POETRY AND THE FATE OF THE SENSES

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I. The Beloved's Voice

Let's say I am thinking about my love for your voice—not the sources of my love for your voice, but what it is I love when I love your voice. What is the “object” of this love? I could not love the voice of an animal or the voice of a god. I would not be able truly to listen to the voice of an animal, and I could not bear to listen, on the scale of human history where we live, to the voice of a god. Yet it is not really the anticipation of reciprocity that fuels my love for your voice. Nor is it simply that the voice is metonymic to the body as a whole. We love voices as we love eyes—vessels of that presence we call the soul: to love the voice and the eyes is far different from loving the color of someone’s hair or even someone’s way of walking. The individuation of the voice is not synonymous with the individuation of the body as the site of experience: the body is too general an entity, too material a substance, to account for the individuality of the voice. After death, when the voice is silent and the light in the eyes is gone, the body—the shell that is the body—remains.¹

Marcel Proust, in his account of Marcel’s first experience with a telephone in The Guermantes Way, writes with great subtlety on the love for a voice and the love expressed in a voice. In this passage, Marcel awaits a call from his grandmother. He is at Doncières and she is in Paris. And when the call comes, he hears her voice for the first time: “seen without
the mask of her face, I noticed in it for the first time the sorrows that had cracked it in the course of a lifetime. He hears her voice as her voice, not as the instrument of language and expression but in its particularity as the reservoir of her life’s experiences. In complex ways this scene will bear upon a later situation of involuntary memory as Marcel puts on his boots in the hotel room in Balbec where previously he and his grandmother had communicated by means of a private language of knocks on the party wall between them. Marcel will for the first time acknowledge to himself the reality of her death. Yet already in the discussion of this first experience of the telephone, the narrator realizes that to hear the individuality, the idiosyncratic “grain” of the voice, is both to encounter and to defer the encounter with the death of the beloved:

[At] what a distance we may be from the persons we love at the moment when it seems that we have only to stretch out our hands to seize and hold them. A real presence, perhaps, that voice that seemed so near—in actual separation! But a premonition also of an eternal separation! Many are the times, as I listened thus without seeing her who spoke to me from so far away, when it has seemed to me that the voice was crying to me from the depths out of which one does not rise again, and I have felt the anxiety that was one day to wring my heart when a voice would thus return (alone and attached no longer to a body which I was never to see again), to murmur in my ear words I longed to kiss as they issued from lips forever turned to dust.

The beloved’s voice is untouchable. It is that which touches me and which I cannot touch. Yet the one who “owns” it—that is, the one who belongs to it—cannot touch it either. I cannot see my eyes when I see; they are invisible to me. And I cannot hear my own voice when I speak: I hear only its echo or resonance and when it comes to me on a recording it comes as a stranger’s voice, as horrid and uncanny as a glimpse of my own corpse. The voice and the eyes take part in the more general truth that I cannot witness my own motion as a whole: I cannot see what is alive about myself and so depend on the view of others. It is the viewpoint of the beloved that gives witness to what is alive in our being.

What Proust brings forward is that what is irreducible in one’s voice is the irreducibility of one’s death. Yet as the individual voice contains within it the seed of its own disappearance, its fragility and impermanence, so, in its fleetingness, does it bear a kind of aural imprint of its history, its ancestry—in the voice is the voice of all first voices. The dead are the source of the continuing seed of death in the voice. And when we love voices, we love beyond language, beyond articulation. All love may be, as Freud contends in Civilization and Its Discontents, counter to socialization; but the love for the voice alone is the most asocial of all—not because it returns us to an animal connection, for in this sense animal voices are preeminently social, but rather because the love of a voice in its individuality draws us toward all that resists the law, including that death which has dominion over law.

Voice in poetry is a further development of a path toward volition that Hegel describes in his Philosophy of Fine Art: “Motion, however, is not the only expression of animated life. The free tones of the voices of animals, which are unknown in the inorganic world, where bodies merely roar and clatter through the blow of objects external to them, then already present to us in the higher expression of animated subjectivity.” But because poetic voice is informed by, often indeed formed by, the imperatives of rhythm and repetition, its volition is problematic—more problematic than, say, the production of discursive sentences in prose such as these. We will see that this doubled movement in poetic production, toward mastery on the one hand and toward being mastered on the other, has made poetry suspect as a force against reason and valued as a means of ecstasy. It is suggestive that in his late nineteenth-century history of Greek poetic forms, Gilbert Murray mentions the Socratic tradition that “string instruments allow you to be master of yourself, while flute, pipe, or clarionette or whatever corresponds to various kinds of ‘aulos’ puts you beside yourself, obscures reason and is more fit for barbarians.” Tactility, manipulation, and externalization remain the “touchstones” of reality here and the wind as a force of possession the vehicle of transport and self-transformation.

In our discussion of sound, I have emphasized the broadest aspects of sound production and reception in poetry: such aspects are continuous with our reception of sound in nature, in manmade environments and conversation, with animal cries, and utterances of pain and fear. But I have underemphasized the made and intended production of sound—the ways in which sound is formed for pleasurable, beautiful, and ultimately social ends. Specifically, sound production and reception in poetry always carry an image of the particularity of human voices. It is not just sound that we hear; it is the sound of an individual person speaking sounds. The diffuse-ness of sound, the problem of invocation and the specific consequences of invocation bears regarding the impossibility of closure, our need to attribute source or causality to sounds when we hear them—in the production of lyric all of these amorphous qualities of sound production are traced to the situation of the speaking person. Such sounds might be imitations of
sounds in nature, of animal cries, or of the most elaborately inflected nuances of human conversation, but in every case sound is here known as a voice.

What do we mean when we speak of “voice” in poetry? To indulge in such creative writing workshop clichés as that of “the poet finding his or her own voice” is to substitute a reifying and mystifying version of subjectivity for what is in fact most profound and engaging about poetic voice—that is, the play of transformation it evokes beyond the irreducibility of its own grain, its own potential for silence. The “object” of my love for your voice emerges in the relation between my history and the uniqueness of your existence, the particular timbre, tone, hesitations, and features of articulation by which all the voices subject to your own history have shaped your voice’s instrument. In listening, I am listening to the material history of your connection to all the dead and the living who have been impressed upon you. The voice, with the eyes, holds within itself the life of the self—it cannot be another’s.

The individual voice is in these ways demonic, mediating, traversing, in Diotima’s sense of the δαιμών (daimon) of love in her discourse to Socrates in the Symposium. Diotima explains that the daimón is a spirit, intermediate between the divine and mortal—the power that interprets and conveys to the gods the prayers and sacrifices of men and to men the commands and rewards of the gods; and “this power spans the chasm which divides them and in this all is bound together, and through this the arts of the prophet and the priest, their sacrifices and mysteries and charms and all prophecy and incantation find their way.” In an elaborate development of metaphors and analogies, Diotima explains that poetry as the creation or passage of being out of nonbeing is an apt description of all forms of making or poiesis, but it is most truly the art of music and meter. Analogously, the lover seeks the passage or creation of nonbeing into being through the immortality of human reproduction—whether through biology or through cultural forms that outlast their makers. But in either case love is not something that one has. Love is set in motion instead as a lack, and love is not a form of being; “no man can want that which he has and no man can want that which he is.” Love is a process of bringing to birth the beautiful and the good—what exists “without diminution and without increase.”

In the Symposium the inspiring and inspired creation of poetry is thus analogous to the creation of love. Nevertheless, Diotima speaks with particular favor of those creators who use not merely their bodies as their means of production: “creative souls—for there are men who are more creative in their souls than in their bodies—conceive that which is proper

for the soul to conceive or retain. And what are these conceptions?—wisdom and virtue in general. And such creators are all poets and other artists who may be said to have invention.” She asks, “Who, when he thinks of Homer and Hesiod and other great poets, would not rather have their children than any ordinary human ones? Who would not emulate them in the creation of children such as theirs, which have preserved their memory and given them everlasting glory?” This model of poiesis shows the poet as a master of form, seeking models in what is truly good and beautiful and thereby ensuring his immortality in the future, his intelligibility across generations. While the context of the banquet gives comic instances of a loss of mastery—the flute girls, the wine, the hiccups of Aristophanes—Diotima describes the purposeful path of “that life above all others which man should live, in the contemplation of beauty absolute.” Here “the true order of going or being led by another to the things of love, is to use the beauty of earth as steps along which he mounts upwards for the sake of that other [absolute] beauty.”

Regardless of this purposeful trajectory, the tension we have described between mastery and surrender in processes of poiesis is deeply inscribed in Plato’s texts when we consider them as a whole. The model of poetic mastery in the Symposium is countered by the account of poetic inspiration presented in more complex and even negative terms in the Republic and several of the Platonic dialogues. In these texts a recurring anxiety accompanies the idea of poetic will, and this anxiety centers constantly on the question of whose agency is speaking in the poetic voice—what is the source or cause of the sound that is heard in poetry? It is an anxiety that affects poet and reader alike; indeed, it is often expressed as an anxiety about the contamination that might arise between these two positions.

For all of those reasons we have discussed—the ways in which rhythms inhabit the body beyond volition; the ways in which others, including the dead, are manifested in the voice of the poet as an individual speaking person; the ways in which sound tends to escape the confines of closure—poetry becomes a suspect source of thought. When actors become the recipients of actions, when speakers speak from the position of listeners, when thought is unattributable and intention wayward, the situation of poetry is evoked. In Phaedrus, Plato explains, “There is . . . a third kind of madness, which is a possession of the Muses; this enters into a delicate and virgin soul, and there inspiring frenzy, awakens lyric and all other numbers . . . he who, not being inspired and having no touch of madness in his soul, comes to the door and thinks that he will get into the temple by the help of art—he, I say, and his poetry are not admitted; the same man is nowhere at all when he enters into rivalry with the mad-


man." Poets who work by means of technē alone [that "art" that he has in mind] will remain outside the door of artistic success.

Yet in the Republic Plato also has another kind of exclusion in store for successful poets because of his deep suspicion of the consequences and effects of their work. Although he is willing to accept certain forms of epideictic poetry celebrating heroism or the gods, at the heart of his objection is the derivative nature of poetic imitation. Slippages between poetry and the ideal/real make poetry a fertile ground for corruption: poetry can provide false prophecies (Book II, 383c); variations in poetic form can produce licentiousness (Book III, 404e), and lawlessness in poetic form can result in changing the laws of the city (Book IV, 424c). Poetry can corrupt the concept of beauty by promoting what is merely crowd pleasing (Book VI, 493d), and it can corrupt the crowd by providing a substitute for thought (Book X, 595b/c). Correlatively, poetry is easy to compose without knowledge of the truth (Book X, 598e), and poetry appeals to the excited and variable in character (Book X, 605a). Throughout these well-known arguments of the Republic, the corrupting power of poetry resides in its charm, and the most dangerous aspect of this charm is that it is unthought. Here the threat to the citizenry arises from the qualities of poetry and the definition of knowledge that are outlined respectively in Ion and Theaetetus.

Socrates explains to Ion that "the spectator is the last of the rings which, as I am saying, receive the power of the original magnet from one another. The rhapsodist and the actor are intermediate links, and the poet himself is the first of them. Through all these God sways the souls of men in any direction which he pleases, causing each link to communicate the power to the next... And every poet has some Muse from whom he is suspended, and by whom he is said to be possessed, which is nearly the same thing, for he is taken hold of." Socrates is interested in critiquing the claims to knowledge of rhapsodists such as Ion, but he relegates the poet to a similar position by viewing the poet as a conduit to the power of the muse or God. The meaning of possession here does not reside simply in the idea that the poet's utterances are not original or reasoned. Rather, such utterances pass through the speaker by means of an external force. One is "beside one's self," and the distinction the Theaetetus draws between having and possessing knowledge has thereby complex implications for both the situation of the muse who possesses the poet and the situation of the poet who merely has what the muse has endowed to him.

In his image of the aviary, Socrates explains that one must distinguish between possessing and having knowledge: "Well, may not a man 'possess' and yet not 'have' knowledge in the sense in which I am speaking? As you may suppose a man to have caught wild birds—doves or any other birds—and to be keeping them in an aviary which he has constructed at home, we might say of him in one sense, that he always has them because he possesses them, might we not?... And yet, in another sense, he has none of them." The distinction between possessing and having knowledge arises during Socrates' analysis and refutation of the Pythagorean equation of knowledge and sense perception. Furthermore, the metaphor that most systematically suffuses his rhetorical strategies, that of the active/passive reciprocity between the midwife and the laboring woman, forms an analogy to what is productive, but limited, in sense perception—that one is both the agent and vessel of sense perception.

The rhapsodist and the poet possess knowledge—it is present or at hand—but they do not have it; they are not in control of it or able to transform it. Rather, they are themselves possessed by the power of the muse who inhabits them. In picturing this situation, forms of play that might be termed ventriloquist come to mind. Ventriloquism per se is characterized by speaking from the belly or trunk of the body rather than from the head, projecting a voice from or across a distance spatially (and in the metaphor of possession, temporally as well). This voice is distinguished by its origin in another place. We might also recall the child's game in which one person stands behind another with the person in front keeping his arms behind the back with elbows protruding, the person behind puts her arms through the crooks of the partner's elbows and moves his limbs in coordination with the facing partner's speech. A dissociation of voice and gesture, and gesture from the body, results. Such forms of play, and expressions such as being "out of one's head," "out of one's mind," or, as cited earlier, "beside one's self," provide a sample of ways in which we make possession manifest through qualities of distanitation and disassociation. It is not coincidental that these instances are alterations or reversals of the standard reality-making situation of reciprocal face-to-face communication.

Friedrich Schiller writes analogously of the loss of self in aesthetic experience in which "man is an occupied moment of time": "Everyday language has for this condition of absence-of-self under the domination of sense-perception the very appropriate expression to be beside oneself—that is, to be outside one's ego." Standing behind, standing before, standing beside—all send the voice into a difficult trajectory; it is the trajectory of writer and reader who can only project and approximate one another's presence, and it is the trajectory of generations, of the many-branched temporal path between the dead and the living. As the daimōn of the Symposium bore messages by means of incantation and prophecy through the space between gods and men, the voice as sound is resolved in the meet-
ing between persons that moves or touches those who are in its presence — those touched, Diotima explains, “whether awake or asleep.” Plato is making a broad claim that poetic making is in fact the performance of something scripted in another context. Paradoxically, these examples of play as possession are willed by the players. The possibility of willed disassociation thereby reintroduces the issue of sincerity in regard to the paradigm of possession. The point for Plato is that one cannot intend to be possessed; one is helpless before the power of the magnet and one’s helplessness is contagious. Yet this very complaint reintroduces poetic images into the thought of Plato himself and makes his thought all the more readily taken up by others. Such paradoxes of willed possession run from Plato to Romantic inspiration to the trope of sleep in Surrealism and the trope of chance in Modernism.

In contrast, Monroe Beardsley and W. K. Wimsatt’s classic examination of intention in “The Intentional Fallacy” links the notion of a mastering and original poetic will to Romantic genius theory. “It is not so much a historical statement as a definition to say that the intentional fallacy is a romantic one,” they write, citing Longinus as their first example of a Romantic before the period and continuing on to the affinities between Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and the aesthetics of Benedetto Croce. Yet the argument of “The Intentional Fallacy” reintroduced the Platonic critique by claiming that following such a will would lead one astray from doing the serious public work of reception. By asserting that poets could not know or anticipate the effects of their work and by idealizing the rationality of the public in receiving poetic compositions, Wimsatt and Beardsley continued the project of the Republic.

When we remember that both the positive arguments about creativity in the Symposium and the negative arguments about inspiration in the Republic and other texts involve accounts of poëtisis that imply processes that are passive and active at once, we can, however, begin to consider a more complex model of poetic subjectivity and agency. For poets, like all humans, are creatures who both strive toward mastery and seek the release or end of stimulation. The creative, beauty-pursuing artists of the Symposium will hear the messages of the gods whether they are awake or asleep, and they will seek out the absolute whether it is attainable or not. The poets described in “Phaedrus,” “Ion,” “Theaetetus,” and the Republic will seek an inspiration that can only descend unbidden — there is no techne to help the poet’s desire for habitation by the muse, and any poet who proceeds by rules alone, we have learned, is doomed to failure, the failure of the merely sane.

Therefore, the relations between seeing and hearing, or image and metrical structure, and the reciprocating relations of presence and absence between speaker and listener might be explored more usefully in terms of concepts of language and poetic convention as they are historically constructed: in relation to a conflicted — rather than unified — subjectivity and in relation to a differentially organized community of reception. Here another theoretical discussion of possession is relevant: Nicolas Abraham’s study of transgenerational haunting and the permeability of voice and person outlined in his psychoanalytic study “L’Ecoce et le noyau.” Abraham’s work focuses on patients who engage in compulsive and repetitive actions that seem to have no obvious referent yet turn out to be the continuation of conflicts dating to previous generations. For example, one of Abraham’s patients, an amateur geologist, spends his weekends breaking rocks. In doing so, Abraham writes, “he is acting out the fate of his mother's beloved. The loved one had been denounced by the grandmother (an unspeakable and secret fact) and having been sent to ‘break rocks’ (casser les cailloux = do forced labor), he died in the gas chamber... a lover of geology, he [the patient] 'breaks rocks,' then catches butterflies which he proceeds to kill in a can of cyanide.” Abraham sees the patient as inhabited by a foreign body. The “staging of a word” by the patient constitutes “an attempt at exorcism, that is, an attempt to relieve the unconscious by placing the effects of the phantom in the social realm.” Abraham uses the image of ventriloquist to describe the phantom’s effect: “The phantom is a formation of the unconscious that has never been conscious — for good reason. It passes in a way yet to be determined — from the parent’s unconscious into the child’s... The phantom’s periodic and compulsive return lies beyond the scope of symptom-formation in the sense of a return of the repressed; it works like a ventriloquist, like a stranger within the subject’s own mental topography.”

Abraham is concerned with those cases in which a powerful trauma has initiated the repetition of gestures through generations. Such a singular cause provides a useful explanation within the therapy of individual patients. Although poems are more often the outcome of many forces, rather than such a singular event, this notion of a haunting under terms that have outlived their referents is an account of poetic possession of tremendous power and usefulness. It introduces into the concept of poetic action a temporal dimension that significantly complicates issues of semantics. And it is exactly the phenomenon of which Plato warns us — that a subject possessed by an unfathomable and external agency will place words into the social realm where they will continue their profoundly irresponsible effects or consequences. Yet what is this irresponsibility other than the inevitability of mediation in the construction of mean-
The poet needs a continuing reader—both the social and historical context in which the poem is on a continuum with other poems, making it intelligible, and the poet himself or herself as changing reader of his or her own practice over time. As knowledge of reference necessarily withers, the poem does not lose fullness or complexity but rather acquires a residue of accrued meanings that expand the possibilities for poetry’s significance. The particularity of a poem, its occasional quality, falls away as its form comes forward.

Although we could find this process of residual meanings at work in any poem’s meter, it seems that particular poems acquire particular force in this regard. Nevertheless, we should not discount the idea that the force of some lines or works depends on what we might think of as almost purely formal features tied to physiology or the structure of the language itself rather than to the particulars of generation or an individual poet’s psychology. For example, we might wonder why a line such as the opening of Thomas Gray’s elegy, “The curlew tolls the knell of parting day,” is both memorable and enduringly familiar. We might note its perfect iambic pentameter that washes against the trochaic pull of the words of compound syllables (curfew and parting) and the elision of “tolls the” and “knell of.” It is a line that sounds like what it is about, and it uses the range of vowel sounds in English, making a pattern in a single line of gathering and receding echoes e/u/e/o/e/e/o/a/i/a—an effect that contributes to the growing sense of ringing loudness we have as it progresses.

In other cases, an individual word, gradually accumulating a veneer of the archaic, comes to signify allusion to the history of poetry as much as to any available reference. I have in mind the recurrence of guerdon in Geoffrey Chaucer’s translations of Boethius and the Romanc de la Rose. In Tennyson’s “The Princess” and “End,” in William Carlos Williams’s “Asphodel,” and in Ashbery’s “Finnish Rhapsody.” Or we become aware of rhyme and rhythm signifying the surrender of the will to compulsory form in poems such as Sylvia Plath’s “Lady Lazarus” with its exact rhymes, slant rhymes, and repeated terms, evident, for example, in the following stanzas from the middle of the poem:

Dying
Is an art, like everything else.
I do it exceptionally well.

I do it so it feels like hell.
I do it so it feels real.
I guess you could say I’ve a call.
It's easy enough to do it in a cell.
It's easy enough to do it and stay put.
It's the theatrical

Comeback in broad day
To the same place, the same face, the same brute
Amused shout:

"A miracle!"
That knocks me out.
There is a charge

For the eyeing of my scars, there is a charge
For the hearing of my heart —
It really goes.

In these central lines, the too-slant and too-exact rhymes well, hell, real, cell, and theatrical all lead to miracle—mirror/call, the problem of the repetitive call, the calling and calling that was needed to bring Plath back from an earlier second suicide attempt; the call to death mirrors the call to life. The poem’s final emphasis on images of resurrection hardly solves this problem of repetition.

Gwendolyn Brooks’s “Anniah,” a poem to which we will return at length later, follows a strict tetrameter and equally relentless use of exact rhymes in an infinitely varying pattern over its forty-three seven-line stanzas. In lines such as these from the opening stanzas, Brooks uses exact end rhymes and internal consonant pairs (foolly, tatters, berries, littering, little) to create a Spenserian effect, a kind of confetti’d milieu, for the appearance of her heroine, who is associated with “sweet and chocolate” and at the same time “left to folly or to fate.” “Fancying on the featherbed / what was never and is not,” Annie dreams:

What is ever and is not.
Pretty tatters blue and red,
Buxom berries beyond rot,
Western clouds and quarter-stars,
Fairy-sweet of old guitars
Littering the little head
Light upon the featherbed.

Both Plath and Brooks employ redundant word choice and exact rhyming as a means of representing the transport or compulsive way-laying of subjective intention. To this extent, they demonstrate that we cannot necessary conclude that strict form signifies authorial mastery or control; it as readily can signify the submission of will within convention.

When we listen to a meter with a specific function and history, we find that the choice of meter is not simply a matter of dipping into a repertoire of simultaneously available, and determined-by-occasion, metrical varieties. Meter has its own internal history, its own evolution, and along that temporal path it accrues a weight of allusion.29 The history of meter is tied to the specific development of national languages and at the same time to what might be called the creolization of forms as languages merge and are distinguished in political and historical contexts.30 The consequences of translation, and error in translation, are relevant in this regard. Jean-Michel Rabaté writes of Mallarmé’s translations of Edgar Allan Poe’s poems: “[Mallarmé’s translations into prose] can seem absurd in the case of purely musical poems, such as ‘The Bells,’ which plays an alliterative music based on echoes, internal rhymes, and tinnituselation effects of pure sound. Mallarmé realizes that this poem is untranslatable but nonetheless strives to render it in French—that is, in the language that can absorb it (and not on the page) as a signifying dissemination. . . . Error becomes productive and positive since it assaults the language and fashions a new sort of French, halfway between a misunderstood original and an excessively faithful paraphrase.”31 Implicit in such a translation from sound effects into a discursive semantic is the idea that the absence of reason will continue to haunt the sentences of the prose text and pull against the sense of its meaning in “French.”

Consider as well the forms we know as short meter (trimeter quatrain with one tetrameter line), common meter (alternating trimeter, tetrameter quatrains), and long meter (tetrameter quatrains). Ballad, hymn, and other song forms using this structure are meters with a particularly rich legacy of accrued meanings. To use these forms means that one carries over into writing an enormous weight of social and cultural resonance. The phrase common meter joins with the terms from music, common measure and common time, to signify the two beats to a measure, 4/4 rhythm, under which the entire musical system is coordinated and out of which variations proceed. Common meter presents itself as the most suitable form for group singing—the coordination of song and the coordination of social life under a common temporal framework emphasizes integration and solidarity.

Beneath these meters lies the four-beat line of early English accentual verse. At the same time, the reliance on iambic places them between the spoken “naturalness” of iambic pentameter as it developed in English and
the rhythmic thumping of the Germanic forms—either dipodic or fourbeat.²² If, as the Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics claims, iambic pentameter has “been fashionable in English primarily during periods marked by an interest in classical rhetoric and by a commitment to the maintenance of a sense of order and limitation, for of all English metrical systems, it is the one most hostile by nature to impulse, irregularity, and unrestrained grandiosity.”³³ the pentameter only developed out of a long process of the loss and recovery of Chaucer’s iambics, the increasing consciousness of the parallels and tensions it evoked in relation to English spoken syntax, and the residual echo of the pure stress and syllabic conventions between which it was negotiated.³⁴

When Emily Dickinson uses hymn meters, she radically disrupts the possibility of social integration by her breaks and interruptions within the lines and the slanting of rhyme—like a person breaking off the smooth flow of received language or emphatically singing off-key in a crowded church. Moreover, her use of hymn meters makes us hear the individuality of her voice and the specificity of her words because of their dissonance from the habits of tradition.

Here is one of the most famous of her poems on “religious” subjects, a poem that can be seen readily as a critique of the very nature of religion, the 1859 version of #216:

Safe in their Alabaster Chambers—
Untouched by Morning
And untouched by Noon—
Sleep the meek members of the Resurrection—
Rafter of satin,
And Roof of stone.

Light laughs the breeze
In her Castle above them—
Babbles the Bee in a stolid Ear,
Pipe the Sweet Birds in ignorant cadence—
Ah, what sagacity perished here!³⁵

The pure stress tetrameter lines in this poem—“Safe in their Alabaster Chambers / Sleep the meek members of the Resurrection / Babbles the Bee in a stolid Ear / Pipe the Sweet Birds in ignorant cadence— / Ah, what sagacity perished here”—present a clear narrative order: the meek dead lying in their tombs, despite the babbles of the bee and the piping of the birds, will not awaken. Their “sagacity” has perished, but the sagacity of the dead is more than a little ironized. No one would read this poem and choose the sagacity of the dead over the ignorant cadence of the sweet birds. Nor would we ever be willing to give up the breeze’s castle for the safety of the satin rafters and stone roofs of an alabaster chamber. The dimeter lines—“Untouched by Morning / And untouched by Noon— / Rafter of satin, / And Roof of stone. / Light laughs the breeze / In her Castle above them”—give qualifying information, functioning like asides to the audience. The poem could readily be put back into hymn meter by joining the dimeter lines and thus producing two quatrains, but the point is that Dickinson pulls out these lines and thereby individuates her voice. By doubling the consciousness of the narrative in this way, she establishes the basis for our ability to read a double meaning into “what sagacity perished here!” at the close. This is hymn meter transformed by sotto voce effects of dissonance.

Ballad form can also present complex possibilities for deepening the texture of common meter. The traditional Anglo-Scotts ballad builds a narrative structure on a repeating pattern of quatrains. Thus, narrative movement, the propulsion forward, is conducted against a current of alternating repetitions in beat and rhyme. And this narrative movement, unlike that in other narrative forms, is presented in a relatively unusual way. A solo singer performs as if spoken through—he or she voices, with no signal in the voice itself, shifting points of view through dialogue or other conversational means. If we return to the model of ventriloquism, the ballad singer performs all the parts of a play as if inhabited by the characters, yet within a presentation of physical person that remains constant throughout. Of all the singers of Western lyric, the ballad singer is the one most radically haunted by others—for he or she presents the gestures, the symptoms, of a range of social actors, and he or she presents those gestures as surviving symptoms of a previous action.³⁶

If you can imagine what it would be like to sing a ballad such as the well-known Child Ballad “Edward,” keeping your body contained and your voice constant, you will see how powerfully the starkness of ballad form emerges. Here is the first stanza as it is written in Child [No. 13B]:

“Why dois your brand sae drap wi bluid,  
Edward, Edward,  
Why dois your brand sae drap wi bluid,  
And why sae sad gang yee O?”

“O l hae killed my hauke sae guid,  
Mither, mither,  
O l hae killed my hawk sae guid,  
And I had nae mair bot hee, O . . . .”³⁶
In “Edward,” it is clear that the repeating lines of dialogue with their tags of apostrophe (“Edward, Edward!”, “Mither, mither!”) produce an effect in time that is not adequately represented by print. Ballad criticism refers to this effect as “leaping and lingering.” Even though this term is usually applied to the narrative movement of the ballad, it is also a way around the problem of the impossibility of a definitive quantitative verse in English—that is, a way to get something like a musical, rather than a spoken, sense of duration into the sound. In “Edward” the lingering happens through repeated questions, repeated answers, the redundancy in the mother’s speech, and the apostrophes that destabilize the meter. The “leaping” happens at the close of sections where Edward’s answers acquire their definitive and elaborated meaning. The asymmetry between Edward’s speech and his mother’s speech exaggerates the discontinuous relation between their utterances. And the pattern of closure on the level of the stanza prepares us for an overall effect of incremental repetition across stanzas—an effect culminating in the powerful information delivered in Edward’s last words in stanza 7:

“And what wul ye leve to your ain mither deir,
Edward, Edward?
And what wul ye leve to your ain mither deir,
My deir son, now tell me, O!”
“The curse of hell frae me sall ye beir,
Mither, mither,
The curse of hell frae me sall ye beir,
Sic counsells ye gav to me, O.”

Stanzas 5, 6, and 7 make up the ballad testament, the pronunciation of judgment that is often found at ballad closure. Before Edward delivers the final pronunciation of the testament, giving “the curse of hell” to his mother, he tells her, in answers to her questions about his property, that he will let his “towers and ha’” “stand tull they down fa’” and that he will leave to his “bairns and . . . wife” “the warlde’s room” where they will go begging. In the ballad’s testament, goods are dispersed, the boundary between life and death is breached, and the audience is guided toward a moral or judgment.

In “Edward” the ventriloquism works through shifts in voice staged in tension with a movement toward dramatic resolution. In other ballads, such as “The Three Ravens,” the voice is haunted by means of a shadow effect of etymology. “Edward” is probably a later ballad than “The Three

Ravens” (Child No. 26A) or its variant, “Twa Corbies” (Child No. 26B), the latter beginning, “As I was walking all alone, I heard two corbies making a mane.” “The Three Ravens” tells a story of the fidelity of “hawks, hounds and leman” to a stricken knight; “The Twa Corbies” tells of a knight abandoned by his hawk, his hound, and his “lady fair.” Dialogue, narrative movement across repetition, testament, and judgment are all present here as they are in “Edward.” The narrative frame in “The Three Ravens”—“There were three ravens sat on a tree”—is necessary so that the speakers can be designated as animals. Once that is established in stanza 2, the three ravens can take turns speaking. Their threefold position as predators is inversely mirrored in the threefold helpers—the hounds, hawks, and fallow deer “as great with young as she might go,” transposed in the end to hounds, hawks, and leman. This transposition comes to reside in the extraordinarily complex etymology of the Old English fallow—the color of the deer is the color of unplowed earth. Yet the barrenness of this earth, left unplanted so that weeds might grow and die on it as “bastard fallow,” is key to the fertility of the crops that will later be planted there. At the same time, a fallow, from the late sixteenth century forward, is “a substitute or supplement” in mechanics and, in physiology, a spurious conception—one in which “a shapeless mass is produced instead of a foetus” (Oxford English Dictionary). As profound as any change between the animal and human world in Ovid, or as any Freudian slip, the transposition from pregnant deer to leman links the ballad to the antique world of the moral fable and to the symbolism of feudal allegory.

I have chosen these examples to indicate the extraordinary richness of issues of “readability” underlying our use of traditional forms. Although one could construct a genealogy of these issues around other forms, such as the tension I have indicated between the Germanic four-stressed line and iambic pentameter, I want to emphasize here the tensions between spoken and sung discourse, and so propositional and what might be called somatic utterance, in poems by Keats, Hardy, and Elizabeth Bishop. Although it is not coincidental that these are three poets with especially complex relations to issues of genealogy and tradition as themes in their works, I am interested primarily in the ways in which our readings of certain of their poems recapitulate the ambivalence between will and possession that seems to mark the process of each poem’s creation.
II. Three Cases of Lyric Possession

Keats

In a letter of 22 November 1817 to Benjamin Bailey, Keats wrote, "[H]ave you never by being surprised with an old melody—in a delicious place—by a delicious voice, felt over again your very speculations and surmises at the time it first operated on your soul—do you not remember forming to yourself the singer's face more beautiful than it was possible and yet with the elevation of the moment you did not think so—even then you were mounted on the wings of imagination so high... What a time! I am continually running away from the subject." This passage forms part of one of Keats's early statements on poetics and goes on to emphasize sensation and somatic memory as key to imaginative work. At this point in his progress as a poet, Keats contrasts such a state of mind with complex thought and consecutive reasoning. His description of his own imaginative process is consonant with contemporary accounts of his chanting mode of recitation. Keats's emphasis on the disassociation of poetic feeling and conscious thought is best exemplified by the "gothic" poems pre-dating the great odes. Keeping the structure of the traditional ballad in mind, we might turn to the earliest manuscript of "La Belle Dame sans Merci." This is the version of Keats's poem recorded in a journal letter of 1819 to his brother George and his wife Georgiana, who had emigrated to America at the time of Keats's writing:

La belle dame sans merci—

O what can ail thee, Knight at arms
Alone and palely loitering!
The sedge has withered from the Lake
And no birds sing!

O what can ail thee, Knight at arms
So haggard and so woe begone!
The Squirrel's granary is full
And the harvest's done.

I see death's a lilly on thy brow
With anguish moist and fever dew,
And on thy cheeks death's a fading rose
Fast Withereth too—

I met a Lady in the Wilds Meads
Full beautiful, a faery's child
Her hair was long, her foot was light
And her eyes were wild—

I made a Garland for her head,
And bracelets too, and fragrant Zone
She look'd at me as she did love
And made sweet moan—

I set her on my pacing steed
And nothing else saw all day long
For sidelong would she bend and sing
A faery's song—

She found me roots of relish sweet
And honey wild and honey manna dew
And sure in language strange she said
I love thee true—

She took me to her elfin grot
And there she wept | and sigh'd full sore,
And there she sighed | end there she sighed
And there I shut her wild wild eyes
With Kisses four—

And there she lulled me asleep
And there I dream'd Ah Woe betide!
The latest dream I ever dreamt
On the cold hill side.

I saw pale Kings and Princes too
Pale warriors death pale were they all
Who cried La belle dame sans merci
Thee hath in thrall.

I saw their star'd lips in the gloam
Ail-reemble
With horrid warning | gaped wide
wide-appe
And I awoke, and found me here
On the cold hill's side
And this is why I weep sojourn here
Alone and palely loitering.
Though the sedge is withered from the Lake
And no birds sing.  

The commonly acknowledged sources for "La Belle Dame" are what was once thought to be Chaucer's pentameter translation and adaptation of Alain Chartier's dialogue "La Belle Dame sans Mercy"; the Paolo and Francesca episode from the fifth canto of Dante's Inferno; the Cymeoles and Phaedria episode and the Rock of Vile Reproach in Book II and the adventure of Britomartis in the Castle of Busirane in Book III of The Faerie Queene; a passage in Shakespeare's Pericles; and Keats's rereading of his own poems Endymion and The Eve of St. Agnes, where the song Porphyro sings to Madeline in stanza 33 is "La belle dame sans mercy." There is a great deal of argument regarding which of the many sources might be dominant—some references are particular, such as the "pacing steed" that is linked to Chartier's language, and others are structural, as in the outlines of Endymion.

Sometimes mentioned, but without specific evidence of Keats's coming into contact with the source, is the link between "La Belle Dame" and the ballad and legend of Thomas Rymer or True Thomas, a ballad whose narrative maps closely on that of "La Belle Dame" and which Keats could have known through reading Robert Jamieson's Popular Ballads and Songs or Sir Walter Scott's Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border. Thomas is a thirteenth-century Faust figure who is taken away by the Queen of Elfland and forced to serve her in her kingdom for seven years. Thomas is a "rymer" because he has written a romance in which he tells of his visit to Elfland and of his gift of prophecy from the queen.

The Scott and Jamieson volumes contained, in addition to versions of the traditional ballad, copies of manuscript editions of this metrical romance written in long-meter quatrains rhyming a/b/a/b. The thematic connections of the ballad and romance to Keats's poem are obvious, but the structure of the Thomas ballads is characterized by an immediate plunge into the scene of meeting between Thomas and the Queen of Elfland and "he said/she said" bracketing of the dialogue. The power of Keats's poem comes not only from the thematic borrowings he has made and from his use of ballad cliches such as the rose and the lily, the light foot, pacing steeed, and fairy song but also from the ways he has taken up the most dominant formal features of the traditional ballad and used or adapted them.

To speak or sing Keats's "La Belle Dame" would be to engage in the experience of disassociated ventriloquism characteristic of ballads such as "Edward"—to plunge one's self immediately into the urgent context of speech. "La Belle Dame" is not a ballad with a frame narrative. Rather, the interlocutor begins with his question, "Oh what can ail thee, knight-at-arms," and the switch to the knight's voice, which will narrate his captivity and awakening, begins without marking or frame in stanza four. Although the rest of the ballad, stanzas 4 through 12, is in the knight's voice, the knight's long "answer" does address the interlocutor's question—"what can ail thee?" The question requests a diagnosis; the answer provides a narrative of experience, and it is only in the dream's reported speech, the pale kings' announcement, that the knight himself has come to consciousness of his condition. It would be, therefore, misleading to claim that the ballad is in "dialogue" form. Rather, there is a systematic displacement of voice from the interlocutor to the knight to the fairy queen to the kings until at the end the knight takes up the very language of the interlocutor: "And this is why I sojourn here / Alone and palely loitering / Though the sedge is withered from the Lake / And no birds sing"—he is repeating the interlocutor's language as a sleepwalker would, the language speaks through him. Although it often has been noted that the knight's figure seems dissipated, drained of its energy by the intensity of the sexual encounter, it should also be obvious that in his speech, the knight appears at the end without will. Keats emphasizes this in the manuscript by adding ellipses to the final stanza.

A disassociation and merger of voices and persons is evident in the relation between the two names of the ballad—"True Thomas" and "Thomas Rymer"—and the relation between the two brothers Thomas and John Keats that provides the historical context for the poem's composition in the journal letter to George and Georgiana Keats. This long letter was begun on Valentine's Day of 1819 and completed on 3 May of that year. On 15 April, Keats had found a set of letters that were part of a hoax perpetrated on his brother Tom by their mutual friend George Wells during Tom's fatal illness. Wells had forged letters to Tom from a fictional French girl named Amena, and John Keats was convinced that his brother's suffering had been worsened by the effect of the letters. In the journal letter, he mentions his discovery of the letters to George and Georgiana and moves on to other topics, including a fantasy in "extemore" couplets: "When they were come unto the Faery's Court." Three characters are presented in this fantasy—an Ape, a Dwarf, and a Fool, all in the service of a "fretful" princess. When the princess turns on the three with a switch, the Dwarf distracts her with rhymes. In this fanciful allegory, George is the Ape, John is the Dwarf, and Tom is the sleeping Fool.
Although the letter goes on in a lighter vein, with a parody of Spenser making fun of Keats's friend Charles Brown and gossip about Keats's circle, the mistaken obsession of Tom with the "false Amena" continues to be on Keats’s mind. He writes on 16 April, “I have been looking over the correspondence of the pretended Amena and Wells this evening—I now see the whole cruel deception. I think Wells must have had an accomplice in it—Amena’s letters are in a Man’s language, and in a Man’s hand imitating a woman’s... It was no thoughtless hoax—but a cruel deception on a sanguine Temperament, with every show of friendship.” Keats continues his judgment with language of unrelenting violence, language quite atypical of his tone in his correspondence: “I do not think death too bad for the villain... I consider it my duty to be prudently revengeful. I will hang over his head like a sword by a hair... I will harm him all I possibly can—I have no doubt I shall be able to do so.”¹⁵ A true Thomas who is also a Thomas Rymer collapses the identities of the two brothers and presents a scenario in which they are simultaneously elected and made to suffer by an unearthly lover. The third position Keats is able to attain is that of the interlocutor—the ballad figure who questions the knight and is able to cross the threshold into knowledge of death. He is bound to silence, and the reward is prophecy. Furthermore, by miming the violent distantiation of Wells's hoax, Keats is able to master it.

Keats’s “La Belle Dame” displays many parallels to the metrical romance of Thomas Rymer as recorded by Jamieson and Scott.¹⁶ In both versions of the romance, the beginning of Thomas's journey is distinguished by the singing of birds. This is the beginning of the Jamieson text:

As I me went this Andrys day,
Fast on my way making my mone,
In a mery mornynge of May,
Be Huntley Bankes my self alone,

I herde the jay and the throstell,
The mavis menyd in hir song,
The wodwale farde as a bell,
That the wode aboute me rong.⁵¹

And this is the Scott version:

In a lande as I was lent,
In the gryning of the day,
Ay alone as I went,

In Hultle bankes me for to play,
I sawe the throstyl, and the jay,
Ye mawes moyde of her song,
Ye wodwale sanke notes gay.⁵⁴

Although the connection of “and no birds sing” to William Browne’s refrain, “Let no birds sing,” has often been noted,⁵⁵ Keats also has taken the singing birds of the start of the romance and made their silence the dominant feature of the nature portrayed in “La Belle Dame.” In a similar inversion, the sexual encounter of the romance leaves the fairy queen wasted. In the Jamieson text, the fairy queen warns Thomas that if he has her, “fore alle my bewte thow wilt spille.” After he “lies with her,” the following consequences ensue:

And all hir clothis were away
That he before saw in that stede,
Hir een semyd out that were so gray,
And alle hir body like the lede.

Thomas seid, “alas! alas!
In feith this is a doletul sight,
That thu art so fadit in the face,
That be fore schone as sunne bright!”⁵⁶

In the Scott version, Thomas complains, “Allas / Me thinke this is a dull-full syght / That thou art fadyd in the face.”⁵⁷ This transformation turns in the ballad, romance, and “La Belle Dame sans Merci” on the ambiguity of the word moan/mone, which can mean both a complaint or expression of grief and sexual intercourse. Keats’s belle dame makes sweet moan as she loves, sings a fairy's song, says “I love thee true” in “language strange,” weeps, sighs, and lulls the knight to sleep. In the romance it is the knight who is “making mone” at his being alone. The reversibility between male and female positions echoes the inversion of the “language strange” of Amena, who seems a woman but is “really” a man and who seems a person but is really a fiction. And it replays the reversibility of writer and subject—the grieving John Keats as Thomas Rymer and the fading Tom Keats as knight.

One of the most intriguing aspects of the problem of the relation between Keats’s poem and the traditional ballad of “Thomas Rymer” (or “Rhymer”) is as one of its historical sources is that both the poem and bal-
lad thematize the problem of archaic, or dead, forms of expression. Here is the opening to Mrs. Brown of Falkland's [born 1747] version:

True Thomas lay oer yond grassy bank
And he beheld a ladie gay,
A ladie that was brisk and bold,
Come riding oer the fernie brae

Her skirt was of the grass-green silk;
Her mantle of the velvet fine,
At ilka tett of her horse's mane
Hung fifty silver bells and nine.

True Thomas he took off his hat
And bowed him low down till his knee:
"All hail, thou mighty Queen of Heaven!
For your peer on earth I never did see."

"O no, o no, True Thomas," she says,
"that name does not belong to me,
I am but the queen of fair Elfland,
And I'm come here for to visit thee."

In this initial encounter between Thomas and the queen, we find a constant splitting of perspectives. Thomas is lying on the bank, and the queen comes riding on her horse. As we are given descriptions of her skirt, her mantle, and the bells on her horse's mane, our eyes follow those of Thomas as he rises to meet her. But his greeting is mistaken: this is not the Virgin Mary, the Queen of Heaven. This is an emissary from an archaic and pagan world, a dead world that is animated here and will make the world Thomas knows fall away. The term knight-at-arms introduces a similar problem of identification, for it is a catachretic expression of "man-at-arms"—by making Tom a "knight," the poet places him in the same fictional realm as the Amena and fairy queen figures. The Indicator version of the poem, published in 1820, may seem at first glance more antiquated in its use of a term like "wight." This term, meaning "a corpse," is also brutally realistic.58 But even in the revisions of the letter version of the manuscript, copied earlier, we see that in the encounter between the interlocutor and the knight, Keats has twice crossed out "death's" as an attribute of the Knight's countenance, and the withering of the sedge at the close of the poem has been transposed from the draft that had the knight saying "I wither here" rather than "I sojourn here." Speaking to fairies, according to British folklore, can be deadly. As Falstaff says in The Merry Wives of Windsor, act 5, scene 5, "They are fairies; he that speaks to them shall die." Latin could be used when it was necessary to speak to a fairy, and perhaps Thomas's greeting is therefore not so much an error as a precaution that matches a dead Christian language to an encounter with the pagan world.59

Keats has used the trimeter line to break the common meter, making these lines also bear the weight of deepening meaning just as do Edward's reply lines. The trimeter lines introduce the theme of silence: the silence of the birds and the silence of the missing heat. This break in the meter is often noticed and has been juxtaposed to the poem's continuing iambic structure. But in fact we could also see these fourth lines as doing what the first stanza signals; that is, they can be heard as making a break with song into raw speech. In this reading, one can hear the tetrameter continuing, but here as spondees. This effect seems most pronounced when it is underlain by the awkward inversion of the possessive pronoun and verb in the king's pronouncement: "Who cried La belle dame sans merci / Thee hath in thrall." The tension between singing and speech suffuses the ballad, just as it underlies the two qualities of Thomas as "rymer" and as prophet, as shown in his traditional nickname, "Tammy-tell-the-truth."

In addition, the ballad form reframes the context of the meeting of the knight and the interlocutor as an account of causality. The knight is giving testimony, and, as in the case of Edward's mother, the interlocutor comes to a realization of his or her own peril in this dead world to which the knight has awakened. A great deal of our reading of "La Belle Dame" rests in the meaning of the word latest in "latest" dream—the term refers to both the most recent event in the situation—the dream of the pale kings' warning—and to the idea of last things implied by that situation. The warning finally gives a name to the phenomenon that has occurred to the knight. Keats's pale kings are linked to the prophecies ascribed to Thomas in the latter parts of the romance—prophecies that predict the death of Alexander III, the Battle of Bannockburn, the accession of James VI to English rule, and other struggles between Scotland and England.60 The problematic name of the fairy queen also links the poem to the tradition of deathbed conversation that runs throughout Anglo-Scots balladry, conversations in which true names and true identities are at last revealed. In all of these ways, the choice of ballad form enables Keats to reenact the betrayal of his brother by an unreal lover, to provide testimony, and to provide himself with a testament.
forms, especially relying on common meter with alternating abcb rhyming in his work. As we saw in the example of “During Wind and Rain” in the previous chapter, he often was influenced by the prosody of folk song and hymns: in addition to common meter, the forms he most frequently used were long meter and ballad meter. Hardy's family had been involved in vernacular music traditions—both sacred choral song and secular dance and game music—for generations. His grandfather, father, and uncle were all string players; as part of the Stinsford church band they, like the Mellstock quire described in several of the poems (“The Rash Bride,” “Seen by the Waits,” and “The Paphian Bull”) and Under the Greenwood Tree, played the “waits” traditional to Christmas. Hardy's 1897 poem on the Mellstock quire, “The Dead Quire,” is of particular biographical interest for it takes up the theme of generations in relation to music. The poem tells of a Christmas Eve when the current young people of Mellstock are carousing in a tavern, singing “songs on subjects not divine.” At the stroke of midnight they hear singing outside, “The ancientquire of voice and string / Seemed singing words of prayer and praise / As they had used to sing.” Hardy describes the dead quire's singing as being itself replete with the voices of the dead:

The sons defined their fathers' tones,  
The widow his whom she had wed,  
And others in the minor moan  
The viols of the dead.”

The roisterers silently file after the sound of the voices until they reach the headstones of the quire members in the cemetery. In this poem contrasting ghostly singing and silence, it is worth noting that Hardy uses the stanza structure of Keats's “La Belle Dame”—long meter with a trimeter line concluding each quatrain.

In later life, Hardy arranged for a local pianist to accompany his own playing of fiddle tunes he had known by heart since childhood. He kept books of dance tunes and their steps and wrote in his copy of Hullah's The Song Book the names of people he associated with various songs. Twenty-five of his poems simply say “song” beneath their titles. He has a group of poems called “A Set of Country Songs,” and he frequently attaches to his titles such phrases as “written to an old folk tune,” “echo of an old song,” “a new theme on an old folk measure,” “to an old air,” and “with an old Wessex refrain.” Significantly, he associated “fiddle playing” with obsession, referring in Under the Greenwood Tree, for example, to fiddlers who “saw madly at the strings with legs firmly spread and eyes closed, regard-
less of the visible world."65 In The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy, initially compiled by his second wife, Florence, mention is made of Hardy's obsessive performances of dance tunes only brought to an end by the anxious intervention of the hostess of the dance "clutching his bow-arm at the end of a three-quarter-hour's unbroken footing to his notes by twelve tireless couples."66 Florence Hardy also records that at the age of four, Hardy would be moved to tears by his father's playing and would dance "to conceal his weeping."67 "Bowing higher," obsessive speed and repetition, weeping, and catharsis are some of the psychological and physiological qualities Hardy associates with traditional music and dance, and this is the context traditional metrics provides in his poetry.

"The Voice" is a kind of hinge in the 1912–1913 sequence. It underlines the dramatic divergence between past and present, between received and invented form, and, in terms of the overdetermined and ambivalent grief expressed throughout the sequence, between convention and truth. The poem follows "The Haunter," one of only two poems of the series (the other is "The Spell of the Rose") put into Emma's voice. It thereby, in its account of the dispossessed, disassociated relation between the dead and the living, foregrounds its incapacity to "answer" Emma's "calling."68

The Voice
Woman much missed, how you call to me, call to me,
Saying that now you are not as you were
When you had changed from the one who was all to me,
But as at first, when our day was fair.

Can it be you that I hear? Let me view you, then,
Standing as when I drew near to the town
Where you would wait for me: yes, as I knew you then,
Even to the original air-blue gown!

Or is it only the breeze, in its listlessness
Travelling across the wet mead to me here,
You being ever dissolved to wan wastlessness,
Heard no more again far or near?

Thus I, faltering forward,
Leaves around me falling,
Wind oozing thin through the thorn from norward,
And the woman calling.69

The poem has dramatic metrical shifts. The first two stanzas have the triple-time dactylic meter that Hardy used in at least sixteen other poems in his oeuvre. But the third stanza has a pattern that only appears in this work. The opening's triple dance rhythm and galloping effect bring forward many allusions to the dancing and horseback riding of his courtship—effects evident as well in the early poems of the sequence. When after "Can it be you that I hear?" a caesura is introduced, the spell of that rhythm is broken, but only gradually as "Standing as when I drew near to the town" reintroduces the dominance of the rest of the stanza. Breaking the dactylic and then reintroducing it creates an effect of fading echo, and the repositioning of the consonance between the earlier rhythm and the secondary rhythm, the past and the present, is reinforced by the central visual image in the poem—the original air blue gown whose authenticity is proclaimed and lost at the very instant of its mention, the gown appears as a literally evaporating image. When the rhythm strikes up a third time in the third stanza, Hardy uses spondees to break it—the emphatic "heard no more again far or near." And the echo of these spondees becomes "Thus I"—the stark realization of his singularity and loneliness as falling meters become quite literally falling meters: faltering forward. "Leaves around me falling" changes the direction toward a trochaic meter before one last imposition of the dactylic associated with Emma "Wind oozing thin through the thorn from norward" and the break again through spondees.

This poem has a rather startling amount of tension between metrical organization and metrical noise. It is a poem full of emotion worked through on the level of sound and is about as close as poetry can come to the condition of music and still maintain its meaning as poetry. Hardy put into this poem an entire world of metrical allusion. For example, the poem borrows its triple rhythm from what is often described as a "song," "Haste to the Wedding." But "Haste to the Wedding" is in fact the melody to a traditional dance tune involving two couples alternately casting, swinging, and advancing to a gallop step and another triple time step. Like many such dance tunes, the work ends on a dominant in the expectation that it will continue, like a round. The version collected by Cecil J. Sharp in 1909 is reproduced here [p. 136].70

Furthermore, critics have often noted that "the original air blue gown" is a reference to a blue gown Emma wore when Hardy first met her. Even when her age made such clothing inappropriate, Emma wore muslin dresses with blue ribbons.71 But this image also conflates two other related song and dance texts, "Jan O Jan" and "The Blue Muslin Gown." "Jan O
"Haste to the Wedding" (First Version).

Text: "Haste to the Wedding" (Second Version).

Music: "O will you accept of a kiss from loving heart; That we may join together and never more may part?"
"Yes, I will accept of a kiss from loving heart; That we may join together and never more may part.

And I'll walk and I'll talk with you."
"When you might you would not; Now you will you shall not,
So fare you well, my dark eyed Sue."

The directions for the song and dance say "it then turns back in reverse order, going from the grandest to the smallest offers of wealth and ends with 'When you could you would not.'" The songs obviously seem overdetermined in relation to "The Voice." "The Blue Muslin Gown" with its familiar dress, dabling in dew, and rather bitter mutual refrain "When you might you would not / now you will you shall not" echoes the conditions of tragically delayed expression and regret running throughout the sequence. Furthermore, if we turn to the 1858 edition of Psalms and Hymns, one of Hardy's own hymnals, we find that he has also picked up on the conventional Christian hymns of parting—hymns that contend that life is parting and eternity the end of parting. Hymn 891 with its falling meter and emphatic language seems particularly relevant to the form Hardy has worked through and by means of which he has achieved this extraordinary nexus of emotion and sound:

When shall we meet again,
Meet ne'er to sever,
When shall peace wreath her chain
Round us for ever?
Our hearts will ne'er repose,
Safe from each blast that blows,
In this dark vale of woes,
Never, no, never!

When shall love freely flow,
Pure as life's river?
When shall sweet friendship glow,
Changeless for ever?
Where joys celestial thrill,
Where bliss each heart shall fill,
And fears of parting chill
Never, no, never!

"Haste to the Wedding" From The Country Dance Book (1909).

Jan" is probably the older work. Hardy writes that it was "played in his childhood at his father's house, around 1844." Hardy wrote an operetta in 1923 based on the piece; the operetta was performed by the local Dorchester players and directed by Hardy in his old age. The work is a courtship dance in which the men advance, offering the women various forms of wealth: "O madam I will give you a fine silken gown / With four-and-twenty flounces a-hanging on the ground. / If you will be my joy, and my only dear / And if you will walk along with me everywhere!" But the women respond with emphatically negative replies: "O I will not accept of your fine silken gown / With four-and-twenty flounces a-hanging to the gourn' / And I'll not be your joy, or your only only dear. / And I'll not walk along with you, anywhere." The stakes grow higher, until the final verse, where the man's offer of "true love" is greeted with assent.

"The Blue Muslin Gown" is a popular song contemporary to Hardy that has the same structure based on courtship. It begins:

"O will you accept of the mus-e-lin so blue,
To wear all in the morning, and to dabble in the dew?"
"No, I will not accept of the mus-e-lin so blue,
To wear all in the morning and to dabble in the dew; Nor I'll walk, nor I'll talk—with you."

But the ending of this version is more applicable to the Hardys' in many respects failed romance:
The hymn goes on in the remaining two verses to turn to heaven as the place where “soon shall we meet again.” That these songs are complexly interrelated is even more exaggerated by the fact that versions of the “Jan O Jan” and “Blue Muslin Gown” song-dances were sometimes referred to as “The Keys of Heaven.”

Underlying “The Voice” and the 1912–1913 series as a whole is the expression of grief as inaudibility. Hardy has used the printed poem to emphasize the incommensurability between life and death, past and present. The frantic survey of alternative sites of life and activity returns as inevitably as the Mellstock quire members to the site of the silent tomb. The structure of the series does not lead toward resolution; rather, it presents us, like the separations and rejoinsings of “Haste to the Wedding” and the reversible emotions of the “Blue Muslin Gown,” with an infinitely creating and negating activity. The end of “The Voice” emphasizes the tension induced by the multiple referents of silence—the certainty of the opening of the poem, “Woman much missed, how you call to me, call to me,” is, by the end of the poem, the certainty that the sound is the wind with the wind in fact taking up again the lost dactylic music of the opening: “Wind oozing thin through the thorn from norward.” At the greatest emotional distance from the ease of the dactylic are the harsh, metrically clumsy, falling lines directly preceding these: “Thus I, faltering forward, / Leaves around me falling,” lines that obsessively mime the thematic of the fall from grace. The reader feels he or she has stumbled into the reality principle—the wind now taking the place of the ghostly voice, until the last line, when we turn back inevitably into reversal: “And the woman calling.”

The staging of grief here, like the staging of grief throughout the sequence, raises issues of authenticity that acquire their own tragic cast, for the authenticity of the speaker’s emotion can be created only in a context of dialogue and third-person viewpoint. The single lyric singer here has summoned a literal choir of witnesses to his grief, yet Hardy with his characteristic tragic sense comes to repeat and enact the bleak prospect of unintelligibility as the only means for bringing “peace thereto.”

**Bishop**

In concluding, I want to consider briefly a third example of metrical haunting. Bishop’s meditative poem “At the Fishhouses.” Bishop is a poet who often used traditional hymn, ballad, and blues meters in her work. In such pieces as “Visits to St. Elizabeths,” which uses the cumulative structure of “This is the House That Jack Built” to re-create the aura of Ezra Pound’s confinement in a madhouse; “The Burglar of Babylon,” which displays variations on ballad meter simulating the quality of a broadside sheet; and “The Riverman,” with its underlying samba rhythms, Bishop shows the extraordinary facility with which she could use metrical allusion. The opening line of “Arrival at Santos,” “Here is a coast; here is a harbor,” echoes the children’s finger play, “Here is the church; here is the steeple.” In this poem, as Bishop moves into the ornate dictation of the next three lines—“meager diet of horizon”; “self-pitying mountains”; “frivolous greenery”—she even further exaggerates the simple dichotomy of the opening echo.

“At the Fishhouses” is a poem that at first does not strike us as having a musical structure. It begins:

> Although it is a cold evening,
> down by one of the fishhouses
> an old man sits netting,
> his net, in the gloaming almost invisible,
> a dark purple-brown,
> and his shuttle worn and polished.
> The air smells so strong of codfish
> it makes one’s nose run and one’s eyes water.
> The five fishhouses have steeply peaked roofs
> and narrow, cleated gangplanks slant up
> to storerooms in the gables
> for the wheelbarrows to be pushed up and down on.

Nevertheless, the poem moves brilliantly between speech and song, the initial tetramer and the immediate discursive sense of speaking evoked in the beginning connective, “Although,” establish an initial rhythm against which variations will arise. The first variation comes after the opening quatrains. The two lines “a dark purple-brown / and his shuttle worn and polished” evoke a digression from the meter that is an intensification of attention to the subject—they note closely and thereby lose the exactness of the form. When the tetramer is reintroduced in “The air smells so strong of codfish,” it is quickly extended by a line of pentameter, miring the excess of the body’s response to codfish: “it makes one’s nose run and one’s eyes water.” The playful movement between form and content continues as the next line introduces a number that the change in meter has already brought forward: “The five fishhouses have steeply peaked roofs.” Here the shift between the tetramer and pentameter is established as the baseline of the poem. In other words, the poem’s lines are,
as it explains in a self-referential pun in lines 43 to 46, like “thin silver trunks laid horizontally across the gray stones, down and down, at intervals of four or five feet.”

Throughout the poem much of the metric is exemplary to the meaning: the stressed tetrameter/pentameter baseline is broken for the first time in line 14 describing the spilling over of the sea. The sea functions as a mnemonic in the poem, its rhythm and generality sending the speaker into a sequence of reveries that will in each case evoke a particular. The tetrameter quatrain and theme of the herring signaled by abcb rhyme in lines 21 to 24 introduce a metrical allusion from Eugene Field’s children’s poem, “Wynken, Blynken, and Nod.” Under Bishop’s lines: “The big fish tubs are completely lined / with layers of beautiful herring scales / And the wheelbarrows are similarly plastered / with creamy iridescent coats of mail,” we can hear and see those of Field: “Where are you going and what do you wish / The old moon asked the three / We have come to fish for the herring fish / That swim in this beautiful sea / Nets of silver and gold have we / Said Wynken, Blynken, and Nod.” Bishop breaks the spell of this allusion with the introduction of the flies and the prosaic, and death-ridden, language of “crawling on them” in line 25.

Despite the extensive manipulation of sound and music being worked by these metrical puns and allusions, the poem up until the moment of the speaker’s offer of a Lucky Strike to the old man is constructed almost entirely (the exception is the smell of codfish) of visual references. And even the visual references can pun on this silence, for the “ancient wooden capstan / cracked with two long bleached handles / and some melancholy stains, like dried blood,” brings to mind the Romance words for “a halter or muzzle” derived from the Latin capistrum and including the Portuguese cabresto. Similarly, the introduction of the “black old knife” that scrapes the fish from its scales, or “principal beauty,” marks the first stanza break in the poem.

There are, in fact, three stanzas in “At the Fishhouses”—irregularly shaped and fitting loosely into the ode divisions of strophe (here the introduction of the scene and animation of the figure in the landscape), antistrophe (the turn away from the land to the shore and the metacommentary on the metric), and epode (the final trajectory of immersion first with sight, then sound, then touch, then taste). The initial triple spondees of the refrain introducing the epode, “Cold dark deep and absolutely clear,” are also presented with a reference to their source—the three hammering chords that open each of the first two periods of “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.” Luther’s hymn, which Bishop shares a knowledge of with the seal, may be read as a reference to the part of her childhood spent

with the Bulmer (alternatively spelled “Boomer”) branch of her family, the hymn-singing Baptist relatives of her mother, in Great Village, Nova Scotia. This thereby is the site of the poem, the referent of both sense impression and memory.

In lines 60 to 62, that rock against the flood is transmuted into another prior part of this conversation whose response has begun “Although”—Marianne Moore’s 1924 poem “A Grave,” which begins:

Man looking into the sea,
  taking the view from those who have as much right to it as you have to it yourself,
  it is human nature to stand in the middle of a thing,
  but you cannot stand in the middle of this;
  the sea has nothing to give but a well excavated grave.
  The first stand in a procession, each with an emerald turkey-foot at the top,
  reserved as their contours, saying nothing,
  repression, however, is not the most obvious characteristic of the sea; . . .

Moore’s poem—with its bleak materialism, its emphasis on the human denial of death, and its final lines “the ocean, under the pulsation of lighthouses and noise of bell-buoys, / advances as usual, looking as if it were not that ocean in which dropped things are bound to sink— / in which if they turn and twist, it is neither with volition nor consciousness”—can be seen to be the prior discourse to which Bishop’s “Although” is a response.79 In countercourse to the sea as a site of repression, Bishop gradually arrives at the possibility of the sea as a site of knowledge—the music evoked by its presence has reawakened the sound of a tragic childhood. At its close the poem returns to the origins of sense impressions under the frame of experience in a dialectic between the senses and abstraction that is powerfully evocative of Wordsworth’s “Intimations” ode:

If you should dip your hand in,
your wrist would ache immediately,
your bones would begin to ache and your hand would burn
as if the water were a transmutation of fire
that feeds on stones and burns with a dark gray flame.
If you tasted it, it would first taste bitter,
then briny, then surely burn your tongue.
It is like what we imagine knowledge to be:
dark, salt, clear, moving, utterly free,
drawn from the cold hard mouth
of the world, derived from the rocky breasts
forever, flowing and drawn, and since
our knowledge is historical, flowing, and flown.

This transposition from the most abstract senses of sound and sight to the immediate physicality of touch and taste is a historical journey to the sources of Bishop's early loss of her father and mother. Indeed, in her well-known masterpiece, the villanelle “One Art,” Bishop proclaims herself, in full mastery, as an artist of loss.

Bishop's short story “In the Village” tells of the onset of her mother's madness after her father's death. It begins, “A scream, the echo of a scream, hangs over that Nova Scotia Village.” The scream, her mother's scream, recurs through her memory, yet it is juxtaposed by another sound—that of Nate the blacksmith, whose shop is at the end of the garden. As a child, Bishop cries, “Make me a ring! Make me a ring, Nate!” and the blacksmith complies by making a horseshoe nail into a ring for her finger. But her request is also to make the hammer ring, and the work ends, “Nate! Oh, beautiful sound, strike again.” The blacksmith's ring, like the transmutation of fire at the end of “At the Fishhouses,” promises the Pythagorean dream of a harmony of sound and number, and a harmony of the world. It is a harmony also imagined out of the intervals of the blacksmith's hammer. Here Bishop marks the transition from an unattributable, almost animal, scream to a form of volitional sound—the sound of her own art's mastery of suffering. This is one dimension of “At the Fishhouses”'s deeply serious pun on the idea of “sounding”—the sounding of a voice and the sounding of the depths of the sea as means to knowledge. Many of the poem's early lines have to do with the glancing and glittering light that falls on earthly things—those flashes of beauty to which we are given access and which provide us with reflections or mirrors of reality. These sparkling images find their resolution and opposition in the poem's final emphasis on “total immersion”—the plunging beyond the surface of things, the abandonment of light in pursuit of depth. The conclusion to “At the Fishhouses” establishes the viability of being mothered by a grave, just as the poem as a whole works through the process by which music is refined from pain.

Readings of voice and possession necessarily run the risk of an undue emphasis on coincidence, an amorphous notion of influence, and an unsatisfactory explanation of intention. There is perhaps no more considered thinking about these possibilities of poetic voice than Walt Whitman's “Vocalism.” Beginning with a definition, “Vocalism, measure, concentra-
which cleverly and economically sets forth the terms of Jesuit "clamor" and response: "Tibi vero gratias agam quo clamore! Amore more ore re." For a recent overview of the Jesuit interest in an architecture of sound, see the discussion in R. Po-Chia Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal: New Liturgical and Sacramental Needs Required Churches to Have Innovative Features: A More Spacious, Hall-like and Uninterrupted Nave to Accommodate Larger Crowds to Hear Sermons; Flat Or Wooden Roofs for Better Acoustics... the Baroque Church, Exemplified by the Gesu, Focused Scapular and Space in a Central Realm Where Sermons Were Preached, Mass Celebrated and Communion Dispensed." [161].

86. "Meditation on Hell," in *Gerard Manley Hopkins*, 292–295. See also Daniel A. Harris's discussion of the role of the senses in the 1885 sons in *Inspirations Unbidden*. Harris links the senses to a crisis in Hopkins's theology regarding the Incarnation and provides an astute reading of the role of the senses in many of the poems.
89. Hopkins, *Sermons and Devotional Writings*, 137.
90. See Tsur's discussion of Jakobson and Waugh, who are themselves responding to an argument about synaesthesia made by E. H. Gombrich, on this parallel between the back-front continuum in sound production in relation to the dark-light continuum in visual perception (What Makes Sound Patterns Expressive, 20).
95. From Hopkins's sermons, in *Gerard Manley Hopkins*, 282; see also 283–287 for a discussion of "pitch" and free will.
96. Geoffrey Hartman describes the "vocative" aspect of Hopkins's style: "This holds for sound, grammar, figures of speech, and actual performance. Tell and toll become cognates... We find cries within cries as in: 'Not/ I'll not / carvon comfort;/ Despair / not least on thee.'" (What Makes Sound Patterns Expressive, 20). Although Hartman uses one of the 1885 sons as an example of this point, it is the facility for the vocative in the majority of Hopkins's work that makes the breakdown of the vocative in these late sons so dramatic and immediate. See "Introduction: Poetry and Justification," 1–15. See also Hartman's reading of the "Windover," in "The Dialectic of Sense-Perception," in the same volume, 117–130.
98. See R. Murray Schafer, "Acoustic Space"; and G. N. A. Vesey, "Sound," 500–501. "Sound, to our ears, is diffuse, like smell, or relatively massive, imping-

**Chapter Three**

1. I have been greatly informed by Roland Barthes's two essays, "Listening" (245–260) and "The Grain of the Voice" (267–277). Barthes, however, contends that the voice "bears an image of the body" (255).
3. Ibid., 175.
4. See Maurice Merleau-Ponty's working notes on this issue in *The Visible and the Invisible*, 254.
8. Marjorie Perloff: "the poetry establishment (especially the official verse culture of the university writing programs) still posits a situation in which the aspiring poet can—indeed must—discover his or her own unique voice; a voice that somehow differs from all others. But in what exactly does this uniqueness consist, given the ongoing commodification of language in our culture? How much more 'sensitive-than-thou' can the individual artist be?" (Wittgenstein's *Ladder*, 187).
10. Ibid., 335–343.
12. Ibid., 342.
19. See the useful discussion of Plato's rhetoric regarding poetry and philosophy in Judovitz, "Philosophy and Poetry: The Difference between them in Plato and Descartes."
25. It will be useful here to bear in mind that "somatic" in psychoanalytic usage is not coterminous with "the body." Abraham writes:

The somatic must be something quite different from the body proper, which derives from the psychic as one of its functions, the psychic having been described by Freud as an exterior layer, an envelope. The somatic is what I cannot touch directly, either as my integument and its internal prolongations or as my psyche, the latter given to the consciousness of self; the somatic is that of which I would know nothing if its representative, my fantasy, were not there to send me back to it, its source as it were and ultimate justifications. The somatic must therefore reign in a radical nonpresence behind the Envelope where all phenomena accessible to us unfold. It is the Somatic which dispatches its messengers to the Envelope, exciting it from the very place the latter conceals. [The Shell and the Kernel, 81]
28. This kind of "survival" is best described as a form of archaism. See Owen Barfield, "Archaism," in Poetic Diction, 152–167. In her comparative quantitative studies of the vocabulary of poetry from the 1540s to the 1940s by century, Josephine Miles discovered considerable continuity across the entire period, with "ten major verbs" and "eight major nouns" carried forward. She concludes "the great change in the five centuries [of verbs] is the loss of find, tell, think and the gain of hear, fall, lie from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The verbs have become more passive and receptive" (Continuity of Poetic Language, 497).
29. Annie Finch's The Ghost of Meter is a useful introduction to some of these issues, paying particular attention to the relationship between free verse and iambic pentameter. However, her notion of meter as a kind of "code" (see 3–30) seems to be at once too narrow, for the associations of meter are not in a one-on-one relation as are the terms of a code, and too broad, for she writes that "the word code implies that meter in a metrical organic poem can function like a language, carrying different information at different points within a poem" [12]. Languages cannot be mere codes that work by means of one-on-one relations between signs and referents. Meter could function like a language in the traditional structural sense that it could have both a metaphorical dimension (it could point, e.g., to other works in the same meter) and a metonymic dimension (it could be contiguous with other forms of meter). Here we would be saying something like what Lacan says when he says that the unconscious is structured like a language, but that is not the direction Finch pursues.
30. I am indebted to John Szwed for this broad use of the term creolization, stemming from his seminar on the creolization of cultural forms at the University of Pennsylvania, Department of Folklore and Folklife Studies, in 1977.
33. See Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, 498.
34. Thompson, 2 and 16.
36. These formal features of the ballad are described in Roger D. Abrahams and George Foss, Anglo-American Folksong Style.
37. In The Ballad as Song, Bertrand Bronson argues on the basis of internal evidence that "Edward," as it has been passed down from Thomas Percy's version, has probably been amended by literary, rather than folk, culture. See "Edward, Edward: A Scottish Ballad and a Footnote" [1–17].
39. See ibid., 111–113.
41. See Robert Gittings, John Keats, 150, 160.
43. See discussions of the poem's sources in Gittings, John Keats, 298–304; Walter Jackson Bate, John Keats, 278–281; Jack Stillinger, The Texts of Keats's Poems, 232–234 (Stillinger notes that Brown and Woodhouse both added "A Ballad" under the main title of the poem, but Keats's draft in the journal letter does not have this subtitle); Walter H. Evert, Aesthetic and Myth in the Poetry of Keats, 249–255; and Marjorie Levinson, Keats's Life of Allegory, 45–95.
44. Levinson writes, "Most of the narrative content [of 'La Belle Dame sans Merci']—I refer to forms, not functions—derives from two slightly earlier works [than Chartier’s], the Scottish True Thomas and Thomas Rymer ballads which Keats had read 'Englished,' or in translation in Jamieson's and Scott's editions (Keats's Life of Allegory, 53). Levinson does not provide evidence for Keats's read-
ings but lists the contemporary editions—Jamieson's of 1806 and Scott's of 1812. Neither of these books were named in the list of Keats's books made by Charles Brown at the time of the poet's death. See Hyder Edward Rollins, The Keats Circle, I: 253–261. Yet, as Phyllis Mann wrote in a 1962 essay on "Keats's Reading," "[N]or can Charles Brown's published list of books in Keats's possession or on loan at his death be taken as anything but a small section of his reading" (38–47). Earl Wasserman suggests that the Jamieson text, and perhaps Scott's, were important influences but also provides no direct evidence of Keats's reading:

Whatever the specific source may have been, the narrative clearly belongs to a folk legend best known in the form of the mediaeval ballad, "Thomas Rymer." In the version available to Keats in Robert Jamieson's Popular Ballads 1806 (the variant in Scott's Minstrelsy differs in a few important details), Thomas encounters a beautiful lady whom he thinks to be the Queen of Heaven, but who identifies herself as "the queen of fair Elfland." She takes him upon her milk-white steed, for he must serve her for seven years, and for forty days and nights they ride through blood while Thomas sees neither sun nor moon. Forbidden to touch the fruit of this strange country lest he suffer the plagues of hell, Thomas eats the loaf and drinks the claret that the elf-queen has brought. At length they rest before a hill, and the elf-queen, placing his head on her knee, shows him three wonders—the roads to wickedness, to righteousness, and to fair Elfland. It is the last of these that they are to follow, and for seven years "True Thomas on earth was never seen." (The Finer Tone, 68–69)

Wasserman thereby provides a useful account of the traditional ballad of True Thomas/Thomas Rymer, but, like Levinson, he does not consider the variations to be found between the traditional ballad and the metrical romances provided by Jamieson and Scott. Aileen Ward's John Keats: The Making of a Poet does not mention the ballad as a source of "La Belle Dame," but it does see the poem as having "sprang from" the Wells–Amena correspondence (272). Both Elizabeth McLaughlin ("The Mermaid of Galloway" and 'La Belle Dame sans Merci') and Bernice Slope ("The Climate of Keats's 'La Belle Dame sans Merci':" 195–207), cite Keats's interest in ballads recorded in his letters from his walking tour in the summer of 1818, from his knowledge of Hazlitt's 1818 lecture on Robert Burns, Thomas Chatterton, and ballads and other more general cultural influences. Their essays emphasize thematic connections between "La Belle Dame" and a ballad recorded in R. H. Cromek's 1810 volume Remains of Nithsdale and Galloway Song, "The Mermaid of Galloway." It is likely that Keats knew of this volume, for in a letter of 10–14 July 1818 to Tom, he wrote some lines he referred to as a generic "Galloway song." The poem tells the story of Keats's encounter with a wedding party near Ballantraie; he refers to the bridegroom as "Young Tam" who has a "reddened cheek," is "daffed like a chick—He could na speak." "The Mermaid," on the basis of textual evidence alone, obviously has been either created or doctored by Allan Cunningham. Cunningham told his biographer David Hogg that he contributed all but "two little scraps" to the prose and poetry in Cromek's volume. (See the comments on the flyleaf of Maurice Buxton Forman's copy of Cromek, now in the collection at Keats House in Hampstead. My thanks to the curator Christina M. Gee for her help with this issue.) And Keats is using his poem to evoke the picturesque qualities of the landscape, speech, and characters he has discovered on his journey; to work in a blatantly, even comically, imitative style—for he makes each of his "fourteener" lines here one syllable short at thirteen, and to both tease his brother and at the same time express some of his own anxieties about marriage. Neither work could be mistaken for a traditional ballad or metrical romance, but "La Belle Dame's" structure is quite close to that of the traditional ballad and romance; its marked departures from that form are of interest because of their relation to those forms. Finally, further evidence that Keats would have known of the Thomas Rhymer legend is its mention in Thomas Warton's The History of English Poetry where Thomas is described as an important figure in the early history of English poetry (56). Grant T. Webster argues in "Keats's 'La Belle Dame sans Merci': A New Source" that Keats used Dante as a source for the poem yet that his knowledge of Dante stemmed from the selection presented in Warton. Even so, there is no definitive proof that Keats read Warton. The picture is complicated even further when we consider that Keats told Benjamin Bailey, in letters of 10 June and 18–22 July 1818 that he was going to take and has taken along the "three little volumes" of Henry Francis Cary's 1814 translation of The Divine Comedy. Carol Kyros Walker suggests in Walking North with Keats, "Keats gives no evidence of reading or thinking about Dante in his letters and journals... He is perhaps only being polite in telling Bailey that Dante is the only reading material he took with him" (193, n. 15).

45. See Leach, The Ballad Book, 131.
46. Wasserman describes the ballad as "a dialogue between the knight and the stranger" (The Finer Tone, 66).
48. Ibid., 344.
49. Ibid., 347–349.
50. I follow here Bate, John Keats, 471, and Gittings, John Keats, 300.
52. I will focus on the structural connections between the works. We might note, however, more tangential connections that could have appealed to Keats: the fairy queen's interdiction to Thomas not to speak during their sojourn in Elfland is analogous to the interdiction Keats was under from Isabella Jones at the time. Gittings writes that Isabella Jones asked Keats that they "should be acquainted without any of our common acquaintance knowing it.... [Keats] accepted her request as part of the 'enigma' he had always felt her to be" (John Keats, 257). We might also note the romance's allusion to claret wine, about which Keats earlier in the journal letter had composed some celebratory prose, describing the wine as walking about the "cerebral apartments" "like Aladin about his enchanted palace so gently that you do not feel his step" (Keats, The Letters of John Keats, II: 324).
54. Sir Walter Scott, Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border, IV: 79–137. As in the Jamieson text, the choice of birds is suggestive, for, even granting the fluctuations we find in early English bird names, the birds chosen represent variations in bird
song and habit: the “throstell” probably means a blackbird, rather than a thrush, for the mavis or song thrush is listed on its own. Thus, the jay and the blackbird can be yoked (and in the Scott version more accurately “seen” than “heard”) as birds that talk rather than sing and that habitually steal the nests of other birds or place their eggs in the nests of other birds; the wodewose is likely here a golden oriole with its flute-like whistle and so the second yoking is of true song birds. See also the more general discussion of singing birds and enchantment in Paton. Paton’s work and other studies of fairy lore are linked to “La Belle Dame” in Stuart M. Sperry, Keats: The Poet, 234–241.

55. See Bate, John Keats, 478. Keats could also have had in mind Dante’s description in the Paradiso of the lark’s song and the silence after its descent (Canto XX, 1, 73) or Milton’s lines from Paradise Lost regarding the nightingale’s song, “Silence was please’d” [Book IV, 1, 604].


57. Scott, Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border, 93–94. This is a central argument of Levinson’s reading of the two versions of the poem, claiming that the “self-consciousness” of the Indicator version establishes the Brown version as the ur-form. See Keats’s Life of Allegory, 66.

59. See Lowry Charles Wimberly, Folklore in the English and Scottish Ballads, 281 and 282, and Francis B. Gummere, Old English Ballads, 362, n. 17. Gummere mentions the use of Latin in fairy encounters. I have taken Mrs. Brown’s text from Gummere, 290–292. For a discussion of the use of a dead language as the expression of words “no longer mere sound, but not yet a significa
tion,” see Giorgio Agamben, “Pascoli and the Thought of the Voice,” 64.

60. Of course, this also seems a conflation of the stricken Scandinavian subjects and pale warriors of Macbeth in a letter to Tom Keats of 23–26 July 1818, during his walking tour of Scotland, Keats mentions having seen the grave of Macbeth at Iona: “We were shown a spot in the Churchyard where they say 61 kings are buried 48 Scotch from Fergus 2nd to Macbeth.” See The Letters of John Keats, I:217.

61. For useful discussions of the series in relation to Hardy’s poetry in general, see James Granville Southworth, The Poetry of Thomas Hardy, and Donald Davie, Thomas Hardy and British Poetry. Among specific studies of the series, Robert Cirassa, “Thomas Hardy’s Poems of 1912–1913,” and Richard A. Sylvia, “Thomas Hardy’s The Voice,” are particularly helpful.


66. Hardy, The Life and Work, 28. This biography itself brings up suggestive issues of ventriloquism and ghost writing, as “an authorized biography written by the subject himself but intended for publication after his death over a collabora
tor’s name.” See Michael Millgate’s introduction to this edition—described as an edition on new principles of the materials previously drawn on for The Early Life of Thomas Hardy 1840–1891 and The Later Years of Thomas Hardy 1892–1928, published over the name of Florence Emily Hardy (xii).


68. Martin Seymour-Smith claims in his more recent biography that Hardy’s process of self-analysis regarding his marriage, begun in the 1912–1913 poems, is resolved in “Survive,” the final poem of Late Lyrics and Earlier, which presents a confrontation with self-ventriloquism. The chorus of this poem is “my own voice talking to me,” and the final stanza dissolves that voice: “You taught not that which you set about, / Said my own voice talking to me; / That the greatest of things is Charity / And the sticks burnt low, and the fire went out, / And my voice ceased talking to me.” See Seymour-Smith, Hardy, 802–803.


71. See, for example, F. B. Pinion, A Commentary on the Poems of Thomas Hardy, 105. The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy, ed. Millgate, mentions many incidences of visitors’ critical comments on Emma’s childish and fanciful clothing and records her in old age dressed in “her usual girlish outfit of white dress and blue sash” (483).

72. See the discussion and text in Mardon, Thomas Hardy as a Musician, 13.

73. See Baring-Gould and Sheppard. This transcription has minor discrepancies between the text printed with the music and the text printed solely as lyrics. I have followed the lyric text in each case.

74. For Hardy’s relation to hymnals, see Dennis Taylor, Hardy’s Metres and Victorian Prosody, 209–210.

75. Mardon, Thomas Hardy as a Musician, 13.


77. Field, “Wynken, Blynken, and Nod,” in Poems of Childhood, stanza 1, 38. Although Bishop often discusses her long standing affection for hymns, I can find no evidence of Bishop mentioning this poem. But it is suggestive to find her friend and Vassar classmate Mary McCarthy citing the poem as a childhood favorite in her autobiography, How I Grew, 3 and 4.

78. Moore, “A Grave,” in Collected Poems, 56–57. Bishop herself once referred to Cape Sable, where her great-grandfather Hutchinson had died, as this “graveyard of the Atlantic,” which she would either drown in or write about as means of fulfilling her destiny. Recorded in Brett C. Millier, Elizabeth Bishop, 2.

79. The allusion to Moore is specifically marked in the 1955 volume A Cold Spring. In which “At the Fishhouses” first appeared in book form by its being followed ten poems later by “Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore.”
