SHAPING FREE VERSE:

AMERICAN PROSODY AND POETICS 1880-1920

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Abstract

Shaping Free Verse: American Prosody and Poetics 1880-1920

This dissertation reveals the untold history of free verse in the United States. Current accounts of the genre contend that free verse was a response to the metrical homogeneity of poetry at the turn into the twentieth century, and that it revitalized a dying art form. I show that these teleological histories misrepresent both the state of poetry at the end of the nineteenth century and the impulses that underwrote free verse experiments. I focus on the crucial (and crucially understudied) role that academics and critics played in promoting free verse to show that early discussions of the genre were driven by an ideal of American identity. I argue that nineteenth-century literary scholars abstracted national and racial identities into verse traits, and that twentieth-century critics turned this set of ideas about the connections between communities and poetic forms into the genre of free verse poetry.

My first chapter, "Communities in Verse," analyzes the work of Francis Barton Gummere and Richard Moulton, who distilled widely circulated ideas about the connections between poetic rhythm and national identities into influential theories of poetic evolution. In "Whitman Made Modern," I trace the uneven process whereby Walt Whitman was constructed as the father of American free verse. My third chapter, "New Poetry, New Americans," examines the role that anthologists such as Harriet Monroe and Amy Lowell played in creating the genre of the New Poetry, which has come to be identified with free verse. In "Reading *Poetry*," I argue that Harriet Monroe's critical project in founding *Poetry* magazine was to consolidate poetry as a genre and to

discipline readers out of the promiscuous habits of consumption that prevailed in the early decades of the twentieth century. Ultimately, *Shaping Free Verse* provides the first history of the genre to take into account the role that academic and critical discourse played in creating free verse. It rethinks the transition between nineteenth-century American poetic cultures and modern poetic thought, and it demonstrates that the term "poetry" names, not a coherent genre, but rather any number of fantasies about social relations.

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Introduction

The Untold History of Free Verse Poetry

"[T]here is nothing to cut loose from. Remember this that is do not remember but know this when there is no more to tell about what prose and poetry has been."

- Gertrude Stein, *Narration: Four Lectures*

"Poetry's liberation from the shackles of meter is one of the most important non-events in late nineteenth-century literary history."

- Max Cavitch, "Stephen Crane's Refrain"

What do we know about the history of free verse poetry in America? When did it begin to capture the attention of academics, critics, and non-professional readers? Why did free verse become a flashpoint for critical debate when it did? Which journals and newspapers devoted space to the issues raised by the term? Was free verse considered a form or a genre? a fad or a revolution? Who was invested in its success, who in its failure, and why? What was at stake in debates about poetic innovation, and what sorts of pasts and futures did these debates construct for American poetry and its readers? As incredible as it might seem, this is a history about which we know very little. We have many accounts of the prosodic systems and poetic theories developed by individual poets who wrote in forms that we now recognize as free verse; scholars including Chris Beyers, Stephen Cushman, and Charles Hartman have been scrupulously attentive to the metrical

systems and rhythmic ideals articulated by Walt Whitman, Ezra Pound, H.D., and T.S. Eliot, among others, and have provided suggestive answers to the question of what individual poets thought they were doing when they played with free verse forms. None of these studies, however, treat the contemporaneous academic and critical debates that surrounded and shaped the reception of free verse experiments in America at the turn into the twentieth century. The reasons for this omission are manifold, but can be traced in part to the continuing critical focus on the poetry and manifestos of poets who were most invested in promoting narratives of free verse as a break with a stultifying poetic past[i] – an emphasis that has led to a vast oversimplification of the messiness of prosodic discourse in the nineteenth century. It has become a commonplace in literary histories (particularly in teaching texts aimed at undergraduates) that poets who wrote in free verse broke with "conventional" prosody in order to create forms that were more in tune with the rhythms and upheavals of modern life than Victorian poetry could ever hope to be.[ii] But as scholars and critics working between 1880 and 1920 (when debates about free verse in America were most intense) were acutely aware, there had never been anything "conventional" about English prosody. Rather than signifying a coherent linguistic system or singular approach to the technical aspects of poetry, the term "prosody" named an almost infinite number of debates about the nature of the English language and the rhythms that could be rendered on a page by a poet so as to be registered by readers and auditors.[iii] Because the English language developed from both Germanic and Latinate sources, it was neither purely accentual (i.e., each line organized around the number of beats or accents it contains, as in *Beowulf*) nor purely syllabic (i.e., each line organized by

the number and types of syllables it contains, as in classical Greek and Latin poetry). English-language poets could play with both systems, creating any number of idiosyncratic rhythms and forms. This meant that English prosody had always been remarkably "free" in comparison to German or French prosodies, among others, which were purely accentual or syllabic, and which accordingly operated under much stricter constraints than English prosody. As Harvard professor John Livingston Lowes argued in his 1919 book *Convention and Revolt in Poetry*, versification in English could be said to be "absolutely incapable of formulation" because, while "[t]here is one way, and only one, of correctly reading a Latin hexameter," there could be "three or four ways of reading an English blank verse line." According to Lowes, it was possible that "no two mortals ever read aloud any given long passage of [English-language] verse with precisely the same rhythms" (237). For critics like Lowes, who had been trained in the vicissitudes of English rhythms, the predominant issue raised by early debates about free verse was not a simple matter of formal constraint versus liberty, but the much thornier question of what it would mean to loosen the rules of poetic form in a linguistic system that could already accommodate Shakespeare's iambic pentameter, Longfellow's translation of the Icelandic kalevala form into the American epic *The Song of Hiawatha*, Tennyson's translations of Latin alcaics, Whitman's biblical cadences, and Swinburne's experiments with seemingly every linguistic tradition under the sun, to name just a few of the prosodic experiments that were well-known and oft-debated in the nineteenth century. To paraphrase Gertrude Stein's meditation on the difference between poetry and prose, cited above as an epigraph, there was nothing for free verse poets to cut loose from, but

rather a welter of prosodic debate to join. How did academics and critics make sense of that welter? What types of poetic theories and systems did they develop to understand the place of free verse in an already complicated prosodic field? Why have we forgotten the multiplicity of these prosodic discourses, and how will recovering their histories inform current theories of poetics?

Shaping Free Verse takes up these questions by providing the untold intellectual history of the academic and critical discourses that shaped ideas about free verse in America between 1880 and 1920, including academic theories of the origins of poetic rhythm and critical accounts of the so-called "New Poetry" of the 1910s. I argue that nineteenth-century literary scholars made sense of the welter of English rhythms by conflating social and artistic structures and abstracting national and racial identities into verse traits, and that twentieth-century critics then turned this set of institutionally-sanctioned ideas about the connections between communities and poetic forms into the genre of the New Poetry, which came to be identified with free verse. I begin by exploring how rapid changes in the anthropological concept of culture at the turn into the twentieth century affected academic debates about the role of rhythm in modern poetry. My first chapter, "Communities in Verse," focuses specifically on the communal origins hypothesis posited by Francis Barton Gummere in the 1880s and expanded upon by Richard Moulton in the 1910s. Gummere, who received his Ph.D in philology at the University of Freiburg in 1881 and who taught at Haverford College until his death in 1919, published prolifically and was recognized as an authority on the origins of poetry and on Old English ballads. Gummere believed that his philological studies of poetry,

combined with data from contemporaneous ethnological and anthropological studies, proved that poetry had originally been the product of a primitive throng that sang and danced together. He believed that the rhythms of these communal dances provided the physical basis for a tribal group's abstract sense of its identity, and he extrapolated that nationally and racially specific rhythms could concretize what he called, a hundred years before Benedict Anderson, "imagined communities." Gummere argued that the increasing hegemony of John Stuart Mill's definition of poetry as "feeling confessing itself to itself in moments of solitude" (Mill 71) was responsible for an uptick in "dithyrambic raving" towards the end of the nineteenth century, and that such free verse effusions were a dire threat to modern imagined communities (*Beginnings* 60). According to Gummere, rhythm needed to regain its pride of place in definitions of poetry if the art form was to retain its social functions.

The fact that Gummere is currently unknown to most scholars shows how thoroughly he lost the battle against Mill's version of poetics, but it also highlights the importance of recovering this lost moment in American poetic thought. For though Gummere dropped out of most historical accounts of modern poetics, his theory of the communal origins of poetry was fundamental to the earliest iterations of literary theory, as well as to some of the most influential movements in poetry in the 1910s and 1920s, as my later chapters will show. The rising intensity of Gummere's response to free verse over the course of his career also provides a register of how changes in the concept of culture affected ideas about poetry. In his early books, published between 1881 and 1901, Gummere remained confident that rhythm would remain a defining factor in poetry

in spite of growing interest in Walt Whitman and other free versifiers, whose "centrifugal" rhythms he believed were too irregular to support the health of national and racial communities. By the time Gummere published his final book length study in 1911, however, he feared that an insurmountable sea change had occurred in American poetics, and that rhythm's importance to the nation's poetic tradition was no longer recognized. I pair Gummere with Moulton because Moulton's work helps to reveal the intellectual developments that inspired Gummere's fear. Moulton, who became the University of Chicago's first professor of literary theory and interpretation after Gummere turned down the position to continue his teaching at Haverford, simultaneously institutionalized Gummere's theory of communal origins and challenged his conclusion that rhythm was the basis of sociality. Moulton agreed that communal songs were the most primitive forms of poetry, but he argued that the evolution of poetry into solitary expression with no necessary connection to embodied rhythms reflected the higher stage that human cultures had reached in the modern era. He advocated for the comparative study of world literatures as a way to understand how discrete national cultures were evolving into a larger web of civilization, reflecting new notions of cultural pluralism that were emerging in revamped departments of anthropology in the 1910s. The vast distance between Gummere and Moulton's conclusions about the role of rhythm in poetry, which opened up in a remarkably short period of time, highlights the need to understand this moment as more than the run-up to the New Criticism, as it has been treated in extant institutional histories. Unlike accounts of the progressive rise of modern criticism and modernist aesthetics, which assume stable definitions of poetry, rhythm, and meter during this

period, this chapter emphasizes the instability of these concepts, showing that American poetics before the New Criticism was a contentious, rapidly changing, and complexly interdisciplinary field of inquiry and debate. Given the volatility of literary study in this moment, each new iteration of the imagined connections between poetic traits and social structures deserves contextualization and examination. A close study of the work of Gummere and Moulton begins to show how the intricacies of this moment shaped American poetry in significant and unacknowledged ways.

Taking academic debates about the origins of poetry and the functions of rhythm as its backdrop, my second chapter, "Whitman Made Modern," explores the uneven process by which Walt Whitman began to be constructed as the father of American free verse poetry in the 1910s. This decade saw an explosion in scholarly work on Whitman; a search for "Walt Whitman" in all of the journals classified as either language and literature or linguistics journals archived in *JSTOR* shows that the number of articles mentioning Whitman jumped from 20 between 1890 and 1899 to 53 between 1900 and 1909 to *158* articles between 1910 and 1920. As the sheer volume of writing suggests, critical opinion about Whitman's rhythms and his place in American literary history was sharply divided. Though Whitman's claim to the title of the first American free verse poet is now taken for granted in most literary histories, his writing was not called free verse with any regularity until well into the 1920s, and even then, arguments about the nature of free verse abounded. Was free verse the same as *vers libre*, metrical prose, spaced prose, mosaics, cadenced verse, or polyphonic prose, to name just a few of the new forms early twentieth-century prosodists believed they had discovered? If not,

where did Whitman's writing fit within the taxonomy of modern poetic forms? For critics working in this decade, the answers to those questions determined how they positioned Whitman in literary history – and those answers had everything to do with how they perceived the connections between poetic rhythms and social organization.

This chapter focuses on the competing accounts of Whitman's rhythms offered by a few prominent academics and critics, including Fred Newton Scott, Amy Lowell, and Mary Austin. Scott, whose 1908 article "A Note on Walt Whitman's Prosody," published in *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, helped to kickstart the sudden academic interest in Whitman, believed that the modern study of rhythm could scientifically prove that Whitman had created a new national art form out of the speech rhythms of the American people, and had in the process created a modern print analogue to the primitive embodied throng. Scott graphed what he called the "nutation," or the long wave lengths characteristic of prose rhythms, against the "motation," or the shorter wave lengths characteristic of poetic rhythms, that he found in Whitman's writing to show that Whitman had combined the two types of rhythm to create an unprecedented and wholly American prosodic system. Like Gummere, Scott abstracted verse traits into social attributes, arguing that Whitman's hybrid rhythm was the perfect expression of and artistic complement to the hybridity of the American nation. By harmonizing the potentially lawless irregularity of American speech with the regularity of "motative" poetic rhythm, Scott believed, Whitman had constructed a perfect rhythmic allegory for the freedom that could be found within a democratic social order, making Whitman the first poet to truly express the social life of the American people through poetic form.

According to Scott's line of reasoning, although there was no returning to the premodern throng that could create a group's identity through rhythmic performance, the poet could tap into that ancient mode of poetic sociality to create formal representations of modern imagined communities.

In spite of Scott's seemingly scientific proofs of his thesis, many of the most vocal critics working in the 1910s believed that Whitman had failed to create a coherent rhythmic system on which to found a new national tradition. I turn from Scott's vision of Whitman to a few of the numerous alternative lineages that his contemporaries constructed for American poetry, concentrating mainly on the critical work of Amy Lowell and Mary Austin. The contest over Whitman's place in literary history shows that Whitman did not naturally accede to the position of the progenitor of free verse or an American poetic tradition, as has so often been assumed, and demonstrates how academic theories about the origins of poetic rhythm spread into non-scholarly critical debates. Both Lowell and Austin, who published mainly through non-academic journals and presses, drew on Gummerian ideas about primitive rhythms to argue that Whitman had amassed America's raw materials without synthesizing them into a rhythm that could reflect and shape the nation as an imagined community. Indeed, Lowell went so far as to argue that Whitman had not written poetry at all, but had instead composed "metrical prose." She explained that the Imagists and other modern poets, on the other hand, were getting back in touch with the "exceedingly subtle rhythmic effects" that early humans naturally felt in their bodies in the days of communal poetry, and were consequently creating more vital national rhythms than anything Whitman had dreamed of ("Some

Musical" 130).[iv] Austin agreed that Whitman had failed to create a national rhythm, but she argued that such a rhythm was waiting to be rediscovered in Native American poetry. According to Austin, the modern poets Lowell promoted were simply realizing that "American poetry must inevitably take the mold of Amerind verse, which is the mold of American experience shaped by the American environment" (42). If Whitman's prosody was useful at all, according to Austin, it was only as a negative example of the centrifugal rhythms that would keep the American community from cohering. The rhythms of true free verse, on the other hand, as the products of the American landscape and its earliest inhabitants, provided a solid foundation for a homegrown national literary tradition.

My third chapter, "New Poetry, New Americans," continues to explore ideas about the types of rhythm that would help to support an American community by tracking the growth of critical conversations about the so-called New Poetry in the 1910s. I argue that the New Poetry, far from comprising an aesthetically or theoretically coherent body of writing, as so many literary historians have argued, was the name for an ongoing discourse about poetry and cultural identity. My account focuses on four widely circulated and publicized collections and studies that helped to shape that discourse: Harriet Monroe and Alice Corbin Henderson's *The New Poetry: An Anthology* (1917), Amy Lowell's *Tendencies in Modern American Poetry* (1917) and Louis Untermeyer's *Modern American Poetry: An Introduction* and *The New Era in American Poetry* (1919). Each of these texts, in distinct but related ways, constructed a fictional generic coherence for the New Poetry based on the idea that it was the organic product of the many folk cultures that had taken root in America with each new wave of immigration. These

critics argued that what made the New Poetry new was neither its form nor its subject matter, but rather its ability to organize communities around a shared set of national and racial concerns.

In the introduction to their anthology, Monroe and Henderson argued that the New Poetry was not a formalist movement, explaining that it had little to do with "mere details of form" or "diction," but dealt instead with the "fundamental integrities" of the art form (v). Their explanation of what these integrities were remained vague; they argued that the New Poetry had broken free from the arbitrary poetic "rules and formulae" that had developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to get back to the "spirit" of the most primal beginnings of the art form, as could be seen in the New Poets's experiments with ancient Hebrew, Greek, Anglo-Saxon, Native American, Japanese, and Chinese rhythms and sensibilities (x). Monroe and Henderson argued that the return to a primitive poetic spirit heralded the triumph of what anthropologist and poet Edward Sapir called "genuine" cultures over "spurious" cultures. A genuine culture, according to Sapir, was one in which "nothing is spiritually meaningless," while a spurious culture was one in which individuals were alienated from the products of their labor and in which art played no role in daily life (Sapir 233). Monroe and Henderson believed that the New Poetry, by returning to the vaguely defined "spirit" of primitive poetry, had the potential to effect a reintegration of an American culture grown spurious thanks to the fractures introduced by industrial modernity. The "old" poetry had no cultural force, but they believed that the New Poetry would be able to organize new relations between art and life. As Monroe argued, "aboriginal motives and rhythms" had been "a gold-mine of

song await[ing] full development," and the American New Poets especially had honed and perfected this raw material in order to tell "the tale of the tribe," or to picture a healthier, more "genuine" version of American society ("The Free-Verse Movement" 704-705). Amy Lowell and Louis Untermeyer similarly positioned the New Poetry as an index to the progress of national culture rather than an as aesthetic development in their respective works on the subject. Lowell's *Tendencies in Modern American Poetry* focused on the New Poetry's relationship to emerging social and political orders, dismissing questions of form and content. To Lowell, the importance of the New Poetry was not the "newer, freer forms" used by some poets, but the vital, primitive spirit into which all the New Poets had tapped (3). According to Lowell, this vital new spirit was that of the new American "race" that was being created as the country's Anglo-Saxon "root-stock" absorbed the best attributes of its newer immigrant groups. Lowell argued that the New Poetry, as the expression of the American "race," justified the country's newly stated aspiration to become the shepherd of democracy on the international scene; in the New Poetry, critics could see "a fusion of much knowledge, all melted and absorbed in the blood of a young and growing race," and this fusion pointed to the higher plane of development that American culture had reached (280). As the vanguard of cultural progress and racial evolution, Lowell believed, America deserved to take on a new stature in the international artistic and political scenes. Louis Untermeyer's books on the New Poetry likewise posited a close connection between the "primitive" spirit of the New Poetry and the growth of American democracy. He argued that the New Poets had managed to translate the best aspects of premodern oral cultures into literary works,

thereby bringing into existence the communal audience that had been broken apart by the rise of print capitalism in the modern era. Untermeyer argued that what he called the "raciness" of the New Poetry was such a vital force that it allowed modern readers to feel that they were hearing and seeing a poetic performance that was in fact only written, returning them to the state of the preliterate poetic throng. The New Poetry thus provided a pathway back to older, more cohesive modes of democratic sociality that would otherwise have been lost in the wake of technological progress. Untermeyer argued that this pathway could be opened by poetry written in either "traditional" or innovative forms; as long as the poetry tapped into a vital premodern spirit, the way it conveyed that spirit was irrelevant. For each of these critics, whose works were viewed as the definitive accounts of the New Poetry well into the 1930s, the movement had everything to do with the expression of a national "spirit" and almost nothing to do with the forms or styles in which that spirit was expressed.

Although Monroe, Henderson, Lowell, and Untermeyer were very clear about their lack of interest in "innovative" poetic forms, the vast majority of studies of the New Poetry written later in the twentieth century have attempted to find formal principles that structured the movement, and have retroactively separated the "innovative" free verse poems from the "traditional" poems collected in anthologies of the New Poetry. Critics who work on Monroe have taken particular pains to explain away many of her editorial choices, since she treated the rhymed verse of Grace Hazard Conkling and Joyce Kilmer with the same seriousness as she did the free verse of H.D. and T.S. Eliot, in both her anthology and in *Poetry* magazine, which she founded in 1912. Craig Abbott, for

instance, excuses Monroe's inclusion of genteel "three-name poets" in her anthology by arguing that she was "editing a movement that was still moving," and so was bound to include poems that would not stand the test of time (90-91). Robin G. Schulze similarly attempts to explain why Monroe was "a strangely unmodern champion of modernist verse" (50) by looking for the roots of the outmoded aspects of her editorial sensibility in her world travels. By taking for granted that there was an obsolete tradition of genteel poetics that needed to be challenged, these accounts risk fundamentally misrepresenting Monroe's critical project. The hard and fast line that contemporary critics seek to maintain between the disdained genteel versifiers of the 1890s and the poets we have come to recognize as modernist revolutionaries was nonexistent for Monroe not because she was a bad critic, but because her editorial decisions had very little to do with promoting formally innovative poetry. In my final chapter, "Reading *Poetry*," I turn to the editorial files of *Poetry* magazine, which Monroe donated to the University of Chicago in 1931, to show how contemporary accounts of modernist poetry have set up a warped framework through which to view Monroe's contributions to American poetics. According to the vast majority of critical work on *Poetry*, this publication revitalized a dying art form and made poetry viable again by championing experimental work and by creating a wider readership for poetry in general. I argue that Monroe did indeed help to "[transform] the way that poetry and poets [were] recognized and read," as triumphalist accounts of *Poetry* have it ("Guide to *Poetry*"), but that she did so by attempting to shut down the extensive decentralized circulation of poems in newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, advertisements, circulars, bulletins, scrapbooks, and other mixed-genre media

that had been a vital part of American cultural life throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Monroe drew on Progressive Era ideas about the civic functions of art and actively sought the support of the growing university systems in an attempt to move poetry out of the hybrid space of popular print and into institutionally-sanctioned and organized spaces. Far from bringing poetry to readers who had been ignoring it, Monroe sought to discipline readers out of their promiscuous habits of consumption.

I consider a diverse set of materials in this chapter to show the complexity of Monroe's engagement with nineteenth- and twentieth-century verse cultures and to uncover the many strategies she employed to consolidate poetic discourse. I read the early promotional materials for *Poetry* against Monroe's account of her lawsuit against the New York *World*, which published her commemorative *Columbian Ode* as part of their coverage of the 1892 World's Fair without first obtaining her permission, to illuminate Monroe's understanding of the relationship between modes of circulation, authorial control, and cultural capital. To Monroe, the problem facing American poetry at the turn of the century was not that it was ignored, but that it was consumed alongside what she considered to be debased genres, including advertising and melodrama, in mass-market periodicals. Both Monroe's landmark lawsuit and the circulars and editorials she used to promote *Poetry* explicitly objected to the hybridity of American periodical culture, positing that such generic intermixing posed a threat to the prestige of poetry as an art form. I argue that critics have misrecognized Monroe's attacks on popular poets such as Edgar Guest and Ella Wheeler Wilcox as a protest against conventional poetry, and that her motivating concern was not experimental poetry as such, but rather the status

of poetry as a genre. To Monroe, the way to combat the heterogeneous print culture that supported Guest and Wilcox was not to separate experimental from popular poetic forms; instead, she sought to create an authoritative mouthpiece for the art form as a whole. It made little difference to Monroe whether her magazine printed sonnets or vers libre, so long as *Poetry* consolidated and centralized poetic discourse in such a way that it could be recognized as an authoritative cultural institution that stood outside of market concerns. By setting poetry apart in this way, Monroe ultimately helped to construct poetry as a singular genre, and to promote the idea that all poetry could be approached through the same set of institutionally-sanctioned reading practices. I close by reading what Monroe called her "museum files," in which she collected letters from readers and amateur poets whose reading practices and poetic theories she considered to be outmoded. By consigning these letters to her museum and committing them to the official university-based archive of *Poetry*, which adopted her terminology and filing system, Monroe ensured that the division she posited between the poetics she promoted in her magazine and the practices she relegated to her museum would seem to be sanctioned by an institutional authority. This move shows Monroe's investment in shaping the terms of poetic debate and points to the importance of recovering the terms that she herself used to shape the future of American poetry – a recovery project that has broader implications for the field of modernist studies in the twenty-first century.

* * * *

Shaping Free Verse is in many ways a highly unusual dissertation; though I believe I have offered compelling reasons for concentrating on the figures and discourses

I study, I want to spell out more clearly how and why this project differs from recent historicist scholarship on modernist poetry. Most obviously, *Shaping Free Verse* does not offer any new readings of individual poems, canonical or otherwise. I have paid very little attention to the pronouncements of poets, choosing instead to concentrate on critical voices that may, at first glance, seem obscure or even trivial. This is a conscious choice made in an effort to redress what I see as a serious imbalance in accounts of free verse. Though it is crucial to understand the systems and theories developed by poets, poets were not the only cultural workers involved in theorizing, promoting, critiquing, and disseminating free verse poetry – a fact that could easily be forgotten if one were to read only recent literary histories. Contemporary scholars have developed countless vocabularies and frameworks for understanding the work of free verse poets, but we have not yet found a way to account for the related work of early literary theorists and cultural critics. Given the volume of writing about prosody by such figures during this period, this omission is staggering. My hope is that by pointedly turning away from the prosodic conversations produced by poets to those produced by academics and critics, this study will raise questions about the distance between the poetic reading practices of the early twentieth century and those of the early twenty-first century. The questions that seem to me to be the most generative at this moment are those that have received the least attention in poet-focused studies. What types of theories and strategies were employed to understand free verse in the 1890s? How and why had the situation changed by 1912, and again by 1920? What existed before the codification of close reading in the post-World War II academy? Which theories do we still grapple with, which seem outdated,

and why? To ask these questions is not to seek an alternative to close reading, nor to recover historical reading practices as viable options today.[v] Rather, I hope to highlight what Michael Warner has called the "historically unusual" position of the academic who close reads ("Uncritical Reading" 36) in order to emphasize the strangeness and heterogeneity of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American poetics – a strangeness that has been continually domesticated in literary histories of the period and translated into terms that make sense for contemporary literary studies.

Though *Shaping Free Verse* moves more or less chronologically through its materials, it does not offer a linear narrative of poetic development, as so many histories of modernism have. To survey the variety of conversations happening around poetry in America between 1880 and 1920 is to see that any attempt to construct through lines or endpoints is to retrospectively impose order on a much more complicated history. My emphasis on the multiplicity and contentiousness of the poetic discourse of this period distinguishes this study from recent historicist studies, which, in attempting to expand the definition of modernist poetry, have ended up reinforcing the idea that such poetry constituted an identifiable body of work that effected a real break with a unified poetic past. John Timberman Newcomb's *How Did Poetry Survive?* is typical of what I will call the problem of modernist historiography. Newcomb's aim is to enlarge the understanding of modernist poetry as a field that encompasses not only canonical and avant-garde figures who were most concerned with formal experimentation, but also poets who worked in "traditional" forms and who were engaged with progressive social causes. Though Newcomb argues that modernist poetry was "an inclusive field of many styles,

political positions, and attitudes toward modernity" (2), he maintains that there was yet a certain cohesiveness and boundedness to modernist poetry as a movement. In spite of its diversity (one might even say its incoherence), Newcomb argues that modernist poetry "[cast] off long-standing generic strictures of style and subject matter" and made "an epochal departure from national traditions" (147), creating a real break "between genteel and modern paradigms in American poetry" (14). Newcomb's assertion that there were American national poetic traditions that had been so thoroughly established as to be calcified by the end of the nineteenth century is questionable, to say the least, but it is indicative of a structural problem in his approach to the history of modernist poetry. Newcomb positions his account as a challenge to "'great divide' binaries that pit avant-garde art against mass culture" (152), but his challenge is built on the most persistent great divide narrative – that of the genteel versus the modern. Newcomb's study, in other words, gestures towards the stylistic heterogeneity of the poetry of the modernist era, but it does so at the expense of understanding that the unifying term "modernist," far from being a descriptive term, is a critical fiction endorsed by poets who were invested in proclaiming their own modernity and by scholars who have been invested in maintaining disciplinary divisions between historical periods.

Newcomb's work is symptomatic of the larger problem of historiography in contemporary accounts of modernist poetry. Simply put, the historicist approach to American modernist poetry in the past two decades has uniformly failed to ask basic methodological questions about how poetry is and has been read in the academy, and this failure has led to a reinforcement rather than of overturning of the narrative of heroic

modernism advanced by figures such as Pound and Eliot and institutionalized most notably by Hugh Kenner, in which modernist poets are portrayed as liberating the art form from the hidebound conventions of nineteenth-century genteel verse. This will undoubtedly strike many scholars of modernism as an outsized claim, given the vicissitudes of modernist studies in the past two decades. Since 1994, the Modernist Studies Association and its associated journal, *Modernism/modernity*, have advocated for a "new" modernist studies, or a more historically attentive approach to modernist texts that could challenge such heroic historical narratives by drawing more attention to marginalized authors and overlooked social issues. In their account of contemporary modernist studies in the 2007 edition of *The Cambridge Companion to Modernist Poetry*, Alex Davis and Lee Jenkins argue that this historicist approach has caused an absolute "transformation of the discipline," so that modernist poetry is now understood according to a both/and rather than an either/or model; scholars have shown that modernist poetry "involves recuperations of history and Futurist and Dada abandonments of tradition; arcane and demotic registers of language; elitist and populist forms of literature" (3; 1). According to Davis and Jenkins, this historicist transformation has been so complete that the danger to the study of modernist poetry is no longer a lack of historical context or a missing sense of the variety of modernist poetry; rather, in moving so definitively away from "the New Critical version of modernism canonised [sic] in the 1940s, with its emphasis on the text as an autonomous entity," the new modernist studies threaten to "inadvertently sidelin[e] . . . issues of poetic form" entirely (3), thus completing a turn from aesthetics into history. Ruth Jennison's recent study of what she calls *The Zukofsky*

Era (the echo of Kenner's field-shaping *The Pound Era* is significant) evinces a similar concern with ensuring that the protocols of close reading do not lose pride of place in critical practice. Jennison argues that the aesthetics of the Objectivist poets bring together social and formal concerns in exemplary ways, and thus provide a case study for how scholars can "draw on the rich formalist traditions of close reading modernist poetics while also attending to the historical complexity of the situation in which modernist texts are produced" (2). But the new modernist studies has never been as far removed from New Critical formalism as Davis, Jenkins, and Jennison suggest, nor has it fully grappled with the implications of the newly "rediscovered" formal diversity of modernist poetry. Take, for instance, the three articles on poetry in the most recent volume of *Modernism / modernity* (April 2013). Seventeen out of twenty pages (85%) of Connor Doak's article on the poetry of Vladimir Maiakovskii are devoted to close readings of individual poems; ten out of fifteen pages (67%) of Janet Neigh's article on Langston Hughes's poetics consist of close readings; nine out of sixteen pages (56%) of Benjamin Kohlmann's article on Edward Upward and W.H. Auden contain close readings of poems and journal entries. Each article is committed to contextualizing the social movements and historical events that influenced the production and reception of the poems they close read, but none of these articles questions the idea that the proper way to undertake this contextualization is to consider how the speaker of a poem frames those social issues and to ask how metaphor, versification, and imagery complicate the position(s) voiced by that poetic speaker.[vi] Such an approach would not be a problem if not for the fact that the idea of a poetic speaker is a New Critical fiction that did not necessarily inform how

modernist poets and readers understood their poetic endeavors.[vii] Modernist poetry, whether canonical or marginalized, avant-garde or "traditional," was produced during a period when approaches to poetry were widely varied and contested, meaning that to read such poetry uniformly through New Critical paradigms, as even the most historically attentive contemporary scholarship does, is to miss some of the most important historical and conceptual factors involved in the production and promotion of the poetry published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This is precisely why the importance of theories such as Gummere's and Moulton's to modernist poetic movements have been missed, and why the New Poetry has consequently been misrepresented as a formalist movement; the history of these prosodic discourses is not easily told through close readings of poems or through author-centered studies. This is a history that can only come into view through a study of the critics, anthologies, journals, discourses, and debates that made up the larger field of American poetics at the turn into the twentieth century.

This history can also only be told by leaving behind the idea that modernism is an honorific term. The types of historicist projects that Davis and Jenkins single out as rediscovering the heterogeneity of modernist poetry still understand modernism as a descriptor that names a new relationship to modernity, conceived as a salutary break with a genteel past. The non-canonical poems and poets these studies recover are valued for the ways in which they help to create that break in spite of their "traditional" forms or marginalized subject positions, respectively. As Sarah Ehlers has argued in an important essay reconsidering the relationship between the Victorian and the modern in American

poetry, our understanding of literary history is still heavily influenced by the misogynistic logic of anti-Victorian modernism (48). Ehlers calls attention to "the critical inclination, especially prevalent in studies of women's poetry, to recuperate late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century US poetry in the name of modernism" (42), which reinforces "the derogatory terms in which American Victorian poetry – especially that of women – has been cast" (49). By searching for "proto-modernisms"[viii] in nineteenth-century texts and explaining how seemingly genteel poets were modern in spite of the "traditional" forms they used, studies that recover poems in the name of modernism reinforce the genteel/modern binary and retell the same historical narrative with a new cast of characters, recruiting marginalized authors and texts to the categories they are meant to undermine. Though the both/and model of modernist poetics seems to expand the scope of modernist studies, it in fact reinforces disciplinary divisions and obscures the more complicated histories behind the formal diversity of the poetry written during the early twentieth century. Put differently, the recent discovery that modernist poetry was formally "traditional" and "experimental" (recalling the old joke about the honky-tonk that has both kinds of music, country *and* western) has produced the illusion that historicist scholarship has recovered the most important contextual knowledge about the social, intellectual, and aesthetic forces that influenced modernist poetry while yet leaving some of the most influential discourses and poetic ideals in the historical ash bin.

Shaping Free Verse tells a different story. It is messier and more open-ended than the narrative of heroic modernism because it is the story of what Max Cavitch has called the "non-event" of poetry's liberation from meter (33). As I will show, free verse was not

a set of systematizable formal practices; it was the name for a number of poetic theories that were extensively debated and rearticulated in a variety of media and critical contexts, and that changed with each new iteration. I explore the work of a number of forgotten poetic theorists and academic debates in such great detail in order to emphasize the imaginary, constructed nature of poetic rhythm itself – which is precisely the radical and unsettling understanding of meter that many scholars of Victorian poetry have been advancing in recent years, but which has failed to jump the disciplinary division into modernist studies.[ix] Many scholars of Victorian poetry take for granted that there is no unified system of "conventional" English meter, and that prosody names, not "an aesthetic category . . . distinct from the political or cultural sphere," but rather any number of contradictory "way[s] of thinking" about "gender, class, and national structures" (Martin and Levin 150; 153). Scholars such as Jason David Hall, Matthew Hart, Meredith Martin, and Yopie Prins have investigated how definitions of meter, rhythm, prosody, and versification shifted throughout the nineteenth century, and how these fields were imagined as forces that could construct and support ideal forms of English national identity. This work shows that, although accentual-syllabic systems of scansion, based on the foot as the most basic metrical unit, have come to seem like the natural way to approach the formal study of English-language poetry, such systems only achieved hegemony in the twentieth century. The idea that there could be a "traditional" or an "experimental" meter is thus what Matthew Bevis calls "an approximation, a fiction of regularity imposed on bodies of verse" (99). By ignoring the fact that nineteenth-century prosody was always a field of cultural struggle on both sides of the Atlantic, the

heroic narrative of modernist American poetry "forget[s] to acknowledge or question the national and class ideologies" that have authorized this simplified version of literary history, as Martin's work reminds us (*Rise and Fall* 10). *Shaping Free Verse* takes up the challenge posed by these studies to think about prosody in all its historical complexity. I argue that it is not enough to theorize modernist poetry in terms of both/and; to truly do justice to the complexity of this historical period, critics have to treat the innumerable critical fictions that constituted American poetics at the beginning of the twentieth century. Gummere's imagined community, far from being an obscure footnote in an institutional history, is a crucial site from which to begin this reconceptualization of the history of modernism.

Chapter 1

Communities in Verse

"Poetry now means the emotional mood of a thinker alone with his world; we forget that it ever meant anything else."

- Francis Barton Gummere, *The Beginnings of Poetry*

In an address to the British Academy in 1919, George Saintsbury, who had attempted to establish himself as *the* authority on English prosody with the publication of his 1,577 page *History of English Prosody from the Twelfth Century to the Present Day* (published in three volumes between 1906 and 1910), ridiculed the state of prosody studies in the American academy. Saintsbury noted that he had written his *History* with nothing more than "a library of poetry and an ear," but that "in America – where there are many universities with much money and an eager desire for something new," prosodists had begun using "soundproof chambers, recording instruments of the utmost delicacy, . . . drums covered with rubber and mica, mounted on pointers (including special pointers for 'nose-tones') which work on smoked paper; or the cabinets mattressed and padded as if for the reception of ------" (a helpful anonymous annotator of this text notes that the

missing word is likely either “corpses” or “courtesans”) in order to develop more exact systems of poetic rhythm (4-5). Saintsbury's account of the methodological decadence of American prosodists may seem exaggerated, but, as Michael Golston's investigation into *Rhythm and Race in Modernist Poetry and Science* makes clear, Saintsbury's description barely scratches the surface of the apparatuses and experiments these scholars devised in the 1910s and 1920s to more accurately measure the rhythms of poetry. Golston shows that, despite Saintsbury's attempts to shame poetry out of the lab, the science of rhythmics that developed out of these experiments had a profound effect on the formal innovations of modernist poets such as Ezra Pound, W.B. Yeats, and William Carlos Williams. My study shares Golston's sense of the importance of modernist science to the development of modernist poetics, but I argue that there is a significant prehistory to the science of rhythmics that Golston's book leaves out. Laboratory investigations into the rhythms of poetry did intensify in the 1910s and 20s as a response to fears that free verse would collapse the distinction between poetry and prose entirely, but these experiments grew out of earlier attempts to scientifically settle the role of rhythm in modern poetry through the study of the origins and evolution of literary forms. In the pages that follow, I argue that this largely overlooked moment in the history of American poetics was a driving force in the development and reception of free verse forms inside and outside the American academy at the beginning of the twentieth century. I begin this chapter by briefly sketching the importance of evolutionary theory to early articulations of poetic theory, and then turn to one hypothesis of literary evolution in particular – the theory of the communal origins of poetry – as it was elaborated by Francis Barton Gummere and

Richard Moulton. From the 1880s through the 1920s, almost every serious scholar of poetry in the American academy weighed in on the communal hypothesis, and more than one academic career was made on the basis of research on the subject. In addition to giving literary studies the prestige of a scientific endeavor, theories of communal origins allowed scholars to construct powerful fantasies of national and racial communities united by specific poetic forms. I focus specifically on the communities imagined by Gummere and Moulton because they were recognized as the preeminent theorists of poetics origins in the 1900s. The University of Chicago offered Gummere its first professorship in literary theory and interpretation on the strength of his research, and after Gummere turned down the offer to continue his teaching at Haverford College, Chicago approached Moulton (who accepted the position) because his work on the "ballad dance" grew out of Gummere's theory of the communal origins of poetry. Though Gummere and Moulton worked from the same assumptions, they reached very different conclusions about the role of rhythm in the construction of imagined communities. The distance between their arguments reveals a great deal about the interdisciplinarity of early literary theory, and shows how changes in American poetics were closely tied to changes in the anthropological concept of culture. As my later chapters will show, the competing hypotheses of Gummere and Moulton provided highly suggestive and influential frameworks for later scholars invested in promoting American literature as a coherent national tradition. This overlooked moment in the history of the American academy thus helps to shed light on the promotion of new verse forms by key modernist figures.

I. The evolution of literary theory

My account of early iterations of modern literary theory builds on and nuances extant accounts of the professionalization of literary studies, including Gerald Graff and Michael Warner's foundational histories of the broad methodological and hermeneutical shifts that took place in the 1880s and 90s. Graff and Warner show that during this period, philologically-trained scholars began to reinvent literature as an object that could be studied inductively. As Warner argues, this philological approach constituted "a fundamental break" with older modes of amateur criticism and Biblical interpretation, and established literary study in this period as a matter of "advancing and debating hypotheses within a scientific community" ("Rewards" 14; 20). The importance of the shift from amateur to professional criticism has been underscored in institutional histories by Kermit Vanderbilt, David Shumway, and Elizabeth Renker, among others, but few studies have attended to the specific hypotheses and debates that animated the scholarly imagination at this crucial moment and constituted the first versions of modern literary theory.[x] Though professional literary studies were marked from the outset by conflict and debate, as Graff's account emphasizes, and few scholars at the turn into the twentieth century agreed on the methods that were proper to literary study, American scholars during this period were generally united in one assumption: the study of literature had to begin with an understanding of the origins of literature and the evolutionary principles that guided its development. In one of the first textbooks of literary criticism, *An Introduction to the Methods and Materials of Literary Criticism: The Bases in Aesthetics and Poetics* (1899), Charles Mills Gayley and Fred Newton Scott explained that there

was no single method of criticism that could do justice to literature as a field of inquiry, and that their aim in writing their textbook was simply to "place before those interested a conspectus of the problems to be solved" and "a review of the methods suggested for their solution" (iv). Yet in spite of the many possible methods of literary study, there was still a foundation that all literary scholars needed to share. Gayley and Scott argued that the student of literature "should naturally first acquaint himself with the history of literature, with the development of its kinds." Once the student had acquired "a fair knowledge of the scope and the evolution of a literary species, he may proceed to an inquiry into the laws that regulate its evolution," and outwards from there to comparisons of different "literary species," of various national literatures, and, finally, of "literary art with other forms of art" (vi). The goal of literary study was, in other words, to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of literature as a reflection of the cultures that made up civilization as a whole – a goal inherited from the most grandiosely Romantic modes of German philology. Gayley and Scott's reliance on a vocabulary of evolution (e.g., their use of "species" rather than "form") to describe such study was not accidental. For literary scholars of this period, the predominant issue was not whether evolutionary paradigms could be applied to literature; philological and anthropological inquiry had already proved that languages and societies, respectively, evolved over time, and that literature, as a linguistic and social product, would naturally reflect that evolution. Indeed, Richard Moulton argued that the incorporation of evolutionary theory into literary study was the defining factor of modern criticism; he claimed that, "The failure to recognize literature as a thing of evolution was the fundamental error of the literary

theory that dates from the Renaissance," because such theory posited static, ideal literary forms rather than recognizing the "natural evolution" of literary genres (*Modern Study* 49-50).

Thus the question that most occupied critics in the 1900s was not *whether*, but *which* evolutionary paradigms should be deployed to create the desired comprehensive view of the world's cultures, as can be seen in an exchange between John Matthews Manly and John Preston Hoskins in *Modern Philology* carried on between 1907 and 1909. Manly, who chaired the English department at the University of Chicago from 1898 until 1933 and who served as the president of the MLA in 1920, and Hoskins, professor of German at Princeton University from 1895 through 1935, argued about whether evolutionary theory was best understood analogically or schematically. Manly posited that evolutionary theory was most useful to literary scholars as a loose analogy. He cautioned that critics had to be careful to remember that literature was not a living organism, and that the "principles true of the development of plants and animals have no necessary validity for works of art." Yet literary scholars had no choice but to grapple with concepts of evolution, according to Manly, because the theories of Darwin, Herbert Spencer, and Hugo DeVries had so fundamentally altered the thought patterns of modern man that it was impossible to think about the development of anything, organic or inorganic, without invoking evolutionary theories. As he put it, "the whole process of human thought has, whether we like it or not, been transformed" by the science of evolution, so that it had become "practically impossible to speak or think of any unified body of facts showing progressive change as men habitually spoke and thought before

1860" (580). Manly argued that as long as literary scholars avoided a too-programmatic understanding of literary evolution, this paradigm shift was ultimately beneficial because it forced scholars to confront disciplinary blind spots. He explained that his work on the development of new dramatic forms, for instance, had received an unexpected boost from DeVries's theory of mutation, which posited that evolutionary jumps were the products of the sudden introduction of a new "unit" to an existing organism. Manly argued that one could track the evolution of dramatic forms in the same way that DeVries had tracked the evolution of plant species, by looking for the "single, simple mutation" that prompted evolutionary leaps at different historical moments (590). Without the help of such theories, Manly argued, it would be impossible to for literary scholars to escape their own interpretive biases. The analogy between biological evolution and literary morphology was not perfect, but it was still "suggestive in the highest degree," and served to "direct . . . attention to phenomena which the unaided eye might never see" (592).

Like Manly, John Preston Hoskins believed that advances in evolutionary science would help literary scholars to better understand their objects of study, but he argued that they would help precisely because they challenged the idea that texts could be analogized to biological organisms. In a two-part article published in 1909, Hoskins argued that the real significance of DeVries's work was that his ideas were "being gradually transformed into a science of genetics" that could account for the interplay of social, psychological, and environmental factors in the evolution of organisms. In Hoskins's opinion, the ability to account for multiple variables in the development of literary forms was precisely what literary scholars lacked and what an over-reliance on biological analogies hindered. He

explained that key psychological and social "factors" in the development of new literary forms such as "individual talent or genius" had "no analogues . . . in biological terms," which meant that simple biological analogies obscured many of the most important variables in literary evolution (BA I 408). Literary scholars who wanted to develop "a true . . . [and] a scientific account of the process of literary change" would thus need to keep up with new developments in psychological and sociological theory as well as in biology (BA I 411). As he explained the following year in *PMLA*, "The development of literature is the result, not the cause, of the changes which other institutions undergo" ("Place and Function" 400), and so literary criticism rightly undertaken would be a genetic study of the many extratextual forces that helped to shape the literary forms that gained popularity at any given moment in any given nation, as well as an appreciation of the aesthetic achievements of individual talents. By moving towards "an evolutionary theory in psychological form," Hoskins argued, literary scholars could definitively "classif[y] and arrang[e] . . . the ever-growing mass of literary data" in order to provide "a foundation [for] something like permanent critical judgments" so that literary studies could become "a much more potent factor in education than it has ever been" (BA II 80-81). The incorporation of evolutionary theory into literary study, in other words, would help the field to move away from its roots in amateur criticism and towards the status and prestige of a hard science.[xi]

Hoskins's call for a genetic study of literature highlighted the fact that, as Moulton put it, "the study of literature in its natural development touches some twenty other studies, distinct and independent" (*Modern Study* 97). Gayley and Scott concurred,

suggesting that students interested in "the comparative study of literary origins and development" should read widely in sociology, law, anthropology, and ethnology, paying particular attention to Herbert Spencer's *Data of Ethics and Principles of Sociology*, E. Leveleye's *Primitive Property*, Sir Henry Maine's *Village Communities*, *Early History of Institutions*, and *Ancient Law*, T.H. Huxley's explanation of "Biology" in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, and Edward Tylor's *Primitive Culture* and *Anthropology*. A synthesis of these fields may have seemed daunting, but according to Gayley and Scott, the work of Francis Barton Gummere had come close to achieving such a synthesis (266). Indeed, they argued that Gummere's interdisciplinary thinking was so exemplary that they "would unhesitatingly commend to the attention of students whatever he may publish upon the subject . . . [of] the origins of poetry" (270).[xii] Gummere began his career as a philologist, earning his Ph.D. at the University of Freiburg in 1881. His wrote a dissertation on the development of metaphor in Anglo-Saxon poetry, and he later combined this philological understanding of English-language literature with contemporaneous anthropological and ethnological theories to argue that poetry was originally the product of a primitive "throng" that sang and danced together. Gummere believed that the rhythm of these communal dances provided the basis for social consent and group cohesion, and he extrapolated that nationally and racially specific rhythms could concretize what he called, a hundred years before Benedict Anderson, "imagined communities." Gummere believed that his theory was a necessary corrective to the work of John Stuart Mill, whose definition of poetry as "feeling confessing itself to itself in moments of solitude" threatened to obscure the communal, social origins of the art form.

Gummere feared that the popularity of Mill's definition, which, as Virginia Jackson argues, had become the dominant paradigm for understanding lyric poetry by the late nineteenth century (*Dickinson's Misery* 130-131), would distort the record of literary evolution by overemphasizing the modern forms and functions of poetry. He explained that in the modern era, "a solitary habit of thinking has made itself master of poetry, particularly the lyric," so that contemporary critics had lost sight of poetry's origin in shared, communal forms. Such a loss seemed to Gummere to be catastrophic; if cultural identity was an effect of shared poetic rhythms, as he believed it to be, then uncoupling rhythm from poetry, as Mill's definition did, would lead to poetry's cultural irrelevance and, potentially, to the disintegration of the state as an imagined community. For scholars such as Hoskins, Gayley, and Scott, the genetic study of poetry represented an important advance in modern literary criticism, but for Gummere, it represented a crucial intervention in modern social life.

Gummere began developing his case against Mill as an undergraduate at Harvard University under the tutelage of Francis James Child, the foremost ballad theorist and anthologist in the nineteenth century. Child believed that the poems that were closest to their origins in oral performance, such as Old English ballads, could be seen as survivals of a time before "book-culture." Child traced the "survivals" of this oral culture in popular printed ballads; though he believed that these poems had been corrupted in the act of being collected and printed, his philological training led him to believed that they could still teach scholars the otherwise unknowable history of a preliterate people. As Michael Cohen explains, "in Child's ballad discourse, popular ballads and preliterate folk

were origin points in developmental narratives about cultures and nations" (249).[xiii] Gummere believed that the validity of his mentor's work had been proved by contemporaneous ethnological studies, including those of Daniel Brinton, whose career as a professor of American linguistics and archaeology at the University of Pennsylvania overlapped with Gummere's tenure at Haverford. In books like *Aboriginal American Authors and Their Productions* (1883) and *The Basis of Social Relations: A study in ethnic psychology* (1902), Brinton endorsed popular theories of orthogenesis and recapitulation, arguing that man as a species evolved through discrete stages of civilization, and that the traces of early stages of evolution were preserved in more highly evolved organisms and institutions. The ethnological study of "savage" or "primitive" social groups thus provided unique insight into the origins of human culture, because "in such [primitive] conditions . . . we are nearer the origins of arts and institutions" (*Basis* xv). Gummere looked to Brinton's studies of Native American poetry to prove that the oral literature of primitive tribal groups was especially useful for bearing witness to social structures and customs that had passed away in "higher" stages of civilization. Gummere argued that Brinton's studies showed that "primitive conditions" of literary production necessarily led to communally-produced poetry, performed by the social group as a unit, and that this communal performance led to a certain type of social cohesion no longer found in "advanced" societies. According to Gummere, Brinton's work on the "incessant refrain" of Native American poetry, which was danced and chanted by entire tribal groups, proved that the repeated refrain served a clear social function – to produce "consenting cries and movements" that synced individuals into a

unit, thereby concretizing the group's identity. Primitive poetry, according to Gummere, could thus be defined as a "consenting and cadenced series of words" (*Beginnings* 314), in marked contrast to Millian definitions of poetry as the expression of an isolated individual. Gummere argued that in light of this ethnological proof, it was a scandal that "nearly all writers on poetry have neglected . . . the communal basis of the art" (*Beginnings* 67). Whatever poetry had become, its evolution began with communal rhythms.

Brinton and other ethnologists emphasized the importance of the "group-mind" in primitive societies and artworks, but Gummere took the hypothesis of the group-mind a step further to argue that the rhythms of communal poetry were not merely reflective of, but responsible for, the formation of a group's tribal identity. Brinton's study of the "ethnic psyche," or the mindset of primitive man, for instance, seemed to prove that primitive life was "made up of a number of experiences common to the mass but not occurring in any one of its individual members" (*Basis* xiii), and that the phenomenon of this "group-mind" could be explained as "the actual agreement and interaction of individuals resulting in mental modes, tendencies, and powers not belonging to any one member" (*Basis* 30-31). Gummere argued that the "agreement of individuals" could only be brought about through "tribal incantation and choral singing," which he called "the original social fact" ("Primitive Poetry I" 201), explaining that P.M.A. Ehrenreich's ethnological research on the Botocudan tribe of South America had proved this to be so. Ehrenreich claimed that the oral poetry of the Botocudos was produced,

> On festal occasions [when] the whole horde meets by night round the camp fire for a dance. Men and women alternating . . . form a circle; each dancer lays his arms about the necks of his two neighbours [sic], and the entire ring begins to turn to the right or to the left, while all the dancers stamp strongly and in rhythm the foot that is advanced, and drag after it the other foot. . . . Throughout the dance resounds a monotonous song to the time of which they stamp their feet. . . . Now and then, too, an individual begins a song, and is answered by the rest in chorus. . . . They never sing without dancing, never dance without singing, and have but one word to express both song and dance. (qtd. in *Beginnings* 95-96)

Gummere interpreted Ehrenreich's account to mean that, "the primitive horde in festal dance and song, [found] by increased ease of movement and economy of force, by keener sense of kind, by delight of repetition, the possibilities of that social consent which is born of rhythmic motion" (*Beginnings* 89). Ethnological accounts like Ehrenreich's seemed to prove that the Botocudos' identity as a coherent social body did not precede their festal dances; rather, it was produced as a result of their rhythmic motions, which helped to create a physical instantiation of collective tribal identity. Gummere explained that the Botocudos demonstrated "the rude fashion of imagining a community by converting the concept of it and the yearning for it into external acts, which, in turn, fortify and extend the concept itself" (*Democracy* 234), meaning that "rhythmic utterance and rhythm itself" were thus "not so much the outcome as the occasion of social union" (*Beginnings* 385). Gummere concluded that organized social relations never existed a

priori with any preliterate people, but were instead the result of the "loud and repeated crying of a throng, regulated and brought into consent by movements of the body, and getting significance from the significance of the festal occasion" (*Beginnings* 94). In his account, rhythm was not so much a linguistic effect as an embodied racial characteristic that helped to confirm the identities of discrete tribal groups. Members of preliterate societies did not simply recognize their membership in a group because they sang that group's songs; rather, the rhythms of communal, oral poetry created the group as it sang. Put another way, cultural (or, in more advanced groups, national) identity was an effect of poetic rhythm.

Ethnological accounts of the primitive origins of poetry threw into relief how much the form had changed historically, and prompted Gummere to seek an explanation for the disintegration of the poetic throng into individual poets "expressing themselves to themselves." The education he had received as a graduate student in Germany provided him with ready-made answers. Following Herder, Gummere argued that print capitalism was the primary engine driving this fall from a state of communal harmony. He believed that the historical shift from oral, pagan religions to textually-based Christianity, and the coincident move from feudalism to capitalism, had instituted "a radical difference between primitive and civilized societies" that made communal composition impossible. Because modernity was characterized by "the increased importance and voluntary, rational activity of the individual" ("Primitive Poetry I" 194), the poet had naturally "detach[ed] himself from the throng in short improvisations" until he had gradually "turn[ed] his active fellows into a mute audience" (*Beginnings* 454). Gummere argued

that this change had allowed modern poetry to gain originality and sophistication, but it had also "forced [poetry] to give up its immediate power over men," which was its ability to create social relations from rhythmic performances (*Beginnings* 458). That this loss was tied to industrialization and technological change had been proved by Karl Bücher's influential 1896 study of the rhythm of labor ("Arbeit und Rhythmus"), according to Gummere.[xiv] Bücher argued that early songs of labor, which were composed by men as they worked, were always highly and regularly rhythmical, which proved to Gummere that "primitive man was less impeded in bodily movements than is now the case, and that these movements were more marked." Because the rhythms of labor songs had to have matched the movements of the work being performed, "primitive man's" movement must have been "rigorously exact" to have "[begotten] a rigorously exact rhythm" which was accompanied "at first [by] half meaningless sounds and then words."[xv] The exactness of primitive movement and verbal rhythm had dissipated in the modern era, according to Gummere, because men increasingly worked as individuals rather than as groups. Citing Bücher, he explained that workers laboring as individuals for a modern company were found to be "uncertain and unrhythmic," but when two or more of these workers were brought together, their shared movements "at once induce[d] an exact rhythm, the rhythm born of consent." The alienation of industrialized labor was thus registered in poetic rhythm. "Advanced" cultures were compensated for the loss of an absolute, exact sense of rhythm by their ability to create "a higher synthesis of individual performances" on a level "unknown to the savage," but Gummere argued that at root, even this abstract intellectual labor grew out of the social consent created by rhythmic movement

(*Beginnings* 108-111).[xvi]

Gummere argued that, taken together, the studies of Brinton, Ehrenreich, and Bücher revealed,

> the spectacle of a long evolution, at one end of which, the uncertain, tentative beginnings of social life, we see human beings acting, alike in the tasks and in the pleasures of their time, with a minimum of thought and a maximum of rhythm; while at the hither end is a highly developed society, where the monotonous whir of machinery has thrust out the old cadence and rhythm of man's labour, where strenuous and solitary wanderings replace the communal dance, and where every brow is marked with the burden of incessant thought. (*Beginnings* 111-112)

Theorizing in a Herderian vein, Gummere posited that the evolution of poetic form revealed the price that "advanced" cultures had had to pay for adopting the twinned phenomena of printed literature and industrial capitalism. The poetic art of preliterate cultures may have been simple and repetitive, but it "[beat] with the pulse of a whole race," and became "racial or national, . . . 'popular' in its best sense." As soon as Christian scribes had begun to "cop[y] . . . exercises from a dead page" without a "sense of race," rhythm as the defining factor of poetry had begun to be lost to sight. This loss was intensified with the rise of the capitalist marketplace, which encouraged individual authors to produce ever more technically accomplished, bloodless poetry in an attempt to gain fame and fortune with a novelty-seeking public. What had been "poetry for the ear" gradually became "poetry for the eye," and in its translation to the page, poetry lost the

"racy," embodied vitality that had been its birthright (*Beginnings* 131). Modern printed poetry, in other words, helped to fracture the once coherent social body, and the loss of rhythm in contemporaneous definitions of poetry was one symptom of that fracture.

Gummere's strategies for dealing with the idiosyncratic rhythms of modern poetry and the attendant loss of communal identity changed markedly between the first and second halves of his career, and the difference between his conclusions in the 1880s and 1890s and those he developed in the 1900s and 1910s reveals a great deal about the rapidly changing study of poetry in the American academy. Early in his career, Gummere was optimistic about the possibility of developing modern metrical communities through pragmatic educational programs. For instance, in 1885, he proposed that the study of English literature in primary schools should be reorganized according to philological principles so that American children would begin with a sense of the racial traits and virtues that were encoded in Germanic roots of the English language. Gummere believed that, although English had been modified by its contact with Latin, French, and other languages, "the heart of [the Englishman's] speech, and the pulse of his poetry remained Germanic" (*Germanic Origins* 101), and he posited that the traits attributed by historians to Anglo-Saxons – frankness, loyalty, patriotism, democracy, and sacrifice – were encoded in the "pulse" of Germanic poetic rhythms. Gummere argued that because the rhythmic sense of children, like that of "primitive" tribal members, was more exact than that of educated adults, students who learned the rhythms of Anglo-Saxon poetry at a young enough age would be able to internalize the racial traits those rhythms encoded. Such a course of instruction would thus "train up a race of scholars" who could recognize

in poetic rhythms a distant but still vital form of communal life ("What Place" 171). By properly educating American children in the rhythms of Old English poetry, the United States could build a coherent national identity from the foundations established by its imagined Anglo-Saxon ancestors.[xvii]

By the time Gummere published his final book-length study in 1911, however, he was significantly more pessimistic about the possibility that his program of prosodic nationalism would see any success in the near future, thanks in large part to a shift in focus in literary studies. When he began his career, the profession emphasized the philological study of literature as it was practiced in German universities, which helped to underscore Gummere's belief in the Anglo-Saxon foundations of the English literary tradition. As departments of national literatures began to take on more distinct identities, however, and as philologists began to question the idea that the English language had developed from a strictly Anglo-Saxon core, scholars became increasingly interested in the cultural exchanges that shaped the rhythmic hybridity of modern poetry. To many of Gummere's contemporaries, irregular poetic rhythms seemed to be a sign of a higher cultural synthesis rather than signs of a cultural crisis. Gummere narrated this shift in literary criticism as the result of a second Norman invasion, arguing that a marauding French poetics, which valued idiosyncratic, individual expression over rhythmic communal feeling, had won the war for the American reading public's attention, and had consequently popularized a wrongheaded theory of democracy. He pointed to the increasing popularity of Walt Whitman's poetry (which was just beginning to be institutionalized; I discuss Whitman's changing reputation more fully in my next chapter)

as an indication of how far astray Americans had gone from the democratic ideal encoded in Anglo-Saxon rhythms. The fact that Whitman had gained a reputation as the "democrat of the western world" showed that both the wrong type of unrhythmic lyric poetry and the wrong type of democracy had gained a firm foothold in American life. Gummere's early philological training had taught him that Anglo-Saxon democratic order required that individuals always subsumed their needs under those of their imagined community, while French democracy encouraged individuals to pursue their own interests at the expense of the larger social group. Gummere argued that the properly democratic poet would thus seek "to put vigor and freshness and efficiency into the art by making it more spontaneous, by bringing poetry closer not only to nature but to the people and to the beginnings and unspoiled early phases of life," which would mean using the regular rhythms characteristic of primitive communal poetry (*Democracy* 100). Whitman's poetry seemed to Gummere to be a mere display of "individual freedom" rather than an expression of communal life; he adhered strictly to the doctrine, "say what you will, of what you will, how you will," without attending to the needs of his imagined community. By attempting to become "a law unto himself," Gummere argued, Whitman shirked the true democratic duty to put himself in the service of his nation by submitting to its artistic as well as its political laws (*Democracy* 115-120). Unchecked freedom of expression may have seemed to be an indication of democracy in action to the larger reading public, but for Gummere, this freedom was simply an empty gesture. He explained that,

> Whitman deliberately refuses to keep step: and all the great poets do keep step, mainly in a very simple kind of march. They lead; but they lead in the consent of a consenting, coherent band . . . He cannot be the poet of democracy in its highest ideal who rejects the democratic idea of submission to the highest social order, to the spirit of the laws, to that imagined community. (*Democracy* 124-125)

Gummere argued that Whitman's attempt to move away from artistic convention was not a true act of self-liberation, because the march of communal poetics was not a constraint but "the active function of the community" (*Democracy* 131). Even worse, Whitman's poetry only *seemed* to offer an escape from poetic convention. Gummere explained that Whitman's invitation to see him as a man rather than an artist indicated that his

> poetic 'confession' is to come, as it were, from the witness-box and not from the conventional shelter of artistry. . . . [But] ink and paper are already a disguise; and even the entry, made as sincerely as you could make it, in your private diary, has already taken on something of this conventional manner. It is not quite yourself. The 'I' of every lyric poet is conventional, however sincere the utterance, however direct the confession. (*Democracy* 126-127)

The effect of the loss of rhythm and its accompanying sense of poetic community was thus doubled for Gummere, as this loss was incurred in the name of a false liberation from the healthy social body. Too, Gummere argued, Whitman's address to his readers

was symptomatic of the way that modern lyric poetry had changed the very nature of the modern crowd. He explained that because the overwhelming majority of modern poets addressed secrets directly "into the reader's ear," they had created a sense that such privacy was valuable while "the human mass, so unstable, so swayed by passion and blind instinct," was a "pathetic sight" rather than the vestige of a healthy communal past (*Democracy* 214). The increasing value of the individual, in other words, had impeded the modern crowd's ability to collect into a unified whole that was more than the sum of its parts. The intertwined fates of poetry and democracy ensured that as one side fell, so would the other, hastening the process of modern fragmentation that had begun with the rise of print capitalism. It thus seemed clear to Gummere that his attempt to realize premodern sociality through modern metrical education had met with potentially insurmountable resistance by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century. However, as we will see, the long and uneven process of generic abstraction and consolidation in modern poetics created a number of surprising intersections and afterlives for raced theories of poetics like Gummere's.

II. The evolution of the culture concept

Gummere's despair about the fate of the community imagined through verse was reflective of the complicated position the theory of communal origins occupied in the 1910s. On the one hand, Gummere's theory had gained wide acceptance; as Louise Pound noted in *PMLA* in 1917, the idea that the earliest form of literature was communally performed poetry had become, "without doubt, a view now widely accepted

in the United States" ("The Beginnings" 221). Indeed, as late as 1929, Pound noted that Gummere's theory of communal ballad composition was being taught in American high schools, and that it seemed "to have a monopoly in the textbooks and the teaching of the secondary schools" ("High-School" 495). On the other hand, new developments in anthropology were leading scholars to modify and alter Gummere's hypothesis and his conclusions about rhythm's role in shaping social institutions. Folklorist Arthur Beatty, for instance, who earned his Ph.D. at Columbia University in 1898, just as Franz Boas was reinventing Columbia's department of anthropology, argued in a 1914 article in *PMLA* that, "No one who has a true appreciation of the matter would think for a moment of denying that communal, or community dancing is a characteristic of every people in a low stage of culture" (487), but he also noted that the theory of communal origins was in need of modification in light of new developments in anthropology. Beatty explained that "the anthropology of Durkheim and his school" had made "an advance upon that of Tylor and the English school" by "emphasiz[ing] the *individuality*" of tribal groups "rather than the characteristics which each holds in common with all others" (489), and consequently, literary studies needed to account for the differences between the early poetries of different national traditions rather than emphasizing the similarity of primitive "throngs."

It is precisely this shift in anthropological paradigms that has caused the type of raced prosodic fantasies developed in Gummere's work to drop out of contemporary institutional histories, and to be taken as historical curiosities rather than intellectually influential forces. Such fantasies are viewed as typical of a brief moment before a

modern pluralistic concept of culture emerged, and with it, a more cosmopolitan version of literary criticism. Gerald Graff, for instance, notes that theories of race were hugely important "in the formation of language and literature departments in the 1880s," but he argues that serious literary critics quickly moved away from the "nationalist idiom" of departmental founders (70-72), and that the Romantic nationalism of historians like Taine and philologists like Herder and the brothers Grimm had become "embarrassing" to serious scholars by the 1880s (76). But such thinking continued to operate even in serious criticism in the 1900s and 1910s; as Susan Hegeman has shown, anthropologists and related academic investigators in the first few decades of the twentieth century "were not committed in any rigorous way to relativism in its common contemporary sense as an epistemological, antifoundational position. Rather, relativism in this moment often went hand in hand with a foundational belief in scientific rationality and the commonality of humankind." Early versions of a pluralistic concept of culture thus "coexisted uncontradictorily with foundational theories of value" (7). Literary theorists remained engaged with anthropology and ethnology during this transitional period, and iterated ideas of literary evolution that reflected the tension between an emergent relativistic bent and more sweeping categorical claims about humankind as a species. Beatty, for instance, noted that although new ethnological research showed that the communal dances of "present-day savages" differed from tribe to tribe, they still served as "example[s] of the race of man ever tending to break forth into song when favored with the proper environment and instructors" (498).

This is the complex conceptual terrain that Richard Moulton entered in the 1910s.

In many ways, Moulton's criticism seems to move beyond the nationalistic thinking of scholars like Gummere, and to provide a prototype of more modern versions of literary criticism. Indeed, Suzy Anger has positioned Moulton as a New Critic avant la lettre, suggesting that perhaps Wimsatt and Beardsley's intentional and affective fallacies were derived from ideas Moulton espoused in his 1915 work *The Modern Study of Literature: An Introduction to Literary Theory and Interpretation*. Anger argues that in "Moulton's now forgotten works we find the principles of New Criticism originally and brilliantly introduced," and that, "In locating meaning in semantics, he opens the way to a range of anti-intentionalist arguments to follow, from Oscar Wilde through the New Critics, and ultimately to structuralist and poststructuralist theory" (139). To be sure, Moulton did encourage critics to attend more fully to texts and to spend less time on related historical issues, arguing that there was an "inner" and "outer" study of literature, and that only the inner study was properly literary interpretation. But Moulton's idea of what constituted the inner study of literature was hardly New Critical; instead, it was a direct reaction against the formation of departments of national literature in the early decades of the modern university. To Moulton, the difference between the "inner" and "outer" study of literature was not the difference between literature and history, but rather the difference between the comparative study of world literature as a whole and the study of national literatures in separate departments. He argued that "The Outer Study has responsibility for the total output of particular authors or nations or epochs: the Inner Study recognizes only what part of this discloses features of literary evolution." Moulton believed that the outer study, as it was carried out in departments of national literature, was dangerous

because, since it was closely related to historical investigations of national development, it ran the risk of keeping a scholar "forever in the region of *knowing about* literature instead of setting himself to *know* the literature as it is" (*Modern Study* 115-116). Moulton argued that such supplementary knowledge was beneficial, and that the line between the two approaches was "a fluctuating boundary, which must be drawn by each student for himself" (*Modern Study* 99). But put in proper perspective, questions of literary history were "a means to an end"; histories of national literatures provided clues about the evolution of literary forms, which in turn showed that literature developed out of intercultural contact as well as out of discrete national traditions (*Modern Study* 110). The inner study may have been more concerned with textual analysis than the outer study, but its "main interest" was "in literary evolution" as a process that crossed arbitrary national and disciplinary boundaries (*Modern Study* 491). (See figures 1 and 2). A turn towards literary morphology – what Hoskins called the "genetic study" of literature – would thus allow scholars to move away from literary study as "a mere aggregation of separate literatures" and towards the study of "the unity of literature" as a body of interrelated texts (*Modern Study* 78). According to Moulton, this comparativist turn could provide "nothing less than the Autobiography of Civilization" where national literary studies had provided only local insight into isolated works (*World Literature* 56). The force of Moulton's critical intervention was thus to push scholars to theorize beyond the bounds of their specialized disciplines in order to produce a more complete picture of the evolution of culture on a grand scale. He explained that the comparative study of what he called "Literary Bibles," or culturally significant works, would shed light on the

process of literary evolution as the "survival of the spiritually fittest" by demonstrating which literary forms survived the pressures of different historical moments (*World Literature* 53-54). This evolution would provide scholars with clues about which social values were most important at any given moment, and would help scholars to understand the mechanisms of cultural evolution. If Moulton was less interested in maintaining national boundaries than Herder or Taine, he was yet still invested in finding the "truth" about the development of civilization in the same way that German philologists had been in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

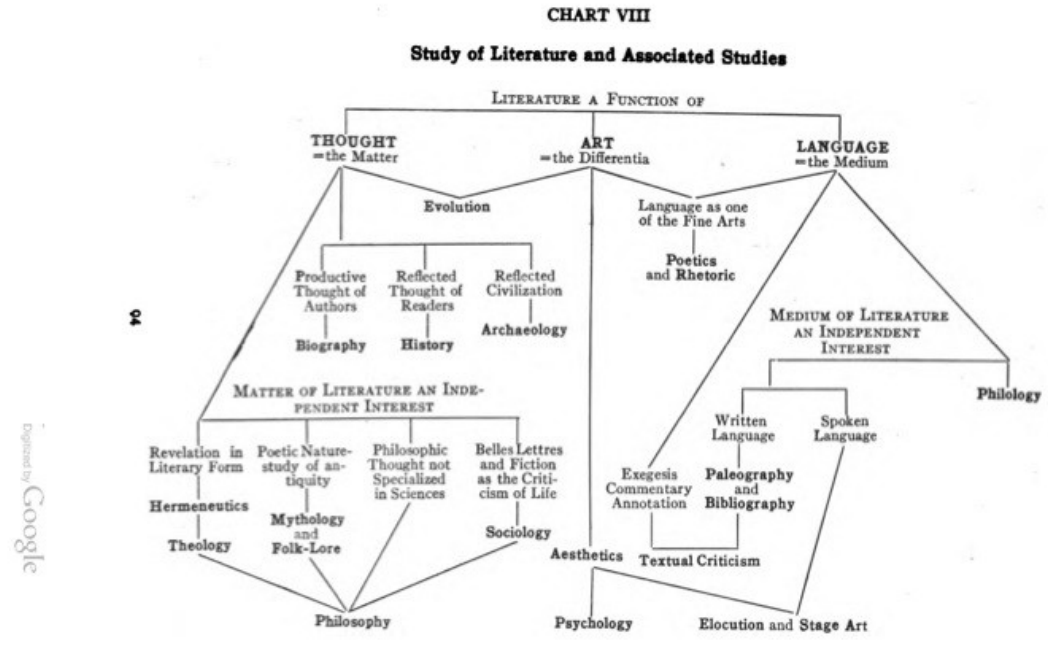

Figure 1: Moulton's schema of fields related to the study of literature (Modern Study 94).

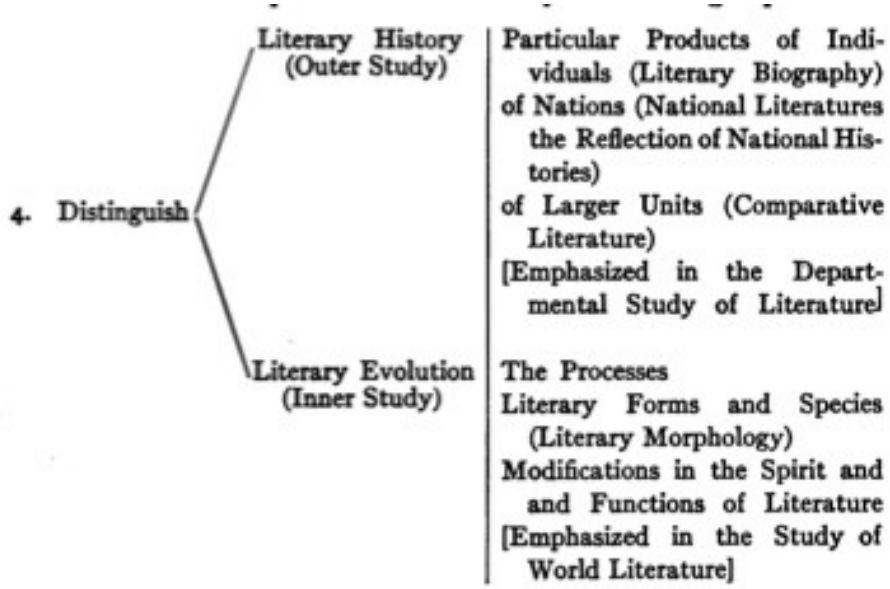

Figure 2: The key differences between the inner and outer study of literature (Modern Study 108).

Moulton argued that the most basic literary form from which all others evolved was what he called the "ballad dance." Following Gummere's account of the origins of poetry,[xviii] Moulton argued that countless studies "of folk dances among the most diverse peoples in an early stage of civilization" had shown that when literature first appeared spontaneously in the evolution of human civilization, it had taken the form of the "ballad dance," in which participants sang and danced a story together (*Modern Study* 11). Because it united verbal, aural, and physical forms of narration and expression, the ballad dance was the "protoplasmic form [that] contain[ed] all other literary forms in embryo" (*Modern Study* 27). (See figure 3). Moulton argued that Classical critics had erred in viewing literary types (such as lyric, epic, and drama) as fixed categories; they were more properly akin to "the elements of chemistry," because "in actual literature they will be found, sometimes singly, more often in combination" (*Modern Study* 20). The "inner

study" of literature, properly understood, was a sort of physical science that involved tracing the interactions of these elements to understand how literary forms changed and adapted under the pressure of shifting environmental and cultural conditions. Formal analysis was primary to Moulton, but only insofar as it reflected "modifications in the spirit and functions of literature" (*Modern Study* 109).

CHART I

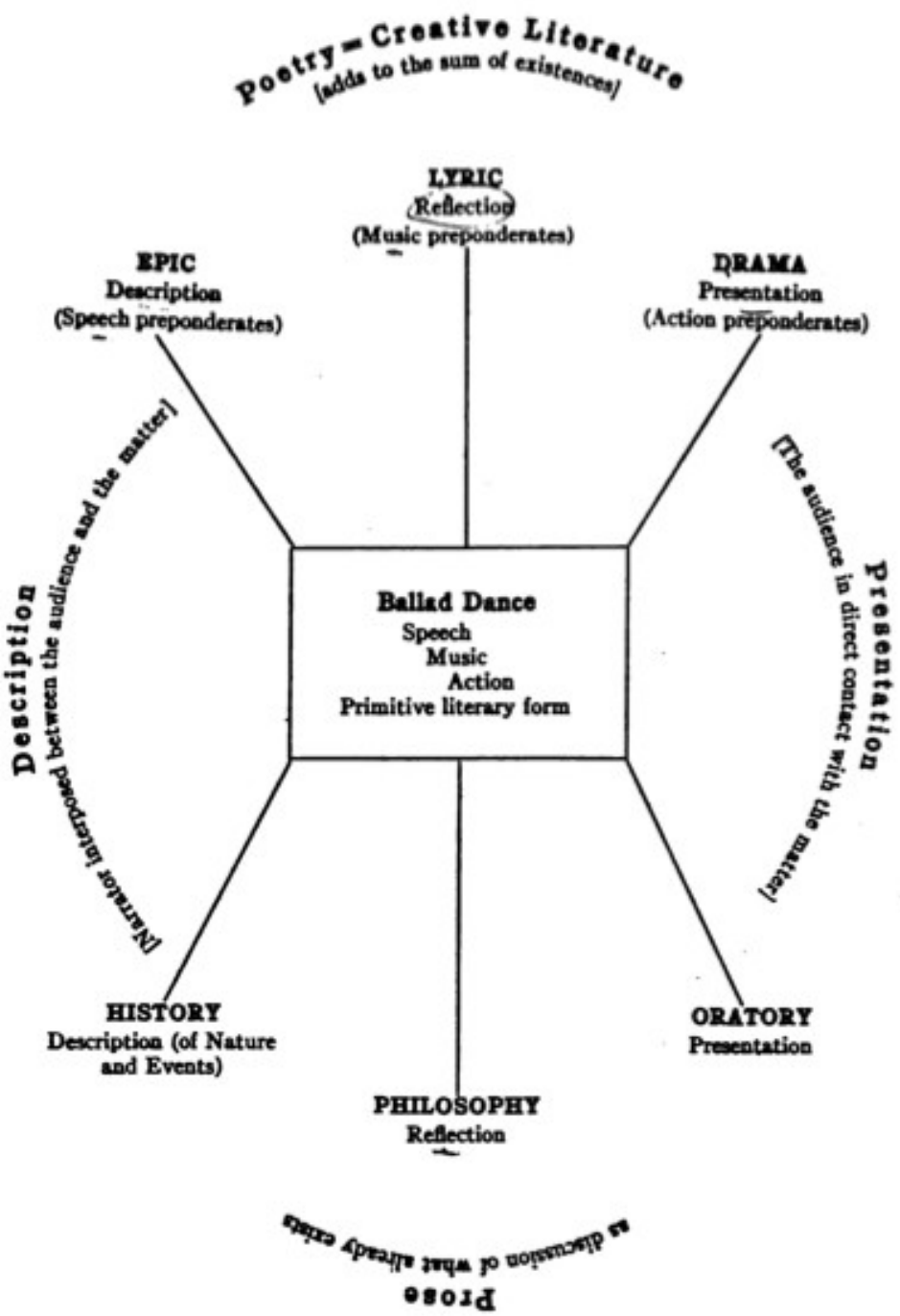

Figure 3: Moulton's vision of literary evolution (Modern Study 18).

Lyric poetry seemed to Moulton to offer one of the clearest shifts in "the spirit and functions" of a literary form. Like Gummere, Moulton believed that early forms of poetry like the ballad dance had been authored by groups rather than individuals, and were consequently concerned with convention as a reflection of community interests. Moulton explained that, "In the age of oral poetry originality had not yet been invented . . . What is new in oral poetry becomes beautiful in proportion as it echoes what is old" (*Modern Study* 23). Gradually, the "extemporized effusions of individuals, either interrupting the dance or running concurrently with it," evolved into "the ballad apart from the refrain," giving rise to poems written down by individuals, and finally to poetry composed entirely by individual authors (*Modern Study* 36-38). (See figure 4).

CHART XVIII

Morphology of Lyric Poetry

1. Attraction to Epic and Drama

- Compare elaborate odes, such as Gray's *Bard*—narrative ballads—Amoebaean poems of **Theocritus**
- Dramatic psalms of the Bible—Dramatic idyl of *Solomon's Song*
- Lyrical epics of Shelley, Southey, Byron—and especially **DANTE**

2. Attraction to Philosophy

- Wisdom literature (Biblical, Classical, modern) where the lyrical element preponderates—typical: *In Memoriam*, Browning's *Christmas Eve* and *Easter Day*

3. Differentiation

between
- Choral: *Deborah's Song*—Chorus in Greek tragedy
- Individual: the great mass of songs, odes, etc.

between
- Objective: the mood prescribed from without
  - Hymns and ritual—Incantations—Encomia—(modern) Elegies
  - Occasional poems: **PINDAR**—Epithalamia, etc.
- Subjective: the crystallization of particular moods and sentiments: Love songs—Horatian odes—'Lyrics' *par excellence*

miscellaneous differentiation into unlimited number of types: lyric form readily coalescing with other forms (e.g., in Browning)

4. Inspiration of Technique

Sonnet
- Freer form of Biblical sonnet—or earlier European (compare *Hekatompathia*)
- Specific form of Italian and English sonnet: Dante, Petrarch, Milton, Wordsworth
- [Compare 'forms of false wit' in Addison's *Spectator*, No. 58]

Brevities (miniature sonnets)
- Biblical epigrams and number sonnets
- Classical and modern epigrams—especially the Greek *Anthology* and Martial
- Sanskrit quatrains
- Japanese 'tanka' [syllabic form]

5. Lyric Compounding

- The *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam
- The Odes of **Horace**—Sanskrit centuries
- Biblical Hallels—*The Songs of Ascents*
- Biblical acrostic poems—especially *Lamentations*
- Especially: Sonnet sequences (implying creative frame): **DANTE, PETRARCH, SHAKESPEARE**

Figure 4: Moulton's vision of the morphology of the lyric form (Modern Study 198).

Moulton's account of poetic evolution thus did not dispute the premises of Gummere's theory, but his conclusions about the role of rhythm in poetry and society differed radically. For Moulton, literary forms reflected but did not cause or shape dramatic social shifts, meaning that what had been a tragedy for Gummere was merely proof of the ongoing progress of civilization for Moulton. Moulton agreed with Gummere that preindustrial societies had been far more homogeneous than their modern counterparts, and that this equality had led to a sort of democracy of literary opportunity. He explained that the oral poet "has for audience the whole public," meaning that all classes of people were able to listen to minstrel bards; as he put it, in preindustrial societies, "all classes of society have equal literary opportunities." He also concurred that printed literature introduced "a gulf between the reading and the non-reading classes" and "disfranchised . . . a large part of society" (*Modern Study* 22). But where Gummere saw the breakup of the unity of medieval communities as a symptom of an unstoppable social disintegration, Moulton saw it as proof of intercultural exchange that would result in a higher synthesis of previously separate literary traditions and tendencies. He explained that the Middle Ages had not been the last instantiation of unified community, but rather "constitute[d] a vast gathering ground" where the "limitless variety of poetic materials" provided by various cultural traditions had undergone "free intermingling and fusion" to provide a "foundation for the poetry of the future" (*World Literature* 42-45). Moulton argued that the inductive study of texts had shown that English literature was not

essentially Germanic, but instead represented an amalgamation of the best traits of "English folklore and German; Celtic lore . . . Norse heroic saga . . . ; all the accumulations of Oriental nations, brought into Europe by the Arabs; . . . in addition to what remained of Hellenic story . . . and the story wealth of the Bible" (*World Literature* 43). English poetry was thus constituted by "the amalgamation of the literary riches of many races in a product that becomes infinitely richer as it amalgamates" (*World Literature* 46). (See figure 5). For Moulton, there was thus no need to offset the losses caused by the transition from oral to printed literature because those losses were intrinsically counterbalanced by the gains of intercultural exchange. Moulton argued that the true differences between preindustrial society and "Modern Culture" could "be summed up as a New Thought, a New Poetry, a New Religion, and a New Art," where each new field was characterized by its synthesis and transcendence of older ideas. He explained that inductive observation had created the New Thought, "in which observers and thinkers of all races and generations gradually resolve into a coöperation for the advance of truth." The New Poetry (a phrase with a particular cultural cachet at this time, as I will discuss more fully in chapter three), rather than representing socially destructive centrifugal forces, as Gummere believed it did, represented an equilibrium that was in fact conducive to social order. Moulton explained that the New Poetry combined elements of the "fundamental antithesis" between "Romantic and Classical" tendencies, which were "the centripetal and centrifugal forces of creative literature," since Classical poetry sought to embody the past and respect "an established sense of form," while the "Romantic impulse" encouraged "novelty, free invention, and surprise." In the modern

era, Moulton argued, "The mutual play of these antithetic tendencies keeps poetry in wholesome equilibrium." The New Religion was similarly characterized by the "free play of religious thought, in which authority itself must be a voluntarily accepted authority," just as the New Art was represented by the orchestra, which united "human voices . . .as one type of instrument" (*World Literature* 49-50). Modern culture, in other words, was a matter of synthesis rather than of disintegration, and the evolution of poetry from a communal to an individualistic form reflected that synthesis. Far from being characterized by disintegration and alienation, modernity was characterized by the synthesis of and harmony between national traditions that were no longer held in check by arbitrary tribal affiliations and national borders.

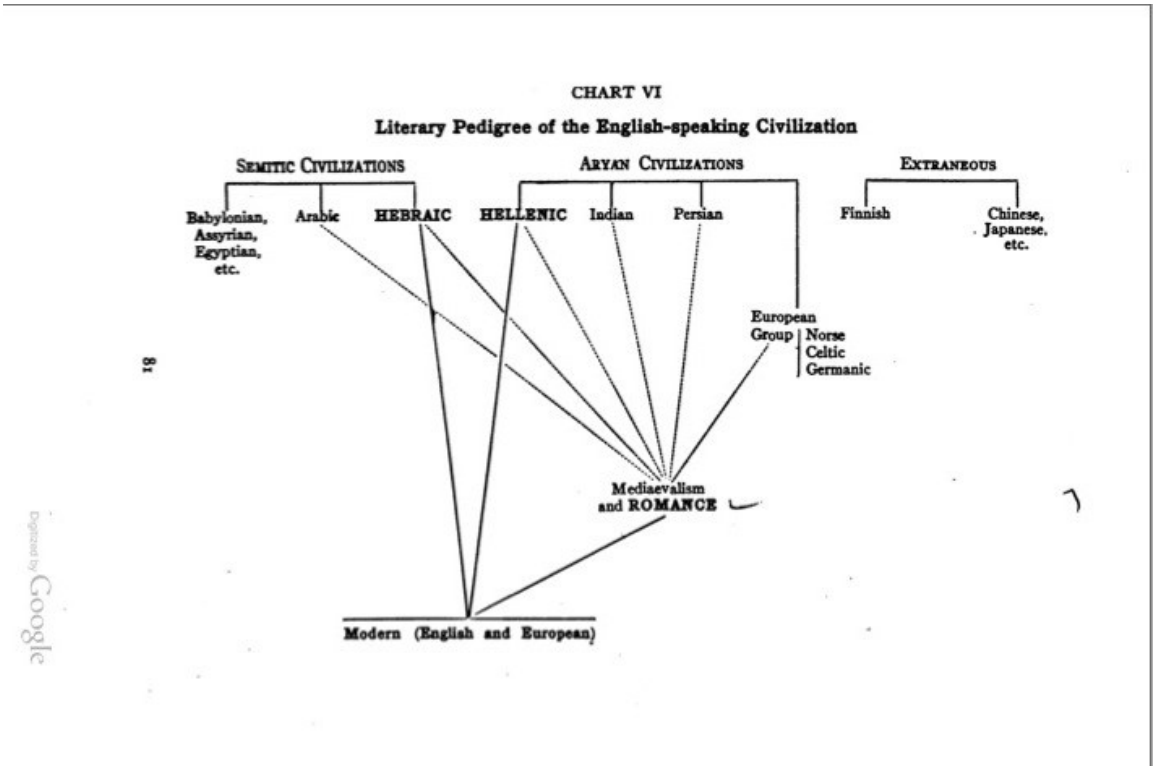

Figure 5: Moulton's "Literary Pedigree of the English-speaking Civilization (Modern

Study 81).

In Moulton's iteration of the communal origins hypothesis, poetic rhythms had almost nothing to do with the ultimate fate of the imagined community. This was because he believed that literature was a reflection of, rather than a shaping force in, social relations. Rhythm had provided "a sort of scaffolding" for poetry as it evolved away from its origin in the dance, but in "fully developed poetry," the scaffolding of rhythm was not a necessary part of the art form. To Moulton, the decreased importance of rhythm in modern poetry was thus a sign that literature had followed a "natural course" of development (*Modern Study* 11-12) rather than a sign of social disintegration. Poetic rhythm was a sort of silent music, a trace of a long forgotten form of syncretic art. Moulton explained that the real difference between poetry and prose was not rhythm, but that poetry dealt with imagined possibilities while prose was "limited to the discussion of what already exists" (*Modern Study* 16). He argued that Gummere had reached a different conclusion about the role of rhythm in poetry because Gummere was primarily "concerned with the *usage* of the term 'poetry,'" while Moulton was "concerned with the principles of literary theory," which required "a firm stand . . . against the traditional error" of defining poetry as rhythmic literature (*Modern Study* 17 note 1; italics in original). But in both cases, Gummere and Moulton were concerned with the relation of literary theory to the construction of a unified imagined community. The difference between the two was in the temporal direction of their utopian horizons. For Gummere, the study and theory of literature showed that lost modes of premodern sociality could be recovered in modern metrical discourse. For Moulton, literary theory provided a

different path to social unity, by showing how the "poetry of the future" could achieve an unprecedented cultural synthesis that would also portend a more closely knit world civilization.[xix] He argued that the "full significance" of his "conception of world literature" was that it showed "that the whole of Europe . . . constitutes a single reading circle. The various nations have gradually differentiated from the unity of mediaeval Europe in which they grew together: yet in our broad outlook we see here a single literature. . . . The recognition of this unity was never so clear as at the present moment" (*Modern Study* 89-90). For Moulton, modern literary theory helped to make visible the fact that poetic and cultural evolution shared the same principles, and were necessarily correlated.

Moulton's insistence on "the present moment" (meaning roughly 1915, when *The Modern Study of Literature* was published) as the moment when the correlation between poetic traits and social organization had been made clear accurately measured the critical climate in the 1910s; most critics working at this time took it for granted that poetic form indexed the state of a culture's health. And yet, as we will see, this seeming critical consensus set the stage for some of the most contentious prosodic debates in American poetics. Theories of American exceptionalism intersected with Moulton's ideas about the crossing of national boundaries in complex and contradictory ways, and critics became preoccupied with the question of what types of poetic rhythms and forms could accurately represent the new American "race" that many believed was being forged from the nation's immigrant groups. If we now take it for granted that Walt Whitman carved a path for the "poetry of the future" by loosening the bonds of "traditional" rhythm, the

genealogy of modern American poetry was much less clear in the 1910s. In my next chapter, I examine how the theory of communal origins was used both to construct Whitman as the father of American free verse and to question his claim to that title. For many critics, the future of American poetry turned out to lie not with Whitman, but with a much more distant imagined past.

Chapter 2

Whitman Made Modern

"[P]oetry's origin is to be found in the dance, in the rise and fall 'of consenting feet' (in Gummere's phrase) . . . Whitman's desire to give up borrowed cadences altogether came from his crude re-living of the primitive evolution of poetry."

- F.O. Matthiessen, *The American Renaissance*

Whitman studies in the twentieth century have shown us the truth of Whitman's declaration, "I am large, I contain multitudes." There is a Whitman for every artistic and social need: the aesthetic Whitman liberates poetry from the shackles of its past; the queer Whitman challenges heteronormative structures; the historic Whitman registers the rapid technological and media shifts of modernity; the political Whitman shows us the promise of liberal selfhood. There are British, Spanish, German, Brazilian, Portuguese, Italian, Polish, Swedish, and Russian Whitmans, as Gay Wilson Allen and Ed Folsom show in *Whitman and the World*, each of which responds to distinct cultural trends and historical events. Whitman's varied legacies can make it seem as if "Whitman is mere *bathybius*; . . . literature in the condition of protoplasm – an intellectual organism so simple that it takes the instant impression of whatever mood approaches it," as the British

critic Edmund Gosse half-seriously proposed in 1896 (97). Contemporary critics have been attentive to the constructed nature of these various Whitmans, particularly following the publication of the seminal essay collection *Breaking Bounds* in 1996, which was intended to direct critical focus to "the performative and staged dimensions of the figure 'Walt Whitman' and the constructedness of his reputation" (Erkkila 9). And yet, there is one Whitman who critics continue to accept as a natural fact: Whitman the father of free verse, who liberated American poetry from the confines of "traditional" poetry. This figure has been so fully naturalized that even the critics who are most attuned to Whitman's shifting place in history are still unable to recognize that the alignment of Whitman with free verse happened at a particular historical moment. David Reynolds, for instance, whose carefully historicized work is otherwise sensitive to Whitman's protean reputation, states as fact that, as the "father of free verse," Whitman "changed the course of poetry" by "liberat[ing] poetry from rhyme and meter, opening it up to the flexible rhythms of feeling and voice" (ix). Even Betsy Erkkila, the editor of *Breaking Bounds*, literalizes this figure by explaining that Whitman "broke away from the form and content of traditional verse" to found a new tradition of poetic rhythm (7). To be sure, Whitman's own writings seem to authorize this vision of Whitman as the father of a new poetic form; as he put it in the preface to the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, the American poet's job was to "[see] the solid and beautiful forms of the future where there are now no solid forms" (334). But to claim that Whitman's new form was free verse is to take for granted that we know what free verse was and is, and, in the process, to simplify a complex history of debates about modern poetic rhythm. Whitman's poetry

was not called “free verse” with any regularity until the 1920s, and even then, arguments about the nature of free verse abounded. Was free verse the same as *vers libre*, metrical prose, spaced prose, mosaics, cadenced verse, or polyphonic prose, to name just a few of the new forms early-twentieth-century prosodists believed they had discovered? If not, where did Whitman's poetry fit within the taxonomy of modern poetic forms? Did the openness and flexibility of these modern forms herald the triumph of American democracy, or its impending breakdown? These free verse debates generated thousands of pages of writing that circulated among academics, critics, amateur and professional poets, and lay readers in America and England,[xx] and provided fodder for the creation of countless competing metrical systems. That these debates have been collapsed into a linear narrative about free verse as a coherent genre highlights the incredible fact that, twenty-four years after its publication, Cary Nelson's observation in *Repression and Recovery* that “we no longer know the history of [modern] poetry”(4) remains true. By attending to the lost early twentieth-century conversations that debated Whitman's place at the beginning of an American poetic tradition, this chapter attempts to restore a sense of the complicated, non-linear, contingent history of modern American poetry, at the same time that it attempts to understand why this history has been so difficult to narrate. I argue that only a historical approach to rhythm can bridge the persistent gap between the actual record of modern American poetics and our selective, teleological narratives of its development. To recognize that Whitman was constructed as the father of free verse in the twentieth century is to reorient our sense of literary history, and to open up important questions about how current models of periodization affect how we think about

the functions and characteristics of different poetic forms and genres today.

Of course, there have been attempts to understand Whitman's place in literary history as a function of particular modes of criticism. Scott MacPhail, for instance, argues that the "lyric-nationalist readings of Whitman" (137) as the fountainhead of American poetry stem from the simultaneous emergence of the New Criticism and American studies in the mid-twentieth-century American academy (133-134). MacPhail's analysis importantly highlights how the New Critical ideal of the lyric as the genre that transcends history and ideology, when applied to Whitman's poetry, helped to "[serve] the ideological needs of [mid-century] state structures of power" by providing a seemingly rational, coherent articulation of American nationalism (139-140). But I want to suggest that an exclusive focus on this era's construction of Whitman misses the many other times that Whitman – and, more specifically, Whitman's rhythms – became a useful figure for the propagation of narratives of national progress. In the 1900s and 1910s, as the second great wave of immigration increased the diversity of the American population and stimulated anxiety about the country's ability to absorb multiple immigrant bodies into a coherent national body, Whitman's rhythms became a flashpoint in debates about the perils and promises of assimilationist ideologies. In the process, these debates produced key ideas about the nature of free verse and modern poetry that continue to circulate in the academy today in deracinated, decontextualized forms. This significant moment in the country's "absorption" of Whitman as a generative figure thus provides a particularly rich site for rethinking the relationship between poetic rhythms, national ideologies, and literary history.

I. Fred Newton Scott's Whitman: Rhythm as national allegory

Whitman simply proclaimed that he had created a new form of national poetry, but many scholars in the early-twentieth-century American academy believed that their investigations into the origins of poetic rhythm had finally proven that this was so. Fred Newton Scott became one of the first academics to argue that Whitman had successfully created an entirely new, and entirely American, verse form when he published "A Note on Walt Whitman's Prosody" in *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* in 1908. Scott was a hugely influential figure in English studies in the early 1900s. He served as president of the Modern Language Association in 1907, founded the department of rhetoric at the University of Michigan, co-founded the National Council of Teachers of English and the Linguistic Society of America, and authored an impressive number of textbooks, critical studies, and scholarly articles, including the widely used *Introduction to the Methods and Materials of Literary Criticism*. Scott was particularly interested in the problem of differentiating the rhythms of poetry from the rhythms of prose, and his work in this area led him to believe that he had discovered the solution to the problem of Whitman's irregular form (though, importantly, he did not call that form free verse). Scott's reconceptualization of Whitman grew out of his engagement with an unlikely pair of theorists: Francis Barton Gummere and John Stuart Mill. Gummere, of course, would have been horrified at being grouped together with Mill, but Scott had no trouble combining aspects of their oppositional theories because he believed that poetry had evolved into a unified, coherent genre, and that academic investigators could discover the

"primal causes" and universal principles that governed that evolution ("Differentia" 254). If poetry could be studied scientifically, it was possible that both Gummere and Mill had discovered truths about the genre, even if they differed in the conclusions they drew from those truths. In eliding the distance between Gummere and Mill, Scott ignored the fissures and pressure points in prosodic discourse, thereby contributing to the growing sense that there was one "right" way to read poetry rather than multiple ways to approach different genres and metrical forms.

Scott's version of "right" reading is, curiously, both an artifact of turn-of-the-century pseudoscience as well as a source of many influential ideas about the organic rhythms of modern poetry. Scott accepted Gummere's theory that modern poetry had evolved from primitive forms of song and dance, and that its evolution had proceeded according to certain scientifically verifiable principles. Too, he accepted Mill's famous distinction between eloquence and poetry, and he posited that this distinction held the key to finding the fundamental difference between the rhythms of prose and the rhythms of poetry. Scott explained that speakers who wanted to communicate information had to factor in the response of their audience, and so their speech tended to display "a swaying, fluctuating movement of a seemingly irregular kind." Speakers who wanted to express emotion, on the other hand, had only to account for their own feelings, and so tended to produce "a fairly regular series [of sounds] subject to changes in tempo and pitch corresponding to the successive moods of the speaker." If written prose and poetry had developed as modes of communication and expression, respectively, as Scott believed both Mill's and Gummere's theories proved, then it stood to reason that the rhythms of

prose would be made up of long non-repeating units, while those of poetry would be made up of short recurring units. In communally composed premodern poetry, Scott explained, those short units corresponded to the stamping feet and clapping hands of the throng described by Gummere. In individually authored modern poetry, on the other hand, the units of rhythm were derived from the "physiolog[y] and psycholog[y]" of individual bodies ("Differentia" 262-263). To Scott, then, the most fundamental units of English-language poetry were not syllabic units (iambs, dactyls, anapests, etc.), as many prosodists believed, but rather temporal units derived from the rhythms of the human body. Syllabic units could be rightly understood as abstractions imposed upon those basic bodily rhythms.

Scott's attempt to substitute temporal units for syllabic units had many precedents in the nineteenth century – most famously, in E.S. Dallas's 1852 assertion that meter was simply "time heard" and in Coventry Patmore's 1857 elaboration that meter was made up of "'isochronous intervals,' or units of time" (Hall 7). These temporal units were so often tied to the rhythms of the body that, as Jason Rudy argues, "the history of Victorian poetry is in no small part a history of the human body" (2).[xxi] If Scott was aware of this rich prosodic history, however, he did not let on. He presented his theory as an entirely new discovery that was only possible thanks to advances in modern science. He appealed to his own amateur experiments and to popular evolutionary theories to justify his approach to rhythm, which helped to give his prosodic theory the appearance of a disinterested, scientific discovery. He presented "data" drawn from his encounters with animals to prove that his rhythmical laws held for all vocalizing animals, explaining that,

when he managed to overhear the songs of birds and the cries of cats without their noticing (meaning they had no audience and were only attempting to express themselves to themselves, to paraphrase Mill), their vocalizations came "in a rhythmical (one might almost say a metrical) series," but that, once his subjects noticed his presence and realized they had an audience, their cries became "harsh, strident," and "less regular." He noted that his anecdotes about mewling cats and chirping birds opened him to "smiles and gibes," but he remained confident that "the researches of Darwin, Groos, and others concerning the genesis of expressive signs" proved the validity of such evidence ("Differentia" 259-260). To Scott, it was clear that his observations, combined with other studies in evolutionary science, plainly showed that the same set of rhythmical laws governed all languages, from the non-human to the primitive to the modern, and that his generation of theorists was the first to have discovered this fact. In Scott's account, meter was an empirical, verifiable phenomenon rather than an abstraction.

Scott argued that the discovery of these universal rhythmical rules meant that the answer to the question of how to interpret Whitman's idiosyncratic cadences was finally at hand. He posited that Whitman's unusual long lines were the result of a blending of the wave-like rhythms of prose (which he called "motation") and the more steady rhythms of poetry (which he called "nutation"). According to Scott, Whitman's natural "delight in large *free* movements and rushes of sound made him impatient of the *short* units, the quickly recurring beats, of the nutative rhythm. He wished to embody in his verse the largo of nature," and so he "sought to make [these natural sounds and movements] the very foundation of his prosody, the regulative principle of his rhythm" ("A Note" 149;

my emphasis). Whitman had asserted that his poems were the best expression of democratic freedom, but Scott found scientific proof that Whitman's poetry was indeed more “large” and “free” than the “short,” cramped, and stifling movements of “regular” meter. Scott thus helped to naturalize the opposition between “traditional” foot-based systems of prosody and more organic forms of meter.

At the same time, Scott's theory was able to locate the genesis of this new metrical freedom in the language of the American people. He explained that Whitman's hypersensitivity to the unique beauty of American speech helped him to see that he had to create an entirely new idiom in order to adequately express its “peculiar genius,” and that it was his ear for “the pitch-glides and speech-tunes” of prose that allowed him to develop his new, hybrid poetic form (“A Note” 149). In revaluing American speech as a tool of literary innovation, Scott's theory responded to a strain of British criticism that viewed Whitman's prosodic originality as an unfortunate effect of his insufficient metrical education. According to this view, Whitman was simply not educated enough to know that there were already metrical forms suitable for the expression his ideas. Percy Smythe, 8th Viscount Strangford, put forth this argument most bitingly in 1866. In a satire couched as a defense, Smythe explained that Whitman had “somehow managed to acquire or imbue himself with not only the spirit but with the veriest mannerism, the most absolute trick and accent, of Persian poetry.” Smythe argued that Whitman's uneducated state led him to translate this spirit into an undisciplined “yawp,” but if he had had the good luck to attend an English preparatory school, and if “Persian verse-making had been part of the Haileybury course, after the manner of Latin alcaics and hexameters in an

English public school," then Whitman might have been another Edward FitzGerald, translating mystical Eastern poetry into proper English forms (298-300). Smythe's offhand references to specific Latin (and, elsewhere in the piece, Persian) meters are meant to give a sense of exactly how little metrical knowledge Whitman possessed. Not only did poets in the nineteenth century have access to countless English meters; the metrical traditions of all of the languages of the world were increasingly being translated and adapted for use by English-language poets. In ignoring these possibilities, Whitman proved his status as an uncultured American who could only "yawp" irregularly. The poet Roden Noel carried Smythe's joke forward into the 1880s when he responded to Swinburne's famous 1887 attack on Whitman. Noel pretended to defend Whitman's metrical sensibility, claiming that Swinburne had misunderstood Whitman's rhythms because he was insensitive to meters other than "sapphics and alcaics, or intricate English and French metres." Swinburne's finely trained ear was thus unable to register Whitman's more sweeping rhythms, Noel quipped, which were akin to "the harmonies of Bhagavad-Ghita, Icelandic Edda, Norse Rune; . . . [and] the cadences of Thalaba" (654). The eminent prosodist George Saintsbury's analysis was similar, though kinder; he argued that Whitman's rhythm was "too varying, complex, and subtle to be readily seized," and so it would seem "strange . . . to a reader familiarised with the exquisite versification of modern England or France, [though] it is by no means in disagreeable contrast therewith" (399).[xxii] No matter the individual stance on the value of Whitman's cadences, it was clear to nineteenth-century critics that he was foregoing a world of metrical possibilities, and that his refusal of the metrical past required either condemnation or explanation.

Whitman's defenders in the 1880s and 90s did little to justify his metrical project; they tended to assert that Whitman was an important innovator and defender of democracy without providing proof of their own, simply quoting Whitman's poetry in the belief that it spoke for itself.[xxiii] It was not until Scott and other scholars of American literature set out to prove that their objects of study formed a coherent national literary tradition that critics began to attempt to explain and categorize Whitman's metrical innovations in a systematic way. Scott's account of Whitman's speech-based rhythms seemed to provide particularly compelling evidence that American poetry had finally become an organic expression of a unified national culture rather than an imitation of British poetry. As such, the poetic tradition that Whitman inaugurated could help to maintain the unity of the nation, creating a feedback loop between national identity and its literary expression. In Scott's opinion, as in Gummere's, social and artistic institutions were intimately linked. He argued that poetry and government were ruled by the same principles, explaining that,

> the relation between art and nature is like that between a people and its government . . . The people can become free and remain free, only by submission to restraint. They can preserve their coherence, their communal individuality, their organic life and opportunity for unlimited expansion of that life, only as these things incessantly find expression in traditional, law-observing, law-embodying institutions. ("A Note" 137)

Prior to Whitman, no American poet had been able to devise a poetic law that could give expression to the American people's unique "organic life," and so American literature had

failed to successfully cohere as a national tradition. The realization that Whitman had been creating within the bounds of rhythmic law rather than simply "yawping" without a sense of poetic rules meant that he could take his rightful place as the fountainhead of a modern American literary tradition, and that scholars of American poetry could finally prove that their discipline was a vital and important area of research.

Though Scott followed Gummere in arguing that a nation's literature and its identity were inseparable, his sense of the relationship between poetic rhythm and identity was slightly different. Gummere believed that national identity was an effect of rhythm, but Scott understood rhythm to be an allegory for the functioning of a nation. If Scott's conflation of prosody and social relations was less absolute, it was no less powerful, for Whitman's prosody as allegory provided a model for reconciling the potential chaos and heterogeneity of a truly democratic society with the supposed lack of freedom in an other social system. Scott put forth this model in parable form, explaining, "when I read Whitman's poetry in light of [the] conception" of Whitman's prosody as an interweaving of two types of speech rhythms,

> a fantastic myth passes through my mind. I seem to see in Whitman some giant-limbed old heathen god who has descended to the earth fain to take part in the dance of mortals. He begins by practicing the waltz, but soon tires of the mincing steps and quick gyrations. He wants a larger, freer movement. He then tries marching and running and leaping, only to find that what his soul hungers for is the undulating movement of the waltz. So, devising a kind of colossal minuet, with woven paces and with waving arms, he moves through it with a grandiose,

> galumphing majesty peculiar to himself, flinging his great limbs all abroad and shedding ambrosia from his flying locks, yet with all his abandon keeping time to the music, and in all the seeming waywardness of his saltations preserving the law and pattern of the dance. ("A Note" 149-150)

Scott advanced this parable of Whitman the dancer god as the foundational myth that America had been searching for since its colonial days. The motative movement of prose, with its potentially lawless irregularity, stands in for the heterogeneous individuals that make up the American people. These fractious individuals are brought under control by the regular, lawful nutative steps that allow bodies to move together in "the rhythm of consent" that Gummere had theorized, thereby becoming a unified people. For Scott, the "discovery" of Whitman's prosody was also the discovery of the first American throng. By finding their rhythm, he believed, the American people had found a way to overcome the social divisions and pressures that always threatened a democratic society. The "waywardness" and "abandon" of willful individual subjects would be harmonized in the pattern of the "colossal minuet" that was *Leaves of Grass*. For Scott, Whitman was useful not so much as the familiar figure of metrical revolution – the Whitman who liberated the line and "broke new wood" for Ezra Pound – as the figure of metrical reconciliation – the benevolent dancing giant who would bring his community together.

II. Whitman and *vers libre*: Rhythm as "racial fact"

Scott believed that the question of Whitman's rhythm and his consequent place in literary history was a settled affair. But for the majority of critics in the 1910s, the issue

was far from resolved. If Whitman had effected a prosodical sea change, as Scott believed his researches had proven, at approximately the same time that French *vers librists* had transformed French prosody, what was the relationship between Whitman's rhythms and *vers libre*? What would it mean to call Whitman's American form free verse when that term was the translated name of a French phenomenon? Had Whitman actually created a new American form, or had he simply responded to a larger revolutionary zeitgeist? For many scholars and critics involved in the free verse debates of the 1910s, the same scientific studies of rhythm that proved to Scott that Whitman had created the first American verse form instead confirmed that Whitman's metrical innovations were a false start rather than a new beginning for American poetry. Amy Lowell was one of Whitman's most vocal detractors during this period. In her 1914 article "*Vers Libre* and Metrical Prose," published in *Poetry* magazine, Lowell explained that Whitman had not invented a new prosody, but had rather stumbled into what she called "metrical prose." Lowell believed that a misunderstanding of the nature of English meter was causing critics to overvalue Whitman's work, and to overlook the truly groundbreaking prosodical experiments being carried out by contemporary poets. This was clearly a self-interested claim on Lowell's part, but her understanding of English prosody was shared by many of her contemporaries. Lowell explained that *vers libre* had become a catch-all term for all innovative poetry, which was problematic because it obscured the significant differences between French and English versification. In French poetry, Lowell argued, with its "firm and inelastic rules," it was "difficult . . . to escape monotony," and so French *vers librists* had rightly rebelled against the constraints of

traditional meter. English prosody, on the other hand, was "so much freer, and permits of so much more change," that translating the rhythms of *vers libre* into English was almost impossible. According to Lowell, most poets who attempted this feat – including Whitman – ended up producing "metrical prose" rather than free verse (214). Sounding much like Scott, Lowell argued that the rhythms of speech formed a spectrum, from the long "wave lengths" of prose to the short, repeating "curves" of poetry, and that Whitman's rhythmical "wave lengths" could prove that his most experimental passages were prose rather than poetry. The curves of Whitman's lines were "very long," but with a clear "return," which stood in marked contrast to the curves of *vers libre*, which were "much shorter" with an "excessively marked" return (215-217). The difference proved to Lowell that Whitman had not created a new poetic meter; indeed, much of his poetry was not even poetry, making him an unsuitable father figure for an American poetic tradition.[xxiv]

Lowell believed that her hypothesis was verified in 1916, when she collaborated on a series of laboratory experiments with William Morrison Patterson, a professor of English at Columbia University. Lowell read poems aloud into a state-of-the-art "sound-photographing machine" that "measure[d] the time-intervals" between her vocalizations. Patterson and Lowell interpreted the results of these experiments somewhat differently (Patterson believed that the rhythms of *vers libre* could be translated into English; Lowell did not), but they agreed that they proved that Whitman was not the metrical innovator Scott believed him to be. Patterson explained that Whitman's poems were "mosaics," which he defined as a genre in which "the several kinds of verse and prose . . . alternate

successively," creating an unsynthesized blend of multiple types of rhythmic curves. To Patterson, the "long curves" of Whitman's rhythms "drop[ped] into rather futile regularity" too often to truly break free from the constraints of "traditional" meter, and so could not be considered *vers libre* ("New Verse" 264). By placing the rhythms of prose and poetry side by side without fusing them, Whitman had pointed to the limits of, but had not transcended or transmuted, poetic form.[xxv] And if Whitman had been unable to synthesize the diverse American speech rhythms he took as his starting point into a coherent form, then his poetry would certainly not be able to accurately represent and reflect a coherent national character, as cultural critics believed a national poetry should.

In his powerfully influential 1915 polemic *America's Coming-of-Age*, Van Wyck Brooks posited a more complicated reasons for Whitman's formal failure. It was not that his prosody was too free and unsystematic; rather, Whitman could not have represented the American character in his poetry because it did not yet exist. Brooks explained that America in the 1850s and 60s – like America in the 1910s – was a collection of "chaotic raw materials," and until the unassimilated immigrant groups that made up the population had been turned into a distinct American "race," no poet could create the representative form capable of founding a native tradition. Whitman had done all he could by diagnosing the problem with American poetry, which was that it was the product of a derivative, "genteel" culture that promoted the outmoded ideals of European romanticism.[xxvi] Until "the American character" had been "determined . . . as a racial fact," no poet could do anything more (10). For Brooks, the very condition of an American literary tradition was its perpetual deferral; if the American people needed a

representative poet to show them their character, and if such a poet needed to have a coherent racial type to represent in his poetry, then American poetry was defined by its continual striving for an ideal that could only ever be imagined. Brooks's account turned American poetry into a utopian horizon rather than a discrete body of literature, helping to institutionalize the longstanding idea that American poetry could only cohere once an American identity had been located.[xxvii]

Brooks argued that the increasing popularity of the term "new" as a prefix in the 1910s was a sign of the perpetual and necessary "vague fumbling" toward that utopian horizon (167). But for champions of the so-called New Poetry, the term indicated the arrival of the wished-for future – which was also, strangely, the useable past that the genteel tradition had obscured. If Whitman had attempted to create an American tradition out of whole cloth, and had consequently created something idiosyncratic rather than representative, as so many critics believed, the New Poets of the 1910s, on the other hand, were returning to the primitive roots of poetry, and were consequently rediscovering the power of rhythm to create imagined communities. Patterson, for instance, argued that the free verse experiments of Imagist poets were a return to the "ancestral cadence" of the earliest English throngs who had chanted and danced their poetry, and as such they offered a powerful vision of rhythmic community that was illustrative for America as a nation of diverse immigrants ("New Verse" 266). Lowell agreed, arguing that it was the abstraction of meter as marks on a silent, printed page that had deafened modern readers to the "exceedingly subtle rhythmic effects" that early humans naturally felt in their bodies; consequently, rag-time, as an "instinct in the Negro

race, a memory of the Congo," was more rhythmically complex than most popular newspaper poetry, and Franz Boaz had proven, in his study of the Kwakiutl tribe, that "the American Indian exhibits extreme facility in the execution of syncopating rhythms" that white Americans no longer possessed ("Some Musical" 130). In Lowell's opinion, the metrical experiments of the Imagists had succeeded where Whitman's had failed by tapping in to the pre-literate physical origins of rhythm and the vital, primitive sociality of the Gummerian throng.

Though Lowell praised the "subtlety" of rag-time, she was reluctant to accept rag-time as a legitimate part of an American rhythmic inheritance. Her reluctance points to the central issue in debates about the origins of an American poetic tradition and the American "folk": such origins had to be capable of assimilating heterogeneous bodies to produce a singular American type – what Brooks called the "American race" – and that type needed to neutralize what appeared (at least to someone like Lowell) to be the threateningly "foreign" or "ethnic" aspects of much of the American population. For Lowell, this origin would necessarily be modern, because the American "race" was a modern evolutionary product. According to Mary Austin, however, there was a more ancient and organic solution to the problem of a national type.

Austin is best remembered as a regional, local-color author and as a radical feminist and environmentalist.[xxviii] Her role in advancing an evolutionary view of poetic rhythms is less often noted, even though her theory of rhythm was a touchstone for F.O. Matthiessen in *The American Renaissance*. In *The American Rhythm*, first published in 1923, Austin argued that the endless search for a representative American poet by

scholars from Emerson to Brooks to Lowell had missed the significant fact that, "[a]ll this time there was an American race singing in tune with the beloved environment, to the measures of life-sustaining gestures, taking the material of their songs out of the common human occasions, out of the democratic experience." Native American poetry, Austin believed, had grown organically out of the American landscape, and the harmony between its rhythms and the environment meant that Native American poetry was almost a mimetic representation of America. Austin fantasized that the connection between the land and native poetry was so absolute that she could, simply by listening to the rhythms of "Amerindian languages," which she did not speak, "refer them by their dominant rhythms to the plains, the deserts and woodlands that had produced them" (18-19). While English-language poetry had become increasingly literary and book-bound, Native American poetry had developed organically.

Austin believed that Native American rhythms were the only basis on which a distinct American poetry could be founded because poetic rhythms were rightly derived from the rhythms of daily life. The rhythms of work and play in America were necessarily different from the rhythms of life in England; "the foot pace on the new earth, ax stroke and paddle stroke," gave rise to movements and patterns that were distinctly American (12-13). Because immigrants to the United States had experienced "an emotional kick *away* from the old [i.e., European] habits of work and society," Austin explained, "a new rhythmic basis of poetic expression [was] not only to be looked for, but [was] to be welcomed" as "evidence of the extent to which the American experience has 'taken,' among the widely varying racial strains that make up its people" (9; emphasis in

original). Derivative poetic rhythms were, for Austin, material evidence of a colonial mindset, while new rhythms were the sign of a new people beginning to feel their distinct identity. American poets had to be careful about the types of primitive rhythms they developed, however, as certain rhythms encouraged idiosyncrasy and fragmentation while others encouraged group cohesiveness. Austin was particularly wary of jazz rhythms because they were "a reversion to almost the earliest type of [rhythmic] response of which we are capable," and consequently "[implied] a certain amount of disintegration of later and higher responses, which would make an excessive, exclusive indulgence in jazz as dangerous as the moralists think it" (152).[xxix] An overdose of Whitman's rhythms was almost as bad as an overdose of jazz, according to Austin, because Whitman simply listed the diverse materials of American society without organizing and synthesizing them into a cultural type. Austin explained that, "the genius of Whitman [was] not so much to be a poet as to be able to say out of what stuff the new poetry was to be made." He was "seldom far from the rutted pioneer track . . . Out of [its] dust, sweaty and raucous, we hear him chanting, principally of what he sees, so that his rhythms, more often than not, are mere unpatterned noise of the street" (17). No less than jazz rhythms, Whitman's poetry was "bond-loosening" and "soul-disintegrating" rather than community-building (32).

A genuine American poetry would draw on the rhythms that promoted communal identity rather than those that mimetically reflected the fragmentation and racial heterogeneity of twentieth-century America, and, according to Austin, Native American poetry was the only communally-oriented form available to American poets. She argued

that Native Americans never used poetry "for the purpose of conveying information"; instead, "the combination of voice and drum in the oldest Amerind usage is *never for any other purpose than that of producing and sustaining collective states*" (23; emphasis in original). Austin cited many of the same ethnologists as had Gummere to argue that democratic societies were the products of environmentally-influenced poetic rhythms; she explained that, "if we go back in the history of the dance we find the pattern by which men and women, friends and foes, welded themselves into societies and became reconciled to the All-ness. Here we find economy of stress giving rise to preferred accents, and social ritual establishing the tradition of sequence" (9). By dancing and chanting together, in other words, members of a group produced a sort of tacit social contract that resulted in the production of a coherent group identity. Austin argued that "rhythmic performances" were in fact the only way to convince individuals to subsume their interests under the interests of a group, and to orient themselves communally rather than self-interestedly. As Austin colorfully phrased it, "the poetic orgy . . . is the only means that has ever been discovered of insuring the group mind" (36).

Like Lowell and other more self-interested promoters of the New Poetry, Austin believed that contemporary American poetry marked a return to the primitive roots of poetic rhythm. She argued that the "extraordinary, unpremeditated likeness between the works of such writers as Amy Lowell, Carl Sandburg, Vachel Lindsay and Edgar Lee Masters, exhibiting a disposition to derive their impulses from the gestures and experiences enforced by the American environment, to our own aboriginals" showed that a distinct American poetic tradition could finally be identified (46). The similarities of

form between the new and the old American poetry showed that modern poets had finally realized that, “American poetry must inevitably take the mold of Amerind verse, which is the mold of the American experience shaped by the American environment” (42). If Whitman's prosody was useful at all, it was only as a negative example of the centrifugal rhythms that would keep the American community from cohering.

Changes in Whitman's reputation were not linear, of course, and at the same time that Austin and likeminded critics condemned Whitman's attempt to create an organic American poetry, critics such as Ruth Mary Weeks championed Whitman's rhythms as the first truly modern innovation in poetry. Weeks was one of Scott's students at the University of Michigan in the 1910s, and in her 1921 article “Phrasal Prosody,” she took up the argument he had advanced in “A Note on Walt Whitman's Prosody.” At first glance, Weeks's article seems to support the standard narrative of Whitman as a metrical innovator who broke with tradition; hers was one of the first academic studies to call Whitman's poetry free verse,[xxx] and she predicted that Whitman's rhythms would be a vital part of the future of American poetry. But early academic accounts of free verse such as Weeks's were more complicated than the polemical accounts advanced by poets such as Ezra Pound. For Weeks, free verse was not a break with the metrical past, but rather a step towards an ultimate poetic harmony that would reconcile “Procrustean classic” meters with the innovative rhythms of modern life. Weeks, like Austin, held to the Gummerian view that poetic rhythms evolved in tandem with the rhythms of everyday life, so that “primitive” poetry was strongly rhythmic and communally oriented, while modern poetry was irregularly rhythmic and individualistic. These idiosyncratic

rhythms were an inescapable part of modern life, but they needed to be reconciled with the needs of the American community if poetry was to become a useful force in contemporary life. Drawing on Scott's preferred metaphor, Weeks argued that, "[t]he new day has new needs; the long free stride of democracy cannot accommodate itself to classic dancing measures," and that Whitman had created the new measure of modernity by taking the "vocal wave" as his "rhythmic unit" (14-15). Unlike Scott, however, Weeks believed that the vocabulary of "traditional" metrical poetry, based on syllabic feet, was compatible with Whitman's "new rhythmus." She argued that he had "attempted to use the various types of [vocal waves] as other poets use arbitrary groups of syllables to produce rhythmic effects," shifting the emphasis from the syllabic unit to what she called the "phrasal unit." Whitman had invented many types of "phrasal feet," she explained, including the "trochaic emphasis foot," and Amy Lowell's "delicate trochees," Sandburg's "resounding dactyls and amphibrachs," Edgar Lee Master's "hesitating minor iambs," and Ezra Pound's "mixed measures" were simply "perfecting this new and more flexible rhythmic unit" (17-18). To Weeks, preserving the vocabulary of "classic meters" as a means of describing free verse was important because it hinted at the ongoing evolution and the ultimate unity of poetic verse forms. She explained that free verse would not overtake "classic" meter, but would instead dialectically incorporate it, helping poets to develop "a richer, more pulsing measure than we have known, various yet sustained, combining syllabic and phrasal accent, pitch, time, pause, and rhyme – all the rhythmic values of spoken English" into a singular "rhythmus." Free verse was not a disruption or a break with the past, then, but "a new and beautiful note [in] the composite chord of the

coming poetic harmony" (19). Weeks extended Scott's utopian horizon beyond national boundaries; in her opinion, the rhythms Whitman invented had the potential not only to unify the heterogenous national body of America, but, more broadly, to reconcile the past with the present, bringing the evolution of social life to a new pinnacle. If the gains of modern civilization had been offset by the loss of "the habit of social experience" that primitive civilizations had manifested in their tribal dances (13), as Weeks believed, then modern man needed the "golden strand of meter" to bind that ancient, communal mode of sociality to the present. Because rhythmic and social harmony were one and the same, Weeks argued, a completely harmonized poetry could overcome the fragmentation and alienation that had been ushered in by mechanized print and hastened by the industrial revolution (19). Whitman's free verse pointed the way to this new incarnation of an Ur-rhythm, but only as part of a holistic vision of poetry that included both free verse and "classic" meter as integral parts of modern culture.

III. *Bathybius whitmanii*: Rhythm as evolutionary principle

The wildly different conclusions about Whitman's place in the American poetic tradition that Weeks, Austin, and their contemporaries reached allow us to see the cultural work that prosodical fantasies did in the early twentieth century. For critics such as Weeks and Scott, poetic rhythms could point the way to an abstract social harmony, while for Austin, Lowell, and Brooks, among others, prosodical systems had very concrete effects on the evolution of the American "race." I have offered extending readings of these competing visions of American poetry because attending to these fantasies of

rhythm not only allows us to better understand modernist poetic movements in context; it also allows us to see the ways in which these seemingly scientific approaches to rhythm have shaped the canon of American poetry later in the twentieth century.

When Edmund Gosse joked in 1896 that Whitman was "mere *bathybius*," he was unable to anticipate how apt his characterization would turn out to be. The *bathybius haeckelii* affair was one of the more notable scientific events in the nineteenth century, as it provided a rallying point for anti-Darwinians. In 1868, the British biologist Thomas Henry Huxley began to study sediment samples collected during the installation of the first transatlantic telegraph cable in 1858. Huxley believed the samples contained a sort of primordial ooze that was the missing link between inanimate and animate matter, and he quickly published his findings. It was not until 1875, when the Challenger Expedition undertook a sustained analysis of the ocean floor, that scientists realized that Huxley had mistaken a simple precipitate for the common ancestor of all living organisms. In many ways, this story is the perfect analogue to the story of Whitman's canonization. F.O. Matthiessen can easily be seen as a Huxley figure, promoting a vision of linear evolution from a single organism into the multiplicity of modern life. In his field-shaping work *The American Renaissance* (1941), Matthiessen relied heavily on the evolutionary theories of rhythm espoused by Gummere and Austin to argue that Whitman was the first modern poet to realize the physical basis of all poetic rhythm. Whitman understood that words had to be "grasped" with the senses before they could be effectively deployed, according to Matthiessen, and this understanding freed American poetry from the confining concept of "language as something to be learned from a dictionary." Indeed,

Matthiessen went so far as to argue that Whitman had actually undergone a "crude re-living of the primitive evolution of poetry" from its "origin . . . in the dance, in the rise and fall 'of consenting feet' (in Gummere's phrase)" to the modern day. Whitman's primary "experience of natural rhythm" as the most basic source of poetry allowed him to move away from what Matthiessen, citing Austin, called the "conventional" poetry "of instructed imitation" to "the internal pulsations of the body, to its external movements in work and in making love, to such sounds as the wind and the sea," and so to forge an entirely new poetic tradition out of those primary sense experiences (564-565). Whitman's poetry was consequently "more authentic than something Longfellow read in a book and tried to copy" (567), and was thus far more suited to founding a truly native poetic tradition.[xxxi] As the product of an organic evolution of rhythm, Whitman's poetry was the foundational text that would create a new species of poetry that was better adapted to the rhythms and demands of modern life.

The endless critiques of Matthiessen's American canon have not lessened the power of his interpretive paradigm for later scholars of modernist poetry and poetics. The idea that primitive poetry could point the way to more socially effective modern rhythms remains particularly strong in the contemporary discourse of ethnopoetics, as can be seen in Jerome Rothenberg's 2002 introduction to the "Ethnopoetics" section of Ubuweb, a website devoted to archiving twentieth- and twenty-first-century avant-garde poetry and art. Rothenberg argues that modernist artists in the early twentieth century found analogues to their avant-garde practices in the traditional cultural practices of many of "the world's deep cultures – those surviving *in situ* as well as those that had vanished

except for transcriptions in books or recordings from earlier decades." According to Rothenberg, such practices have historically helped Western artists to change the perception of formal innovations that "have been seen and heard as radical, even disturbing departures from conventional practice" by showing that such practices in other contexts have been viewed as "traditional" and "culturally acceptable." Like the evolutionary view of Whitman, Rothernberg's pluralist vision encourages a naturalization of the unconventional as a way to prove the relevance of avant-garde art to contemporary life.

Fantasies of rhythm as the product of a traceable evolution have become a part of modern poetics, and there is no excising the effects of this discourse from contemporary debates and discussions. But as Scott's coda to his article on Whitman indicates, fantasies can be registered as such even as they continue to shape the material practices of poets and critics. As he closed "A Note on Walt Whitman's Prosody," Scott noted that his vision of Whitman's prosody was only powerful if other readers believed in it – and he had his doubts that they would. He explained that even for him, Whitman's poetry did not hold up to multiple readings, making it unlikely that "his mode of versifying would pass into the consciousness of the race and seem as much a matter of course as iambic pentameter." Scott's moment of doubt, which he narrated as a moment that "[shook his] faith" (153) indicates that, in some way, he understood his abstraction of social relations into poetic rhythm to be an ideologically-motivated wish rather than a description of an empirical phenomenon. For many critics working later in the century, this belief hardened into dogma, crystalizing Scott's fantasy of a poetically mediated social order

into truth. As I will argue in my next chapter, such a belief was crucial to the consolidation and promotion of the New Poetry, which continues to be misunderstood in literary histories of American modernism.

Chapter 3

New Poetry, New Americans

"Music I heard with you was more than music,
And bread I broke with you was more than bread.
Now that I am without you, all is desolate,
All that was once so beautiful is dead."

- First stanza of Conrad Aiken's "Music I Heard," the opening entry in Harriet Monroe's *The New Poetry: An Anthology*

In the May, 1920 issue of *Poetry* magazine, Alfred Kreymborg noted that, "[t]ouring America is very easy now-a-days. All you have to do is to hitch Pegasus to the locomotive. Poetry will carry you and yours anywhere you care to go" (90). Kreymborg's vision of contemporary poetry as passenger car was meant as a joke about the poet's lack of material ties to any one place; the impoverished poet, having no steady work, was free to get up and go whenever he pleased. But Kreymborg's joke also offered the perfect metaphor for the so-called New Poetry, which *Poetry*'s founding editor Harriet Monroe had worked to define since her magazine's inception in 1912. Monroe repeatedly argued that the New Poetry was not characterized by any coherent theory or identifiable

form; indeed, it was the unprecedented range of forms, genres, and subject matter that the New Poetry encompassed that made it remarkable. This formal diversity, Monroe believed, was a reflection of the heterogeneity of modern American life. Free verse poems about skyscrapers and cityscapes offered readers a glimpse of metropolitan living; translations of Native American songs by Mary Austin and Lew Sarett allowed readers to tour the southwest; Edgar Lee Masters and Robert Frost guided readers through the small towns of the midwest and the northeast, respectively, in both "traditional" and modern metrical forms. If contemporary poetry could move the vagabond poet across the country, it also offered stationary readers a way to see America without leaving their homes.

Recent studies of the New Poetry have done the important work of restoring this poetic diversity to view, contributing to the growing sense that the divide between "experimental" and "traditional" poetry, like so many of the binaries that structured twentieth-century studies of modernism, was a polemical construct rather than a reality.[xxxii] Most recently, John Timberman Newcomb's *How Did Poetry Survive? The Making of Modern American Verse* has provided an in-depth account of the New Poetry as "a broad-based response, occurring across many styles and political positions, to the experience of living in the industrialized metropolis" (4). This recognition of the heterogeneity of the New Poetry is an important critical step, but Newcomb's account also problematically positions the New Poetry as an expansive, pluralist endeavor shepherded by critics and poets "commit[ted] to cultural reciprocity" (52). In what follows, I argue that the desire to prove that modernist poetry was socially and ethically

engaged has led Newcomb and other literary historians to employ concepts of culture anachronistically, leading to a fundamental misrecognition of the nature of the New Poetry. Current accounts posit that the New Poetry was an identifiable, if heterogeneous, body of work that reflected a commitment to multiculturalism, making it an ethical counterweight to the troubling imperialist poetics of figures such as T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. But the New Poetry was not a collection of texts;[xxxiii] it was rather a polemical discourse about American identity that was shaped by social scientists, literary scholars, and cultural critics. The idea of the New Poetry emerged at a time when the concept of multiculturalism as we understand it had not yet crystallized, meaning that a celebration of poetic diversity could as easily be used to champion racialist logic and American exceptionalism as it could to promote cross-cultural understanding. The ethical dimensions of the discourse known as the New Poetry are complicated at best, a fact that highlights the urgent need to interrogate the historiography and research methodologies that inform current historicist approaches to modernist poetry.

The mischaracterization of the New Poetry is symptomatic of the failure of much of the most suggestive and creative historicist work on American poetry in the 1910s and 20s to truly question the narrative structure that has governed literary histories of the twentieth century. Though a great deal of attention has been paid to the polemical and promotional aspects of modernist claims to have made art new by breaking with an outmoded genteel culture, the idea that modernism constituted a real cultural break is remarkably persistent in studies of American poetry, making the revisionism of accounts such as Newcomb's more apparent than actual. The desire to preserve “modernist” as an

honorific rather than a descriptive term – a holdover from triumphalist accounts of poetic modernism as a literary revival – has produced an underhistoricized emphasis on modernist poetry's diversity and cosmopolitanism, understood as early forms of contemporary pluralism. As Len Platt has argued, the need to create distance between the horrific consequences of racialist thinking as they were manifested in the twentieth century "fundamentally distorted our perceptions of modernism and modern literature," which was all too often implicated in scientific racism (15). In order to retain modernism's reputation as a salutary break with a conservative past, in other words, critics had to downplay the era's own complicity in a violently conservative epistemological order. That this distancing has warped our understanding of literary history can be seen in Michael Golston's *Rhythm and Race in Modernist Poetry and Science*. Golston carefully traces how racialist accounts of rhythm were integral to modernist poetics, noting that the ideas that rhythm "originate[d] in the blood" and that "racial metabolism generates the rhythms of a people's poetry" were fundamental to the poetics of the most influential poets of the 1910s and 20s, including Ezra Pound and W.B. Yeats. He argues that "poetry's rhythms most forcefully carry its politics," and that the poetry of the modernist era, written when racial rhythms were held to be a scientific fact, is thus necessarily imbricated with authoritarian modes of thinking (209-210). Yet Golston's narrative is ultimately redemptive, positing that William Carlos Williams rescued poetry from such fascist ideologies of rhythm by embracing the relativity of poetic measures based on the heterogeneity of American spoken language. Golston notes that Williams was still deeply interested in the poetic "tempos" that could be "generated

by heterogeneous American bodies" and manifested in spoken language, but he removes Williams's theories from the complications of racialist and nationalist debates about American speech rhythms in order to create a more ethically sound version of modernist poetics (214-215). Golston argues that Williams "lifts poetic rhythms out of the nexus of the body and into the trope of the sign, effecting a profound break with both the poetry of the past and the poetry of the immediate present" (209). But it is Golston rather than Williams who lifts modernist poetics out of the complications of its social context in order to preserve a conceptual rupture between the poetics of the past and the desired progressive poetics of the future. Debates about American speech dialects were necessarily debates about racialized American bodies. Williams may have celebrated miscegenation as America's "pure products" went "crazy," but his poetics were not as far removed from ideologies of embodied rhythm as we may want them to be.[xxxiv]

The key elision in Golston's history is also the key elision in Newcomb's;[xxxv] both accounts assume that cultural relativity is a historically stable concept. Any move toward a relativistic understanding of culture is seen as a progressive step away from suspect poetic ideologies. Just as Golston points to Williams as the ethical alternative to Pound and Yeats, Newcomb looks to *Poetry* magazine's engagements with foreign poets and cultures as a "bracing antidote to the ethnocentric, elitist, and often quite simply mean-spirited Poundian high modernism we have inherited," arguing that similar engagements in other little magazines of the era helped to turn poetry into a way of "sharing . . . self and other, familiar and new, native and foreign, across a world understood as irrevocably modern and inextricably interdependent" (52). But as Susan Hegeman, Brad Evans, and

Marc Manganaro have shown, the concept of culture was in flux in the 1910s and 20s; it was not until the 30s that the modern idea of culture as "a set of patterns values, and beliefs," as opposed to the Romantic idea of culture as the spirit of racialized national groups, became widespread in American academic and public discourses (Hegeman 4). When the New Poetry was being theorized most vigorously in the mid-1910s, the interlocked fields of literary scholarship, ethnology, and philology were still dominated to a surprising degree by Romantic theories of cultural products as evidence of national and folk spirit. Even Franz Boas, who, according to Carl N. Degler, "almost single-handedly . . . developed in America [a] concept of culture" that "would in time expunge race from the literature of social science" (71), had not yet repudiated the idea of *Volksgeist* in the 1910s.[xxxvi] It was against this intellectual background, in which "relativism . . . coexisted uncontradictorily with foundational theories of value" and with belief in "the commonality of humankind" (Hegeman 7), that modernist poets and critics explored the diversity of the New Poetry. The international outlook evinced by the little magazines of the era did not necessarily entail relativism as we understand it, and in fact more often than not involved an orthogenetic view of cultures in which American culture was understood to be the place where the national cultures of the world had gathered to be consolidated and perfected in what was frequently named the coming American "race."

My account of the New Poetry focuses on four widely circulated and publicized collections and studies that helped to shape the discourse: Harriet Monroe and Alice Corbin Henderson's *The New Poetry: An Anthology* (1917), Amy Lowell's *Tendencies in*

Modern American Poetry (1917), and Louis Untermeyer's *Modern American Poetry: An Introduction* and *The New Era in American Poetry* (1919). I have chosen these works because of their broad reach and sustained engagement with contemporaneous ideas of cultural development as they were elaborated in academic and popular criticism. Monroe and Henderson's anthology went through four printings in 1917 and continued to be printed in new runs through 1922 (a revised edition was issued in 1923 and was reprinted and updated through the 1930s). Untermeyer's anthology was also issued in a second edition and remained in print through the 30s (Newcomb 21-22). Lowell's book began as a series of well-attended lectures and sold well enough to be reprinted multiple times in the 20s (Bradshaw 84). As I will show, each of these texts, in distinct but related ways, constructed a fictional generic coherence for the New Poetry based on the idea that it was an organic product of the American people. These critics abstracted social relations into verse traits, drawing on anthropological and ethnological discourses to argue that what made the New Poetry new was its ability to organize communities around a shared set of national and racial concerns. Far from championing a modern version of cultural relativism, these anthologies supported Romantic ideals of national growth.

I. "Mere details of form"

When Monroe pitched an anthology of the New Poetry to Edward C. Marsh at the Macmillan Company in 1915, she presented it in explicitly pedagogical terms. She wrote that *Poetry* magazine had "aroused great interest among colleges," intimating that students were in need of a guide to experimental modern poetry. But, as Craig Abbott

points out, the anthology failed in its role as study guide, since it "did little to dispel . . . confusion" about what precisely the New Poetry was. Abbott points to the anthology's "alphabetical arrangement and rather general introduction" as key reasons why critics were still able to erroneously use the monikers "new poetry and Imagism synonymously" or to divide "the new movement into two elements, Imagism and free verse" (91; 99). Abbott's explanation glosses over the definition of the New Poetry that Monroe and Henderson offered in their "rather general" introduction, however, which turned away from formal traits or generic markers as ways to identify the New Poetry. Monroe and Henderson posited that the New Poetry was recognizable by virtue of its difference from "over-appareled" Victorian verse, but that this difference was found,

> not in mere details of form, for much poetry infused with the new spirit conforms to the old measures and rhyme-schemes. It is not merely in diction . . . These things are important, but the difference goes deeper than details of form, strikes through them to fundamental integrities. . . . The new poetry strives for a concrete and immediate realization of life; it would discard the theory, the abstraction, the remoteness, found in all classics not of the first order. . . . In presenting the concrete object or the concrete environment, whether these be beautiful or ugly, it seeks to give more precisely the emotion arising from them, and thus widens immeasurably the scope of the art. (v-vi)

In many ways, this passage rhymes with the Imagist manifesto, making it easy to claim Monroe and Henderson for that more or less coherent aesthetic program of metrical

innovation. Like the Imagist manifesto, their introduction calls for "a poetry that is hard and clear, never blurred nor indefinite" that "render[s] particulars exactly." But crucially, Monroe and Henderson make no mention of the manifesto's second tenet: that "the individuality of a poet may often be better expressed in free verse than in conventional forms" (*Some Imagist* vi-vii). According to Henderson and Monroe's circular logic, "mere details of form" were unimportant because they could not make a genre. Instead, the direct presentation of objects would allow for a greater expression of modern life, even if that expression happened to fall into perfectly even iambic pentameter. The New Poetry could be recognized, then, not by metrical characteristics, but rather by the fact that it expressed "fundamental integrities" that were indicative of a new modern spirit. By abstracting poetry in this way, Monroe and Henderson believed, they could open the art form to unknown innovations.

For generations of twentieth- and twenty-first-century critics, this expansion of form has been the sign of a successful break with the poetic past. But the concept of "spirit" has a particular historical valence, and is a clue to the long-buried roots of Monroe and Henderson's poetics, as well as an indication that the vagueness of their definition of the New Poetry was not accidental. Their idea of the fundamentals of modern poetry arose from their engagement with nineteenth-century ballad discourse, contemporary ethnology, and philological debates about the nature of the English language. Brad Evans has described the confluence of these discourses as "'the ethnographic imagination,' the experimentation . . . with new ways of perceiving, representing, and producing structures of affiliation and difference" which "developed

within the context of institutional shifts in fields such as philology, geography, folklore, anthropology, and literature" (7-8). In the 1910s and 20s, the literary ethnographic imagination was focused on ballad discourse as it was disseminated by scholars like Gummere, Moulton, and Austin, as I discussed in previous chapters. The extent to which Gummere's theory of the development of poetry saturated discussions of English and American poetry during this period cannot be overestimated; it was taught in high schools[xxxvii] and frequently debated in *PMLA* and other mouthpieces of the newly professionalized discipline of English literature.[xxxviii] It spilled over into more popular magazines as well; the theory of ballad origins was frequently mentioned in *Poetry*,[xxxix] and the racialized ballad logic exemplified in Gummere's work can clearly be seen in Monroe and Henderson's description of the renewed vitality of the New Poetry.[xl] They posited that the poetry in their anthology was "a vital force no longer to be ignored" because it was "coming nearer than either the novel or the drama to the actual life of to-day" (*The New Poetry* v). Like Gummere, they traced this vitality to the influence of Anglo-Saxon traits on modern English language poetry. They argued that the New Poetry, like Anglo-Saxon verse, "set before itself an ideal of absolute simplicity and sincerity" (*The New Poetry* vi), which they opposed to the bookish, technically accomplished verse of Tennyson, Swinburne, and other major Victorian poets.[xli] For Henderson and Monroe, as for Gummere, poets who were immersed in Anglo-Saxon verse had access to a purer type of expressive poetry that was not distanced from the world. These simple premodern rhythms, derived from oral recitation, could overcome modern man's sense of alienation and estrangement from his body. In this vision,

"restoring" a link between the word and the world which was believed to have been lost would help to create a truly modern expressive poetry that could capture the spirit of the age.[xlii]

Unlike Gummere, however, Monroe and Henderson did not stop with the hypothesis that Anglo-Saxon rhythms were *the* root of modern English poetry. For them, the ancient poetry of *all* languages was important in creating poetry that could express the spirit of an age. Whereas Gummere sought to organize a community of Anglo-Saxon Americans around the rhythms of primitive poetry, Monroe and Henderson argued that Anglo-Saxon poetry could help to ground a cosmopolitan community of readers. They followed George Saintsbury's prosodic model, which posited that a pure Anglo-Saxon linguistic core was impossible to isolate. For Saintsbury, who had established himself as a leading scholar of poetics with his monumental *History of English Prosody*, published in three volumes between 1906 and 1910, English prosody was a tangle of competing linguistic conventions that could only be sorted out by resorting to a system of scansion based on a flexible foot. While Gummere and other strict Anglo-Saxonists believed that an Anglo-Saxon "root-stock" defined the English language, Saintsbury argued that English was more like a chemical compound than a plant.[xliii] He believed in "the gradual formation of the blend called the English language, and the concomitant determining of a new blend of prosody – not French, not Latin, not Old English, not a mere mechanical jumble of all three, but a new chemical compound" (*A History* 510). In espousing this theory, Saintsbury explicitly positioned himself against Gummere. He recognized Gummere as "the chief living authority in America on English Poetics," but he dismissed

Gummere's interest in poetry's "connection with savages, dancing, etc." as superfluous to any discussion of the "principles" of English versification. For Saintsbury, what he called "the extraordinary compositeness of English" meant that the rhythms of English poetry were necessarily plastic and variable (*A History* 499-500).

By following Saintsbury's assessment of prosodic history, Henderson and Monroe crucially changed their understanding of the role that generic tradition played in molding imagined communities, producing a seemingly more cosmopolitan poetics than Gummere's. Gummere had argued that Anglo-Saxon rhythms were regularly patterned and generically marked, and that those characteristics helped to organize social groups. Monroe and Henderson, on the other hand, argued that Anglo-Saxon rhythms were irregular and without pattern. In their view, the history of English prosody was a history of conflict between the vital but uneven rhythms of the Anglo-Saxon language and the highly codified and formalized rhythms of French. They explained,

> Chaucer may have had it in his power to turn the whole stream of English poetry into either the French or the Anglo-Saxon channel . . . he naturally chose the French channel, and he was so great and so beloved that his world followed him. . . . But it was possibly a toss-up . . . If . . . Langland . . . had had Chaucer's authority and universal sympathy, English poetry might have followed his example instead of Chaucer's; and Shakespeare, Milton and the rest might have been impelled by common practice to use – or modify – the curious, heavy, alliterative measure of *Piers Ploughman*, which now sounds so strange to our

> ears . . . Langland reminds us that poetry – even English poetry – is older than rhyme, older than iambic measure, older than all the metrical patterns which now seem so much a part of it. (*The New Poetry* viii)

Monroe and Henderson argued that to look into the prehistory of English poetry was to find not regular rhythms, but rather a free, improvisatory mode of composition – the elasticity that Saintsbury had posited.[xliv] This history proved to Henderson and Monroe that it was only "an instinctive prejudice" that made people believe that "English poetry, to be poetry, must conform to prescribed metres," for prescribed meters were actually a French legacy (*The New Poetry* viii). Monroe and Henderson did not see regular meters as inherently negative, but they argued that as metrical conventions were repeated throughout the centuries, they became more rigid, so that by the 1890s, poetry had become so literary that it had lost its relevance to everyday life. They claimed that generic and metrical conventions, rather than bringing an audience together, were in fact "obstacles that have hampered the poet and separated him from his audience" (*The New Poetry* x). According to their narrative, too much formalism would lead poetry to lose its readers, who would not see their daily language reflected in rigid metrical schemes. To recover both a vital connection to life and to the audience that saw its life reflected in verse, Henderson and Monroe argued, modern poets needed to return to the freer, speech-based rhythms of Anglo-Saxon poetry and of other premodern poetic traditions.

Even as Monroe and Henderson argued against metrical rules, however, they continued to veer away from formalism as a way to define the New Poetry. In their

modified balladic vision, poetry would retain its ability to organize imagined communities by becoming its own abstract realm with its own non-metrical rules. They explained that the New Poets were "trying to make the modern manifestations of poetry less a matter of rules and formulae, and more a thing of the spirit." The important aspect of the New Poetry was that it was drawing on a variety of ancient poetic traditions, including Hebrew, Greek, Anglo-Saxon, Japanese, and Chinese, and that this melding of tradition created an abstract realm ruled by spirit rather than by metrical law. They explained, "all these influences, which tend to make the art of poetry, especially poetry in English, less provincial, more cosmopolitan, are by no means a defiance of the classic tradition. On the contrary, they are an endeavor to return to it at its great original sources, and to sweep away artificial laws – the *obiter dicta* of secondary minds – which have encumbered it." They believed that both the "spirit and form" of poetry were moving toward a "great[er] freedom," but that the important aspect of this freedom was not any lasting formal innovations that it would introduce (*The New Poetry* xii). Instead, they argued that the defining characteristic of modern poetry was the type of readerly communities it could bring into existence.

This vision seems pluralistic in the modern sense, but for Monroe and Henderson, there was always a nationalistic flavor to poetic cosmopolitanism. If they acknowledged the existence of discrete world cultures, they were yet able to support a vision of the progressive evolution of the civilization of mankind. Discrete cultures were, in other words, the part that indicated the state of health of the whole civilization. Such a viewpoint was common in this period, and was indeed supported by Edward Sapir, one of

Franz Boas's students who eventually helped to develop ideas of cultural relativity as we understand it today.[xlv] At the time of the publication of Monroe and Henderson's anthology, however, Sapir still believed that individual cultures took part in the evolution of civilization as a whole. He argued in *The Dial* in 1919 that although there were discrete world cultures that needed to be understood on their own terms, there were "genuine" and "spurious" cultures that were more and less evolved. A genuine culture, according to Sapir, was one in which individual subjects did not feel alienated; it was "not of necessity either 'high' or 'low'; it is merely inherently harmonious, balanced, self-satisfactory . . . It is, ideally, speaking, a culture in which nothing is spiritually meaningless." A spurious culture, on the other hand, was one in which work was spiritually unfulfilling rather than integrated into cultural life. For Sapir, Native American tribes offered the best examples of "genuine" culture, while industrial society was "spurious." If American society was to become spiritually integrated, Sapir argued, it would need to find ways to solve the problem of alienated labor. If it did not, "civilization, as a whole, [would move] on" without it, since "culture [could] com[e] and go" (233-235). To Monroe and Henderson, poetry offered the means of that spiritual reintegration, since it could blend the best parts of "genuine" cultures in order to rejuvenate American literary life. In a retrospective of the New Poetry in *The English Journal* in 1924, Monroe explained that "aboriginal motives and rhythms" had been "a gold-mine of song await[ing] full development," and that the New Poets had honed and perfected this raw material in order to tell "the tale of the tribe," or to picture a healthier version of American society, in which poetry was not unimportant to daily life ("The

Free-Verse Movement" 704-705). This was a view Monroe had been espousing for years. In "Rhythms of English Verse," for instance, published in the December, 1913 issue of *Poetry*, Monroe argued that modern poets needed to "restore . . . the great universal laws of rhythm" in order to return to the fundamental basis of the art form – a basis that was the same for "all music and the poetry of all languages" (111). In this view, individual cultures were important insofar as they contributed to the progress of civilization as a whole. Indeed, in reviewing Amy Lowell's take on the New Poetry, Monroe criticized Lowell for not recognizing the necessity of integrating the songs of "genuine" folk cultures into contemporary American poetry. She argued that Lowell had erred in overlooking Vachel Lindsay, who "represents a tendency much richer and more indigenous than that personified by the imagists, for example, however fine and high theirs may be," and that "all the wild lore that is in our western blood – . . . the folk-sense of magic in nature and life, the instinct of sympathy with all kinds and races of men – all this is in Vachel Lindsay's tendency, and he carries a good share of the new movement on his shoulders" ("Miss Lowell on Tendencies" 153-154). Henderson likewise argued that the New Poetry was characterized by its "essentially native folk-spirit," which was "a necessary sub-soil for any fine national poetic flowering" ("The Folk Poetry of These States" 269-271). For Monroe and Henderson, the shift in anthropology towards exploring individual cultures helped to support the Romantic idea of a literary tradition as an expression of a people rather than to instantiate a cosmopolitan poetics as we understand it today. Writing in 1922, Monroe explained that if her magazine had helped to "make a vital people aware of its imaginative and creative power," then she had

accomplished the poetic revolution that she set out to effect ten years earlier ("Ten Years Old" 36). Not form, but spirit, was the sign of that success.

II. New Poetry, new Americans

In the same year that Monroe and Henderson published their account of the New Poetry as evidence of the progress of civilization, Amy Lowell put forth a competing theory of the relationship between new genres and new communities. Lowell's *Tendencies in Modern American Poetry* also abstracted poetry into an idealized realm in which contemporary culture could become more "genuine," but, perhaps because Lowell's book was published six months after the United States had entered World War I, Lowell imagined an even more nationally specific role for the New Poetry in America. (Henderson and Monroe wrote their introduction while the United States was still pursuing a policy of non-intervention.)[xlvi] Lowell believed that the New Poetry's freer spirit was an indication of the triumph of American civilization and evidence of the country's new role as the defender of global democracy. In making this argument, Lowell drew on the same Anglo-Saxonist thought that informed Gummere's poetics. Nineteenth-century historians of Anglo-Saxon England had helped to popularize the idea that Anglo-Saxons were a fundamentally freedom-loving, community-minded people, characterized by their nation-creating energy and vigor. Works such as Sharon Turner's four-volume *History of the Anglo-Saxons*, published between 1799 and 1805, John Mitchell Kemble's *The Saxons in England* (1846), and Thomas Babington Macaulay's *The History of*

England (1848) argued that Anglo-Saxons were, in Turner's words, "superior to others in energy, strength, and warlike fortitude," and that these traits helped them to found strong governments and powerful nations. (qtd. in MacDougall 93). As Hugh MacDougall argues in *Racial Myth in English History*, racial Anglo-Saxonism played a key role in Romantic historiography, as exemplified by Hegel, who came to "identif[y] the progress of universal history with Germanic political thought and culture." Hegel and other Romantic historians "asserted that the final stage of history was reached with the development of Christian Europe and specifically with the full manifestation in [their] own time of the Germanic Spirit" (90). In its circulation from Germany to England to America and back again, this notion of historical progress took on very specific cultural meanings. In America, scholars such as Gummere took Hegel's claim that "the German Spirit is the Spirit of the New World" quite literally; they posited that there was a distinctly American "race" that was founded primarily on Anglo-Saxon stock. As Reginald Horsman argues in *Race and Manifest Destiny*, white Americans in the mid to late 1800s began to "conceive of themselves as the most vital and energetic of those Aryan peoples who had spilled westward, 'revitalized' the Roman Empire, spread throughout Europe to England, and crossed the Atlantic in their relentless westward drive" (5). In this popular view of the world-conquering Germanic peoples, America came to be seen by many Anglo-Saxonists as the place where history and civilization could reach their apogee (Horsman 37-38).

Lowell drew on these ideas to argue that the Anglo-Saxon "root-stock" of American society was being improved as new ethnic groups immigrated to America and

intermarried with its Anglo-Saxon founders to produce a distinctly American "race" (*Tendencies* 201).[xlvii] Lowell conflated artistic and social structures, and argued that the evolution of the New Poetry could provide an index to the growth of the new race that was producing it. She argued that the New Poets were "ceding more and more to the influence of other, alien peoples, and fusing exotic modes of thought with their Anglo-Saxon inheritance. This is indeed the melting pot" (*Tendencies* 4). In Lowell's view, art and the social body were mutually reinforcing spheres of life; as the one became united and homogenized, so too did the other. The existence of a homegrown national poetic tradition, whatever forms it took, would prove that Americans were "no more colonies of this or that other land, but ourselves, different from all other peoples whatsoever." To Lowell, then, the New Poetry was the organic expression of the newly formed American race. Her logic paralleled the logic of Child's and Gummere's ballad discourse, which had posited that the popular ballad was an organic expression of the Anglo-Saxon race.

Lowell believed that 1917 was an especially important year in the flowering of American literature and culture because the war effort had sped up the process of racial assimilation that was helping to create a more advanced society. Lowell explained that, "the welding together of the whole country which the war has brought about, the mobilizing of the whole population into a single, strenuous endeavour, has produced a more poignant sense of nationality than has recently been the case in this country of enormous spaces and heterogeneous population" (*Tendencies* v). The New Poetry of 1917 was thus not only expressing the spirit of the new American race; it was also articulating America's emerging role as a world leader. In Lowell's view, the advanced

state of American poetry reflected the advanced state of American civilization. She argued that, "the change which marks American poetry has been going on in the literature of other countries also. But not quite in the same way. Each country approaches an evolutionary step from its own racial angle, and they move alternately, first one leads and then another . . . At the moment of writing, it is America who has taken the last, most advanced step" (*Tendencies* vi). According to Lowell's thinking, America's "racial angle" was, at root, Anglo-Saxon, which meant that Americans were the vanguard of world civilization. Just as the American army was fighting for "the ultimate peace of the world and for the liberation of its peoples," in President Woodrow Wilson's words (Wilson 42), American poets were leading the world into a new stage of poetic advancement, which would be an "era of accomplishment which will endure until another 'movement' shakes the world again and mankind takes another step on its eternal path" (Lowell, *Tendencies* 141). By drawing on the "vigor" of its Anglo-Saxon core, American poetry could help to complete the nation's civilizing mission of "making the world safe for democracy."[xlviii]

In part because Lowell saw the New Poetry as an index to the progress of civilization, she believed that its spirit was more important than its form. Like Monroe and Henderson, she remained skeptical of formal traits as definitive characteristics of emerging genres. She explained that,

> when people speak of the 'New Poetry,' they generally mean that poetry which is written in the newer, freer forms. But such a distinction is misleading in the extreme, for, after all, forms are merely forms, of no particular value unless they are the necessary and adequate clothing to some particular manner of thought.

> There is a 'New Poetry' to-day, and the new forms are a part of its attire, but the body is more important than the clothing and existed before it. (*Tendencies* 3)

In other words, the New Poetry could only be reliably classified according to its spirit or attitude. For Lowell, formal innovation was simply a happy consequence of the new American spirit, not its cause. As she put it, "modern subjects, modern habits of mind, seem to find more satisfactory expression in *vers libre* and 'polyphonic prose' than in metrical verse" not because a "cadence engenders the idea," but because "the idea clothes itself naturally in an appropriate novelty of rhythm" (*Tendencies* 243). Like Henderson and Monroe, Lowell did not value the New Poetry's formal innovations as such. The New Poetry was important in Lowell's estimation because it displayed "a fusion of much knowledge, all melted and absorbed in the blood of a young and growing race" (*Tendencies* 280). Its key cultural contribution was that is proved that a unified American "race-soul" was coming into existence (*Tendencies* 333).

As in Henderson and Monroe's argument, genre became a mode of recognition for Lowell. Form could not be a definitive factor in poetry, she believed, because it had to be continually changeable and adaptable if it were to remain the organic expression of the evolving American people. For Lowell, abstracting poetry in this way provided a solution to the problematic at the heart of nineteenth-century ballad discourse. According to the logic of ballad discourse, modern poets could not return to an oral poetic culture; they could only access its spirit and translate that spirit into the written word. But this act of translation would necessarily lose a great deal of the vigor of premodern oral culture.

Modern "bookish" poets were thus involved in a game of diminishing returns. They could only counter the necessary loss of premodern vitality by continually experimenting in an attempt to get closer to the "race-soul" of their nation. Lowell argued that these experiments would eventually crystallize into lifeless convention, as she believed all poetry must, but that new modes of expression would continue to grow from the vigorous blood and the racial feeling of the American people. The goal of the critic thus became recognizing when poetry was a genuine expression of a nation, regardless of the forms that expression might take. As long as poetry expressed the spirit of the people producing it, it would be recognizable as modern poetry. In Lowell's words, "art becomes artificial only when the forms take precedence over the emotion" (*Tendencies* 7). For Lowell, the formal innovations that made up a small part of the New Poetry were simply incidental, of little lasting consequence next to the larger issue of the emerging American "race-soul." Any formal experimentation was the sign, not the cause, of modernity.

According to Lowell's narrative, then, the New Poetry was necessarily only one stage in the endless progress of civilization. It was an important stage, however, because it was the first truly authentic expression of a newly emerging people, and it deserved to be marked and recognized as such. For Lowell, the best way to mark this moment was to contrast it with a caricature of nineteenth-century literary cultures. If Lowell recognized the irony of using the logic of nineteenth-century ballad discourse to declare a break with the nineteenth-century, she did not remark upon it. Instead, she argued that the New Poetry as an organic expression of the American race was a straightforward victory over the derivative literary culture of nineteenth-century America. Lowell followed the

Whitmanian line that poets had not known how to use the raw materials of the American countryside and the American people, claiming that America in the nineteenth century had been "a great country practically dumb," and that the "virile [American] race, capable of subduing a vast continent in an incredibly short time," had "no tongue to vent its emotion" (*Tendencies* 7). In helping to create this fictional division between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, Lowell promoted the idea that the emergence of a new genre was an indicator of the success and health of an emerging race. Along with Monroe and Henderson, Lowell helped to simultaneously solidify the idea that the New Poetry was one such expression of a modern spirit and to cover over the nineteenth-century roots of this paradigm.

III. Poetic democracy

If Monroe, Henderson, and Lowell show us how racial and national concerns were abstracted into a genre, Louis Untermeyer's work demonstrates how openness of form came to be equated with democratic opportunity. This connection turned on a particular understanding of the relationship between poetry, its modes of circulation, and its readers – an understanding derived from ballad discourse. In this view, advocated by Gummere and Sapir, among others, the advent of print capitalism broke up homogenous preliterate communities into competing factions.[xlix] In his 1901 book *The Beginnings of Poetry*, Gummere romanticized medieval European feudalism as a system which encouraged "homogeneous and unlettered communities" who sang together as unified groups.[l] Print capitalism, on the other hand, encouraged a proliferation of genres and individual

authors, which divided "lay society into lettered and unlettered" (176-177). He explained that premodern bards composed "as members of a class or guild, and any member might use the common stock of expressions and ideas," while the modern author was freed "from the clogs of his mediaeval guild" and so was able to take up the "distinctly modern idea of fame, of glory, as a personal achievement apart from community or state" (141-142). The notions of private property and of the author as owner of his work reinforced each other, and together erased the idea of a communal oral tradition. Sapir likewise posited that the art of "genuine," non-industrial cultures was more integrated into daily life than the art of industrial societies, which merely offered symbolic consolation for the loss of a spiritually-fulfilling mode of life.[li]

Untermeyer shared this view of the role that oral tradition played in shaping unified audiences. While Gummere believed that the uneven rhythms of the New Poetry were further dividing the reading public, however, and while Sapir doubted that art could unify a culture, Untermeyer argued that the New Poetry was translating the best aspects of premodern oral cultures into literary works, thereby bringing into existence the communal audience that had been broken apart by the rise of mass print. In his anthology *Modern American Poetry: An Introduction* and in his critical work *The New Era in American Poetry*, Untermeyer used terms imported directly from ballad discourse to argue that American poetry had gone through a fallow period in the print-mediated nineteenth-century. This poetry was imitative and carried "the dull aroma of the textbook; [it was] desiccated and musty with learning." The autochthonous American productions of the twentieth century, on the other hand, carried "a whiff of the soil . . .

[and] an accent of the people" (*New Era* 4). In Untermeyer's view, the New Poetry was throwing off the weight of print culture to return to the "human, racy and vigorous" qualities of oral poetry. The New Poetry was thus "not only closer to the soil but nearer to the soul" of the American people (*New Era* 9).

Untermeyer argued that this renewed vitality was due to the fact that the New Poets were using "actual speech instead of ornate literary phrasing," so that the poetic language "that used to be borrowed almost exclusively from literature, comes now almost entirely out of life." This return to the speech of everyday life helped to bring bookish modern poetry back to the inaccessible realms of pre-literate oral culture. Modern poetry was still written, but, Untermeyer claimed, in works like the "fully-flavored blank verse of Robert Frost, . . . the words are so chosen and arranged that the speaker is almost heard on the printed page." Similarly, he argued that reading Vachel Lindsay's poetry aloud would give readers access to a scene of primitive prayer and dance by sounding the rhythms of "the buoyant and even burly music of camp-meetings, negro 'revivals' and religious gatherings" – scenes that would not be out of place in Gummere's works on primitive communal dances (*Modern American* ix).

Behind Untermeyer's synaesthetic fantasy of an orality that could be experienced through writing was an ideal of open access to culture. Untermeyer too lamented the division of "lay society into lettered and unlettered," to borrow Gummere's phrase, and he believed that the New Poets were healing this fracture by using American speech rhythms and American folklore as their raw materials. He argued that the New Poets were finally recognizing that they had their own native traditions on which they could found a

national literature. He explained that, "young as this nation is compared to her transatlantic cousins, she is already being supplied with the stuff of legends, ballads, and even epics. The modern singer, discarding imported myths, has turned to celebrate his own folk-tales" (*Modern American* xi). As Americans realized what distinguished them as a group, Untermeyer argued, they were finally bringing their country out of its culturally colonized state, and were consequently beginning to cohere as a unified people. And in turning from Greek myths and English folk-tales, the New Poets were helping to make poetry relevant to daily life once again. Because the New Poetry drew on this "racy" material rather than on legends drawn from books, he argued, readers were "no longer . . . frustrated because of a lack of knowledge of recondite legends, because of an ignorance of the minor *amours* of the major Greek deities, or the absence of a dictionary of rare and archaic words." For Untermeyer, a poem's literary or tropological qualities could only make a work inaccessible to the majority of readers; the specialized cultural knowledge required to access "traditional" poetry would maintain class divisions and antagonisms.[lii] The way to create a truly democratic poetry, accessible to all Americans, was to do away with the literariness of nineteenth-century poetry. By parting with the "self-imposed strictures" of the old poetry, Untermeyer argued, the New Poetry was "expressing itself once more in the terms of democracy" (*New Era* 10-11). The New Poetry, by allowing its readers to hear and see what was actually only written, would help modern citizens to access a vital form of democratic sociality that had been lost with the rise of modern literacy. Like Henderson and Monroe, Untermeyer found in the abstraction of poetry a key to organizing imagined communities out of an increasingly

diffuse and heterogeneous print public.

Untermeyer's abstraction of poetry figured the form as the transparent, hyperlegible speech of a unified people, capable of being read by anyone regardless of their educational background. He too viewed poetry as a non-formal realm of "spirit" which transcended the need for formal classification. Like Henderson, Monroe, and Lowell, Untermeyer believed that the New Poetry's return to colloquial speech *could* affect the forms of modern poetry, but he was not particularly interested in formal innovation for its own sake. Echoing Monroe and Henderson, he argued that a poem did not have to be formally experimental in order to be recognized as part of the New Poetry. He posited that Edwin Arlington Robinson,[liii] for instance, "uses the strictest rhymes and most conventional metres," yet still "makes them more 'modern' than the freest free-verse." Likewise, he argued, readers could see the new spirit in the metrically traditional poetry of "Richard Hovey, Bliss Carman, James Whitcomb Riley, H.H. Knibbs, the two Benéts, and a half a dozen others," which was yet "full of the tang of native sounds and scenes" (*Modern American* x). Untermeyer believed that what was new in the New Poetry was not form but spirit, and consequently he argued that modern poetry had been set free not from metrical tradition, but from the nineteenth century more generally. He argued that the New Poetry was freed from "a vague eloquence, from a preoccupation with a poetic past," and that the New Poet had "been transferred to a moving world from a lifeless and literary storehouse." This new freedom allowed the New Poets and their readers to "look at the world [they live] in; to study and synthesize the startling fusion of race and ideas, the limitless miracles of science and its limitless curiosity, the growth of

liberal thought, the groping and stumbling toward a genuine social democracy" (*New Era* 13). For Untermeyer, then, the real difference between the New Poetry and the old was the type of imagined communities they could organize. The dusty literariness of nineteenth-century poetry would keep people divided and unequal; the "racy" vitality of the New Poetry would bring Americans together so that they could fulfill the nation's destiny as bringer of world democracy.

IV. Critical desire and the shape of history

Oren Izenberg recently proposed that we reimagine the poetry of the first half of the twentieth-century as, not a literary or aesthetic endeavor, but rather as an "ontological project" of "reestablishing or revealing the most basic unit of social life." For Izenberg, modernist poetry "articulat[es] a new humanism" by "seek[ing] a reconstructive response to the great crises of social agreement and recognition in the twentieth century" (1-4). But what the discourse of the New Poetry shows us is that such an ontological project is not necessarily "reconstructive" or productive of the social good. The New Poetry, as much as the leftist, Objectivist poetry Izenberg focuses on, sought to reground social life in the folk traditions of "genuine" cultures, thereby providing an aesthetic solution to the problem of alienated labor and cultural degeneration through a problematic appeal to racial and national identities perceived to be authentic. The continuing critical desire to reshape modernist poetry as an ethically sound political endeavor evinced by Izenberg, Newcomb, and Golston risks both misrepresenting the historical record and further separating the study of American poetry from the larger intellectual contexts in which it circulated. This is serious risk at a time when new databases such as the Modernist

Journals Project and evolving data visualization tools offer new possibilities for the historical study of modernist poetry. It is imperative to consider our own critical desires as we approach the ever-expanding archive, and to guard against remaking the evidence in that archive in the image of the present or future we might wish to see. There is indeed an ethical dimension to such a historical approach to poetics, but rather than searching for a politically acceptable modernist poetry, it involves an openness to the alterity of history, especially when historical actors do not imagine social relations in recognizable or politically acceptable forms. A truly historical approach to modernist poetry – one that could more fundamentally challenge the idea that this poetry offered uniquely ethical ways to encounter and cope with industrial modernity – would involve an acceptance that there is a fantasmatic, utopian element to contemporary visions of poetry as a means of organizing the social world, just as there is a fantasmatic, and often politically problematic, element to past attempts to imagine a better future through poetry. By paying closer attention to the ways in which such a project has manifested itself in the literary historical record, both negatively and positively, we can perhaps gain a deeper understanding of the continuing critical desire to envision poetry as a unique sphere of political and social action, separate from other literary forms and historical discourses. To this end, my final chapter examines Harriet Monroe's early and influential attempt to separate poetry from the heterogeneous print culture in which it circulated at the turn into the twentieth century. *Poetry* magazine shaped American poetics in fundamental ways, as many scholars have argued, but, as I will show, its most basic contributions to the field have been overlooked. Recovering Monroe's institutional ambitions highlights the

consequences of the shift from nineteenth-century verse cultures to twentieth-century professional criticism, and suggests how we might think differently about the history of that change.

Chapter 4

Reading *Poetry*

"To have great poets, there must be great audiences too."

- motto of *Poetry* magazine, taken from Walt Whitman

"For humanity's sake, for my mind's sake, for any sake, will you please tell me what kind of a magazine you are editing under the name of "Poetry." Is it a rejuvenation of some lost art, or is it supposed to be some new and fantastic one?"

- Letter to Harriet Monroe from a subscriber in Huntington, West Virginia, September, 1916

In 1919, Harriet Monroe ran an ad for *Poetry* magazine that positioned *Poetry* as a specific type of cultural arbiter: the curator.[liv] The ad offered an "invitation" to its readers to see that "*Poetry, a Magazine of Verse*, is not a magazine in the ordinary sense; it is an art gallery - the poet's gallery, where he hangs up his poems." Monroe's choice of metaphor was calculated. In comparing poems to paintings, the circular capitalized on the explosion of civic institutions of the fine arts that had taken place in Chicago since the

1880s.[lv] In this ad, as in much of the marketing material for *Poetry* (most famously, in "The Motive of the Magazine," which ran at the end of the first issue), Monroe implied that poetry was the only fine art without institutional support, and that this lack also meant that the potential audience for poetry remained unorganized. The ad solicits its readers to view *Poetry* as the necessary institution that could create and organize the proper audience for poetry: "Come and see what the jury has picked out . . . For poets need, as much as they need galleries in which to hang their work, spectators." Like the Art Institute of Chicago, which collected the best visual art, *Poetry* would select the best literary art for a public that wanted and needed to be educated.

In spite of the openness of this invitation, however, *Poetry* was not interested in attracting all spectators to its exhibitions. Just as Monroe sought to curate the right types of poems for her print gallery (namely, those that would reflect a modern "spirit," as I argued in my previous chapter), she also sought to curate and cultivate the right type of reader. Separate from the mass reading public that consumed newspapers, magazines, and novels with indiscriminate zeal, this imagined audience would help to advance *Poetry*'s aesthetic vision by treating poetry as a sacred realm apart from popular print. Thus at the same time that Monroe curated poems for her public art "gallery," a living space of active work and ongoing conversation, she also curated a set of letters from readers and amateur poets to be stored in what she called her "museum" files, which turned the reading practices and poetic theories in these letters into a set of curiosities interesting because of their obsolescence. By committing these letters to the official, university-based archive of *Poetry*, which adopted her terminology and filing system,

Monroe ensured that the division she posited between the vital, modern poetic practices evidenced in her "gallery" and the outdated practices consigned to her "museum" would seem to be sanctioned by an institutional authority. This move shows that Monroe was not only adept at shaping the terms of poetic debates in her own moment; she was also acutely aware of how she could use official channels to affect future interpretations of her magazine's role in modern cultural life.[lvi] Indeed, Monroe's curatorial work continues to powerfully influence current criticism. Scholars have mined the *Poetry* archive for proof of Monroe's business acumen and for details of her relationships with modernist luminaries such as Ezra Pound and Wallace Stevens, but the "museum" folders full of letters from amateur poets and undistinguished readers have been completely ignored, precisely because they seem to offer evidence of the impoverished, underdeveloped state of poetry in turn-of-the-century America that is assumed in so many literary histories.[lvii] In this chapter, I argue that reading these letters with an eye to the constructed nature of the genteel/modern binary allows us to see that they are in fact proof of the range and vitality of poetic practices that existed before, during, and after the advent of *Poetry*. This argument builds on a number of studies that have begun to look more critically at *Poetry*'s self-mythologization to show that, as Furey puts it, *Poetry* "ironically narrowed the field it claimed to open" (680). I demonstrate that Monroe did help to "[transform] the way that poetry and poets [were] recognized and read," as triumphalist critical accounts of *Poetry* have it ("Guide to *Poetry*"), but that she did so by attempting to shut down the heterogeneous, decentralized circulation of poems in newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, advertisements, circulars, bulletins, scrapbooks, and other mixed-genre media

that had been a vital part of American cultural life throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Monroe used new copyright laws, Progressive Era ideas about the civic functions of art, and the growing university system in an attempt to move poetry out of the hybrid space of popular print and into institutionally-sanctioned and organized spaces. Far from bringing poetry to readers who had been ignoring it, Monroe sought to discipline readers out of their promiscuous habits of consumption.

This is a very different picture of Monroe's critical ambitions than has been painted by recent attempts to recover Monroe as an influential modernist figure. Such work has upheld the self-canonizing narrative told in the pages of *Poetry*, in which the magazine revitalized a dying art form. According to this viewpoint, Monroe was a visionary who championed experimental poetry as a means of breaking free from the genteel culture that had strangled the lifeblood out of American poetics in the 1880s and 1890s. These accounts map the category of the formally experimental onto the category of the anti-Victorian or anti-genteel, and this terminological slippage has resulted in a serious misunderstanding of Monroe's editorial project, as I began to show in my previous chapter. Liesl Olson, for instance, has recently claimed that *Poetry* was founded as "a monthly magazine dedicated to the new vers libre, not the classical, academic poetry that [Monroe herself] had once written" (np). Olson's account overlooks the fact that the first issue of *Poetry* opens with a pair of Petrarchan sonnets by Arthur Davison Ficke, and that a significant number of poems in most issues are written in "classical" or "academic" forms. In working to distance Monroe from non-modernist poetry (identified variously as "genteel," "academic," "traditional," "classical," and "Victorian," but always

collapsed into a singular group of retrograde tendencies), scholars such as Olson fail to do justice to the complexity and the scope of both turn-of-the-century poetry in general and to Monroe's ambitions for poetry in particular. For Monroe was indeed a champion of "modern" poetry, but her understanding of the term was "linked to conceptions of poetry that were rooted in her earlier experiences and relationships," including her work writing the commemorative ode for the World's Fair, as Sarah Ehlers argues (49) – experiences that, in accounts like Olson's, have been understood as the "classical, academic" Victorianism that Monroe ultimately rejected. In describing Monroe's project not as either passé or modern, but as a bid to change the reading practices of Americans, this chapter aims to open up a view of the variegated poetic landscape of turn-of-the-century America.

I. Surveying Monroe's cultural field: Newspaper verse and the prestige of poetry

As many scholars have noted, nineteenth-century American periodical culture was marked by the "permeability of genres" and the cross-fertilization of media (Delap and DiCenzo 58). Smith and Price argue that American periodicals between 1830 and 1890 "displayed a healthy heterogeneity, since even the most prestigious magazines, including *Harper's Monthly*, *Putnam's*, and the *Atlantic*, mixed popular and elite forms" easily and without comment (7), and Ellen Gruber Garvey has shown that even the boundary between advertising and content was deliberately constructed to be permeable in nineteenth-century periodicals. Scholars of modernism have only recently begun to explore the implications of this generically hybrid print culture for our understanding of

modernist literature, however. As Ann Ardis argues, film studies have overshadowed the importance of print as one of, if not the, "most important new media form of the twentieth century" ("Staging" 30-31), even though periodicals at the turn of the century were "becoming increasingly complex visual texts, changing the reading experience in hard-to-fathom ways" (Ardis and Collier "Introduction" 1-2). A renewed interest in the modernist little magazine has helped to restore a sense of print media's importance to modernism, but few scholars have looked at these magazines in the context of the print cultures that preceded them and lived alongside them for decades (since, of course, the magazines are read as creating a break with that past). But it is impossible to understand these modernist editorial projects without understanding the print cultures from which they emerged. This is particularly true in the case of *Poetry*, which Monroe envisioned as a corrective to popular newspaper poetry. For Monroe, the problem with poetry in America was not its absence, but rather its immense popularity. Recent studies by Mike Chasar and Joan Shelley Rubin have pointed to the inescapability of poetry in the daily life in nineteenth- and twentieth-century America; as Chasar argues, "most poetry circulated outside of books," creating "a vast print world in which, for example, a majority of the nation's newspapers published and republished poems, often on a daily basis" (54). Chasar shows how the antebellum "culture of reprinting" named and explored by Meredith McGill extended well into the twentieth-century, where it had a complex afterlife as what Chasar calls the "culture of everyday reading and writing" (26). Readers did not have to seek out poems, because poems were part of the fabric of the newspapers and magazines they read on a daily basis. As Paula Bennett notes, "even the

most prestigious American periodicals" during the so-called "Twilight of Poetry" "tended to carry five or six poems per issue," so that "hundreds of . . . poems were published each month" (203). Readers encountered these poems as part of a larger print culture in which the lines between media, genre, form, and format were blurred. As Frank Luther Mott argues, it was often difficult to distinguish newspapers from magazines, as both printed "literary miscellany" along with journalistic reporting. This confusion intensified in the 1880's when Sunday supplements to metropolitan newspapers, which mimicked magazines in form and content, became popular (2-3). Shifting ideas about journalism in this period further blurred the boundaries between media and genres; newspapers began to be treated as entrepreneurial ventures rather than political mouthpieces, and editors who wanted to increase circulation and profits made sure to print a little bit of everything in order to attract the largest audience (Baldasty 46). Newspapers (and, to a lesser extent, popular magazines) thus offered their readers "a diverse mix of local, regional, and national news and features on dozens of topics - business, crime, accidents, fires, divorce, suicide, labor, education, religion, sports, inventions, disease, weather, books, theater, music, fashion, and recipes," as well as poems, stories, sermons, and advertisements (Baldasty 3). Readers across the country had constant access to these heterogeneous daily newspapers, thanks to the expansion of the railroad system, and small-town editors often turned metropolitan dailies into fodder for their smaller, more tailored local papers, reinforcing the sense that the stories, poems, and miscellany printed in newspapers were meant to be cut out and recombined with other items in other publications (Smythe 203-

204). Regardless of whether an American reader lived in an urban center or a rural outpost, generically hybrid print media was a significant part of her daily experience.

In 1912, then, Harriet Monroe faced a situation in which poetry was seen as coextensive with other forms of writing, including journalism, fiction, and advertising. As a poet who wanted her work to be recognized with both cultural and financial capital, Monroe believed that poetry had to be abstracted and elevated out of this hybrid print culture if poets were to be properly compensated for their work. Though Monroe is often understood to be a champion of what Pierre Bourdieu calls the autonomous principle of hierarchization, or "art for art's sake," in her alignment with avant-garde poets such as Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams, her writings show her allegiance to the heteronomous principle, which Bourdieu describes as "favorable to those who dominate the field economically and politically (e.g. 'bourgeois art')" (Bourdieu 40). For Monroe, cultural capital was an effect of financial capital. She thus wanted to move from a literary economy of reprinting to one that recognized the rights of individual authors to be recognized and paid for their work. Monroe had begun to work against the culture of reprinting as early as 1892, a year after the U.S. congress passed the first international copyright act. Although the publishing industry was becoming increasingly more consolidated and centralized in the 1890s, vestiges of the culture of reprinting remained, so that occasionally "dissemination ran in advance of, and often stood in lieu of payment," as "[c]irculation outstripped authorial and editorial control" (McGill 1-2). In Monroe's case, the New York *World* printed her "Columbian Ode" as part of their coverage of the Chicago World's Fair without first obtaining Monroe's permission. The

World's defense argued that newspapers "had a right to publish news," and that Monroe's poem "at the time, was news," showing their understanding of form as a permeable, shifting category (*A Poet's Life* 142). They emphasized that they had devoted "a full first page" to the poem and "a portrait of the author," and suggested that such prominent publicity was worth more than direct payment to Monroe. The *World*, operating according to an older model of print circulation, saw poems as part of news reporting, and widespread circulation as more valuable than any payment an author could receive. On the other side of the aisle, Monroe saw poets as cultural workers who deserved proper financial compensation, which she believed would bring a corresponding amount of cultural capital to the poet's coffers. In a retrospective account of the trial in her autobiography, Monroe explained that having one's poem printed on the front page of a newspaper was not a valuable service, as the *World* implied, but rather "an appalling crime" against an author (*A Poet's Life* 142). She proudly noted that her "little lawsuit, being without precedent, established its own precedence and became a textbook case, defining the rights of authors to control their unpublished works" (*A Poet's Life* 139), and crowed that the $5,000 she was awarded in damages showed that the *World* had shown "a gross or wanton or malicious disregard" for her rights as an author (*A Poet's Life* 142).[lviii] In Monroe's view, that her poem had been valued so highly in financial terms by a judge meant that her own store of cultural capital should rise; she recollected that she "had fondly imagined that the success of the ode . . . would give me a certain prestige with the Eastern magazines, and was disappointed that it made not a cent's worth of difference" (*A Poet's Life* 144). In Monroe's desired literary economy, prestige translated directly

into "cents." Authors would have their worked recognized financially, and this financial recognition would signal that they also deserved cultural capital. In her opinion, poetry would become a prestigious rather than a popular art form only through the assertion of authors's rights to financial compensation. Though she was disappointed in the response of "the Eastern magazines," she noted with pleasure that the court case had given her the chance to move her poem out of the mixed commercial space of the newspaper and into the official, authoritative space of the courtroom, where poetry could be given the "dignity" and status she believed it deserved. Monroe recalled being "commanded" to read her poem to the courtroom, which "hushed as I began, and never a sound broke the silence from beginning to end. The dignity of the occasion thrilled me - I wondered whether ever before any poet had read a long poem as part of his sworn testimony in a lawsuit" (*A Poet's Life* 141).

This understanding of the relationship between modes of circulation, authorial control, and cultural capital informed the way Monroe pitched and promoted *Poetry* twenty years later. In "The Motive of the Magazine," published at the end of the first issue of *Poetry* in October 1912, Monroe explicitly objected to the hybridity of American periodical culture, which Pound and other critics had begun to decry as a feminized, commercialized, culturally illegitimate space. Like Pound, Monroe objected to the fact that poems frequently shared the page with "ads from the leading corset companies," and that they were read, recited, and pasted into scrapbooks by undiscriminating "Aunt Hannahs," as Pound famously opined ("Small Magazines" 690). By coming into contact with the feminized space of the disposable, easily-consumable, market-driven periodical,

Monroe believed, poetry lost the cultural prestige that was its birthright. As she explained,

> The popular magazines can afford [poetry] but scant courtesy - a Cinderella corner in the ashes - because they seek a large public which is not hers, a public which buys them not for their verse but for their stories, pictures, journalism, rarely for their literature, even in prose. Most magazine editors say that there is no public for poetry in America; one of them wrote to a young poet that the verse his monthly accepted 'must appeal to the barber's wife of the Middle West,' and others prove their distrust by printing less verse from year to year, and that rarely beyond page-end length and importance. (27)

The midwestern barber's wife served as Monroe's version of "Aunt Hannah"; Monroe figured the threat to poetry as a provincial woman who would only read poetry if it was sneaked in with the news items and pictures that she really wanted to consume. The problem for Monroe was not necessarily this poetry's form or content, but rather its contact with other genres and its free circulation in mass-market periodicals. In order to teach the reading public that poetry was in fact a prestigious form that did not belong in ephemeral periodicals, Monroe promised that *Poetry* would "print poems longer, and of more intimate and serious character, than the popular magazines can afford to use," thereby creating "a place of refuge, a green isle in the sea" (28). Serious readers would no longer have their experiences of poetry sullied by contact with market-driven journalism and serialized fiction, and poets would no longer have to cater to the tastes of

uninformed readers in order to make a living. By removing poetry to this protected space of "refuge" in a sea of piratical periodicals, Monroe believed, poetry could regain its proper place in the hierarchy of artistic forms.

It has been easy to misrecognize Monroe's disavowals of the commercial press as indictments of "traditional" or "conventional" poetry, particularly when Monroe directs her attacks against poets such as Edgar Guest and Ella Wheeler Wilcox, who wrote in recognizable meters that often employed rhyme. But Monroe's repudiation of newspaper and magazine poetry show us that her motivating concern was not formally experimental poetry, as the prevailing critical view has it, but rather cultural capital, and that her bid for institutional power took the form of denigrations of modes of circulation rather than of "traditional" poetic form. In writing against newspaper and magazine poetry, Monroe drew on earlier debates that sought to "resolv[e] the cultural place of poetry in gendered terms" by aligning newspaper poetry with the ephemeral productions of female domestic laborers (Loeffelholz 141). In a 1922 article in *Poetry* entitled "Newspaper Verse," Monroe sought to counter claims in the Washington *Herald* and the Atlanta *Constitution* that the best American poetry was being printed in newspapers rather than in "the higher-class magazines" (324). Throughout the article, Monroe used culinary metaphors to disparage newspaper poems by Edgar Guest, Walt Mason, and other wildly popular male poets as the commercial products of factory workers as opposed to the timeless works of disinterested artists. This tactic echoed mid-nineteenth-century denunciations of newspaper poetry as a feminized, quotidian product, which found particularly clear expression in Josiah Holland's 1858 "Women in Literature," published in the Springfield

Republican. Mary Loeffelholz describes how Holland's piece posited that "women manage the interface between the domestic hearth and the culture industry, where production directly meets consumption"; Holland argued that,

> Here [in the newspaper] woman is at home. As she deals out bread to her household for daily food, so she may deal out her thoughts for the daily food of a multitude of minds. The mass of literature is ephemeral, by necessity. The magazine and the newspaper, the story and the poem - read today, destroyed tomorrow - these are the food of the world, and in this field woman may win, and is winning, the fairest laurels. (qtd. in Loeffelholz 141)

Monroe retained the framework wherein the ephemeral nature of newspaper poetry was aligned with domestic products, but she emphasized the symbolic nature of the gendering of the cultural field by writing strictly about male newspaper poets in terms that had traditionally been used to damn women writers.[lix] She too coded newspaper poetry as the type of "daily food" that would easily spoil, arguing that only comic newspaper poetry was saved "from rot and reek" by its "saltily humorous environment." "Seriously intended newspaper verse," on the other hand, promised to harm the readers it was supposed to nourish. Monroe singled out Edgar Guest for condemnation, arguing that "the stickily sugary Mr. Guest . . . [runs a] molasses factory [that] proves profitable in more ways than one; so, like other wide-awake business-men, he spreads its products over the land" ("Newspaper Verse" 327-328). Monroe updated Holland's food metaphor for the twentieth century; where newspaper poetry had been aligned with the production of bread in home kitchens by female domestic laborers, Monroe equated the mass

production of newspaper poems with industrialized food production. The danger posed by newspaper poetry increased proportionately; as the culture industry scaled up its production and its reach, it threatened to drown the country in (highly profitable) treacle. Even worse, it promised to teach a new generation of readers that poetry was rightly aligned with sentiment and with debased genres such as melodrama. Monroe lamented that "the school-children of many cities are stimulated by [Guest's] example toward the high rewards, financial and glory-coronal, of poesy" ("Newspaper Verse" 328), indicating that they were being led astray by the spectacle of Guest's undeserved fame.

This was also Monroe's primary objection to the poetry of Ella Wheeler Wilcox. When Monroe attacked Wilcox's poetry, she did so not on the basis of its form, but rather because of its association with popular genres like melodrama and with mass-market print. Indeed, her most notable attack on Wilcox appeared in an essay about John Masefield's perilous descent into melodrama in *The Daffodil Fields*. To Monroe, the poems of Wilcox and Masefield represented the same danger to the art of poetry, which was its association with the popular, non-prestigious genres promoted by the culture industry. In her view, any poet who chose to participate in the generic economy of the commercial press, male or female, was complicit in lowering the prestige value of their art form. Like "Newspaper Verse," Monroe's indictment of Wilcox and Masefield coded popular genres of poetry as the easily-digestible pablum that was sapping the vitality of the American reading public. Monroe argued that many popular poets were so tainted by the commercial press that they had "no souls to save - none, at least, which emerge above the milk-and-water current of their verse - the Tuppers and Ella Wheeler Wilcoxes of

their generation." This artistic baby food may have been meant to fortify its readers, but Monroe argued that it was poisoned at the source, because "popularity is poison, an insidious, habit-producing drug which dulls [poets's] minds and undermines their morals; which, once they yield to its control, they must get and feed on at any cost" ("In Danger" 68-69). Monroe saw popular poets as necessarily too attuned to the pressures and demands of the market to maintain any ideals about the moral and civic functions of poetry. Rather than creating poetry according to certain aesthetic ideals, Monroe believed, poets who sought popularity would instead do whatever they deemed necessary to keep people reading – namely, they would circulate their verse indiscriminately, in the endless array of multi-generic periodicals that unthinking readers consumed. Monroe specifically blamed newspapers and female readers for corrupting poetry in this way; she argued that it is "the thousand-and-one journalists and woman's-club orators who love a twice-told tale" who provided "the insidious stimulus of their prompt applause" to the would-be popular poet. As proof, she pointed to Masefield, whose early poetry had been in line with Poundian ideals of modern subject matter and un-sentimentality, but whose recent work showed Masefield "merely indulging his weakness" and his "taste for popular melodrama" ("In Danger" 69-70). It was not that Masefield's poetry was too "traditional" or too regularly metrical; rather, its association with the popular genres printed in newspapers lowered its cultural value by pandering to the debased sensibilities of a mass-market audience.

II. Monroe's institutional ambitions

For Monroe, the only antidote to "milk-and-water" popular poetry was the creation of an authoritative mouthpiece for the art form as a whole. It made little difference to Monroe whether *Poetry* printed sonnets or vers libre, as long as the magazine consolidated and centralized poetic discourse in such a way that it could be recognized as an authoritative cultural institution that stood outside of gendered market concerns. Monroe helped to bring about this perception of *Poetry* as a disinterested institution in a number of rhetorical performances published in *Poetry* and in more established outlets throughout the 1910s. In October, 1912, when the first issue of *Poetry* was printed, Monroe also placed an essay in the *London Poetry Review* entitled "American Poetry." Under the guise of educating her British audience about the state of poetry in America, Monroe made a case for the need for a magazine like *Poetry* in the United States, which she claimed "suffer[ed] from the decentralization of literary taste and authority." Monroe argued that the American poet's audience was comprised of "a few inaccessible readers scattered over a wide area" whose tastes were "still sufficiently colonial" to blind them to the value of American poetry and criticism. Such an audience was not a lost cause, however; they simply needed guidance. Monroe explained that American readers "are intensely imaginative, with deep dreams calling for truly interpretive modern poets. Public sympathy is not dead, but remote and unaware. An organized effort to unite and inform it may be the one thing most needful. Perhaps this will be one of this century's most important achievements" ("American Poetry" 1). Monroe's institutional ambitions are clear; not only did she want *Poetry* to function as the

final word in modern American poetry, she also wanted its founding to be recognized as one of the most important events of the new century. The grandiosity of her claim highlights the scope of her project. Monroe wanted to establish poetry as a recognizable, unified entity, made by poets, interpreted by professionals, and disseminated to the public in an organized way through discrete, official channels.

Though Monroe worked to dissociate poetry from the commercial press, she was acutely aware that even the most abstracted forms of literature were still commodities with financial as well as cultural value, as her lawsuit against the New York *World* showed. Thus she did not seek to remove poetry from the marketplace altogether; rather, she sought to create a parallel literary economy that would operate alongside the popular commercial print market. In "American Poetry," Monroe argued that the few popular American poems that were salvageable as high art needed to become commodities in this parallel economy in order to take on their proper cultural significance. She explained that poems in the ballad tradition were important to American society because they interpreted the cultural contributions of unique communities, but that they had not yet attained the status of literature because of the way they circulated. Poets such as Paul Laurence Dunbar, who "talk[ed] for . . . the Southern negro, Joaquin Miller [who talked] for the far-western rover, and many lesser rhymesters [who talked] for their special neighbors" had created poems of "high lyric beauty" that needed to become the "permanent possessions of literature" in order to be recognized as distinctively American cultural achievements ("American Poetry" 1-2). The popular commercial press created a situation in which such poetry was necessarily short-lived; even the most "perfect lyrics"

seemed to be only offerings of "some obscure vagrant of the muse . . . in a passing magazine" ("American Poetry" 2). Monroe argued that the best examples of this poetry needed to be rescued from their indiscriminate circulation as "songs" that could be performed and republished without being properly recognized as the lasting "artistic achievement" of an individual poet. If modern American poetry was to be recognized as a significant contribution to the art of poetry, Monroe argued, it would have to be conscripted into a more formalized economy.

Through widely-disseminated essays like "American Poetry," Monroe was able to present as fact the claims that the decentralization of poetry in America was impoverishing the art, and that *Poetry* was the needed institution that could unify and centralize poetic discourse. To further legitimate these rhetorical claims, Monroe actively sought alliances with university professors, whose status as experts she believed would help to sanction her own self-proclaimed expertise. Additionally, she saved evidence of these alliances in the official, university-based archives of *Poetry* to provide further authoritative proof of *Poetry*'s importance as an institution. Monroe filed what she called "boosts" and "knocks" of *Poetry*, which were letters from a variety of readers praising or condemning the magazine's project. Her markings indicate that she was attentive to the social positions of her correspondents; when "boosts" came from academic figures, Monroe made a special note of this fact, and usually replied in longhand (Monroe dictated or typed her replies to less important correspondence). As Monroe and her assistant editor Alice Corbin Henderson argued in editorials in *Poetry*, these letters attested to the great need for their magazine, which was the only authority on

contemporary poetry in America. They capitalized on the organization of departments of national literatures, which generally taught very little contemporary writing, to position *Poetry* as the solution to a perceived educational crisis. It is a well documented fact that contemporary literature was generally viewed as the domain of literary clubs and societies within the relatively young modern language departments in American universities in the 1910s; contemporary writing was believed to have a life of its own outside the university. As one university professor put it in 1925, "Contemporary literature needs no study, since its language and background are understood" (Armstrong 124). But Monroe and Henderson painted the lack of contemporary poetry in the university classroom as a scandal. In the January, 1915 issue of *Poetry*, Henderson argued that, "[a] scientific department conducted as a literary department is conducted, with no consideration of the achievements of the last thirty years, would be a disgrace to any college" ("Contemporary Poetry" 177). Monroe and Henderson argued that *Poetry* was the answer to the problem of how to get contemporary poetry into the college classroom. In their December, 1915, issue, they published a piece by Vachel Lindsay, who had been giving poetry readings at a number of universities. Lindsay explained that college professors and students were "echoing the cries and counter-cries heard loudest in the little editorials in the back of this publication" for more modern poetry in their classrooms, and he urged professors and "advanced students" of English to subscribe to *Poetry*, the only comprehensive source for contemporary poetry, noting that "[a]t present I find the magazine oftener in the brain of the professor than on his table" ("A Plea" 160). If professors heeded Lindsay's call, *Poetry* would find a place in the university

classroom, and its status as the authoritative mouthpiece for modern poetry would be confirmed. Far from disdaining "academic" poetry, then, as so many literary histories have it, Monroe saw the academy as one crucial way to separate what she saw as the best modern poetry from the popular poetry that seemed to dilute the art form's cultural prestige.

The letters of support from university professors that Monroe saved show how she turned their interest to her advantage. These letters indicate that *Poetry* was viewed as an authority on contemporary poetry, and that students and professors found it useful. But they also indicate that for many academics, modern poetry was thriving better outside the classroom than it could inside. In 1914, Adolph Babenroth, who taught composition at Syracuse University, wrote to Monroe that her magazine "was of inestimable help" to him when he was invited to lecture to the English Club, "an organization made up of majors and minors in English literature." He explained that *Poetry* "furnished the big gun of the evening," John Gould Fletcher's "Blue Symphony." He added that his letter was meant as "a nudge of encouragement in your good work," and requested that Monroe "[p]rint some more of the Blue Symphony type of poetry." Babenroth's letter makes no mention of a lack of modern poetry in the classroom; for him, contemporary poetry is the domain of the extracurricular club and of the non-academic magazine. It is clearly important to Babenroth that modern poetry be discussed and disseminated, but in his account, this work does not need to take place within a university classroom. Monroe seems to have taken this letter as support for the idea that *Poetry* was becoming a necessity within academia, however; she marked the letter as a "Boost from Univ. prof"

and answered it in longhand immediately, indicating her desire to create a relationship between *Poetry* and the academy (the letter was dated December 8th; Monroe composed her reply on the 12th) (Babenroth MS). Indeed, this seems to be one of the letters Monroe referred to in her proposal for *The New Poetry: An Anthology* as evidence that modern poetry was lacking in the university classroom. Writing to Edward C. Marsh at the Macmillan publishing company in 1915, Monroe noted that, "[f]rom our experience of the last three years we have discovered that college professors, and the arts and literature departments of the women's clubs throughout the country, wish to keep in touch with the new movement in poetry, but do not quite know where to look for the material" (Monroe MS).[lx] To Monroe, her magazine was the obvious - indeed, the only - place to look for evidence of the "new movement" in poetry (after all, Monroe had helped to invent and market the movement, as I discussed in my previous chapter). As she explained to Marsh, *Poetry* had published, and hence owned the copyright to, the majority of what was then considered New Poetry, and so *Poetry* was located firmly at the center of contemporary literature. By 1919, Monroe was able to confidently announce the success of her project; as she put it, *Poetry* "is widely recognized not only as the leading organ of the art, but also as a kind of public institution necessary to its progress" (Monroe MS).

From this authoritative position, Monroe believed, she could educate a public that was always threatening to be seduced away from artistic forms of poetry and into popular modes. Though Monroe had publicly denounced "woman's-club orators" for encouraging the taste for popular poetry in her 1913 take-down of Wilcox and Masefield,

her private correspondence shows her willingness to work with such clubs to guide them back from the perils of periodical circulation. Monroe was particularly interested in club gatherings that worked as an extension of the academic lecture circuit. She responded promptly to a request from Thornwell Haynes, president of Birmingham College in Alabama, who wrote in April 1917[lxi] to ask Monroe for "an original line" or something to read for "the occasion" of his lecture to "a woman's club of the city." Monroe noted that she sent her "Tryon poem," officially titled "April - North Carolina" (Haynes MS). This choice shows that the importance of the lecture circuit to Monroe was not to introduce any radically new poetic modes or experiments to the reading public, but rather to consolidate her authority. She sent a fitting occasional poem – a meditation on April in a small southern town, written in modified ballad meter – to the club, a choice that seems to connect an older mode of public poetry (nineteenth-century occasional verse) with a modern university lecture, where an authority would teach his audience what to glean from that poetry. Even in 1917, Monroe was not far removed from "classical" or "academic" poetry.

Monroe was active in university-sanctioned public lecture circuits, frequently taking on the role of professorial authority herself. The ads she circulated for her lectures played up *Poetry*'s status as *the* source for information about modern poetry, since, as was frequently pointed out in editorials in *Poetry*, few universities offered courses in contemporary poetry. An ad from the 1910s declared that, "Probably no one else has had so good an opportunity as the editor of *Poetry* for thorough acquaintance with . . . [t]he New Movement in Poetry. The magazine, which began as a pioneer in a new field, is no

the recognized centre of influence in this art" ("The New Movement" MS). The ad could easily double as a syllabus for a course in modern American poetry; interested parties are invited to select from lectures on topics including poetic schools such as the "Illinois poets, poets of the middle west, the Imagists, certain radicals, a group of women, the Georgians," or on single poets including "Carl Sandburg, Edgar Lee Masters, Vachel Lindsay, Robert Frost, Amy Lowell, Edna Millay, or any other important figure" ("The New Movement" MS). If American universities were not ready to lecture on the important figures and schools of the modern era, Monroe implied, she would get the job done herself. Other ads played up her connections with academic institutions as well as her credentials as a poet and editor, noting that Monroe had "given courses, or single readings, at the Universities of Illinois, Chicago, Northwestern, Baylor, Indiana, De Pauw, Texas, New Mexico, etc., and before many literary societies" ("Readings in Modern Poetry" MS). Whether speaking about the Georgian poets or "certain radicals," the importance of Monroe's position was that she consolidated poetic discourse, becoming the only authority capable of speaking on the topic of modern poetry. The hybrid nature of these ads shows Monroe bringing together different types of public speech, including the nineteenth-century amateur public lecture and the professional university lecture, so that poetic discourse could become less chaotic and more centrally organized.

II. Curating readers

Against this officially-sanctioned, top-down model of poetic discourse, Monroe pitted a "bad" type of non-centralized poetic discourse based in periodical culture. The letters and poems Monroe relegated to her "museum" files represent the types of poetic economies she rejected, and the types of circulation that she wanted to halt. Though it has been easy to dismiss the practices and views represented in these letters as naïve or outdated, I will show that these readers were simply working with different ideas of poetic circulation than Monroe. Looking more closely at these letters reveals the range and complexity of poetic cultures that Monroe's editorial work helped to obscure, and shows that these readers were not as absurd or outdated as Monroe tried to make them seem.

Monroe's museum files house an impressive array of fan letters, poems, complaints, and appeals, identified variously as "boosts," "knocks," "crank letters," and "amusing letters." The curious thing about these files is the way they group seemingly outré exchanges with letters from amateur poets who simply seem too provincial or naive for *Poetry*; the ramblings of an isolated crank or religious visionary are given as much credence as the protests of Ella Wheeler Wilcox or the entreaty of an amateur poet. If these letters seem crazy or naive from the vantage point of the twenty-first century, however, it is only because they have been taken out of the context of the larger print cultures in which they were composed. Take, for instance, the case of R.B. Orr, whose correspondence Monroe classified as "crank letters." Orr, an amateur poet located in New York City, had submitted some of his poems to a contest *Poetry* ran in 1918 and

received no response. Orr took it upon himself to write to the Chief of Police of Chicago "to find out if the persons or concern announcing The Contest, under the name of *Poetry*, 543 Cass St., is a reliable person or concern," because he had "sent four poems . . . in a registered letter sometime in May to the foregoing address but . . . never received an acknowledgment although I enclosed a letter asking for an acknowledgement." The Chicago police department did in fact investigate, sending an officer to *Poetry*'s office to track down the missing poems. As *Poetry*'s secretary rather sardonically explained to Mr. Orr following this visit, "unless a stamped envelope is enclosed we do not return manuscripts or send acknowledgments. But we did send you a card stating that we would return the poems upon receipt of the necessary postage" (Orr MS). Orr's seems to be a clear case of a naive amateur overestimating his poetry's quality and worth. Indeed, Monroe filed it in the same series of "crank letters" in which she placed a missive from "Her Grace - the Almighty God, Human name Grace C. Wright," a pairing that seems to confirm the outlandishness of Orr's actions (Wright MS).[lxii] But within the context of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century print culture, Orr's fear of being swindled had a basis in reality. Newspapers began running wildly popular contests in the 1880's and 90's in an attempt to increase their circulations; some gave out prizes for the best short stories and poems that readers sent in, while others rewarded entrants who solved puzzles or correctly guessed the answers to trivia questions. A few of these contests resulted in well-publicized news items and, occasionally, prominent legal cases. The Albany *Argus* dominated the news cycle in 1897 when they ran a "brightest-student contest" that required children to send in a coupon printed in the paper, causing "young boys [to grab]

newspapers from readers on trolleys and street corners, [tear] out the coupons and then [return] the despoiled papers to enraged readers." A year previously, the New York *Evening Telegram* had run a contest in which readers were invited to guess the winning number of votes in that year's presidential election. The closest guess was promised a world tour - a prize that William S. Bass found irresistible. Bass won the contest by buying "30,000 copies of the newspaper and [using] a mathematical system to fill in all the coupons." The *Telegram* refused to award him the prize because he had entered multiple times, and Bass sued and won a settlement of either $10,000 or the world tour (whichever the *Telegram* decided to bestow) (Baldasty 134-136). Though there is little available biographical information about R.B. Orr, it is likely that, as a resident of New York State, he would have been aware of these highly publicized contest scandals. If Bass had been able to win such a large settlement from the *Telegram* with the help of the New York court system, then it stood to reason that Orr could at least win the return of his poems with the help of Chicago's law enforcement officials. By dismissing Orr's letter as a "crank" letter, Monroe helped to disappear the history of newspaper writing contests with which many American amateur authors were intimately familiar. At the same time, this dismissal helped to cover over *Poetry*'s indebtedness to this business tactic. For just as the Albany *Argus* and the New York *Evening Telegram* sought to boost their circulations and encourage brand loyalty through their contests, so Monroe hoped to raise *Poetry*'s visibility through hers. Sponsoring a contest for amateur poets proved Monroe's commitment to her famous "open door" policy, which strengthened the integrity of *Poetry* as a brand that readers could trust. Monroe staked her magazine's reputation on

this disinterested judgment, which she set apart from the commercial interests of the popular press, but she used the very mechanisms of popular press advertising to do so.

Many other correspondents, like Orr, understood *Poetry* to be part of a larger print network of newspapers and magazines, within which poetry could circulate as a hypermobile form that would easily translate from the pages of a newspaper to those of a small magazine. This was precisely the understanding of poetry that Monroe wanted to close off, and insofar as would-be contributors to *Poetry* misunderstood Monroe's project, their appeals were naïve. But they are not inherently so; rather, they provide a glimpse of poetic practices that Monroe refused to recognize as legitimate. To a poet-journalist like Lucy Cleveland, for instance, it was unthinkable that newspaper circulation was not a vital part of modern American poetry. Cleveland enjoyed a prolific career writing poems, serialized fiction, and journalistic reports for periodicals such as the Columbus, Georgia *Daily Enquirer*, the Harrisburg, Pennsylvania *Patriot*, the New York *Herald-Tribune*, and *Godey's* magazine. Cleveland was a master of self-promotion and a skillful exploiter of newspaper and mass-market magazine conventions. She heavily advertised her first book of poems, *The Lotus of the Nile*, in a number of newspapers in 1893, and garnered further attention when her poem "Egyptian Girl" was published in the popular magazine *Poet Lore* in 1899. She became famous enough through her work as an author that she was hired her to work as a spokesperson for Oxzyn Balm beauty cream, which listed her name along with Lillian Russell's to advertise their product ("Oxzyn Balm"). To Cleveland, poems were capable of moving from books to magazines to newspapers and back without losing any of their value. Indeed, the fame

that newspaper circulation could bring to a poet was proof of the worth of her work rather than an indication of its commercial (and so debased) nature. If audiences responded to her poetry, then clearly it had served its purpose as a public text designed to delight and edify. Cleveland confidently wrote to Monroe in 1916 as one "true poet" to another to see if *Poetry* would be interested in printing some of her poems. In listing her bona fides, Cleveland emphasized both the newspapers that had published her work and the responses of her readers:

> My poem, 'WHAT ANSWER, O COLUMBIA?' (New York Herald, July 16th, 1915) brought to me requests from men of affairs, - millionaires, - for an autograph copy. One of these gentlemen wrote, 'It is perfect in form and in soul!' My poem, 'TO GREECE,' (New York Herald, November 24th, 1915) went, with the translation in Modern Greek, to Venizelos. I have just heard from him that it has arrived safely. My poem 'TO THE PRESIDENT ON HIS TOURING A 'WEAPONLESS' COUNTRY,' (New York Herald, January 29th, 1916) has been profoundly commented upon, as 'stately, earnest, daring, direct.' 'Daring??' I am the great grand-niece of Major-General PUTNAM, and descended -- direct line, and not by distaff -- from a Viking in the striking train of Rolf der Ganger into 'Normandy.' . . . I believe, modestly, that I am the first to gather up in one flashing verse the esprit, the métier, of the great musicians.

Cleveland's grandiose claims are clearly indebted to a tradition of "puffing" in nineteenth-century newspapers and to later forms of periodical advertising, and as such they can seem overwrought. But Cleveland also cannily picked up on some of Monroe's

pet themes. She emphasized that her poetry was cosmopolitan enough to be valuable to readers from New York to Greece to France, echoing many of Monroe's editorials in *Poetry* that called for poetry to be seen as a truly international, cosmopolitan art form.[lxiii] For Cleveland, her poetry's wide circulation was proof of its relevance to communities of readers across the globe, and so of its contemporary, modern outlook. Too, she emphasized that her poems's "daring" modernity was a product of her racial heritage, as Monroe believed was the case with Sandburg, Lindsay, and other important modern poets Monroe advertised as part of the New Poetry, as discussed in chapter three. As someone who had descended from "Vikings" who settled in "Normandy," Cleveland would necessarily be in touch with both the primitive accentual rhythms of a Germanic/Scandinavian tradition and with the highly cultivated rhythms of France. Cleveland also picked up on the connections between the art of music and the art of poetry, which were frequently explored in editorials in *Poetry* in the 1910s.[lxiv] Cleveland emphasized that she was a trained musician as well as a decorated poet, "having been educated [as a musician] in six of the countries of the Old World." She explained that although her work participated in modern trends in that it took on any and all subjects, her work "always stood for the highest, because I am an artist; and though I may write of mud, I do not make it a prism -- after the fashion of the debasing moderns." Though this may seem a dig at modernist poetry, Cleveland signals her willingness to expand the content of poetry (she "may write of mud") but to ensure that it retained the beauty of high art, which is precisely what Monroe thought the best modern poetry did. Cleveland also played on Monroe's pride in paying poets for their work, noting that "coin-

compensation" was not why she wrote, but that payment was important for a working artist, which Monroe understood, since "it is your notable self, dear Madame Monroe, that stands for the just compensation to the artist" (Cleveland MS). If, at first glance, Cleveland's letter seems outdated, it is important to see the ways in which she cannily responded to many of Monroe's pet theories and ideas. If Monroe seems more modern than Cleveland, it is important to see how her ideas about poetry fit into older paradigms as easily as they do modernist paradigms. That is, not only does Cleveland's letter attest to the persistence of a mobile, hybrid print culture in which poems circulated freely between publications to a wide audience; it also shows the dialectical, rather than oppositional, relationship between Victorian and modernist artistic theories.[lxv] Monroe simply marked Cleveland's letter "funny letter," however, and filed it in one of her "crank letters" files, thereby hiding the similarities between their views of poetry and the less prestigious modes of newspaper poetry the letter attests to.

Like Lucy Cleveland, David B. Metcalf was a popular newspaper poet who saw continuities between his concept of poetry and the ideas about modern poetry that *Poetry* was promoting. His letters to Monroe similarly point to the overlap between older modes of newspaper publishing and newer spaces devoted to poetry as a distinct form. Metcalf wrote to Monroe in February of 1914 in a bid to be included among the "mid-west poets" who Monroe was "rounding up." Metcalf pointed to his prolific output as a newspaper poet; he was published in the New York *Star Journal*, the Chicago *Tribune*, the *Inter-Ocean*, the Louisville *Courier-Journal*, the Philadelphia *Press*, the Cleveland *Leader*, the New York *Weekly*, the New York *Family Story Paper*, *Wavery Magazine* of Boston,

among others. He explained that he wrote for the Chicago *Tribune* "in 1878, the time Miss Ella Wheeler did, who is now Ella Wheeler Wilcox," and that his output comprised "close on to 200 poems pasted in my scrap books, which if published in book form would make close onto 300 pages." He enclosed a copy of "Home of My Childhood," which was published in the *Inter-Ocean* in 1890. For Metcalf, as for Cleveland, poetic success could be measured in terms of circulation and output. The more poems one had in circulation with the reading public, the more claim one had to status as a poet. Ella Wheeler Wilcox thus acted as a legitimizing figure for Metcalf, as her prolific output and popularity made her an important poet. Too, Metcalf believed that these poems could (and should) move across media, from newspapers to scrapbooks to magazines like *Poetry*. Metcalf felt that he had particular reason to be considered for publication, given *Poetry*'s interest in regional poetry as the expression of an American spirit. In a follow-up letter, Metcalf charmingly and guilelessly requested, "as I am an old-time Prairie poet, and as Mr. Yeats, the Irish poet was a guest of yours, and as the papers have puffed him as a man of genius, I wanted him to see it and pass upon the merits of its composition." Metcalf may not have been aware of the changing winds of poetic fortune – he himself noted that he was "no 'Spring Chicken' as the fellow says" – but he recognized that even modernist poets were "puffed" by newspapers and magazines (Metcalf MS). In tying modernist polemic and self-promotion to the nineteenth-century tradition of puffing, Metcalf's letter points to the overlap between the fungible economy of a culture of reprinting and the newer, restricted literary space that Monroe had created. And Metcalf was not simply behind or out of step; he was indeed a genuine prairie poet, of the type

that *Poetry* frequently "puffed" (to use Metcalf's terminology); as I argued in my previous chapter, the New Poetry was tied together precisely through a regionalist emphasis on the racial and spiritual identity of a poet. Metcalf's poetry does not differ substantially, in content or in form, from many of the more "traditional" poets represented in anthologies of the New Poetry. Monroe disagreed, however, and symbolically took Metcalf out of circulation by placing his letters in a "crank letters" folder in her museum files.

Posterity has seemed to confirm Monroe's judgment that Metcalf and Yeats did not belong together, but Monroe's museum files also reveal the extent to which American readers understood popular and highbrow poetry to be contiguous and even overlapping. *Poetry*'s readers, who clearly understood that the magazine sought to elevate the art of poetry, frequently wrote versified letters to Monroe, indicating that for many readers, "light" and "serious" modes of poetry could comfortably coexist in the same discursive space. J.H. Howard of Arcadia, Michigan, was one of many subscribers who wrote a poem to renew his subscription; in highly "conventional" rhymes, Howard explained,

> The first copy of 'Poetry' comes to my hand
>
> Through the courteousness of a friend;
>
> But if on unlimited largess we planned,
>
> All friendships would come to an end.
>
> So the subsequent issues I'm asking from you,
>
> And enclosing a draft for the same;
>
> And unless you default on your brilliant debut,

I will stay with you clear through the game. (Howard MS)

For Howard, as for many other subscribers, the act of reading *Poetry* was coextensive with the act of writing poetry, and this wide-ranging poetic activity could bring together the "high" and "low" types that Monroe wanted to keep separate. "Highbrow" verse could inspire "light" verse that could amuse the reader who wrote it and the serious cultural arbiter he sent it to. Poetry was not an abstract realm for Howard as it was for Monroe; instead, it was a collection of practices of literacy that suffused his everyday life. Like Howard, Maurine Halliburton of Milan, Missouri, testified to the ways in which different modes of poetic reading and writing were significant parts of her daily life (and of her sense of identity). Halliburton was one of many readers who wrote glowingly of both *Poetry* and of Monroe's bugbear, Ella Wheeler Wilcox, in the same letter. For these readers, modern poetic practices were capacious enough to include both Monroe and Wilcox, and this capaciousness was poetry's strength rather than a sign of its decline. Halliburton wrote to Monroe in 1919 to express her enthusiasm for the March issue of *Poetry*, and particularly for Florence Snelling's "March in Tyron" and Frances Shaw's "World Lullaby."[lxvi] She explained that she enjoyed these poems especially because "the metre of the verses keeps them in my mind even if I forget the happily chosen words." She went on to offer an explanation as to why her ear was so sensitive to poetic meter; she had been born a poet, thanks to the prenatal influence of Wilcox. Halliburton explained,

In your correspondence department I find that you are really interested in the poets who contribute to or read your magazine. Maybe you will be interested in hearing how I happened to be born a poet. For that it was. Before my birth my mother was given a copy of Ella Wheeler Wilcox's poem, "Maurine", with some others of her verses. She enjoyed it so much and read it over and over, with no thougth [sic] however as to prenatal influence on the child to which she was to give birth. When I came and proved to be not the boy that was wanted but a girl instead, I was named for the poem that had been so enjoyed by my mother. Before I could write them I was composing verses. When I learned to write I wrote short poems to all members of the family, including numerous poets of which I was fond. I kept this up through all my school days. The product was, of course not at all remarkable as literature but I enjoyed it. I have only a few of the many poems I wrote during my growing up although at one time I had about thirty or more all together in a note book. I lost it and only have those I could remember and re-write. I am twenty-one. In the last five years I have completed one hundred and seven poems, all of which I have. The last year has been the one in which most of my writing was done. Probably this was die [sic] to the fact that I was compelled [sic] to remain at home with my mother and thus had more time than I had had before. The other day I read a copy of Ella Wheeler Wilcox's life and was surprised to find that she attributed her talent to the prenatal influence of her mother's reading of poetry and literature. However this is not uncommon but

> it interested me as Ella Wheeler Wilcox's poems had been the direct cause of my having the talent she claims came to her in a similar manner. (Halliburton MS)

Halliburton's brief autobiography offers a view of some of the many uses to which readers put poetry in their everyday lives. One can only conjecture what her mother thought as she read the story of the weak Helen dying in childbirth while her friend lived and continued to compose poetry, but it is clear that to Halliburton, Wilcox's poetry helped to give her value, since she was not the boy her parents desired. As a child, Halliburton picked up on one particular mode of poetic composition, in which poems are written to and for specific individuals. Her collection of "one hundred and seven poems" attests to how common it was for Halliburton to think in verse - to process her experiences by putting them into poetic form. The simplicity of her admission that she had been "compelled to remain at home" with her ailing mother shows that her daily sphere of action was restricted, and that she used the writing of poetry to cope with this state of affairs. From mystical inspiration to guided study to daily output, Halliburton's poetic practices were varied.

Halliburton added that her poetry was not confined to books she had assembled herself:

> I have had two poems published in THE AJAX, a poetry magazine of Alton, Illinois, and have not long ago received a check from LIFE for a short poem. Aside from that I am quite obscure. But the writing of poetry is a pleasure and, altho [sic] one desires to be recognized, the lack of recognition does not discourage a writer. I hope sometime to have something in your pages, so will

> continue to send verses at times . . . P.S. Just as I finished this the postman brought me another check from "Life." I'm rather elated. (Halliburton MS)

Halliburton's letter stresses that it was the popular poetry of Ella Wheeler Wilcox that provided her with the poetic impulse that inspired her to attempt to write publishable verse. Halliburton may recognize that *Poetry* is a step up from *The Ajax*, but she underscores the continuity between commercially-successful popular poetry and prestigious "literary" poetry. Halliburton sees no reason why Wilcox and Life could not inspire a poet to create work that would be worthy of Monroe's notice. Halliburton both displays pleasure in her commercial success, underscoring her "elation" at having been published in *Life* multiple times, and her ambition to do something more "literary" - to publish verses in *Poetry* as well.

In comparing the poetics of Cleveland, Metcalf, Halliburton, and Monroe, I do not mean to suggest that one set of practices is more valid or important than another. Such a project would be akin to Monroe's own attempt to discipline poetry, and my goal is not to discipline form, but to historicize it. If the modes of poetic circulation evinced by the newspaper poets seem outdated or obsolete, I want to suggest how they in fact remained vital forces well into the twentieth century, and how understanding their cultural effects might change our notion of what it means to read and write poetry today.

Coda

Then as Farce

In 2013, Kenneth Goldsmith was named the Poet Laureate of the Museum of Modern Art. In his inaugural "Poet Laureate" lecture, entitled "My Career in Poetry, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Institution," Goldsmith explained that in the 1970s, MoMA's librarian Clive Phillpot found an ingenious way to let amateur artists into the museum's collection through the back door. Phillpot set up a system whereby anyone could have works acquired by the MoMA if they simply mailed them to the museum's library. The works would be officially catalogued, and, in some cases (as with Bern Porter's found poems), eventually displayed prominently at the front of the museum as the slow-moving institution caught up to the slipperier "unofficial culture" that was usually barred from its gallery spaces. Goldsmith noted that when he was first named MoMA's poet laureate, his instinct was to padlock the front door for at least a day in order to force museum-goers to confront the "secret way that culture flows" from unsanctioned sites of artistic making to the front rooms that are guarded by "the curators, the directors, and the trustees." But, he explained, he realized that such a gesture was unnecessary, because the art form he represents is already independent of the cultural arbiters who decide what counts, financially and culturally, as art. According to Goldsmith,

Poetry doesn't need you. It doesn't require your permission to exist; it doesn't care

> if you love it or not; it's marvelously illegitimate and proudly fraudulent. The whole endeavor, quite frankly, is a farce. It doesn't need institutional support; after all it proceeds perfectly well without it. It requires no money, no funding, no backers, no consensus, no ass-kissing, no political compromises.

For Goldsmith, poetry has taken the place of a defanged conceptual art, which was too easily co-opted by the very institutional forces it sought to challenge. He argues that conceptual art was originally "an act of resistance . . . [which] proposed that art could be made by anyone regardless of their skill set," and that "art could have democratic distribution systems able to be experienced by all." For Goldsmith, poetry's cultural irrelevance, when combined with a new digital culture that encourages piracy, remixing, copying, and what he has elsewhere named "uncreativity," promises to hold open the utopian possibilities that were foreclosed in the realm of visual art. Goldsmith traces the roots of this resistance to early twentieth-century pot-stirring modernists, arguing that their resistance to official verse culture opened space for institutional critique. But what a critique of institutions like *Poetry* tells us is that perhaps the power of unofficial verse culture could as easily be located in the "conventional" poetry published by the *Daily Inter Ocean* or recombined and repurposed in the homemade collections of a Maurine Halliburton. In other words, poetry's power to effect institutional critique might not come from its cultural irrelevance, but from its cultural ubiquity.

[i] Beyers and Hartman, for instance, follow John Hollander's definition of meter as a "'metrical contract' between the poet and reader" (qtd. in Beyers 28), and argue that the unusualness of free verse forms required new readerly contracts. Consequently, they focus on elucidating how individual poets make their idiosyncratic contracts clear to their readers through formal signals (Hartman 131).

[ii] Meredith Martin provides an instructive list of such arguments, pointing to Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane's assertion that Modernism "arrived as if to jolt, shock, and shake up old-fashioned, post-Tennysonian, post-Victorian poetry into something that could 'respond to the scenario of chaos"; Ira Nadel's argument that poets were "entrap[ped] . . . by iambic pentameter"; Rebecca Beasley's statement that "T.S. Eliot, T.E. Hulme, and Ezra Pound 'revolutionized Anglo-American poetry [by] arguing that traditional poetic forms and themes could no longer encapsulate the experience of the modern world'"; and Pericles Lewis's argument that "'the victory of free verse over traditional meters' was 'decisively won in English by Ezra Pound and his friends' and that 'free verse abandoned traditional versification methods including meter, rhyme, and stanza forms.'" As Martin notes, these examples of "the received view" that "modernists violated an established and stable tradition of English versification itself little concerned with experiment" all come "from teaching texts – pedagogical introductions written for beginning literature students" (3).

[iii] The Princeton Prosody Archive, currently being developed by Meredith Martin, promises to show just how varied and intense this debate was. Martin explains that the project will provide "a full-text searchable database of over 10,000 digitized records on the teaching of poetry as both a popular and highly specialized genre between 1750-1923" ("Project").

[iv] Lowell's is clearly a self-interested claim, but even if we view her argument as a promotional strategy, the fact that she drew on the discourse of the primitive roots of poetry is telling of the theory's place in the cultural imagination at this point.

[v] A persistent criticism leveled at historical poetics has been that such studies do not offer an answer to the question of how to read poetry today. See, for instance, Jonathan Culler's "Lyric, History, and Genre," which argues that Virginia Jackson's case study of the lyricization of Emily Dickinson's poetry "does not tell us how . . . we should treat Dickinson's verse if we do not approach it as lyric," and that Jackson "seems to want to dissolve the category of lyric in order to return us to a variety of particular historical practices" (885). But of course that is precisely the point; there is not *an* answer, but rather multiple ways of reading that have been historically possible that may or may not be viable as reading strategies today. To seek programmatic ways to read is to miss the force of the project of historicizing poetic reading practices.

[vi] Doak "explor[es] the intersection of gender representation and political ideology" in Maiakovskii's work, arguing that he "us[ed] his verse as an instrument to negotiat[e] with the hegemonic masculinities of Tsarist Russia, Revolutionary Russia, and the Soviet Union." As proof, Doak close reads individual poems to show how "selected works . . . encapsulate the poet's engagement with broader discourses in Russian society at different historical moments"; Maiakovskii's early poetry, for instance, "parodies, exaggerates, and reverses the gender codes of Symbolism, then dominant in St. Petersburg high society" (240). Doak notes that he is "less interested . . . in engaging with biographical questions" than with "Maiakovskii's poetry" and "the carefully crafted poetic persona who appears in his work" and negotiates the gender politics of early twentieth-century Russia (241). Neigh argues that the poetry Langston Hughes wrote in the 1940s "turn[ed] the place of Harlem into a collective voice that makes a call of solidarity to the West Indies," and that, "Hughes constructs an implicit contrast between this hopeful [poetic] persona and the harsh realities and racial conflicts in Harlem during the Second World War" (265-266). For Neigh, Hughes's poetic voices negotiate a complex political terrain. Kohlmann argues that close reading Edward Upward's leftist poetry can "help to query critical commonplaces about the nature of politically committed literature in the 1930s and the politics of writing more generally" by showing how Upward formally registered "deep hesitations about the possibility of harnessing literature to radical politics" in his poems (288). In each case, the goal is to study the formal devices used to construct a poetic voice that can negotiate difficult political terrain to learn more about a particular literary historical moment.

[vii] My thoughts about the poetic speaker are indebted to Caroline Gelmi, whose dissertation explores the emergence of this critical fiction in much greater detail.

[viii] This term has enjoyed some vogue in recent years. For a typical study of protomodernisms, see Sharon Hamilton's "The *PMLA* and the Backstory to Making Poetry New."

[ix] Notable exceptions include Max Cavitch's "Stephen Crane's Refrain" and Patrick Redding's "Whitman Unbound: Democracy and Poetic Form, 1912-1931." Cavitch notes that the narrative of "[p]oetry's liberation from the shackles of meter" remains popular even though the "long and complex history of versification in English is poorly suited to teleological narratives of liberation" (33), while Redding looks to "non-Whitmanian theories of democratic poetics" to explore the multiplicity of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American poetics (670). Michael Golston's *Rhythm and Race in Modernist Poetry and Science* has perhaps come the closest to providing a historical account of American prosodies, though Golston does not know the longer history of prosodic debate in the nineteenth century, and ultimately his work is invested in finding a politically tenable modernist prosody. Stephen Cushman's *Fictions of Form*

in American Poetry, as the title implies, is attuned to the fictional nature of claims about the links between poetic form, political ideologies, and national identities. Our accounts differ in that Cushman's work emphasizes the interplay between formalism and antinomianism, while I focus more exclusively on the assumptions and ideologies subtending defenses of free verse. Cushman also focuses strictly on ideas of form espoused by poets, while I focus on critical and academic discourses

[x] The far-reaching accounts of Graff and Renker, to take two notable examples, necessarily subsume many of the conflicts and theories that animated early literary study within larger arguments about the ongoing development of the discipline. Graff is focused on the current pedagogical necessity of teaching the conflicts at the heart of literary study, while Renker attempts to account for the historically marginalized status of American literature in the academy. Graff is particularly quick to move from the early decades of literary theory to the emergence of the New Criticism in the 1930s, thereby leaving out crucial aspects of pre-New Critical literary and poetic theory.

[xi] The parallels between Hoskins's call for a genetic study of literature and Franco Morretti's methods of distant reading are suggestive; at times, Morretti's language can sound almost identical to Hoskins's. Though it is beyond the scope of my project, a comparison of their strategies for accruing institutional support for literary study and their belief in what large-scale data analysis can contribute to human knowledge would be illuminating.

[xii] Gayley and Scott position Gummere as *the* authority on the origins of poetry throughout their textbook – a significant position indeed, given that the title of their textbook claimed that literary criticism was rooted in "Aesthetics and Poetics." In 1899, at least, Gummere seemed to be at the forefront of modern literary theory.

[xiii] American ballad discourse was firmly rooted in the early Germanic philology of Johann Gottfried Herder and the brothers Grimm, among other prominent theorists of the *volk*. As Allen Frantzen argues, "The newer 'scientific' methods of philology were suffused with the ideological goals of German romanticism, which were created by, and which helped to foster, national culture. In German universities in the late eighteenth century, modes of linguistic and historical analysis were based on assumptions about the 'spirit of the age' ('Zeitgeist') and the belief in the 'biography' of a people" (63). Child and Gummere both began their careers studying philology in Germany, and they took it for granted that national languages could provide evidence of a people's spirit, the study of which could then prove truths about races and nations. In their view, philological study could "penetrate accumulated history and take scholars directly to the pristine beginnings of their natural culture" (Frantzen 70). The newer sciences of ethnology, anthropology, and sociology seemed to provide evidence about the material conditions of those cultural beginnings, which Gummere used as proof that poetic rhythms and genres evolved in the same way as peoples and cultures. For more on the search for human origins and the development of new academic disciplines in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries, see John H. Zammito's *Kant, Herder, and the birth of anthropology* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 2002), Wulf Koepke's edited volume *Johann Gottfried Herder: Academic Disciplines and the Pursuit of Knowledge* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1996), Geoffrey Galt Harpham's *The Humanities and the Dream of America* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 2011), Brad Evans's *Before Cultures: The Ethnographic Imagination in American Literature, 1865-1920* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 2005), and "The Early Professional Era: 1875-1915" in Gerald Graff's *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1987). The points of connection between the disciplines of philology, anthropology, and literary study are many; for instance, Evans points out the notable fact that the pioneering anthropologist Franz Boas was instructed "in the German intellectual tradition initiated by [Johan Gottfried] Herder," and Boas worked closely with scholars who had been influenced by the philologically-trained Grimm brothers before assuming a professorship at Columbia University (5-6). For most scholars at the end of the nineteenth century, each of theses disciplines seemed to be involved in a singular pursuit of the origins of different national groups, even if individual scholars disagreed about the nature of those origins.

[xiv] Bücher's work provides another node in the complicated interdisciplinary networks of the late nineteenth century. Though "Arbeit und Rhythmus" is clearly in dialogue with contemporaneous ethnology, Bücher was trained as an economist, and later helped to establish journalism as an academic discipline in Germany by founding a department of journalism and the Institut für Zeitungswissenschaften (Institute for Newspaper Science) at the University of Leipzig.

[xv] According to Gummere, this fact meant that rhythm, not melody, harmony, pitch, tone, rhyme, form, or any of the other qualities that poetic theorists used to define poetry, was the most basic building block of the art. Indeed, Bücher noted that it was an accepted fact among "all students of ethnology" that "the only musical element" in primitive song was rhythm (*Beginnings* 109).

[xvi] The specter of Marx here is not coincidental, as Gummere and Marx emerged from the same German intellectual traditions.

[xvii] Gummere was by no means the first poetic theorist to construct an Anglo-Saxon heritage for American poetry. In the 1870s, the poet, musician, and Confederate soldier Sidney Lanier had developed an understanding of "Anglo-Saxon identity as formal, and specifically as metrical," so that "meter [became] a tool for propagating Lanier's particular version of American culture and history" in the wake of the Civil War (Rudy 261-262). Where Lanier responded to the immediate threat of a violent national crisis, Gummere developed his theory in response to the more diffuse but constant threats of lyric poetry and free verse. Though their systems, methods, and conclusions differed, the logic of Lanier's and

Gummere's prosodic nationalism was identical.

[xviii] In his section on the origins of literature in his handbook of literary criticism, *The Modern Study of Literature*, Moulton noted his "obligation to Professor Gummere's *Beginnings of Poetry*" for providing the outline of his account of the evolution of poetic forms (36, note 1).

[xix] The echo of Marx is particularly germane to Moulton's formulation, given their shared intellectual heritage.

[xx] These debates were not geographically restricted, of course, but for the purposes of this chapter I will focus on Anglo-American transatlantic criticism. For an extended consideration of related critical debates in France, see Erkkila's *Walt Whitman Among the French: Poet and Myth* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980). For more on Whitman's larger international reception, see Gay Wilson Allen's *Walt Whitman Abroad: Critical essays from Germany, France, Scandinavia, Russia, Italy, Spain and Latin America, Israel, Japan, and India* (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1955) and *Walt Whitman & the World* (ed. Allen and Ed Folsom, Iowa City: U Iowa P, 1995).

[xxi] Any number of prosodic tracts posit a link between the body and the temporal units of meter; see, for instance, Oliver Wendell Holmes's "The Physiology of Versification" (*The Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* 92.1 (7 Jan 1875): 6-9), which posited that, "the respiration and the pulse . . . are the true time-keepers of the body" which directly influence "the structure of metrical compositions" (6), and Alice Meynell's *The Rhythm of Life and Other Essays* (London: Elkin, Mathews and John Lane, 1893), which argued that the "rhythmic pangs of maternity" influenced the meters used by female poets (6).

[xxii] This line of attack continued into the twentieth century; Amy Lowell argued in her 1920 address "Walt Whitman and the New Poetry" that, "Whitman fell into his own peculiar form through ignorance" (63).

[xxiii] See, for instance, Edward P. Mitchell's "Walt Whitman and the Poetry of the Future," published in *The New York Sun* in 1881, and the anonymous review of *Leaves of Grass* published in *Poet Lore* in 1892 (*The Walt Whitman Archive*. Ed. Ed Folsom and Kenneth M. Price).

[xxiv] Lowell intensified her criticism of Whitman in later years. Most famously, in her lecture on "Walt Whitman and the New Poetry" at the Contemporary Club of Philadelphia in 1920, she declared that "Walt Whitman fell into his own peculiar form through ignorance . . . Whitman never had the slightest idea of what cadence is . . . he had very little rhythmical sense," and he "did not write in metre" ("Walt Whitman" 63; 70). She argued that the more intellectual New Poets promoted true democracy, while Whitman's work was "as dangerous as a Bolshevik pronunciamento" ("Walt Whitman" 75). Melissa Bradshaw notes that Lowell's negative stance on Whitman was prompted in large part by her anxieties about socialism, which was causing unrest among workers in her family's mills; Lowell was "so worried about attacks by disaffected factory workers . . . that she wrote with a pistol in her desk drawer (84).

[xxv] Such conclusions were not isolated to English departments. P.M. Jones, who taught modern French at University College of South Wales, Cardiff, and Cambridge in the 1910s and who established himself as an authority on Whitman's influence in France with two articles on the subject in *The Modern Language Review* in 1915 and 1916, argued that *vers libre* and Whitman's innovations were two distinct developments in two separate national traditions. He explained that the principles of *vers libre* had been "innate in French versification from the earliest times," and so *vers librists* were simply helping French versification to realize its entelechy. Whitman was, at most, "a foreign master who had accomplished a revolution in poetical art similar to that which [french *vers librists*] . . . were attempting," but his experiments were necessarily distinct from those that were shaped by the rules of French prosody ("Influence of Walt Whitman" 192-194). Whatever Whitman had created, in Jones's opinion, was not *vers libre*. See "Whitman in France" (*The Modern Language Review* 10.1 (1915): 1-27) and "Influence of Walt Whitman on the Origin of the 'Vers Libre' (*The Modern Language Review* 11.2 (1916): 186-194).

[xxvi] Brooks's polemic was a variation on a theme established by George Santayana in his 1911 address "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy." Santayana had similarly argued that Whitman's poetry was a formal failure, though he believed that this was due to Whitman's "unintellectual, lazy, and self-indulgent" personal character (53).

[xxvii] The *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* traces the long history of this idea, from Elihu Hubbard Smith's *American Poetry, Selected and Original* (1793) to twenty-first-century anthologies of American poetry. See Michael Cohen's "Poetry of the United States" (*The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. Roland Greene, et al., eds. 4th ed. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2012. N. pag. *Credo Reference.* Web. 21 March 2013.)

[xxviii] See, for instance, James C. McKusick's *Green Writing: romanticism and ecology* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), Maureen E. Reed's *A Woman's Place: Women writing New Mexico* (Albuquerque: U New Mexico P, 2005), Heike Schaefer's *Mary Austin's Regionalism: Reflections on gender, genre, and geography* (Charlottesville: U Virginia P, 2004), and Sherry L. Smith's *Reimagining Indians:Native Americans through Anglo eyes, 1880-1940* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000).

[xxix] Austin is clearly participating in the same racist fantasies as Lowell here; jazz, as an art form associated with African-Americans, seemed to be too closely related to the supposedly threatening characteristics inherent in black bodies. Austin's willingness to admit Native American, but not African-American, poets to an American tradition highlights the changeability of constructions of race at this moment.

[xxx] Whitman's poetry had been casually named *vers libre* and free verse in critical articles published in unspecialized

magazines prior to Weeks's, but academic studies published in specialized journals during this era largely concurred that Whitman had not written free verse.

[xxxi] The irony is that Longfellow, as a champion of the study of world literature, helped to pave the way for Moulton's work, and Moulton helped to set the stage for the idea that Whitman had indeed written the "poetry of the future."

[xxxii] Much of this revisionist work is a response to Marjorie Perloff, who has helped to popularize the idea that there were two major traditions in American poetry – one genteel, one avant-garde. As Cole Swensen writes in her introduction to the Norton anthology *American Hybrid*, "the notion of a fundamental division in American poetry has become so ingrained that we take it for granted," even though "the model of binary opposition is no longer the most accurate one." The past two years alone have seen a number of notable attempts to rethink the "two traditions" narrative of modern poetry (see, for instance, Oren Izenberg, *Being Numerous* [Princeton: Princeton UP, 2011] and Srikanth Reddy, *Changing Subjects* [New York: Oxford UP, 2012]), which pits supposedly hegemonic "nineteenth-century poetic convention" against twentieth-century formal innovation and anti-sentimentality. See Cole Swensen and David St. John, eds., *American Hybrid* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009), xvii-xviii.

[xxxiii] The ever-changing lists of poets allied with the New Poetry should give pause to anyone looking to positively define a canon of New Poetry, however inclusive. As Craig Abbott notes, confusion about the identity of the New Poetry was characteristic of the movement; John Erskine conflated the New Poetry and Imagism, while Mary Hall Leonard conflated Imagism, free verse, the Georgian Poets, and the New Poets. See Craig Abbott, "Publishing *The New Poetry*," *Journal of Modern Literature* 11, no. 1 (1984): 99.

[xxxiv] Golston is by no means the first to propose that Williams's poetry offers a version of modern pluralism. See James Clifford's *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1988), which reads *Spring and All* as a moment of relativist ethnographic inquiry. More recently, Joshua Schuster has linked Williams to Franz Boas, arguing that, "Boas's stress on everyday activity, environmental factors, and racial and cultural migration as constitutive of the human condition connects to Williams's claim for a poetry in contact with local geography and 'the dynamic mob'" (117). Schuster's account of *Spring and All* is provocative, but he admittedly fails to prove that Williams read Boas or was directly responding to his researches (120). See Joshua Schuster, "William Carlos Williams, *Spring and All*, and the Anthropological Imaginary," *Journal of Modern Literature* 30, no. 3 (2007): 116-132. On the opposite end of the critical spectrum, as Schuster notes, Michael North in *The Dialect of Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994) and Walter Benn Michaels in *Our America* (Durham: Duke UP, 1995) have offered definitive discussions of Williams's complicity in racialist and nationalist thinking.

[xxxv] I focus on Golston and Newcomb because these are the two most comprehensive and most symptomatic historical accounts of American modernist poetry to have been published in recent years.

[xxxvi] Marc Manganaro, *Culture, 1922: The Emergence of a Concept* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2002): 26. Boas's insight that cultures were local, historically-situated formations, often credited with instantiating a new pluralism in anthropology, took some time to develop. Boas famously argued against Otis T. Mason and other curators of the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History that artifacts should be displayed according to their place of origin rather than according to their use (under Mason, artifacts were grouped by kind to demonstrate the evolution of mankind as a species), but, as Hegeman notes, "it was not for a number of years that the implications of his challenge to the Smithsonian curators were realized in Boas's own work . . . there was nothing necessarily egalitarian, or antihierarchical, about the gesture of imagining the other as spatially separate from oneself." Clive Bush has also argued for a more nuanced understanding of Boas's early work, explaining that Boas dismissed the "potentially racist implications" of natural selection as it was expounded by social evolutions, while at the same time "accepting developmental and 'primitive-civilised' assumptions which were also an integral part of the same theory." See Hegeman, 38, and Clive Bush, "Cultural Reflections on American Linguists from Whitney to Sapir," *Journal of American Studies* 22, no. 2 (1988): 189-90.

[xxxvii] See Augusta F. Ditty, "Ballad-Writing in the High School," *The English Journal* 3, no. 6 (1914): 382-386. Ditty notes that she focused on the "communal theory" of ballad making in her high school English class.

[xxxviii] See Arthur Beatty, "Ballad, Tale, and Tradition: A Study in Popular Literary Origins," *PMLA* 29, no. 4 (1914): 473-498. Beatty notes that it was common knowledge to anyone who had studied English poetry that there were "two main theories in the field" of ballad study, "the communal [Gummere's version]; and the individualistic, literary, or anti-communal theory." Beatty believed that Gummere's theory had won the day, arguing that, "It would be a waste of time to show how completely in the main Professor Gummere and the late Andrew Lang have met the objections of those who oppose the communal theory" (473-475).

[xxxix] See, for instance, Nelson Antrim Crawford, "Translating Old English," *Poetry* 21, no. 1 (1922): 53-55; Alice Corbin Henderson, "The Folk Poetry of These States," *Poetry* 16, no. 5 (1920): 264-273; and Harriet Monroe, Alice Corbin Henderson, and Carl Sandburg, "Aboriginal Poetry," *Poetry* 9, no. 5 (1917): 251-256.

[xl] Monroe narrated a very Gummerian account of the development of poetry in later years as well; see, for instance, "Prosody" (*Poetry* 20, no. 3 (1922): 149-151), which argued that, "Music and poetry seem to have been among the earliest and most direct human manifestations of the universal rhythmic impulse. At first they were united – lyric

rapture instinctively fitted words to melody, as it does still in certain forms of spontaneous folk-song like keening over the dead or other primitive rhapsodies of prayer and praise. But as life became more complex, the two arts separated, developed each its own imaginative and technical expression of the rhythmic instinct. Literature began in the creation of poems too beautiful to be left to chance memories and tongues, and therefore committed to writing. After the passing centuries had heaped up an accumulation of these masterpieces, the analysts took hold of them; and out of the practice of dead poets grammarians began to make rules for poets yet to come. . . . Thus prosody was born. And thus gradually it developed into a rigid science of verse-structure, a science about as scientific, from the modern point of view, as the astronomy or chemistry of the classic and mediaeval periods." In the same article, Monroe highlighted her debt to "philologists, chiefly German, on the subject of speech-rhythms."

[xli] This opposition highlights the ways in which modernists caricatured nineteenth-century poetry; Tennyson and Swinburne were well versed in Anglo-Saxon meters.

[xlii] The supposed "vigor" of Anglo-Saxon and other premodern poetic rhythms was widely taken for granted in writings about prosody at the beginning of the twentieth century. Like many other poetic theorists, Monroe and Henderson believed that this hypothesis had been proved by scientific studies of rhythm. They pointed specifically to William Morrison Patterson's experiments recording the rhythms of poetry and prose in his laboratory at Columbia University; in a piece in *Poetry* that was both an advertisement for *The New Poetry: An Anthology* and a review of an article by Patterson, Monroe wrote, "[w]e rejoice that [Patterson] agrees with us in linking up the present free-verse experiments with the ancient Anglo-Saxon rhythms, an authentic but long-neglected tradition to which the present editor has paid tribute in her introduction to *The New Poetry – an Anthology.*" See Harriet Monroe, "A Later Word from Dr. Patterson," *Poetry* 12 no. 3 (1918): 171-172. Patterson had traced a direct line between Anglo-Saxon verse and free verse, claiming that in the "newest songs" of vers libre, "we hear, quite suddenly, the harp of our ancestors." See William Patterson, "New Verse and New Prose," *The North American Review* 207 no. 747 (1918): 267. For more on Patterson's work and the scientific study of prosody in the early twentieth century, see Golston.

[xliii] Saintsbury was nonetheless committed to an ideal of Englishness that he believed could me manifested metrically. For a more detailed analysis of his work, see Martin, *The Rise and Fall of Meter*, 79-108.

[xliv] Monroe and Henderson, *The New Poetry*, viii. Monroe had touched on this subject in earlier editorials in *Poetry*; see Harriet Monroe, "Editorial Comment: Rhythms of English Verse," *Poetry* 3 no. 2 (1913): 61-68, and "Editorial Comment: Rhythms of English Verse, II," *Poetry* 3 no. 3(1913): 100-111.

[xlv] Monroe and Henderson were well acquainted with Sapir; they published his verse in *Poetry*, and kept up with the articles he published in *The Dial*, a Chicago-based magazine with which they competed.

[xlvi] For more on Lowell's ideas about America's role in the international scene, see Bradshaw, *Amy Lowell, Diva Poet* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2011).

[xlvii] Lowell's opinion was common in the 1910s; as Horsman explains, beginning in the middle of the nineteenth century, many racial theorists argued that Americans were "a superior blend of all that was best in the white races of Europe. . . . The 'American race' was [believed to be] simply the greatest of the white races." See *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 251-252. The Anglo-Saxon core of this blended race remained of paramount importance; as John Higham argues, Anglo-Saxonist thinkers believed that "the Anglo-Saxon [had] a marvelous capacity for assimilating kindred races, absorbing their valuable qualities, yet remaining essentially unchanged. See Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism 1860-1925* (New York: Atheneum, 1965), 33. Lowell clearly bought into this ideology; although she argued that American society was a melting pot, she was quick to add that only the "Anglo-Saxon ground-work" kept the "crazy quilt of racial samples" in America held "firmly together to its shape, if no longer to its colour." See Lowell, *Tendencies in Modern American Poetry* (New York: Macmillan, 1919), 201. In Lowell's view, the imagined Anglo-Saxon past of America would hold together the potentially chaotic heterogeneity of a nation of immigrants.

[xlviii] The difficulties in Lowell's position should be clear; according to her logic, Americans were better Anglo-Saxons than were the German people, who were apparently making the world unsafe for democracy.

[xlix] For more on the origins of this critique of alienation, see Adam Kuper, *The Invention of Primitive Society: Transformations of an Illusion* (London: Routledge, 1988): 4-5.

[l] Indeed, Gummere went so far as to posit that "in medieval civilization, the same roof often covered the knight and his humblest retainer, the same food fed them, and both were marked by the same standards of action, the same habit of thought, the same sentiments, the same lack of letters, of introspection, of diversified mental employment" (*Beginnings* 177).

[li] See Sapir, "Civilization and Culture" (*The Dial* 799 [Sept 20, 1919]: 233).

[lii] As a high school dropout who never attended college, Untermeyer had reason to resist what he saw as a moribund, useless academic culture.

[liii] Untermeyer and his fellow anthologists always referred to Edwin Arlington Robinson by his full name. Later critics who want to claim Robinson as part of the experimental vanguard often refer to him as E.A. Robinson to distinguish him from the demonized "three-name poets" of the 1890s. See, for instance, Abbott, "Publishing *The New Poetry*," 90; Abbott differentiates "E.A. Robinson" from "three-name poets . . . such as Frank Dempster Sherman, George Edward

Woodberry, Josephine Preston Peabody, and Florence Earle Coates, who for the most part had written in the nineties or continued the style of the nineties into the twentieth century."

[liv] The ad ran in multiple issues of *The Little Review* and *Poetry* in 1919.

[lv] The Art Institute of Chicago was founded in 1882; the Chicago Symphony Orchestra was founded in 1891 and moved into the Orchestra Hall, built specifically for the CSO, in 1904; the Chicago Grand Opera Company was founded in 1910.

[lvi] Monroe's writings are filled with evidence of her ambition to leave a legacy that could affect future generations; see, for instance, the passage in her autobiography in which she explains that she "cannot remember the time when not to die without leaving some memorable record did not seem to [her] a calamity too terrible to be borne" (*A Poet's Life* 55).

[lvii] For instance, the 2002 volume *Dear Editor: A History of* Poetry *in Letters* tells the story of the first fifty years of *Poetry* without making mention of Monroe's "museum," focusing instead on her correspondence with well-known poets such as William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore, Ezra Pound, and Amy Lowell.

[lviii] The sum was truly spectacular, and reflected new cultural shifts in attitude toward copyright. Monroe had been paid only $1,000 by the World's Fair Committee for her poem, itself an impressively large sum for a commemorative ode.

[lix] Monroe's negotiation of gender was complex and somewhat overdetermined by her position as an unmarried, childless poet and editor. As Ann Massa has argued, Monroe was an astute businesswoman who understood that she had to deploy and disavow the category of the feminine at different moments and for different purposes in order to successfully accrue financial and cultural capital for her magazine. Massa shows how Monroe strategically adopted and discarded passive postures (coded as feminine) as she courted financial backers for *Poetry*. Monroe had a reputation for being assertive and even aggressive, but, as Massa puts it, "during the campaign [to find investors] she played quite another role, low-key and deferential." According to Massa, Monroe played "an undetected entrepreneurial game" in which she made it seem as if the Chicago businessmen she targeted were the experts who had come up with the idea of creating an institution to support poetry (Massa 64-65). Monroe showed her awareness of the gender politics involved in this entrepreneurial game in her autobiography, where she noted that although she strongly believed in her own authoritative position in Chicago's cultural scene and in the importance of *Poetry*, she downplayed her confidence and ambition in approaching Chicago's "big men." She explained, "In visiting men's offices I developed certain rules: as the idea of such a magazine seemed a bit amusing even to me, it was quite the natural thing to enter with a smile and laugh with the magnate if he thought my scheme ridiculous." She referred to poetry as her "hobby," and credited certain businessmen with stating her arguments for *Poetry* "more eloquently than [she] could state them [herself]." If this strategic passivity and agreeability failed, however, Monroe was quick to revert to more assertive modes. She noted that if a secretary, "[one of] those polite evaders whom big men placed at their doors," happened to be "immovable," she would "[secure] from some friend of his chief an introduction so authoritative that he had to pass me in," and she recalled with pleasure "an emotion of triumph" at outmaneuvering one of "the most obstinate of these prominent citizens" (*A Poet's Life* 245-246). For Monroe, both feminized and masculinized rhetorical modes and poses had their uses; the trick was to know when and where to use them. Monroe took this same understanding of the strategic uses of gendered positions into her later promotional materials for *Poetry*. But if accruing financial capital had involved trading on the deference and passivity that businessmen expected from a woman who entered their sphere, amassing cultural capital for *Poetry* involved distancing the magazine from the feminized modes of cultural production that critics such as Pound were decrying as culturally and aesthetically illegitimate.

[lx] The anthology was a logical step in Monroe's project to unify public discourse about poetry, as well as a canny bit of synergistic marketing. Throughout the 1910s, *Poetry* kept up a steady supply of articles arguing that contemporary poetry needed to be taught in universities. In 1917, Monroe's anthology arrived as the textbook that could fill that educational gap. This is not to say that the *Poetry* articles were a cynical ploy, but rather that Monroe knew how to capitalize on the market desires that her publication helped to bring into existence.

[lxi] The handwriting is difficult to decipher, but I believe the letter is dated 1917.

[lxii] Wright warned Monroe that the lines she submitted for publication in *Poetry* were "Divine, they bear an inspired message," that "in <u>two years time</u> all <u>art, science, culture</u> . . . will kneel at the feet of the Almighty God the writer of the <u>trash</u> you rejected and find in that God, that Life, a Science, an art above all sciences." Of course, even Wright's letter is not necessarily that crazy; Monroe did not save the poem Wright sent in, but from the description Wright provided, it could be read in light of a tradition of American doomsday poetry beginning with Michael Wigglesworth's *The Day of Doom*. There is even another letter in Monroe's files from a poet who claimed his verse would reveal the truth of god, and so this is not an isolated mode of versifying, even within this small archive (Wright MS).

[lxiii] See the instances of Monroe's rhetoric on the subject discussed in my previous chapter.

[lxiv] See "Prosody" (*Poetry* 20, no. 3 (1922): 149-151), discussed above in endnote xl.

[lxv] For a more thorough discussion of this relationship as a dialectic, see Ehlers.

[lxvi] The "gentility"of these poem titles is worth noting.

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