier University of Louisiana
Yavapai College
York College of Pennsylvania

2. AWP International Member Institutions: Creative Writing Programs, 2013

Aberystwyth University
Bath Spa University
Camosun College
Cardiff University
City University of Hong Kong
Concordia University
Humber School for Writers
John Cabot University
Kingston University
Oxford University
UBC Okanagan
University of British Columbia
University of Victoria
Vancouver Island University
Yale NUS College

APPENDIX III | INAUGURAL POEMS, 1961 AND 2013

1. Dedication⁴⁹³ (Robert Frost)

Summoning artists to participate
 In the august occasions of the state
 Seems something artists ought to celebrate.
 Today is for my cause a day of days.
 And his be poetry's old-fashioned praise
 Who was the first to think of such a thing.
 This verse that in acknowledgement I bring
 Goes back to the beginning of the end
 Of what had been for centuries the trend;
 A turning point in modern history.
 Colonial had been the thing to be
 As long as the great issue was to see
 What country'd be the one to dominate
 By character, by tongue, by native trait,
 The new world Christopher Columbus found.
 The French, the Spanish, and the Dutch were downed
 And counted out. Heroic deeds were done.
 Elizabeth the First and England won.
 Now came on a new order of the ages
 That in the Latin of our founding sages
 (Is it not written on the dollar bill
 We carry in our purse and pocket still?)
 God nodded his approval of as good.
 So much those heroes knew and understood,
 I mean the great four, Washington,
 John Adams, Jefferson, and Madison
 So much they saw as consecrated seers
 They must have seen ahead what not appears,
 They would bring empires down about our ears
 And by the example of our Declaration
 Make everybody want to be a nation.
 And this is no aristocratic joke
 At the expense of negligible folk.
 We see how seriously the races swarm
 In their attempts at sovereignty and form.
 They are our wards we think to some extent
 For the time being and with their consent,
 To teach them how Democracy is meant.
 "New order of the ages" did they say?
 If it looks none too orderly today,
 'Tis a confusion it was ours to start
 So in it have to take courageous part.
 No one of honest feeling would approve

⁴⁹³ "'Dedication,' Robert Frost's Presidential Inaugural Poem, 20 January 1961: Typescript with Frost's Holograph Script Corrections in Ink and Stewart Udall's Holograph Clarifications in Pencil on the Last Page," Stewart L. Udall Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

A ruler who pretended not to love
 A turbulence he had the better of.
 Everyone knows the glory of the twain
 Who gave America the aeroplane
 To ride the whirlwind and the hurricane.
 Some poor fool has been saying in his heart
 (*line 50*) Glory is out of date in life and art.
 Our venture in revolution and outlawry
 Has justified itself in freedom's story
 Right down to now in glory upon glory.
 Come fresh from an election like the last,
 The greatest vote a people ever cast,
 So close yet sure to be abided by,
 It is no miracle our mood is high.
 Courage is in the air in bracing whiffs
 Better than all the stalemate an's and ifs.
 There was the book of profile tales declaring
 For the emboldened politicians daring
 To break with followers when in the wrong,
 A healthy independence of the throng,
 A democratic form of right devine
 To rule first answerable to high design.
 There is a call to life a little sterner,
 And braver for the earner, learner, yearner.
 Less criticism of the field and court
 And more preoccupation with the sport.
 (*line 70*) It makes the prophet in us all presage
 The glory of a next Augustan age
 Of a power leading from its strength and pride,
 Of young ambition eager to be tried,
 Firm in our free beliefs without dismay,
 In any game the nations want to play.
 A golden age of poetry and power
 Of which this noonday's the beginning hour.

2a. The Gift Outright⁴⁹⁴ (Robert Frost)

The land was ours before we were the land's.
 She was our land more than a hundred years
 Before we were her people. She was ours
 In Massachusetts, in Virginia,
 But we were England's, still colonials,
 Possessing what we still were unpossessed by,
 Possessed by what we now no more possessed.
 Something we were withholding made us weak
 Until we found out that it was ourselves
 We were withholding from our land of living,
 And forthwith found salvation in surrender.
 Such as we were we gave ourselves outright
 (The deed of gift was many deeds of war)
 To the land vaguely realizing westward,
 But still unstoried, artless, unenhanced,
 Such as she was, such as she would become.

2b. The Gift Outright⁴⁹⁵ (Robert Frost)

The land was ours before we were the land's
 She was our land more than a hundred years
 Before we were her people. She was ours
 In Massachusetts, in Virginia,
 But we were England's, still colonials,
 Possessing what we still were unpossessed by,
 Possessed by what we now no more possessed.
 Something we were withholding made us weak
 Until we found out that it was ourselves
 We were withholding from our land of living,
 And forthwith found salvation in surrender.
 Such as we were we gave ourselves outright
 (The deed of gift was many deeds of war)
 To the land vaguely realizing westward,
 But still unstoried, artless, unenhanced,
 Such as she was, such as she will become.

⁴⁹⁴ The text of "The Gift Outright" as it appeared in *The Witness Tree* (1942). When the poem first appeared in the Spring 1942 issue of the *Virginia Quarterly Review*, the last line read "Such as she was, such as she *might* become."

⁴⁹⁵ The text of "The Gift Outright" as recited by Frost at the January 1961 recitation.

3. One Today (Richard Blanco)

One sun rose on us today, kindled over our shores,
 peeking over the Smokies, greeting the faces
 of the Great Lakes, spreading a simple truth
 across the Great Plains, then charging across the Rockies.
 One light, waking up rooftops, under each one, a story
 told by our silent gestures moving behind windows.

My face, your face, millions of faces in morning's mirrors,
 each one yawning to life, crescendoing into our day:
 pencil-yellow school buses, the rhythm of traffic lights,
 fruit stands: apples, limes, and oranges arrayed like rainbows
 begging our praise. Silver trucks heavy with oil or paper—
 bricks or milk, teeming over highways alongside us,
 on our way to clean tables, read ledgers, or save lives—
 to teach geometry, or ring-up groceries as my mother did
 for twenty years, so I could write this poem.

All of us as vital as the one light we move through,
 the same light on blackboards with lessons for the day:
 equations to solve, history to question, or atoms imagined,
 the “I have a dream” we keep dreaming,
 or the impossible vocabulary of sorrow that won't explain
 the empty desks of twenty children marked absent
 today, and forever. Many prayers, but one light
 breathing color into stained glass windows,
 life into the faces of bronze statues, warmth
 onto the steps of our museums and park benches
 as mothers watch children slide into the day.

One ground. Our ground, rooting us to every stalk
 of corn, every head of wheat sown by sweat
 and hands, hands gleaning coal or planting windmills
 in deserts and hilltops that keep us warm, hands
 digging trenches, routing pipes and cables, hands
 as worn as my father's cutting sugarcane
 so my brother and I could have books and shoes.

The dust of farms and deserts, cities and plains
 mingled by one wind—our breath. Breathe. Hear it
 through the day's gorgeous din of honking cabs,
 buses launching down avenues, the symphony
 of footsteps, guitars, and screeching subways,
 the unexpected song bird on your clothes line.
 Hear: squeaky playground swings, trains whistling,
 or whispers across café tables, Hear: the doors we open
 for each other all day, saying: hello, shalom,
 buon giorno, howdy, namaste, or buenos días
 in the language my mother taught me—in every language
 spoken into one wind carrying our lives

without prejudice, as these words break from my lips.

One sky: since the Appalachians and Sierras claimed
their majesty, and the Mississippi and Colorado worked
their way to the sea. Thank the work of our hands:
weaving steel into bridges, finishing one more report
for the boss on time, stitching another wound
or uniform, the first brush stroke on a portrait,
or the last floor on the Freedom Tower
jutting into a sky that yields to our resilience.

One sky, toward which we sometimes lift our eyes
tired from work: some days guessing at the weather
of our lives, some days giving thanks for a love
that loves you back, sometimes praising a mother
who knew how to give, or forgiving a father
who couldn't give what you wanted.

We head home: through the gloss of rain or weight
of snow, or the plum blush of dusk, but always—home,
always under one sky, our sky. And always one moon
like a silent drum tapping on every rooftop
and every window, of one country—all of us—
facing the stars
hope—a new constellation
waiting for us to map it,
waiting for us to name it—together.

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