REFORMING AMERICA: A STUDY OF ROBERT LOWELL, ADRIENNE RICH AND JAMES WRIGHT

DISSERTATION

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By

Catherine Hardy, B.A., M.F.A.

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The Ohio State University

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Dissertation Committee: 

Anthony Libby
David Citino
Barbara Rigney

Approved by

[Signature]

Adviser
Department of English
Dear children:

We've been walking nights
a long time over rough terrain,
sometimes through marshes. Days we hide
under what bushes we can find.
Our stars steer us. I write on my knee by a river with a
weary hand,
and the weariness will come through
this letter that should tell you
nothing but love. I can't say where we are,
what weeds are in bloom, what birds cry at dawn.
The less you know the safer.
But not to know how you are going on--
Matile's earache, Emma's lessons, those tell-tale
eyes and tongues, so quick--are you remembering
to be brave and wise and strong?

At the end of this hard road
we'll sit all together at one meal
and I'll tell you everything: the names
of our comrades, how the letters
were routed to you, why I left.

And I'll stop and say, "Now you,
grown so big, how was it for you, those times?
Look, I know you in detail, every inch of each
sweet body, haven't I washed and dried you
a thousand times?"

And we'll eat and tell our stories
together. That is my reason.

Adrienne Rich

"Letters in the Family"
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VITA

May 26, 1947
Born--Alliance, Ohio

1981
B. A.
University of Akron
Akron, Ohio

1983
M. F. A.
(Creative Writing)
Columbia University
New York, New York

1983-1990
The Ohio State University
Columbus, Ohio
Teaching Associate
Lecturer

1990-Present
Art Academy of Cincinnati
Cincinnati, Ohio
Assistant Professor

PUBLICATIONS

Reviews


Article


Poetry

"The Ancient World Calls Me to Enter." The Vincent Brothers Review (Summer 1990).


"Foreign Travel." *Larry's Poetry Anthology* (Fall 1987).


**FIELDS OF STUDY**

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INTRODUCTION

A NECESSARY EMANCIPATION/A NEW TRADITION

The focus of this study is twofold: (1) To examine the work of particular American poets who resisted or naturally relinquished using the poetic forms of the past to find "something new" and (2) To show that from this struggle to change their writing emerged a personal yet socially conscious voice that reexamines America's systems of belief and reshapes how we view the American landscape.

Many American poets in the twentieth century have resisted using strict forms in their work, and a great number of those poets have spent much intellectual energy on writing essays or passionate tracts about the necessity to change how they view and use form, as Pound does in "A Retrospect," Zukofsky in "A Statement for Poetry," or Levertov in "Some Notes on Organic Form." This desire to change, according to Edwin Fusseil, is connected with the American poet’s "necessary emancipation from English tradition, conceived as inherited but not quite wanted order and regularity" and adds that "the American poet had to liberate himself [herself] from an alien culture and sensibility" (11).
Walt Whitman is most credited for liberating the poetic line from the traditional forms predominantly repeated by American poets in the nineteenth century. The desire to infuse in his poems a democratic spirit also established in American poetry the first expansive visual landscape that is typically American.

In Chapter I, I concentrate on sections of Whitman's *Song of Myself*, the entire "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," and selections from the *Drum-Taps* poems to illustrate how Whitman's desire to explore and change form coupled with his deep interest in the self ultimately affected the evolutionary poetic structures (visual and mechanical) that he constructed. I also discuss in Chapter I selected poems, especially sections from *Paterson*, of William Carlos Williams, who was also interested in liberating the self and the poetic line and whose desire to look closely at detail and to say the unsayable works as a kind of corrective on Whitman's idealized American landscape.

In Chapters II, III, and IV, I focus on the poetry of Robert Lowell, Adrienne Rich, and James Wright, respectively, three poets who believed like Whitman and Williams that restructuring American poetry is connected with liberating oneself and, additionally, with liberating others. Interestingly, each poet discovers in
his/her struggle to change that the liberation he/she seeks is ultimately a liberation from the manacles of patriarchal thinking.

Lowell's *Life Studies* is central to this thesis because it emerges from his body of stricter, formalist poems and investigates his personal psychology while it reveals a social disconnection in American society. In the chapter on Adrienne Rich, the social disconnection emphasized is gender related. Her many candid essays and lectures on "the will to change" supplement discussions on selections from her first volume, *A Change of World*, to her most recent collection, *Time's Power*.

James Wright's use of Martin's Ferry, Ohio, his hometown, and the surrounding Ohio landscape also serves to enhance and redefine how we might view the American nation. Like Lowell's and Rich's, Wright's argument is with a nation that asserts the equality of all people in *The Declaration of Independence* while the realistic, everyday life of that nation's citizens never comes close to resembling the prosperity promised by America's framers. Wright's struggle to transcend yet understand the sadness in American society is emphasized by his deep concern with the possibilities of the American language and with transforming his own poetic style so that each poem may reveal the "authenticity" of "human experience"
(Holden, 181). In addition, Wright's "journey" to change represents the undoing of patriarchal thought differently. Unlike Lowell, Wright, as a man, understands he must reject the belief that he has inherited the past acts of aggression of the fathers. Wright deliberately sets out to change himself, and his evolutionary moral system stands as a paradigm for new male thinking. His transformations are examined here in selections from the Collected Poems, To a Blossoming Pear Tree, and This Journey.

Ultimately, I am most interested here in the "turn" each poet makes from closed to open form. The chapters on Lowell, Rich, and Wright focus more heavily on their early work that leads up to their breakthrough volumes in open form. Their later work, while important to this thesis, is touched on more lightly.

Closed form, then, for these poets represents barriers and challenges to the thing each most wants to achieve: a personal liberation. But a personal liberation from what things? Each feels oppressed by "something"; and in the act of breaking from closed form, each discovers a different reason for his/her oppression. Common to each is the belief that closed form is associated with archaic language and patriarchal
thinking. Part of this study investigates if that is a valid assumption about closed form.

As our brains and language develop to reflect new ways of thinking, the forms we work in must also change to reflect that new thinking. Lowell, Rich, and Wright developed their poetry during a radical time in America's history. Lowell's seminal work, *Life Studies*, was published in 1959, the beginning of two decades of dramatic social changes in America. Ironically, the volumes that would be Rich's and Wright's first break from strict form were published during the same year, 1963. The publication of these major works within a cluster of four years attests to the assumption that the dramatic changes occurring in the American society affected their writing. Frequently, outer turmoil in a person's life creates a desire for self-examination. Poulin recognizes that the contemporary poet's desire for self-examination affects how each approaches his/her craft:

... because much contemporary poetry is often intensely personal, the poet responds to experience in a visceral rather than in an intellectual fashion. Response is not filtered or controlled by knowledge or formal education, nor is it shaped by a conscious sense of the formal tradition. (691)
One thing, then, that open form represents for these poets is a discovered psychological territory. Free of artistic choices that involve exactitude (e.g., filling the frame of a sonnet form with language), the poet begins to intuit the line, creating idiosyncratic rules in the process. Discovering that self-rule making expands the number of choices for a poet's work, the poet may respond with anxiety, such as Lowell did in his later work, or with charged energy, Rich's and Wright's experience. The increased number of technical choices and a general lack of strict standards in open form represent reasons for resistance to the new form from those who adhere to formalism.

Strict poetic form represents tradition. It is the architecture built by generations of poets who established basic rules for certain shapes. If a sonnet is attempted, for example, then a poet must consider fourteen lines with a specific rhyme scheme before adding the embellishment of language. The poet also must consider the tradition of subject matter connected with the sonnet: e.g., the theme of a man's love for an unattainable woman, passed on by Petrarch, whose obsession with his unrequited lover Laura established many conventional similes like a lover's heart compared
to a storm-tossed boat (Kennedy 27). Obviously, then, traditional form and content grew out of male experience.

Traditional poetic form, then, is predominantly a group of male-created structures and, therefore, represents patriarchal traditions because these poetic laws of form breathe with the voice of male authority and thought. Those who challenge these structures therefore begin to break down the powerful patriarchal system, whether intentionally or not, which allows a new system of thought to take root. In American poetry, the breaking of strict form opens for poets the possibility for new artistic freedom and thought. The change in poetic form, then, offers an opportunity to establish a new tradition in poetry large enough to include the voices of every segment of society. Rich and Wright especially make that a concern in their new form.

The irony for those poets who do want to challenge this established system is that the poetry community is the very society in which they are seeking acceptance and membership. The new poets respect and admire the large body of poets who formed the traditions; their psychic terror comes out of their desire to break from tradition, which may risk their entrance into and acceptance by this community they seek. The male gods of authority may ridicule and denounce anything outside the tradition. In
fact, the new wave of formalism in contemporary poetry, or as Wayne Dodd calls it, a "conservative turn" (10), suggests one type of resistance to change from the patriarchy. And why the New Formalists trouble Dodd is because "They seem not to be saying this too is poetry, but that this only is poetry—that is, poetry worthy of the name" (10). The conclusion of this study responds to Dodd's comments as well as to those of the New Formalists, namely, Timothy Steele, whose Missing Measures works to debunk the authenticity of open form. Steele claims that "free verse" (his term) "has no positive principles for its proponents to defend," and that the free verse advocates maintain "a defensive revolutionary vehemence," which "discourage[s] attempts to place the free verse movement in some kind of historical perspective and to assess it" (292).

Revealing in Steele's study is that he uses mostly male critics and poets to support his claims and frequently uses the pronoun "he" to suggest a poet worthy of discussion.

Overall, the purpose of this study is not to debunk closed form, but to reveal why certain poets needed to break from its power, and how they, in turn, became empowered by that break. And from a close study of the challenges to traditional form and the male voice in
poetry, it can be seen that several provocative changes occur in the work of the poets included in this study. One is that a distinct desire to hear the female voice in poetry enters into their work. Walt Whitman brazenly announces that he is "Maternal as well as paternal" (Section 16, SOM) and that he intends to "launch all men and women (italics mine) forward with [him] into the Unknown" (Section 44). And William Carlos Williams carries further that new tradition to join the male and female voice in poetry by attacking societal roles assigned men and women in Paterson and imagining women's lives in poems as "Complaint" (about giving birth) and "The Widow's Lament in Springtime." This opens further possibilities for undermining the male, authoritative voice in poetry and exploring the Jungian theory that we should accept the male and female sides within each of us, an "inherited system" from having male and female parents (The Psychoanalytic Years 114).

It is important to establish that breaking from strict form is not the heal-all for coming to terms with the female psyche nor does it create a wide open door for those female powers to enter into American poetic thought. It does, however, make clear that the patriarchy has been broken into and that change is possible, which can lead to an exploration and acceptance
of the female powers. Those working in open form make their own rules based on their own visions, which allows women a freer forum in which to work without the imposing presence of a male-constructed form. The tradition of open form does not carry with it the demands of the patriarchy. Those who bring a patriarchal philosophy to open form reveal their own closed thinking as to how individuals might live.

While attacking strict form allows a provocative psychological discovery for Lowell, Rich and Wright, it ironically creates a dangerous aimlessness in some of their mechanical "experiments." These experimental "failures" are understandable since self-rule making leaves an individual vulnerable to multiple errors. Following Lowell's much acclaimed Life Studies, for example, came a series of thinner, less sharp poems, as is true for work immediately following Rich's Snapshots of a Daughter-In-Law and is witnessed in Wright's Two Citizens.

Lowell, Rich and Wright come to the realization that they have been manipulated by patriarchal thought and see it concretely imbedded in closed form. As each poet comes to grips with the power of the patriarchy, he/she exerts a need to separate from that group. Ironically, this self-imposed exile from the traditional poetic
community represents a key element of what Bellah terms as the "American moral imagination":

One accepts the necessity of remaining alone in order to serve the values of the group. And this obligation to aloneness is an important key to the American moral imagination. Yet it is part of the profound ambiguity of the mythology of American individualism that its moral heroism is always just a step away from despair (Bellah, et al., 46-47).

Therefore, these poets are radical in their approach to form, but their desire to stand alone to serve the larger good (opening poetry and opening the psyche of the individual and society) perpetuates the mythology of American individualism.

Abraham Lincoln is a perfect example of the "lonely, individualistic hero" who was a "self-made man" and who believed in the "moral commitment to the preservation of the Union and the belief that 'all men are created equal'" (Bellah, et al., 47). Lowell, Rich and Wright, too, find a need to serve the larger good or to help us see the atrocities within the societal structure. This is especially pertinent to Whitman since he probably saw Lincoln as a perfect model for the perfect American and since his idolization of Lincoln is so profound in "O Captain! My Captain!" and "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd."
And Lowell, Rich and Wright may be reaching as far back as America's puritanical beginnings and John Winthrop for their definition of freedom in poetry and their philosophical leanings:

He [Winthrop] decried what he called 'natural liberty,' which is the freedom to do whatever one wants, evil as well as good. True freedom—what he called 'moral' freedom, 'in reference to the convenant between God and man'—is a liberty 'to that only which is good, just and honest.' 'This liberty...you are to stand for with the hazard of your lives'. (Beilah 29)

Therefore, the tradition embedded in the open form created by these three poets includes the purpose that frees oneself as well as others, which is very much connected to the American culture. Whatever the causes are, the personal awakening within each of these poets makes them see that they are part of a larger group; and, because of their particular natures, each takes on the responsibility of reforming that group to serve the common good. What emerges from all of this deliberate change and scrutinizing by these exceptional American poets, then, is a body of work that reveals the conflicts that arise from challenging the establishment and the struggle of the individual to find authenticity in his/her life and work. It also emphasizes the satisfaction gained from examining one's own life and
highlights the resiliency in the American language and the possibilities for music in open form. This body of work as well sets down a collective American social consciousness that is constantly challenged and left open for change. In the American tradition to make all people free, these poets remind us that the voice in American poetry is no longer strictly male; it is becoming a balancing act between the male and female sensibilities.
CHAPTER I

Whitman and Williams: Starting Out on the Open Road

1. Walt Whitman

From this hour I ordain myself
loos' d of limits and imaginary lines.

Walt Whitman

In "An Essay on Leaves of Grass," William Carlos Williams states that "Whitman's so-called 'free verse' was an assault on the very citadel of the poem itself; it constituted a direct challenge to all living poets to show cause why they should not do likewise . . . . From the beginning Whitman realized that the matter was largely technical" (Bradley, Blodgett, 903). Whitman's breaking from standard forms and his sprawling lines that rock with his idiosyncratic rhythms are, of course, his most recognized contribution to the new writing in America. But there are other aspects of Whitman's poetry, besides the technical transformations, that help to establish the equally important growing social consciousness in American poetry: (1) The relinquishing of his grand voice in his later work, (2) His joining of a personal and social emancipation, (3) His effort to reveal the male and female sensibilities within each of
us, and (4) His belief that we are a malleable nation, which empowers the individual.

Whitman's form is easily recognized after reading only a page or two. We know we're traveling through Whitman territory because, as beautifully defined by Randall Jarrell,

Whitman is more coordinate and parallel than anybody, is the poet of parallel present participles, of twenty verbs joined by a single subject: all this helps to give his work its feeling of raw hypnotic reality, of being that world which also streams over us joined only by ands, until we supply the subordinating conjunctions; and since as children we see the ands and not the becauses, this method helps to give Whitman some of the freshness of childhood. How inexhaustibly interesting the world is in Whitman! (130)

Though hypnotic and delightful, Whitman's heavy use of coordinate and parallel constructions could cause problems for the reader. In Song of Myself (LOC 28-89), for example, Whitman's catalogue style might force the reader to skim over the list of "wheres" and "overs," and concentrate on only the vibrant, detailed menagerie of images that fall to the right of the page:

Where the panther walks
Where the rattlesnake suns
Where the alligator...sleeps
Where the black bear is searching

(Section 33, LOC 61)
The repetition, then, risks moving from the hypnotic to the intrusive and could cause even a patient reader to skip over large chunks of the poem due to its same look, its same structure. The reader, therefore, may miss a marvelous and humorous image such as the "alligator in his tough pimples" (LOG 61) or a delicate one such as "the katy-did [who] works her chromatic reed on the walnut-tree over the well" (LOG 63).

The repetition in Whitman's poetry many times overwhelms the reader. Everything seems large and out of proportion, which Paul Zweig calls "profoundly theatrical" (61). Whitman's "great poems," Zweig continues, "in particular...Song of Myself--are best read as performances, dramatic monologues" (61). This "grand voice" in Whitman seems connected with his desire to be the great maker, the new poet of America. And it should be remembered that Song of Myself "represents forty years of assiduous experimentation" (Asselineau 933). The many formulative turnings his poetry takes, then, symbolize his conscious breaking up of form and his desire to find a line that will liberate his voice.

Song of Myself, however, remains true to the traditional patterns that appear in the Bible, especially in the catalogues or the repetitious beginnings of lines. What is uniquely Whitman, then, is the "broken" right-
hand margin of the poem. In a sense, Whitman has flipped the poetic line around. Instead of making the end line the position where hard, regular patterns occur, Whitman reverses the regularity to the beginning of the poetic line. This frees the right-hand margin for further experimentation. Whitman, then, borrows from tradition and adds a new twist to the poetic line.

Another example of Whitman using his dramatic, traditional stance is in "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" (LOG 246-253). Many have recognized that the form of the poem is taken from opera, the most flamboyant of all the arts and deeply loved by Whitman. The poem indicates Whitman's borrowing from many sources to experiment with the possibilities in structure. The poem also represents his genius for translating into his poetry from other art forms. Besides Whitman's use of catalogues in this poem, Robert D. Faner recognizes that "Out of the Cradle" emerge[s] as a kind of 'opera without music,' composed of recitatives and arias in the Italian style, and, like the operas it [is] fashioned after, tell[s] its tragic story of love, separation, and death" (177). Faner explains that the recitative "advance[s] the action of the plot," and the aria mainly consists of the "emotional peaks of the lyric dramas," such as when "the hero declares his love or the heroine gives way to
an expression of violent grief" (165-166). In Whitman's poem, the two main characters, the man/poet and the bird who has lost his mate, each takes on one of these two operatic parts: the male/poet's part is the recitative and the bird's is the aria:

And thenceforward all summer in the sound of the sea,
And at night under the full of the moon in calmer weather,
Over the hoarse surging of the sea,
Or flitting from brier to brier by day,
I saw, I heard at intervals the remaining one,
the he-bird
The solitary guest from Alabama.
(recitative)

*Blow! Blow! Blow!
Blow up sea-winds along Faumanok's shore;
I wait and I wait till you blow my mate to me.*
(aria)

(LOG 248)

Whitman's form viewed in this manner seems as dramatic as Milton's or Shakespeare's, and the voice created within this dramatic, explosive style seems as grand as the narrator of Paradise Lost. Whitman, then, in this poem desires to belong to the patriarchal, traditional world.

Much in the poem, including Whitman's notion that he has been chosen to be The First American Poet seems overblown. As D. H. Lawrence says, there is a "falsity" (842) in Whitman which we can't quite accept: "... we sincerely feel that something is overdone in Whitman;
there is something that is too much" (842). Lawrence suggests that this may be an American problem:

All the Americans, when they have trodden new ground, seem to have been conscious of making a breach in the established order. They have been self-conscious about it. They have felt that they were trespassing, transgressing, or going very far, and this has given a certain stridency, or portentousness, or luridness to their manner. (842-843)

The idea of trespassing is an interesting one. It conveys the power of established rules and suggests barriers, creating anxiety and frustration for a poet trying to break those rules. This might explain why Whitman at times sounds false. He may feel a conflict between his desire to follow established rules to gain entrance into the community of poets and his intuitive nature that understands he must forge ahead alone.

The poet in "Out of the Cradle," the creator of this new landscape, desires transformation and something new does happen to him: "My own songs awakened from that hour" (LOG, 253). In Section 16 of Song of Myself, Whitman also discovers the many powers within himself, which is explosively liberating:

I am of old and young, of the foolish as much as the wise,
Regardless of others, ever regardful of others,
Maternal as well as paternal, a child as well as a man,

(LOG 44)

By risking foolishness and moving beyond the expected, Whitman contacts important elements within himself. He explains that we are multi-faceted beings without distinct definitions. The expanding knowledge of the self offers Whitman the opportunity to further question other rigid concepts of being.

Though Whitman leans heavily on the patriarchal structures of the Bible and opera for his poetry, his desire to be "Maternal as well as paternal" adds a provocative and new perspective on the development of the self. In "Out of the Cradle," for example, the theme is not only the self realizing his poetic talents, but also the desire for balance between the male and female through the tale of the bird who has lost his mate.

The narrator-poet of the story identifies with the "solitary," male singer: "O you singer solitary, singing by yourself, projecting me" (LOG 252). The he-bird has lost his mate or the female in his life just as the child in the beginning of the story has, in a sense, lost his secure station with the female through the process of birth: "Out of the Ninth-month midnight" (LOG 246). Anxiety and sadness fill the narrator at the loss of the
greatest feminine influence in his life: his mother. Thus, it is through the loss of the female that the narrator feels freer to respond to and identify with the male: "Is it indeed toward your mate you sing? or is it really to me?" (LOG 251).

If contemporary feminist criticism perceives the male in women's writing as often representing the patriarchy (e.g., Plath's "Daddy"), then it is also conceivable to interpret Whitman's poem as symbolizing male and female sides of himself. The bird, in fact, suggests our spiritual nature; and Whitman indicates that the bird symbolizes poetic song. The alienation between the male and the female established in the poem could represent the conflict Whitman experienced as a compassionate male who rejected the patriarchy's prescribed role for males. Whitman earnestly attempts to come to terms with the female and male sides of himself and understands that nineteenth century society expects him to follow a narrowly-defined male role. "His homosexuality, vaguely but unmistakably expressed in [his] poetry, was another way in which he rejected the narrow definition of the male ego dominant in his day" (Bellah, et al., 35). Whitman's desire for female influences is evident in "Out of the Cradle." The realization that the female has been taken from the male deepens the sense of loss in the poem
since the female figures (the mother and the she-bird) remain separated from the male figures.

At the end of the poem, however, there is a return to the mother image; however, that imagery remains ambivalent: "(Or like some old crone rocking the cradle, swathed in sweet garments, bending aside,)" (LOG 253). The sea, which is "creeping to [his] feet," bringing forth "the word" (LOG 253), represents a womb-like state. There is conflict, perhaps terror, at the thought of returning to the beginning since death, not birth, is the word that echoes to him.

The word "crone" suggests that he is in touch with a terrible power as old as the earth. "Crone" also is a derogatory word for a woman, but a powerful woman because a crone is also a witch. Whitman suggests that he has been affected by female power throughout "Out of the Cradle." "Endlessly rocking," too, suggests infinite energy that began with the mother. Regrettably, the child has grown up in the poem; and at the end of the poem, Whitman views adult experience (and knowledge) with a mixture of joy and fear, represented in "the song of my dusky demon and brother" (LOG 253). The movement of the waves, the womb-like state, and the rocking of the cradle are charged with female energy which serves as the
backdrop for the entire poem. The female energies, then, are an important source of power for the male poet.

In "To the Man-of-War-Bird." (LOG 257-258), Whitman identifies with another bird, diminishes his self-importance, and sees himself as "a speck, a point on the world's floating vast" (LOG 257). The poem, however, manages to be a liberating one. By extracting himself from the nature of man and identifying with the bird, he experiences the capacity of the soul:

Thou born to match the gale, (thou art all wings,)
To cope with heaven and earth and sea and hurricane
Thou ship of air that never furl'et thy sails,

. . .

At dusk that look'et on Senegal, at morn America,
That sport'et amid the lightning-flash and thunder-cloud,
In them, in thy experiences, had'et thou my soul,
What joys! what joys were thine!

(LOG 258)

Whitman suggests again and again in his poetry that the soul is the purest part of the human and that specific roles, whether male or female, prevent us from experiencing the liberation of the soul.

Whitman's chosen Genesis-like act of creating the landscape of America also sets him apart from his society so that he can go about the business of populating his landscape with a variety of people: the carpenter, the
pilot, the duck-shooter, the spinning-girl, the farmer, the lunatic, the quadroon girl, and the half-breed are a few that appear in Section 15 of *Song of Myself*. This bursting, active landscape filled with a variety of people from various economic strata sets down the most detailed view of American life to appear thus far in American poetry. This detail of life in Whitman's poetry reveals his American social consciousness and his desire to treat each life as equally as possible. Whitman remains apart as a god-like figure who wishes to teach us how to open our psyches so we may open ourselves to others around us. The new idea of personal empowerment within a workable society presented in *Song of Myself*, allows us to view America at an angle never before experienced:

That Whitman should have hit upon the poet-orator as a figure for his enlarged selfhood shows how attuned he was to the theatricality of his character—but also to the cultural needs of his reader. His "argument with others" and his flamboyantly staged personage went hand in hand. Writing large-voiced poems; sauntering visibly up Broadway, pink-skinned, bearded, and "limber"; sitting magisterially silent at Pfaff's, or projecting himself in imagination across the country as a voice bursting its confines, transforming inchoate America into a community of hearts: all these constituted for Whitman an act at once personal and political. (Zweig 218-219)
Whitman moving smoothly in and out of society—at once on the city streets and then sounding his "barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world"—suggests that he has the personal authority to expand and contract at will. He is a malleable force and believes his society is, too. What he can do, they can do. Everyone can work as one. But he chooses to remain apart from us to tell us that we work as one. Lyotard mentions in The Postmodern Condition that the "idea that society forms an organic whole" or a "functional whole" has been handed down to us from the nineteenth century, and Whitman certainly gives us the impression in Song of Myself that his society, his America, is a cooperative unit that is "urging" forward. Despite the existence of slavery and the social wrestlings connected with the approaching Civil War, Whitman decided to create a mythic America that he preferred over the real America. And through his myth, he perpetuates the "mythology of American individualism" (Bellah, et al., 46-47), where he remains alone to serve as our moral hero. He was, after all, a journalist and knew of the political and social upheavals in his own time. His grand voice and expansive line, then, help to deny the precariousness of life in America during the 1850s.
If Whitman created a cooperative American society in *Song of Myself*, then in his *Drum-Taps* poems, he also strives to create an America that works together despite the horrible divisions and suffering caused by the Civil War. The frequent omission of any mention that the country is divided reveals Whitman's inability to expose the country's unstable political structure. In politics, Whitman remains a true diplomat. In fact, he begins this collection of commentaries on the war with a scene that makes war look like another occasion for society to dance in the streets:

To the drum-taps prompt,  
The young men falling in and arming,  
The mechanics arming,...  
The lawyer leaving his office and arming,...  
The salesman leaving the store...  
...  
(How good they look as they tramp down...  
How I love them! how I could hug them...)  
...  
War! be it weeks, months, or years, an arm'd race is advancing to welcome it.  
...  
But now you smile with joy exulting old Mannahatta.

("First O Songs for a Prelude."
*LOG* 279-282)

Whitman never states *where* exactly everyone is going or *why* they are armed; he creates an invigorating scene of everyone working for a single cause. The scene may also
reveal the easy naïveté that comes to those inexperienced in war.

If war is as dramatic as opera, we would expect Whitman's war poems to spread across the page the way *Song of Myself* does. However, the lines in the *Drum-Taps* poems retract, there are fewer obvious catalogues, and the voice is toned down. The change in form indicates a change in Whitman's psychology. As his eye turns more and more to the real individual, more emotionally honest scenes appear. "The Wound-Dresser" (*LOG* 308-312) offers a poignant and truer depiction of war: "But soon my fingers fail'd me, my face droop'd and I resign'd myself,/To sit by the wounded and soothe them, or silently watch the dead" (*LOG* 309). Paul Zweig comments that when Whitman actually did go to Virginia during the Civil War to find his brother who had been wounded that he had "been pulled out of his 'slough'--out of himself--by the grim scenes of...battle[s] and by the soldiers: young men like his New York stage drivers and ferryboatmen, made lean and curiously hearty by the experiences of the war" (327). The war experienced first hand threw a harsh light of reality on how real people were living their lives, which reshaped Whitman's psychology and forced him to reshape his poetry and the landscapes he created. Whitman's experiences as a
volunteer in the army hospitals, in fact, gave him some of his most vivid scenes in "The Wound Dresser":

On, on I go, (open doors of time! open hospital doors!)
The crush'd head I dress, (poor crazed hand tear not the bandage away,)
The neck of the cavalry-man with the bullet through and through I examine,
Hard the breathing rattles, quite glazed already the eye, yet life struggles hard,
(Come sweet death! be persuaded O beautiful death!
In mercy come quickly.)

(LOG 310)

The "stern realities" (Zweig, 327) of war are evident in this passage. The parenthetical phrases also reveal Whitman's changing psychological state. "Open doors of time!" suggests the opening of the psyche, the opening of the eyes. This line seems to say, "I am looking directly onto the horrors of war, and the pain we inflict on one another." The dramatic "O beautiful death!" fits here because death is the one thing that Whitman now realizes can stop the individual's torture.

Another psychologically realistic poem that emphasizes the individual is "The Artilleryman's Vision" (LOG 316-317). In this poem, the narrator is in bed with his sleeping wife and the war is over, but he begins to have a flashback of the battlefield: "The engagement opens there and then in fantasy unreal, /The skirmishers
begin, they crawl cautiously ahead, I hear the irregular snap! snap" (LOG 317). He thinks he hears "the sounds of the different missiles" and sees "the shells exploding, leaving small white clouds" (LOG 317). The image is frightening and realistic. As Whitman focuses in closer on his vast society and details one person's life, he is forced to drop his dramatic stance and become more intimate in depicting that life.

Throughout his career, Whitman worked hard to speak intimately of individual lives. His evolutionary poetic structures remain as proof of his determination "to get at the meaning of poems" through form. He moved from reforming patriarchal structures to devising ways of opening the line to make it possible to speak more intimately of individual lives. He uses catalogues, which allow him to populate and move through the crowded streets of Manhattan, then he breaks from using catalogues and opens the line to enter the private shore or woods where he depicts the life of one person working out the meaning of his existence. As he devises those new structures and focuses on individual lives, he brings more authenticity to those lives he unfolds in his poetry. Additionally, Whitman's belief that we are a malleable nation full of malleable people who can change for the better creates a powerful energy that empowers
the individual. His focus is on the individual, and his desire to balance the male and female within himself opens new possibilities for perceiving our own multiple dimensions. Although never fully developed in Whitman's work, the desire not only for a balance between the male and female sensibilities, but for a redefinition of all roles, becomes a growing concern and debate in contemporary poetry. Through his experimentation, Whitman encourages new poets to test "myriads of seasons" (LOC 45). His detailed and idealized American landscape creates a breeding ground for a new social consciousness in American poetry.
2. William Carlos Williams

"[Whitman] always said that his poems, which had broken the dominance of the iambic pentameter in English prosody, had only begun his theme. I agree. It is up to us, in the new dialect, to continue it by a new construction upon the syllables."

William Carlos Williams

If Walt Whitman's vision of America and its people is more mythic than real, then William Carlos Williams' poetry helps to refine and correct Whitman's vision, making it clear that American speech and form in poetry are as malleable as Whitman's Americans. For Williams, the American landscape needed a closer look; therefore, the eye and ear needed to be retrained or sharpened in order to translate that landscape into a new poetry. And Williams also believed that the most efficient way to reveal the truth of American life in poetry was through breaking form.

Whitman discovered that his catalogue style allowed him to clutter his landscapes with various samplings of American life. The variety of people suggested in Song of Myself gives us a panoramic view of nineteenth century American society. Williams, however, in his shorter poems, frequently focused on less to suggest more. Ironically, as a collection, his shorter pieces create a
society of isolated lives, distinctly different in tone from Whitman's poetry. In form, Williams' famous "The Red Wheelbarrow" (SP 56) represents much of what he is searching for in all of his poetry:

so much depends
upon
a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens.

(SP 56)

The poem forces the reader to stop and focus on a few items. Because so little is there--the wheelbarrow, the rain, the chickens--their importance magnifies. We overlook nothing in this sparse poem, unlike our perhaps impatient wandering over the chatty catalogues of Whitman. We then notice that Williams forces us to think of adjectives and nouns, parts of speech, because all of the nouns are isolated on individual lines. We move closer to this examination of language because of the odd separation of wheel and barrow. It forces us to think of that **one** word "barrow," and we find in the dictionary that one meaning of the word is a pushcart, and that the shorter version "barrow" means the same as "wheelbarrow."
In this discovery we learn of the efficiency in language. So through this isolation, we learn the multi-layered life of the word, and Williams encouraged the study of language. In his autobiography, for example, Williams encourages the study of translation because "it gives us an opportunity . . . to make new appraisals, . . . which should permit us to use our language with unlimited freshness" (349).

Like Whitman, Williams hopes to teach the individual, which sets him apart from his "students" in the same way Whitman sets himself apart in Song of Myself. In the case of Williams, his lessons appear easy, but actually are difficult, and they have much to do with visual observation. In "To a Solitary Disciple" (CP 104-105), for example, Williams addresses one listener, which is in direct contrast to Whitman, who speaks as if multitudes were his audience. Williams asks his one student to "notice, observe, grasp, see," though we take in the lesson, too, as someone overhearing his lecture. He repeats the word observe four times to emphasize and remind us that we have misused our power to see. The repetition, suggestive of a litany, empowers us. In a sense, Williams restores our sight by commanding us to observe with attention.
The landscape Williams is observing is American and authentic. There is usually present a sadness and majesty in Williams' characters as he tries to reveal their genuine nature. In "Pastoral" (SF 17), for example, he makes a distinct comparison between nature and man, evenly dividing his comments about sparrows, whose natural lives have been altered due to their urban surroundings, in the first stanza, and his comments about an old man, whose natural life is the city, in the second stanza. Through the separation of images, as in "The Red Wheelbarrow," Williams is able to bring about an intimate and physical appraisal of a scene:

The little sparrows
hop ingenuously
about the pavement
quarreling
with sharp voices
over those things
that interest them.
But we who are wiser
shut ourselves in
on either hand
and no one knows
whether we think good
or evil.

Meanwhile,
the old man who goes about
gathering dog-lime
walks in the gutter
without looking up
and his tread
is more majestic than
that of the Episcopal minister
approaching the pulpit
of a Sunday.
These things
astonish me beyond words.

(SF 17)

The isolation of the images emphasizes the isolation of the man from nature. The man, after all, is surrounded by pavement and never looks up, where perhaps he might see the sparrows or the sky. Williams criticizes our isolation not only through his imagery, but through his comment that "no one knows/whether we think good/ or evil." This kind of astute observation and other portraits of individuals that appear in Williams' poetry cuts through the mythic vision of the happy, energetic, cooperative society that exists in Whitman's America. In fact, as a collection, Williams' shorter poems create a montage of isolated lives, suggesting an isolated society. Though Williams gives integrity and majesty to his characters as in his comparison of the old man to that of an "Episcopal minister/approaching the pulpit" above, he detects their alienation, too. Something is wrong in this society that Williams observes, and he is not afraid to reveal that to us.

There is more, however, than a breakup of form and an interest in language that appears in the poetry of Williams. These changes in form create a new intimacy, an opening of possibility for deeper psychological
investigation that is new in the writing of American poetry. In "Contemporary American Poetry: The Radical Tradition," Poulin says, "the requirements of technique and craftsmanship raise further questions about just how personal and immediate a poem can be" (688-689). One reason contemporary poets understand the power that comes with breaking form is because of the groundbreaking that Whitman and Williams began. Poulin explains that "The scarcity of allusion, in part, is the result of the democratization of poetry under the strong influence of Walt Whitman and of William Carlos Williams, both of whom advocated the use of an American language and rhythm" (691). In addition, these two poets drew extensively from the American landscape for their imagery. Their differing visions of the American society suggest either how society has changed from Whitman's to Williams' time or it reveals the variety of imagistic interpretations available to individual artists. In any event, these two poets remain as dominant forces for contemporary poets who seek to continue the theme of social criticism in American poetry.

A profound observation of America's social fabric is intricately woven in Williams' Paterson. Paterson is evidence of Williams' ongoing interest in America's history and the lives sometimes neglected in history
books: namely, women, Blacks, and blue collar workers. In addition to those social interests, Williams was able to experiment with a variety of forms and integrate them into each Book of *Paterson* while observing more intensely the larger history that has fed into the society we now live in. Williams "asserted over and over that only through an exhaustive commitment to a locale and its language can one begin to discover the universal" (Conarroe, 2). For example, in observing one place, Williams realizes that something as simple as snow behaves differently with each thing it touches:

> These terrible things they reflect: the snow falling into the water, part upon the rock, part in the dry weeds and part into the water where it vanishes--its form no longer what it was:

(Book I, 23)

The subtle musings suggest the silent, microscopic changes that take place around us without our notice. The trained eye of the geologist would easily see that the snowfall or weather is always at work, changing earth's forms. The idea that things change constantly would appeal to someone like Williams. His own need and desire to break free of any strict form in his life and work would gain comfort from such thinking. In
"Asphodel, That Greeny Flower" (SP 226-233), Williams pays homage to Darwin for his radical new vision:

Few men believe that
nor in the games of children.
They believe rather
in the bomb
and shall die by
the bomb.
Compare Darwin's voyage of the Beagle,
a voyage of discovery if there ever was one,

But Darwin
opened our eyes
to the gardens of the world,
as they closed them.

(Book II)

Williams, a medical doctor, a scientist, would be intrigued with the "discovery" of another scientist like Darwin. Timothy Steele defiantly states that "Many experimental poets argue that new poetry in general and free verse in particular express an irresistible evolutionary process" (244) and finds fault in connecting science with open form because "If art is evolution, a poet must, to assure himself that he is evolving, keep changing" (246). And the thought of exploration and change repels formalists because it ignores or obliterates "tradition and history," according to Steele (244). In other words, if you're not repeating strict forms from the past, then you're not writing poetry. Conarroe clears up that misconception about Williams,
which explains the intention of at least a portion of
other practitioners of open form, when he explains:

Williams' ideas in Paterson on the function of
tradition and of the usable past are similar to
those of both Eliot and Pound. He is not
rejecting scholarship and historical research per
se. He is, rather, making a discriminating
rejection of mere academic learning--of learning
that has no relationship to the local present or
to human concerns. . . . The past is for those
who lived in the past, Paterson is reminded. It
is also, however, for those who live well in the
present, provided it is part of a living
tradition and not merely a sump. (71)

That idea of a "living tradition" is an appealing one
to those creating a new tradition in American poetry.
Examining one's own life with the relationship of others
sets down stories that will become a part of a "living
tradition."

Like Whitman, Williams looked for the form that would
reveal his subject, or he let his subject reveal its
form. He said, "I cannot work inside a pattern because I
can't find a pattern that will have me" (Whittemore,
271). Because he eventually worked into using the triadic
line, Williams must have meant in this quote that he
could not work within a strict pattern. Many
contemporary poets have realized, like Whitman and
Williams, that the focus for the new poetry was not on
the stanza, but the line; it has the power to expand and contract like the lungs of a human breathing.

As Williams worked in a variety of forms, he also sought varied ways to understand the people who populated his poems. This is observed in the variety of ways Williams reveals historical facts in *Paterson*: he uses excerpts from newspaper articles, letters, and oral tales. He sees that a combination of facts may come closer to the rendering of a truer American history. Compared to Whitman's, Williams' rendering of characters seems more intimate, too, because of unusual details and the willingness to show the darker or more abrasive behavior of his characters:

That day was a great day for old Paterson. It being Saturday, the mills were shut down, so to give the people a chance to celebrate. Among those who came in for a good part of the celebration was Sam Patch, then a resident in Paterson, who was a boss over cotton spinners in one of the mills. He was my bosss, and many a time he gave me a cuff over the ears. ...He had previously been locked up in the basement under the bank with a bad case of delirium tremens, but on the day the bridge was pulled across the chasm he was let out. Some thought he was crazy. They were not far wrong.

*(Book I, 16)*

Whitman may reveal the less desirable in society in his poetry, such as the prostitute with her "pimpled neck" or "the lunatic" who is "carried at last to the
asylum," but these characters are frequently viewed romantically, obviously loved by Whitman, and described only briefly, someone Whitman passed on the street, but never knew. Williams, however, feels more free to describe precisely the sordid natures of his characters such as his explanation above that Sam Patch was not only a drunk, but that he had "delirium tremens." He also reveals abusive behavior like that of the boss above who strikes his employee.

Another important element that Williams adds to his poetry is direct quotes. By giving speech to individual characters, he creates a dialogue among the citizens in his society. Whitman describes his characters while Williams lets his characters speak, adding a variation of voices to his poetry. At times, Williams steps out of the story-telling mode in Paterson to make a flat, true statement about how it is in American society. One instance of this is through the use of "actual letters (edited slightly by Williams) of a poet who felt rebuffed in her efforts to establish a personal relationship with 'Patterson'" (Conarroe 102). While Conarroe defines "The letters, as a whole, [as] depressingly hysterical outpourings of an unhappy woman who sees herself as a social and economic outcast" (102), the statements in actuality are clear and determined:
That's why all this fine talk of yours about woman's need to 'sail free in her own element' as a poet, becomes nothing but empty rhetoric in the light of your behavior towards me. No woman will ever be able to do that, completely, until she is able first to 'sail free in her element' in living itself—which means in her relationships with men even before she can do so in her relationships with other women....women in general—will never be content with their lot until the light seeps down to them, not from one of their own, but from the eyes of changed male attitudes toward them.

(Book II, 87)

In retrospect, the woman above gives far too much power to the male, believing that her freedom is dependent on his changed attitude, although this certainly is an important element in finally creating an equal society. As Whitman suggested in "Out of the Cradle," a balance must finally exist in society and within ourselves between the male and female sensibilities. And Williams, by dividing Paterson into two major principles, the "man-city" and "mountain, or feminine principle" (Conarroe 63), attempts to investigate why the balance hasn't worked out yet. But Williams' choice of imagery reveals his own sexist thinking: the male is the powerful city while the female is represented by an obvious sexual image like a mountain, which falls into the category of crude humor. However, "by focusing on the individual personae as well as on the more general 'feminine
sensibility,' one discovers the poet's assumptions about
the failure of communication and about the inevitability
of divorce in modern life" (Conarroe 99).

Though Williams is concerned about the divorce
between the male and female sensibilities, his attitude
toward women is ambivalent. Many of his poems attempt to
depict how it is to be a woman. He did, after all, visit
many women patients in their homes and saw them in his
office as he served as their physician. In "Complaint"
(CP 153-154), he realistically reveals the mixed feelings
of agony and ecstasy in giving birth: "She is
sick,/perhaps vomiting,/perhaps laboring/to give birth
to/a tenth child. Joy! Joy!" (CP 153-154). And in one
of his finest poems, "The Widow's Lament in Springtime"
(SP 34), he sees that a woman of his generation is
trapped in an existence that is defined by a man. The
widow in the poem, who has lived "Thirtyfive years" with
one man and then loses him, also loses her life and her
identity. Perhaps not intentional on Williams' part, the
poem reflects the reality of patriarchal institutions,
like marriage, that obliterate a woman's identity. It is
also, quite simply, a poem about the great sorrow felt
after losing someone you love.
In other poems, however, Williams is a lust-mongering man, much like the self he describes to his brother Ed in a letter after he left the University of Pennsylvania:

From nature, Ed, I have a weakness wherever passion is concerned. No matter how well I may reason and no matter how clearly I can see the terrible results of yielding up to desire, if certain conditions are present I might as well never have arrived at a consecutive conclusion for good in all my life, for I cannot control myself. (In Simpson's Three on the Tower 224)

One example of Williams' lust-mongering and seeing women as sexual objects is in "The Young Housewife" (CP 57):

At ten A.M. the young housewife moves about in negligee behind the wooden walls of her husband's house. I pass solitary in my car.

Then again she comes to the curb to call the ice-man, fish-man, and stands shy, uncorseted, tucking in stray ends of hair, and I compare her to a fallen leaf.

The noiseless wheels of my car rush with a crackling sound over dried leaves as I bow and pass smiling.

(CP 57)

The woman is in sexually suggestive attire, a negligee, and because the narrator notices that she is "uncorseted," we wonder how filmy the negligee is or if he is imagining what is under her negligee. Also, the "stray ends of hair" suggest dishevelment, a sign of
sexual looseness or enticement. Though she is also seen sympathetically in her mundane life of calling the ice-man and fish-man and living as a possession in her husband's house, she is symbolically overpowered by the narrator through the use of the leaf imagery. She is compared to a "fallen leaf," which suggests a fallen woman, and the fact that his car drives over "leaves," he has taken her, too, if only mentally. His smiling at the end is ambiguous. She can only guess what he is smiling about, but certainly the reader imagines the smile as sexually suggestive.

Williams' many "love" poems and his attempt to work out what marriage is in his later poetry perhaps permit him to work out his private guilt as an unfaithful husband as well as to find peace within that marriage, making his own life more acceptable. In his poem to his daughters-in-law, "To Daphne and Virginia," he says, "I/who loves them,/loves all women, but/finds himself, touching them, like other men, often confused." The fact that he loves them "all" suggests his inability even in his later life to get beyond sexual attraction with women. His attempt to understand women, however, yields oftentimes truths about how men see women: they are "confused" perhaps because they have been taught to see women as sex objects first, but know logically and in
their societal interactions that women deserve to be
treated with respect and equality. These conflicts
existed in Williams' private and professional life as
they do in most men's lives, and this reveals the
patriarchal attitudes that shape most men from the time
they are born. Williams' willingness to admit these
truths about himself are at times disturbing and
frustrating since overall he is a consciously humane
person, which indicates how powerfully patriarchal
thinking affects our behavior and our society.

Williams' struggle to remain honest in his poetry
resulted in his leanings toward a darker, common side of
life. His last Book in Paterson, in fact, is dedicated
to Henri Toulouse Lautrec, a painter of a seamier life.
And Book V reflects on many painters who worked against
rigid lines to find their own identity in paint.
Mentioned are Bosch and Klee, whose psychologically
frightening and amusing pieces shatter our reality,
forcing us to consider the infinite choices in form.
Striking is Williams' obsession with conveying to himself
and the reader that rigid patterns no longer identify the
changing psyche of twentieth century humans. His
definition of Jackson Pollock's work perhaps best
defines what Williams wanted in his own work:
Pollock's blobs of paint squeezed out with design!
pure from the tube. Nothing else is real
(Book V, 213)

"The first of the themes of which Williams will never let go during his long career is that of the imagination being located, through the necessity of living now and in America, in a shambled paradise--'a ravished Eden'--in fact, in a kind of Heli. And the poet--like Orpheus, like Kora--must live there and, like Asphodel, bloom" (Basil 252). Unlike Whitman, who tried to create an American Eden in much of his poetry, Williams reshapes the vision of America to achieve a truer depiction of American society. They each, through the breaking of strict form, opened up possibilities for a variety of voices, including the feminine voice. In their creations of a democratic society, came the realization that American poetry and society needed to find a balance between the male and female sensibilities. Whitman and Williams chose to depict the American society in their poetry. Each in his depiction perpetuates the idea of the "moral imagination of America," which emphasizes the importance of serving society. In their private lives, they also fulfilled that role: Whitman cared for the wounded during the Civil War, and Williams served as a
physician for most of his adult life. Therefore, their investment in society was both a private and public act. In a discussion of Williams' poetry, but one which also defines Whitman's intentions, Thomas Schaub explains that "Williams . . . anticipates much of the contemporary perception that self and world are united in a field defined by their relations to each other" (449). One new tradition and challenge that Whitman and Williams bring to American poetry is that of liberating the self to serve the common good.
CHAPTER II

Robert Lowell: Reforming the Self

"I like to think that often I have crossed the river into your world. It meant throwing away a lot of heavy symbolic armor, and at times I felt frightened of the journey."

Robert Lowell to William Carlos Williams

As the world changes, its artists respond to those changes. Robert Lowell sensed dramatic changes in his world as he grew up, but was always aware of and was greatly influenced by the atmosphere of tradition that surrounded him in New England. In describing his beginnings he says, "I, too, was born under the shadow of the Boston State House, and under Pisces, the Fish, on the first of March 1917. America was entering the First World War and was about to play her part in the downfall of four empires" (Prose 291). The dark and heavy images that Lowell chooses to mark his beginning not only suggest the conscious effort of an author attempting to create an interesting story about himself as a writer, but they also reveal the real and early conflicts he must have felt between being a member of a well-known American family that lived in traditional New England ("the shadow
of the Boston State House") and wanting to be an
individual and a poet in his own right.

Being born with the Lowell name should be an
advantage. However, Lowell sees privilege as a weight or
dark shadow similar to the one projected by the Boston
State House. Some wealthy people who want to be known
for their individual contributions find it embarrassing
when their success is attributed to family money or
prestige. Lowell's description of his family's literary
talents, hardly complimentary, deflates their importance
while he tries to deny that he may have inherited his
writing talents from them:

I never knew I was a Lowell till I was twenty.
The ancestors known to my family were James
Russell Lowell, a poet pedestaled for oblivion,
and no asset to his grandnephew among the rich
athletes at boarding school. Another, my great-
grandfather, James Russell's brother, had been
headmaster of my boarding school, and left a
memory of scholarly aloofness . . . . There was
Amy Lowell, big and a scandal, as if Mae West
were a cousin . . . . Its last eminence was
Lawrence, Amy's brother, and president of
Harvard, . . . . He was unique in our family for
being able to read certain kinds of good poetry.
(Prose 276-277)

One hardly believes that Lowell was oblivious to his
family's eminence until he was twenty, but his
defensiveness about their mediocrity (in his eyes)
suggests his desire to establish himself as a much
greater literary figure than anyone else in the Lowell family. Of James Russell, he says, "Poor Lowell, his satires, once the rage of Boston and The Atlantic Monthly, are now lonely sui generis things appreciated by neither farmer nor professor" (Prose 194). And Lowell's scathing commentary on Amy's career reflects his general, sexist opinion that "Few women write major poetry" (Prose 287). Lowell sought more than his ancestors' temporary greatness, but, as Lawrence Lipking recognizes, "The poet who sets out to achieve a great career may doom himself to a life of unsatisfied hungers and broken poems" (xiii). Certainly, anyone familiar with Lowell's poetry senses his "unsatisfied hungers" and the great weight of despair that haunts him throughout his career. And if one constant theme runs through his work, it is that of disgust: disgust for his family's genteel lifestyle, disgust at man's inhumanity to man, disgust at women, and, more central to all of his tirades of social criticism, the disgust that he tries to mask in his early work, disgust with himself.

Overall, Lowell is "held by many to be the outstanding poet writing in English in the period since World War II" (Perloff ix). He takes us from Modernism into contemporary society and creates in his poems a "powerful image of America in the latter half of the
twentieth century" (Perloff 53). For feminist scholars, Lowell's work creates a field of land mines because the society he shapes in his poems reflects the changing philosophy of a man born into a tradition that sees women as second class citizens. For the poet, Lowell's work stands as a model for those who seek self-examination in their work and as a treatise on the power of strict form and how breaking it empowers the individual.

In his early poetry, Lowell's inner self frequently hides behind the straining, powerful forms in the landscapes that he describes. The formal structures he chooses to work in further distance him from himself. In "The First Sunday in Lent" (21-22), from *Lord Weary's Castle*, for example, Lowell splits his poem into Part I, *In the Attic* and Part II, *The Ferris Wheel*. The attic suggests a private place where family treasures and secrets are stored, perhaps symbolic of one's own subconscious. The ferris wheel represents the frightening, outer world that spins like the planet, creating anxiety for its passenger. It is interesting in this poem that Lowell chooses the month of March, his birth month, which is also, as the title suggests, a time for fasting and penitence. He, therefore, can cautiously investigate his personal history while revealing how
culture and history in general have contributed to his life:

The crooked family chestnut sighs, for March,
Time's fool, is storming up and down the town;
...

This is the fifth floor attic where I hid
My stolen agates and the cannister
Preserved from Bunker Hill--feathers and guns,
Matchlock and flintlock and percussion-cap;
Gettysburg etched upon the cylinder
Of Father's Colt.
...

On Troy's last day, alas, the populous
Shrines held carnival, and girls and boys
Plunged garlands to the wooden horse; so we
Burrow into the lion's mouth to die.
Lord, from the lust and dust thy will destroys
Raise an unblemished Adam who will see

The limbs of the tormented chestnut tree
Tingle, and hear the March-winds lift and cry:

(LJC 21)

The poem moves backwards in time, back through the narrator's personal history to Troy and to Adam. The "family chestnut" suggests the family tree or history, cynically called "crooked." The child's marbles are "stolen," suggesting that his past is as black and guilt-ridden as the country's, where its dead lie at Gettysburg, or the world's, where thousands were slaughtered at Troy. At the end of section one of the poem, the tree is "tormented," and the narrator desires
to begin again or to cleanse himself indirectly by resurrecting "an unblemished Adam."

Early in his work, Lowell recognized or was trying to come to terms with his link not only with his "tormented" family's history, but also with the entire history of mankind with a focus on the bloody, patriarchal past. He mentions his father's "Colt," and a "Luger of a Hun," symbols of the development of destructive weapons. In the same vein, he mentions Napoleon, noted for leading manly slaughters. The child's stolen marbles, therefore, seem a less serious symbol of man's atrocities, but they begin an association chain, which links this small act of theft to more serious crimes. In Katharine Wallingford's thoughtful Robert Lowell's Language of the Self, she observes that Lowell seemed "always to have been willing to submit himself to the uncontrolled flow of associational thinking" (25). "Free association," she acknowledges, "sneak[s] through the bars of repression and gain[s] access to the unconscious" (25).

The terrible guilt and grief that Lowell pours out in these early poems dramatize his beginning recognition and acceptance of his connection to all past deeds done by man. The powerful drama is further compounded by the intricacies of his strict form. Lowell's voice, in fact, mimics the high pitch of a Calvinistic preacher, who
declares that we all will go to Hell unless we repent our sins. The drama, too, allows Lowell to hide himself behind the loud music of historical events, which prevents him from working out his personal chaos. Part II of the poem, in fact, remains in the time of Lent, before the resurrection, leaving the world in a tormented place and the man at the mercy of Satan:

But the man works loose,  
He drags and zigzags through the circus hoops,  
And lion-taming Satan bows and loops  
His cracking tail into a hangman's noose;  
He is the only happy man in Lent.  
He laughs into my face until I cry.  

(LWC 22)

Clearly, the individual in the poem is enmeshed in familial and historical atrocities. And the traditional poetic structures that Lowell works in outwardly symbolize the psychological and sociological manacles which restrain him. An interesting rhyme series in Part I, for example, links "guns," "Hun," and "Napoleon." The narrator therefore implicates himself with the history of men, beginning with Adam, who have created violence and deceit in the world.

In these early poems, too, Lowell tries to find a way out of this destructive history that came before him. But this places Lowell in a precarious situation. The
patriarchy is a powerful force in society, as Lowell soon recognizes, and the individual's conscious choice to resist the dictates of the patriarchy can end a career or force that individual to suffer persecution. Lowell, however, chose to resist the patriarchy. In 1943, three years before the publication of Lord Weary's Castle, Lowell failed "to report for draft induction" and "was sentenced to one year and a day, but was released from prison after five months" (Mazzaro, 1). In his letter to President Roosevelt, on September 7, 1943, Lowell expressed his conflict between choosing as an individual and living up to familial and societal expectations:

You will understand how painful such a decision is for an American whose family traditions, like your own, have always found their fulfillment in maintaining, through responsible participation in both the civil and military services, our country's freedom and honor." (Prose 368)

The tone of the letter may sound self-important since Lowell appeals to the President by identifying his "family traditions" with those of the socially prominent Roosevelt family. The conflict of choosing between individual beliefs and the demands of the society, however, is real. Despite this conflict, Lowell remained loyal to his own beliefs, with the knowledge that he was ultimately serving the common good. With the threat of
prison, one can hardly believe that Lowell is only self-serving in this instance. In his "Declaration of Personal Responsibility" to President Roosevelt, for example, he states:

Americans cannot plead ignorance of the lasting consequences of a war carried through to unconditional surrender--our Southern states, three-quarters of a century after their terrible battering down and occupation, are still far from having recovered even their material prosperity. (Prose 369)

Because Lowell continued his resistance against war throughout his career, these early objections to serving in a war can be taken seriously. His resistance to the patriarchy serves as a powerful statement to others. In the process of resisting, Lowell achieves a convincing personal philosophy which gains our respect.

Ironically, Lowell's attempts to hide behind the facade of history in his poems backfires. As he investigates the atrocities of man, he slowly realizes his part in the chain of human events. In "Christmas in Black Rock" (LWC 12) (Black Rock, Connecticut is where Lowell served his parole), for example, Lowell asks, "What is man?" The single life, as Lowell observes, is connected to all human events, which are overwhelmingly dominated by the male. As a male, he awakens to the idea that he is intricately rooted in those past events.
The epigraph to Lowell's "The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket" (LWC 14-18) observes the power and stupidity of man, which permits Lowell to examine how his race has transformed the world, perhaps for the purpose of finding an answer to that question of "What is man?":

Let man have dominion over the fishes of the sea and the fouls of the air and the beasts and the whole earth, and every creeping creature that moveth upon the earth.

(LWC 14).

The epigraph reminds us that man has had "dominion over" all creatures of the earth and that he has abused this power. Lowell links himself to this abusive power through familial ties because the poem is dedicated to his cousin, Warren Winslow, who drowned during World War II, and who, therefore, contributed to and was a victim of war, a man-made event. The tragedy of his cousin's death forces Lowell to consider man's destructive nature. The sea, then, symbolizes, like the attic in "The First Sunday in Lent" (LWC 21-22), Lowell's subconscious and the collective unconscious as well.

Robert Hass observes that "The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket" is "a poem of process, and of anguish" and that "Warren Winslow drowns, the Quakers drown, the wounded whale churns in an imagination of suffering and
violence which it is the imperative of the poem to find release from, and each successive section of the poem is an attempt to discover a way out" (6). But what is it that Lowell wants a "way out" of? Interestingly, Hass believes that "Warren Winslow or not, it has always seemed to [him] that Lowell himself was the drowned sailor, just as Roethke is the lost son" (9). It is clear in the poem that personal agony and disgust with society are churning in the waters of its story.

In structure, "The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket" leans heavily towards an iambic pentameter line with variations throughout in stress and rhyme. The choice of structure links Lowell to a male literary world and his use of elegiac expression recalls Milton's "Lycidas," concerning "the death of a young man to whom the poet has a more than casual yet less than intimate relationship; death by drowning; the unrecovered body" (Parkinson, 63). Another male literary figure mentioned in the poem is Ahab, Melville's darkest character in Moby Dick. Lowell was known to have admired and been influenced by Melville's eastern sea stories, and this reference to Melville may suggest Lowell's striving for equal literary accomplishment. In addition, Hugh B. Staples recognizes that "the first twelve lines of the poem, dealing with the imagined recovery of the dead sailor's body, are
taken almost directly from Thoreau's description of a shipwreck victim" (Parkinson, 65). It is obvious, then, that Lowell's criticism of the male gods of authority in the poem is made ambivalently when it is clear that he desires to be connected to the male literary world. Thematically, he criticizes the patriarchy while structurally, he depends on it and honors it in the development of his poem. That desire to be linked to the male literary voice of authority, coupled with an honest suspicion of it, may be part of the anguish created in the poem.

The poem is also written in seven sections, a number repeated in the Bible. The link is appropriate due to Lowell's biblical epigraph and his discussion of Quakers, a tightly formed religious society that supports pacifism, but one that contributed to the slaughter of thousands of whales. Lowell recognizes hypocrisy at all levels of society and reveals that any act of violence, like the horrible slaughter of whales, will change the universe and affect future generations:

The wind's wings beat upon the stones, Cousin, and scream for you and the claws rush At the sea's throat and wring it in the slush Of this old Quaker graveyard where the bones Cry out in the long night for the hurt beast Bobbing by Ahab's whaleboats in the East.

(LVC 15)
In death, the poem reiterates, there is no rest for those who contribute to the domination and destruction of other living things, which makes the poem's epigraph of men having "dominion over the fishes of the sea," an ironical statement. Finally, the male power in this poem is symbolized as dark, violent and vicious.

Section VI of the poem, "Our Lady of Walsingham," however, emphasizes light and the female power and what Hass calls "a remarkable moment in the poem, the most surprising of its modulations, a little tranquil island in all the fury" (21):

There once the penitents took off their shoes
And then walked barefoot the remaining mile;
And the small trees, a stream and hedgerows file
Slowly along the munching English lane,
Like cows to the old shrine, until you lose
Track of your dragging pain.

(LWC 19)

This section of the poem attests to Lowell's affinity with the patriarchy. The Virgin Mary is the Catholic Church's greatest symbol of female power. By using her in this poem as the healer of men, Lowell falls into faulty thinking. Mary Daly's unorthodox view of Mary is of the "restored/redeemed state of perfect femininity" (231) who is a victim of male power:
Within the rapist Christian myth of the Virgin Birth the role of Mary is utterly minimal; yet she is "there." She gives her unqualified "consent." She bears the Son who pre-existed her and then she adores him. According to Catholic theology, she was even "saved" by him in advance of her own birth. This is the meaning of the "Immaculate Conception" of Mary—the dogma that Mary was herself conceived free of "original sin" through the grace of the "savior" who would be born of her. (85).

One of Lowell's intentions in the poem is to cleanse himself/us of the sins of the world. On one hand, he desires a way out of this caustic, patriarchal world; but on the other, he idolizes female virginal power, exposing how powerfully engaged he is in patriarchal thought. Therefore, in these early poems, Lowell recognizes the sins of the patriarchy, identifies with them, and reveals how difficult it is to think outside the patriarchy's prescribed rules. In his middle work, however, Lowell confronts and questions the patriarchy in an attempt to break the bounds that have restricted his thoughts.

Robert Hass reveals his own patriarchal leanings when he admits that he "had felt vaguely hostile toward Lowell's later work, though [he] admired it. [He] thought, for one thing, that the brilliant invention of "The Quaker Graveyard" had come about because [Lowell] had nothing to go on but nerve and that, when the form cloyed in The Mills of the Kavanaughs, [Lowell] had
traded in those formal risks for the sculpted anecdote and the Puritan autobiography" (23). Hass seems more concerned with maintaining a status quo in poetic form than questioning the patriarchal thinking revealed in the poem. As Lowell discovered, and Hass reveals, the power of the influential father is strong and desired; the decision to break from that influence is psychically terrorizing.

Though *The Mills of the Kavanaughs* will not be covered in detail in this study, it is important to point out that that collection is pivotal to *Life Studies* because it predominantly discusses male-female relationships and indicates the expansion of Lowell's vision to include the war that exists between men and women. Jeffrey Meyers calls the collection's title poem a "parable" of Lowell's marriage to Jean Stafford, which ended "when Lowell announced in 1946 . . . his affair with Gertrude Buckman, the former wife of Delmore Schwartz" (38).

The poem "David and Bathsheba in the Public Garden" suggests the original fall of Adam and Eve through the imagery of the garden as well as recalls the story of how David as voyeur first viewed Bathsheba as she was bathing. After David's despicable act of secretly watching Bathsheba and discovering that she is already
married to Uriah, he has her brought to him and impregnates her with his child. David then orders that Uriah be placed in battle where the skirmishes are the fiercest. As expected, Bathsheba's husband is killed, which leaves her free for David. Through the retelling of this story in a contemporary setting, then, Lowell reveals how man has manipulated woman for his own gain. This new or expanded theme in Lowell's work, too, indicates his fascination with and exposure of a sexist society, one in which he has played a full and guilty part.

William Carlos Williams' assessment of the title poem of The Mills of the Kavanaughs looks forward to Lowell's break from strict form in Life Studies: "In this title poem, a dramatic narrative played out in a Maine village, Mr. Lowell appears to be restrained by the lines; he appears to want to break them" (London 36). In addition to this movement away from strict form, Lowell localizes his story and begins integrating direct quotes into his poems, which brings authenticity of character and place to his work, much as Williams did in Paterson.

During the decade that preceded the publishing of Life Studies, Lowell divorced Jean Stafford, married Elizabeth Hardwick, and both his father and mother died. It is not surprising, then, that family and marriage are
the main subjects of *Life Studies*. Unlike his earlier work, however, the poems in this collection also reveal a new vulnerability and sensitivity and much of this has to do with the breaking of form and the throwing away of his patriarchal "symbolic armor."

Part of Lowell's desire to change is revealed through his re-examination of form and discovery that strict form holds the power of silence, which prevents the poet from speaking more directly from his authentic thoughts. Strict form encourages the heavy use of traditional symbolism, which masks intimate thoughts. For poets interested in self-examination in their poetry, most choose open form as a vehicle to the unconscious. In an interview with Frederick Seidel, Lowell reveals that while he was writing *Life Studies*, "a good number of the poems were started in very strict meter, and [he] found that, more than the rhymes, the regular beat was what [he] didn't want. . . . That regularity just seemed to ruin the honesty of sentiment. . . . it said, 'I'm a poem'" (Prose 243). Lowell found himself "simplifying" his poems, and his desire to reveal life more intimately and authentically in his poetry brought about his need to break from closed form, but not to denounce it:

But there's another point about this mysterious business of prose and poetry, form and content, and the reason for breaking forms. I don't think
there's any very satisfactory answer. I seesaw back and forth between something highly metrical and something free; there isn't any one way to write. But it seems to me we've gotten into a sort of Alexandrian age. Poets of my generation and particularly younger ones have gotten terribly proficient at these forms. They write a very musical, difficult poem with tremendous skill, perhaps there's never been such skill. Yet the writing seems divorced from the culture. It's become too much something specialized that can't handle much experience. It's become a craft, purely a craft, and there must be some breakthrough back into life. (Prose 244)

Lowell's "seesaw" ride between strict and open form reveals his continued unwillingness to let go of patriarchal structures. Von Hallberg comments on why Lowell continued to use strict form:

Lowell was more willing than any of his contemporaries to risk the critic's charge of sentimentality, naiveté. This old and simple ambition should be recognized as the primary reason Lowell never wandered far from metrical verse. He had to write blank verse, because this is the medium of memorable verse in English, but he did not have to write sonnets. Those fourteen-line stanzas are in fact a bit much, as though he were poet enough to stand up to even the most famous author of memorable lines. (150)

Yet Lowell suggests that formalism "seems divorced from the culture." Taken one step further, this suggests that open form is the preferred form in which an American poet can speak more freely of the American culture.

Lowell's desire to break "back into life" begins with the first poem in Life Studies, "Beyond the Alps" (3-4).
written in iambic pentameter, which creates a contrast with, but doesn't prepare the reader for, the official breaking into life, his prose piece, "91 Revere Street." In the poem, Lowell takes "the train from Rome to Paris," from the city of religion with a decadent past, which includes classical literature, Lowell's undergraduate major, to the city of art with a similar decadent history. The reader senses that this journey is different from Lowell's previous journeys because he says, "Life changed to landscape. Much against my will/I left the City of God where it belongs." The breaks here include the religious, literary and personal. He leaves behind Catholicism, will give up strict form, and with marriage and the deaths of his mother and father, enters a transformed adulthood. Lowell also breaks from the larger world and begins to focus in on American life in Part I of Life Studies. In "Inauguration Day: January 1953" (LS 7), Lowell suggests the cold war existing in the world through the season's winter imagery:

Ice, ice. Our wheels no longer move. Look, the fixed stars, all just alike as lack-land atoms, split apart, and the Republic summons Ike, the mausoleum in her heart.

(LS 7)
Lowell also prepares us for what he calls the "tranquilized Fifties," ("Memories of West Street and Lepke," LS 85) where all is "fixed" and "just alike," much like fixed form. The "atoms, split apart," suggest the atomic bomb, now part of our psyche and evident in the earth's scarred landscape and the dead and deformed humans, a residue of the war, and the promise of future devastation if we abuse nuclear power. Lowell suggests that the world is different now; our fears seem darker and our sinful acts greater because we have the lethal power to destroy the entire planet quickly.

After the introductory poems, Lowell's prose piece about his boyhood memories, "91 Revere Street" (LS 11-46), rushes to the reader like words broken from a dam. The reverse in time sequence catches the reader off guard as does the use of prose at the middle of a book of poetry. It is not so much the dark confessions of a family, but the purging of the "genteel traditions" (Axlerod, 105) of that family from the psyche of the writer. The sequence of four poems on Ford Madox Ford, George Santayana, Delmore Schwartz, and Hart Crane that follow "91 Revere Street," according to Axlerod, create a way for Lowell to establish a "sense of spiritual kinship to brilliant and tormented writers" who "in some way contributed to his growth as a poet, and all of whom
endured an exile from society prefiguring his own" (106). In a sense, they, too, are a kind of family to Lowell. With respect to previous discussions of the patriarchy, this series of poems also reveals Lowell's strong connection to the influential male community.

"My Last Afternoon with Uncle Devereux Winslow" (LS 59-64) is perhaps the most poignant of all the poems in *Life Studies*, not only because it is about death, but because it stands out as the most personal statement made by Lowell at this point in his career. "It abandons the personae, masks, and anonymity of Modernism in order to reestablish the self as a realm of primary literary interest" (Axlerod, 111). This poem represents a marker in Lowell's poetic career; it breaks through the bounds of strict form and establishes Lowell's voice and vision in his poetry more distinctly. The willingness to reform oneself and art may be one of Lowell's greatest gifts to contemporary poetry. Another is his desire to face honestly his social responsibilities as he sees them though that personal vision may be met with resistance.

The rejection of the mother and father at the beginning of "My Last Afternoon" is important because it liberates the boy:

"I won't go with you. I want to stay with Grandpa!"
That's how I threw cold water
on my Mother and Father's
watery martini pipe dreams at Sunday dinner.

(LS 59)

Lowell's use of autobiography and exact dates (1922)
establishes authenticity in the poem: "I was five and a
half." This poem reflects back to "91 Revere Street" in
the way that it ridicules those on the "Social Register"
and also proves that what was done in prose can be done
more efficiently and as convincingly in open form. The
desire to escape this suffocating world appears in a
beautiful, lyrical style in section IV:

I picked with a clean finger nail at the blue
anchor
of my sailor blouse washed white as a spinnaker.
What in the world was I wishing?
...A sail-colored horse browsing in the
bullrushes...
A fluff of the west wind puffing
my blouse, kiting me over cur seven chimneys
troubling the waters . . . .

(LS 62)

Also striking about this poem is that it unveils Lowell's
early recollections (age five and a half) of an
independent self, recollections that he might have lost
to his subconscious if he hadn't tried so desperately
over the years to peel away at the layers of
misperceptions about himself that he had carried around
for years. In essence, the poem into himself presents
Lowell with the opportunity to gain a new perspective on his life, which permits a release from the world that binds him. His "kiting me over our seven chimneys" parallels with Whitman's "barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world" as well as suggests Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables*, another tale of a family fraying from too many years of traditional thinking. Even the image of "bullrushes" suggests the baby Moses, who floated to a new family and identity, perhaps Lowell's secret desire also. Now, Lowell breaks from his old restraints and alludes to history and literature without the heavy symbolism he depended on in his earlier work. Part of those past restraints are represented by poetry's strict forms, which Lowell abandons in this poem.

It could be said that in this poem where Lowell views the world through a five-year-old's eyes, he is less conditioned by the genteel and male society that surrounds him, although the sailor blouse and "clean finger nail" indicate his refinement and privileged class. Because of his age, we would expect that he views this society, then, with less prejudice. We do suspect, however, that he views the world with precocious insight. It is interesting, therefore, that he still views women with a "little man's" disgust. He is learning his male
role well in the patriarchal society he's being shaped by. His descriptions of the roles women play usually have a tone of disdain in them. One example of this occurs in section III, where he focuses his disgust on Great Aunt Sarah:

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

Forty years earlier,
twenty, auburn headed,
grasshopper notes of genius!
Family gossip says Aunt Sarah
tilted her archaic Athenian nose
and jilted an Astor.
Each morning she practiced on the grand piano at Symphony Hall,
deathlike in the off-season summer---
its naked Greek statues draped with purple
like the saints in Holy Week . . .
On the recital day, she failed to appear.

(LE 61-62)

This family story gives Lowell the opportunity to strike out at two things that frequently disgust him: his traditional, uppercrust family and women, more specifically, women with "talent." Aunt Sarah's privileged class is identified by her "archaic Athenian nose"; it's out-of-date, but terribly proper. She had a promising talent, but this was somehow lost to the world because she gave up, according to Lowell. That talent is
also open to criticism because her "grasshopper notes of genius" create a humorous portrait, which suggests energetic, yet spasmodic fingering of notes. Overall, Lowell is smirking at her. Playing a piece titled *Samson and Delilah*, a story of a woman who had power over a man, may give Aunt Sarah some kind of brief, sordid pleasure. Also, it's probably comical to Lowell to compare Aunt Sarah to Delilah, but Aunt Sarah's power over a man, like Delilah's, is seen as her jilting an "Astor," another socially prominent puff ball as Lowell sees it. The internal rhyme of "tilted" and "jilted" also adds a nice twist of humor. Now Lowell is playing with his subject and his line. Here, Lowell no longer uses heavy biblical symbolism to drive the story of the poem as he did in "David and Bathsheba in the Public Garden." In this poem, it is the female who has the upper hand, but only briefly, since she ends up living a life alone. Implied in the poem is that something is wrong with Aunt Sarah because she is alone, indicating more patriarchal thinking for Lowell. In this story, he perpetuates the spinster myth: a woman without a man, especially in her later years, is considered silly and undervalued by society. Mary Daly defines the word spinster more emphatically:
The functioning of the word spinster to contort women's minds into double-double think is clear. It has been a powerful weapon of intimidation and deception, driving women into the "respectable" alternative of marriage, forcing them to believe, against all evidence to the contrary, that wedlock, will be salvation from a fate worse than death, that it will inevitably mean fulfillment. (393)

Lowell seems to be suspicious of Aunt Sarah for being alone, for being a spinster. And lone women in society have always been "a socially disruptive element, at least when they lived without family and without patriarchal control" (Daly 184).

Lowell's attitude that "Few women write major poetry" might be expanded to "Few women make great art" to reflect his hidden disgust for Aunt Sarah and for women artists in general. Though that attitude remains strong among many in art communities, the discovery of exemplary writing and art works by women that were either kept hidden or ridiculed during their lifetimes should one day quiet those forces that continue to belittle women's art. Poet Emily Dickinson and artist Käthe Kollwitz are two such examples of major artists who continued to produce their art under the pressure of being ignored by the art community. Today there is no question of their excellence. One thing that is true in Lowell's section
on Aunt Sarah is the tragedy of the many wasted lives he observed in his family.

In this poem, too, Lowell observes the traditional division of labor between men and women: men shoot decoys, wear war uniforms and act as "protector" while women serve "pitchers of ice-tea," wear "beauty-moles" and mother. While nostalgic in tone, the poem's depiction of these stilted lives suggests a way of life that can't endure the dramatic changes that will in twenty years split the society. In fact, Uncle Winslow's death at the end of the poem begins a chain of other deaths like Lowell's father's in "Terminal Days at Beverly Farms" and his mother's in "Sailing Home from Rapallo." In addition, Lowell suggests other kinds of deaths. Other terminations include certain ways of thinking and a way of life as suggested at the end of "Grandparents" (LS 68-69): "I hold an Illustrated London News--;/disloyal still,/I doodle handlebar/mustaches on the last Russian Czar" (LS 69).

Lowell records these endings of personal, cultural, and political life, but not without nostalgia for the old days of patriarchal thinking. In "During Fever," for example, Lowell has the duty of parenthood, and recalls his mother, young during "those settled years of World War One" and the "unemancipated woman." He easily yearns
for those times when he "used to barge home late./Always
by the bannister/[his] milk-tooth mug of milk/was waiting
for [him] on a plate/of Triskets." The yearning here may
be the Freudian wish fulfillment of the child to have the
mother mothering him again. His divided feelings are
clear because he ridicules its quaintness with the "mug
of milk" and "Triskets." But he still wants his mother
back. This allows him to mentally escape his
responsibility as a parent and to put his mother in the
role of an "unemancipated woman." Though he suggests in
the poem that that is an unfortunate station for a woman,
he undermines that attitude by actually regretting that
women aren't "unemancipated." His "good intentions" of
understanding women's lives are many times undermined by
his acceptance of patriarchal thinking. In this poem,
the egocentric child emerges and prevents the adult from
changing his sexist attitudes.

To Lowell, males and females get along best in the
roles of mother and child. He admitted to believing in
"man and woman's mutual, self-killing desire to master
the other" (Hamilton 406). And contempt between the
sexes appears throughout Lowell's work, which is a
reflection of his chaotic, personal life as well as the
sexist society he lived in. In "The Flaw" (FTUD 66-67),
for example, he says:
Old wives and husbands! Look, their gravestones wait in couples with the names and half the date—one future and one freedom. In a flash, I see us whiten into skeletons, our eager, sharpened cries, a pair of stones, cutting like shark-fins through the boundless wash.

(FTUD 66)

According to Lowell, the antagonism between two married people won't end with death, but will go on into eternity, "cutting like shark-fins through the boundless wash." Lowell's interest in relationships between the sexes, especially in his later work, also can be taken as a reaction to one of the two greatest issues in American society in the sixties and seventies: women's liberation. (The other, civil rights, handled more diplomatically by Lowell, will be discussed later.) We would expect Lowell to be as open-minded about women's liberation as he seems to be in his thinking about war or the equality of Blacks. However, Lowell remains unable to evolve his thinking about women. Frequently, he chooses to write about the antagonism between men and women and never resolves his underlying disgust with women's lives.
In "To Speak of Woe That Is in Marriage" (LS 88), a wife narrates the horror/whore show inflicted on her when her "whiskey-blind" husband stumbles home:

"The hot night makes us keep our bedroom windows open.
Our magnolia blossoms. Life begins to happen.
My hopped up husband drops his home disputes,
and hits the streets to cruise for prostitutes,
free-lancing out along the razor's edge.
This screwball might kill his wife, then take the pledge.
Oh the monotonous meanness of his lust. . . .
It's the injustice . . . he is so unjust--
whiskey-blind, swaggering home at five.
My only thought is how to keep alive.
What makes him tick? Each night now I tie
ten dollars and his car key to my thigh. . . .
Gored by the climacteric of his want,
he stalks above me like an elephant."

(LS 88)

Ironically, the poem is written in heroic couplets, but the length of fourteen lines suggests the sonnet, whose subject is frequently love. The number of syllables in each line varies, but the overriding line is in iambic pentameter. This is a good example of Lowell taking traditional forms and forcing something new on them. His subject matter is contemporary and shocking, and the couplets add a hard rhyme, which emphasizes the horrific fear the woman is experiencing. Here, the topic is served well by the reformation of traditional forms.
Behind the poem is disturbing, autobiographical information: Lowell "made use of private letters or conversation" (Hamilton 434) of his wife, Elizabeth Hardwick, in the poem. Unfortunately, in Hamilton's biography of Lowell, he never clarifies which lines are direct quotes from Hardwick. This leaves the reader unsettled about the poem, and its apparent intention, being sensitive about a woman's experience, is, instead, a public airing of his wife's pain. In retrospect, this is a kind of mental abuse.

Hardwick was furious at Lowell for insensitive lifting of her personal writings and "wrote letters to his English and American publishers" such as Robert Giroux who recalled that "She said (he) should have checked out permissions" (Hamilton 434). Giroux didn't, of course, because he "had no idea" (Hamilton 434) Lowell used Hardwick's letters in his poetry. Most readers of this poem do not know the history of its content either and cannot empathize with Hardwick; therefore, the abuse to Hardwick is silent, perpetuated by the poem's very existence. Shockingly, Lowell joins a long tradition of male artists, such as Picasso, who are also guilty of taking pain inflicted on a woman who loved them and turning it into art. That issue needs further attention. By clearing up misconceptions we have about certain
pieces of art, we might reconcile some of the hostility that exists between men and women because silent abuse will always eat at the very foundation of relationships, sometimes causing irreparable harm.

Psychologically revealing in "To Speak of Woe" is that Lowell portrays the husband as a disgusting and grotesque drunk, epitomized in the line, "he stalls above me like an elephant," which anticipates the act of rape, and that is what it really is, leaving the woman in perpetual fear and waiting. The poem makes very real the domestic violence that occurs in many alcoholic marriages. Lowell was a known alcoholic and a manic depressive, and he makes clear in many of his poems the personal pain of his mental illness. In "Skunk Hour" (LS 89-90), he says, "I myself am hell" (90) and in "Night Sweat" (FTUD 68-69), his self-aversion brings on a "downward glide" where he faces that "always inside [him] is the child who died." Sadly, this reflects back to the child in the sailor blouse in "My Last Afternoon with Uncle Devereux Winslow," who was very much a vivid and peaceful memory for Lowell. Dr. Charles Whitfield, who specializes in treating alcoholics or chemically dependent people, identifies the "Child Within," which Lowell mentions, as our authentic self and explains, as Lowell
painfully does in his poetry, how this relates to compulsive behavior:

But our Real or True Self, our Child Within, now alienated and hidden from us, has an innate desire and energy to express itself. Secretly we want to feel its aliveness and its creativity. Held in for so long, stuck in such an approach-avoidance dilemma, its only way out is through a specific form or negative compulsive behavior that has worked for us in the past, even though we may get only a glimpse of our True Self by doing so. Such compulsive actions range across a wide spectrum of possible behaviors, from heavy use of alcohol or other drugs, to short-term, intense relationships, to trying to control another person. It may involve overeating, oversexing, overworking, [or] overspending. . . .

(51)

Wallingford astutely relates Lowell's "years-long obsession with the sonnet form" (8) with his mania, where a fascination with obsessive behavior and repetition held its victims prisoner. Retreating back into the sonnet form in his later work might have also allowed Lowell to take the focus directly off of himself, which prevented him from examining honestly his own life. And not only are Lowell's later books *History* and *The Dolphin* evidence of obsessive behavior, but they also make use of private letters and conversations without consideration for his wives, Hardwick or Blackwood. Adrienne Rich savagely attacked *The Dolphin* by calling it "bullshit eloquence, a poor excuse for a cruel and shallow book," and that "The
inclusion of the letter poems stands as one of the most vindictive and mean-spirited acts in the history of poetry"; "the same unproportioned ego that was capable of this act is damagingly at work in all . . . of Lowell's [later] books" (Hamilton 433).

The poems in History are not only blatantly sexist poems, but they are also slovenly written. Von Hallberg calls it full of "warts" where "Lowell is constantly tempted and often lured into a predictable, easy grimness" (153). After Lowell's great break from strict form in Life Studies and For the Union Dead, his return to sonnet writing, albeit loose ones at that, appears as a defeat to progress, according to those in the Williams' camp. When asked by Ian Hamilton if Lowell found fourteen lines "constricting," Lowell answered, "Yes, but that's true of any fixed form, isn't it? . . . It would have been a worry never to have known when a section must end; variation might have been monotony" (Prose 271). What Lowell reveals is what many who break from strict form discover: that open form is a risk, it's Ferlinghetti claiming that the poet is "Constantly risking absurdity/and death" (Poulin 137). There are no constants or security in open form; we fool ourselves if we believe that open form is safe for the sole reason that many today have accepted it as a standard for
writing. And Lowell's ambivalence about breaking completely from strict form reflects his ambivalence about breaking from patriarchal thinking and risking change.

Lowell's repetition of the sonnet form throughout History and The Dolphin sets up visually for the reader a monotonous ride before each poem is explored. But it is reassuring, however falsely, for the poet to know that, well, yes, everything will be in sonnet form. Unlike Whitman, "who had faith that the 'filament, filament, filament' ceaselessly launched out of his noiseless patient spider would finally 'catch somewhere,' Lowell [had] no such assurance; he envision[ed] the poet, like the inchworm, 'feeling for something to reach to something'" (Wallingford 46). Finally, in many of the poems explored, the reader (at least the feminist reader) is easily offended by Lowell's sexism in History. In "Cleopatra Topless" (H 46), for example, a narrator says,

She was the old foundation of western marriage. . . .
One was not looking for a work of art--
what do men want? Boobs, bottoms, legs . . . in that order--
the one thing necessary that most husbands want and yet forgo.

(H 46)
Lowell isn't criticizing that men want women first for their body parts, he's yearning for that "old foundation of western marriage" the way he yearned for mother's care in "During Fever." As Von Hallberg claims, "the preoccupations of History seem far closer to those of the liberal consensus of the 1950s" (173), though Lowell was writing the book in the 1960s.

Jeffrey Meyers defines the subject matter of The Dolphin as "Lowell's painful disengagement from Hardwick, the manic periods that frightened and exhausted his new wife, and Caroline's acute nervous depression, . . . which [Lowell] wrote [about] while living through the emotional chaos" (110). However, Lowell defined the book's topics as "the end of [his] old marriage and then the beginning" of his next marriage (Hamilton 424). Like Williams, then, Lowell seems to be trying to work out his guilt over mistreating women in his later poetry, although the poetry sounds more like he's denying that he's responsible for hurting someone tremendously than he's trying to absolve any guilt. He did, after all, leave wife Elizabeth Hardwick and his daughter Harriet in America with the idea that they would shortly join him in England. Instead, Lowell met Caroline Blackwood and then abruptly cut Hardwick and their daughter out of his life. Many friends, however, stuck by him. In Elizabeth
Bishop's careful letter to Lowell concerning her review of *The Dolphin* she says, "It seems to me far and away better than the *Notebooks*" (Hamilton 422); however, it is disheartening that Bishop could not tell Lowell honestly how insensitive his book was although she does warn Lowell that his lifting of quotes from Hardwick may be "violating a trust" (Hamilton 423). Of *The Dolphin*, Frank Bidart said, "it had to give Lizzie pain, he was very aware of that" (Hamilton 421) and Stanley Kunitz honestly admitted that the poems were "too ugly, . . . too cruel, too intimately cruel" (Hamilton 422).

Lowell's misconception of himself as a great poet as he wrote these later books was encouraged by people like Bishop, his other friends, and his editor. That an editor would publish a book full of these blatant, hurtful comments reveals the sexist, patriarchal society of the publishing industry and how it is responsible for perpetuating these destructive attitudes that devalue a woman's life and her privacy. In "Records," for example, it is obvious that the quoted material belongs to Hardwick:

". . . I was playing records on Sunday, arranging all my records, and I came on some of your voice, and started to suggest that Harriet listen: then immediately we both shook our heads. It was like hearing the voice of the beloved who had died. All this is a new feeling . . . I got the letter
this morning, the letter you wrote me Saturday. 
I thought my heart would break a thousand times, 
but I would rather have read it a thousand times 
than the detached unreal ones you wrote before--
you doomed to know what I have known with you, 
lying with someone fighting unreality--
love vanquished by his mysterious carelessness."

(TD 31)

Aside from the insensitivity of exposing Hardwick's 
personal letter, lines like "but I would rather have read 
it a thousand times/ than the detached unreal ones you 
wrote before--" lack poetic merit. There is no tautness, 
interesting language, or precision connected with sonnet 
writing. Lowell seems to be lying back as a poet and 
taking a scissors to someone else's words, arranging them 
inside the false framework of a sonnet.

In the poem "The Dolphin" (TD 78), Lowell tries to 
sound honest when he says, "this book, half fiction,/an- 
eelnet made by man for the eel fighting--/my eyes have 
seen what my hand did" (TD 78). However, saying that he 
is aware of what he did doesn't prove that he feels 
sorrow or regret for his actions.

Jeffrey Meyers proclaims that Lowell's "refusal to 
fight in the Second World War increased his moral stature 
during his public protest against the war in Vietnam" 
(14). But few have flinched at Lowell's sexist attitudes 
or cruelty in his marriages. This stands as evidence of
our misogynistic society. Lowell's blatant insensitivity to his wives' personal lives, witnessed by his using material from their letters, or his unthinking idiocy in dedicating the poem "Florence" in *For the Union Dead* to Mary McCarthy and then opening the poem with "I long for the black ink,... and brothels of Florence" (a subject McCarthy could hardly be interested in!) reveal a mind steeped in the patriarchy where women are second-class citizens and consideration for their thoughts leaves much to be desired.

Lowell's moral convictions about war and racism in America, however, are more clearly defined and convincing than his opinions about women in society. "For the Union Dead" (*FTUD* 70-72), Lowell's greatest poetic achievement, is about war, loss, and the ill treatment of Blacks in America. It recalls an important segment of American history: the white Colonel Shaw who led a "Negro infantry" (71) during the Civil War and reflects on how Blacks have gained little in America's present society. The poem integrates Lowell's knowledge of closed form (all stanzas are quatrains) with the exploratory creativity of open form. The lines push and pull where they need to; each line is a skillful decision which reflects a movement or gives a visual effect as in stanza two:
Once my nose crawled like a snail on the glass; my hand tingled to burst the bubbles drifting from the noses of the cowed, compliant fish.

(FTUD 70)

Lowell's form breathes naturally like the sculptor's bronze breathes on the Civil War relief which honors Colonel Shaw and his men. The American landscape that Lowell depicts would horrify Whitman, though Whitman would readily agree about the tragic fate of Shaw, whose body was thrown in a "ditch" with many of his men. The America Lowell depicts is dead, as suggested in the title and in the dry South Boston Aquarium, but it oddly is developing as the "steamshovels" (70) dig a new "underworld garage" (70), which suggests hell, or raises "Puritan-pumpkin colored girders" (70), which prepare the way for a new conservative building. The city development, too, eerily parallels the "commercial photograph" (72), which depicts the devastation of Hiroshima. Lowell cynically suggests that urban renewal is a destructive force and "progress" savage. Lowell is right in his assessment that America's social consciousness will never develop as quickly as the modern city. "The drained faces of Negro school-children" (72) painfully remind us of Little Rock, segregation, and
impending violence. Our passive society that allows the Union Soldier to become "abstract" has not learned a thing from our nation's bloody past, as Lowell hoped it would many years before when he declared to President Roosevelt that "Americans cannot plead ignorance of the lasting consequences of a war" (Prose 369).

Lowell was most convincing in his insights about war. Despite his struggle with the debilitating illnesses of alcoholism and recurring mental problems, he wrote conscientiously and convincingly about the self and the American society, which reformed the American landscape and social consciousness in American poetry. His argument with the nation and his desire to break free from strict form made an impact on the patriarchal structure and thought in American society and American poetry. Lowell's argument with women reveals a dialogue between men and women and a new female power that must be reckoned with. His poems also reveal how powerfully patriarchal thought holds captive a mind even as demanding as Lowell's was to know the truth. "Always [Lowell] demands of himself that he question, that he search, explore, that he ferret out the secrets of life" (Wallingford 139). Like Whitman, Lowell discovered that the examination of the self is still a viable and necessary subject. His poetry moves us into a new
territory and, unlike Whitman, Lowell sometimes reveals weaknesses in our society.

Lowell seems to have rolled away a great stone in the consciousness of a society and discovered a dark cave. Like Spencer Brydon's in James' "The Jolly Corner," the descent into the self can be a frightening journey into something "evil, odious, blatant, vulgar" (Litz 247). Few are willing to risk that kind of journey because of its uncertain outcomes. I believe Lowell recognized the evil of patriarchal thought, tried to break from it, and sometimes succeeded in doing so.
CHAPTER III

Adrienne Rich: Transforming the Self

"As I type these words we are confronted with the naked and unabashed failure of patriarchal politics and patriarchal civilization. To be a woman at this time is to know extraordinary forms of anger, joy, impatience, love, and hope."

Adrienne Rich
1974

No poet has made it more her goal than Adrienne Rich to force us to our feet to see the power we women have within ourselves. And, unlike Walt Whitman, she does not hold herself up as a god(dess)-like figure or a model of egotism. Instead, she acts as a catalyst whose energy inspires changes in the lives around her. Her energy comes from a deep desire to change herself, and her long journey into herself unveils new territory which makes possible her insightful explorations of other women's lives. Her reclaiming of women's history, in turn, makes clear that the female energies have all along developed and contributed to the history of our world, especially America's history. By focusing on women's lives, Rich helps to balance the collective energy between the male and the female in American poetry. The landscape in American poetry, once dominated by men's stories and
visions, is greatly transformed through Rich's vision, which encourages other women poets to add their stories to that collective vision. That vision, once powerfully fueled by the patriarchy, now moves more clearly toward integration between the male and female energies because of courageous women like Rich who brought power to the women's movement and helped transform societal attitudes about women's rightful place in that society.

Rich's transformation of the self from a traditional heterosexual married woman to a feminist lesbian allots her a depth of understanding and experience in how the patriarchy shapes our lives. That understanding of the patriarchy is reflected in how she uses and changes poetic form. In her essay, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," she admits that

> It will require a courageous grasp of the politics and economics, as well as the cultural propaganda, of heterosexuality to carry us beyond individual cases or diversified group situations into the complex kind of overview needed to undo the power men everywhere wield over women, power which has become a model for every other form of exploitation and illegitimate control. *(Blood, Bread, and Poetry* 67-68).

In her poetic transformation, Rich responds to that male power by what I see as four major stages: first, as in *A Change of World*, she uses closed or patriarchal forms as the apprentice poet, wanting very much to be taken
seriously as a poet. Second, she slowly, and painfully, extracts herself from the role of traditional poet and consciously breaks from strict form-making in *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law*. In a third, but related, stage, she confronts the patriarchy with a new eye in *Diving Into the Wreck*. And finally, in the poetry that follows *Diving Into the Wreck*, she moves out of the confrontation mode, away "from the argument and jargon in a room," for the purpose of "measuring each other's spirit, each other's/limitless desire," and begins a new standard, "a whole new poetry beginning here," as she announces in "Transcendental Etude" (*The Dream of a Common Language* 76). Rich therefore exemplifies and claims that there is another way of looking at life than through a white male education of the self. And her poetic transformation away from patriarchal forms sets a new standard for all poets to do the same, much the way Williams viewed Whitman's dramatic break from closed form.

In her commencement address to Smith College graduates in 1979, Rich warns that:

... even Women's Studies can amount simply to compensatory history; too often they fail to challenge the intellectual and political structures that must be challenged if women as a group are ever to come into collective, nonexclusionary freedom. The belief that established science and scholarship—which have so relentlessly excluded women from their making—are "objective" and "value-free" and that
feminist studies are "unscholarly," "biased," and "ideological" dies hard. Yet the fact is that all science, and all scholarship, and all art are ideological; there is no neutrality in culture. And the ideology of the education you have just spent four years acquiring in a women's college has been largely, if not entirely, the ideology of white male supremacy, a construct of male subjectivity. (Blood, Bread, and Poetry 2-3)

Rich's revelation reminds us that there is still much work left to do to untangle ourselves from patriarchal thought and to establish a bona fide study of women's history. It awakens us to the truth that the patriarchy is always at work on our thoughts and behaviors and to break from its power requires a conscientious and energetic commitment from everyone, especially from women.

Rich's interest in form as representing the patriarchy, then, includes more than poetic forms: it is the building we work in, the structure of the meetings we attend, and the way we go about living our personal lives. It breathes in every corner of our existence, Rich reminds us. I believe that is why Rich is so difficult to read: the truth of her revelations makes us aware of our great task ahead of us to change our lives, to resist patriarchal thinking, which most of us find too difficult to accept. She always stands as a pillar of conviction that we must and can change, and we respect
her highly for that. So that our journey will be less
difficult, then, she takes on the role of the "moral
individual" (Bellah, et al., 46-47), who will forge ahead
of us, clearing the path, making our journey less painful
than hers. In that same address to Smith College women,
Rich challenges those women of privilege, but also
awakens all of us when she says:

Learn how some women of privilege have
compromised the greater liberation of women, how
others have risked their privileges to further
it; learn how brilliant and successful women have
failed to create a more just and caring society,
precisely because they have tried to do so on
terms that the powerful men around them would
accept and tolerate. Learn to be worthy of the
women of every class, culture, and historical age
who did otherwise, who spoke boldly when women
were jeered and physically harassed for speaking
in public. ... To become a token woman--
whether you win the Nobel prize or merely get
tenure at the cost of denying your sisters--is to
become something less than a man indeed, since
men are loyal at least to their own world view,
their laws of brotherhood and male self-interest.
(Blood, Bread, and Poetry 9)

Rich's desire is for a "just and caring society," and it
is clear above that she sees women's mission separate
from men's because women have a sisterhood to establish
and pay homage to. Many find that separatist view
difficult to accept. By making herself an example for
other women, however, by freeing herself first from
patriarchal forms around her, she believes she liberates others, much as Whitman believes in *Song of Myself*.

Rich is interested mostly, however, in empowering women, and believes that "natural states of being, like heterosexuality, like motherhood, have been enforced and institutionalized to deprive [women] of [their] power" (*Blood, Bread, and Poetry* 3). "Women," Rich believes, "have lived and continue to live in ignorance of our collective context, vulnerable to the projections of men's fantasies about us as they appear in art, in literature, in the sciences, in the media, in the so-called humanistic studies" (*Blood, Bread, and Poetry* 2).

Like many who contribute toward reforming the society they live in, Rich sensed early that she must examine her own life to see how she fit into the society that tried to shape her. And Rich's desire to understand her own psyche and to claim her place in the world is evident in her earliest work, but it is frustrated by her choice to write within the strictures of closed form. In her first collection, *A Change of World*, Rich wants very much to be accepted as a serious poet, so chooses (or unconsciously accepts) to follow in the rhythms of the patriarchy. Ironically, the title of the collection foresees the cultural changes Rich will experience throughout her career as well as the ones she will help to bring about.
In retrospect, the theme of limits and boundaries placed on the individual, persistent throughout these early poems, is not surprising. Rich seems to be riding on an instinct in these poems that reveals a distance and suspicion between men and women, thus a feeling of boundaries. Additionally, her true self, the "I" in these early poems, remains muffled behind the walls of her strict structure; however, it is clearly present, desiring liberation.

In "Storm Warnings" (SP 3), for example, (four seven-line stanzas, which mostly follow a pentameter line in the first six lines, then repeat a shorter, seventh line in all the stanzas), the "I" remains oblique, mentioned only once in each of the first and last stanzas: "I leave the book upon a pillowed chair" and "I draw the curtains as the sky goes black" (SP 3). The storm brewing outside the narrator's house, despite her effort to close it out, affects the well-being of the individual. Nothing can shut out the "insistent whine/Of weather through the unsealed aperture" (SP 3). The poem can be read as symbolizing an individual's psyche, disturbed by unsettling thoughts. In his foreword to this collection, Auden interprets the poem as symbolizing "historical apprehension." If positioned in the context of Rich's other work, that "historical apprehension" most
likely concerns the female sensing the tension and danger of her awakening consciousness in a patriarchal world.

The narrator in "Storm Warnings" does stop reading and is affected by "the air" that "Moves inward toward a silent core of waiting" (SP 3). The storm, then, is internal, too, a reflection of the narrator's psychological state. This underlying idea that there exists an anxiety in the outer and inner world is again impressed by the lines "Weather abroad/And weather in the heart alike come on/Regardless of prediction" (SP 3). However, the poem, in its desire to be a poem, doesn't explore the individual fully; thus, her story remains hidden behind a poetically charged scene.

In "Boundary" (SP 5), however, it's clearer that Rich sees the conflict in and division of the world as gender-related: "What has happened here will do/To bite the living world in two,/Half for me and half for you" (SP 3). The word "bite" has painful and vicious connotations. As Suzanne Juhasz recognizes, "Although the poet considers her subject from on high, at all times distant, distinct, objective, that subject is, nevertheless, relationship: specifically, the intimate relationship between woman and man, Rich's abiding concern throughout her career" (188). Rich recognizes in her poem that the division between woman and man, caused
by a patriarchal society, denies women power and authority: "There's enormity in a hair/Enough to lead men not to share/Narrow confines of a sphere."

The most obvious example of divisions between men and women in this collection is the much-anthologized "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers" (SP 4). It's not surprising that the poem is frequently anthologized. It's easy to teach. It follows a distinct rhyme and rhythm scheme and provides the teacher of poetry with a good example of symbolism. In a desire to be a poem, however, it is perhaps too obvious. The lines, "The massive weight of Uncle's wedding band/Sits heavily upon Aunt Jennifer's hand" (SP 4), exemplify Rich's intentional desire to press the point that marriage equals restrictions for and ownership of the female. And the rhyme scheme of "band" and "hand" sounds like lead weights at the end of the line. Overall, the subject matter seems more interesting than how Rich goes about telling the story.

The woman, traditionally thought of as the patient, suffering partner in marriage by male poets from Homer on, is depicted differently in Rich's poem. Aunt Jennifer is someone aware of her oppressed position who empowers herself through her art, an art traditionally belonging to women: needlework. Rich humorously (and sometimes many consider her work too serious) depicts how
many women, repressed by "ordeal she [is] mastered by," silently seek ways to express their anger, frustration and power. The tigers that Aunt Jennifer creates represent a secret revenge and escape for her because they "go on prancing, proud and unafraid" long after Aunt Jennifer's death, a symbol for astute observers to follow. They also represent her trapped energy, not fully tapped because of her repressive lifestyle. And, outside of Emily Dickinson ("My life had stood a loaded gun"), that point of view is rarely found in American poetry before Rich. Rich suggests, then, that all women have that same instinct expressed in "Storm Warnings": that we must find a way to survive in a patriarchal world that we sense is dangerous and oppressive.

Finally, "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers" reclaims and honors a woman's life that may have been forgotten if not for Rich's poem, the beginning of many poems which reclaim women's history and correct the vision of all history that focuses on male experience. Rich cleverly suggests in her poem that art is a place where women can safely vent their anger and frustration. Rich's act of creating a poem parallels Aunt Jennifer's act of creating needlework. Each is entrapped by the forms they live by and each is seeking a way out of those boundaries.
Speaking as an esteemed member of the patriarchy, W. H. Auden praised Rich in the foreword to *A Change of World*, which won the Yale Younger Poets Prize, mostly for her "capacity for detachment from the self" and for shaping her poems after male poets--namely, Frost and Yeats. In addition, throughout the poems in this collection, Rich frequently mentions male thinkers and artists such as Bach, Mahler and Plato, revealing her good, patriarchal education. As Juhasz rightly suggests:

If and when a woman chooses to be poet, the double bind exists within the writing itself. Her models have all been men; her criteria and standards of excellence have been created by men describing the work of men. Because the masculine has always been the norm in our society, familiarity with the nature of masculine expression and its formalization in art is long-standing and to a great extent determines our very definitions and evaluations of art. (3)

Although Alicia Ostriker identifies Rich as a "cautious good poet in the sense of being a good girl" (105) in her first two books, Rich's second collection, *The Diamond Cutters*, reveals a growing awakening of the feminine consciousness and the continued suspicion that women's lives are limited by their association with men and patriarchal thinking. It also underscores Rich's deep interest in the power of patience, a continued theme in all of her work. The title of this collection, in
fact, suggests the prime symbol of the earth's reward after years of persistent pressure and patience: precious diamonds. And those who cut diamonds must perfect a craft (like poetry) that with one stroke has the power to destroy or liberate that precious stone. Precision in vision and patience, then, are lessons that Rich seems to be learning from the earth in this collection. That vision includes ridding oneself of a fixed and false perception of the universe, learned from an education dominated by "white male supremacy" (*Blood, Bread, and Poetry* 3).

In "Ideal Landscape" (*SP 15*), for example, there is a growing awareness of the self and what lies beneath the surface. As in "Storm Warnings" in her first collection, the self in "Ideal Landscape" seems trapped and unable to express itself fully, as revealed in a scene of repetitious living: "The mornings happened similar and stark/In rooms of selfhood where we woke and lay/Watching today unfold like yesterday" (*SP 15*). In addition, the couplet at the end of each six-line stanza forces a kind of completion. The end-stop, emphasized by the required rhyme, makes it easy for the poet to avoid further exploration into the self. For example, in stanza two, the image projected in the first line of the couplet opens up many opportunities for further exploration:
"The human rose to haunt us everywhere" (SP 15).
However, because Rich must satisfy the rounding out of
the couplet with a rhyme, she squelches those interesting
psychological opportunities that are raised with the
ghostly imagery: "Raw, flawed, and asking more than we
could bear" (SP 15). The double rhyme "raw, flawed,"
too, intrudes on those more interesting thoughts that
occurred in the previous line.

Rich admits in "Ideal Landscape," however, the fault
of seeking "perfection" and senses an "Opening into great
and sunny squares," obvious signs of an opening of the
psyche and the shattering of idealistic thinking. It is
evident, then, that a new perspective on how we observe
our landscape and how we live is a precursor to breaking
from whatever forms bind us in an unsatisfactory and
conditioned life. The poetic closure of the poem,
however, bows to the demands of the couplet and reduces
itself to ornamental writing and limited thinking:
"Never those fountains tossed in that same light,/Those
gilded trees, those statues green and white." The
beautiful language is seductive; however, the ending
seems nothing more than pretty, nonfunctional poetry,
much like the statues mentioned in the scene. Thus, the
desire in the poem is to rid oneself of the ideal, but
the strict form the poem is written in locks the poet
into the bad habit of forced language which encourages self-denial, a common property of closed form.

Rich's regret in *The Diamond Cutters* seems to be that one must give up the beautiful for the unpleasant task of examining the self, which can result in a terrorizing journey into the unknown. In "Lucifer in the Train" (*SP 18*), for example, Rich admits that the "landscape altered" (*SP 18*) with the reality of sin in the world or when Lucifer rode "the black express from heaven to hell" (*SP 18*). And with dreary resignation, Rich admits, "Lucifer, we are yours who stiff and mute/Ride out of worlds we shall not see again,/And watch from windows of a smoking train/The ashen prairies of the absolute" (*SP 18*). Oddly, Rich connects giving up the beautiful with a hell-like existence, much like Robert Lowell does at the beginning of *Life Studies*, his seminal work, in "Beyond the Alps" (3-4), where he leaves also on a train the "City of God" and where "Life change[s] to landscape" (3). Lowell's collection also leads him out of strict form and into the exploratory open form, the same journey Rich's work is taking, though her break from strict form becomes more apparent in her third collection, *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law*. As Rich moves out of the realm of strict form-making, in *The Diamond Cutters*, she laments the loss of the ideal. In fact, in several poems she
tries to revive the "dream again" as if unable to give up the idea of "beautiful" poetry in the tradition of the patriarchy as in "Villa Adriana" (SP 20-21):

We come like dreamers searching for an answer, Passionately in need to reconstruct The columned roofs under the blazing sky, The courts so open, so forever locked.

(SP 21)

The willingness and desire to ferret out history, painfully truthful history if necessary, though, are also at work in this poem: "Dying in discontent, he must have known/How, once mere consciousness had turned its back/The frescoes of his appetite would crumble" (SP 20-21). The crumbling of the ideal, Rich seems to be saying, and the breaking down of false constructs, are necessary to get at the truth of history.

"Living in Sin" (SP 18-19) is one of Rich's first poems that tries to rid itself of pretty poetic moments in search of an honest evaluation of an experience. The poem, written in blank verse with variations, relieves itself of a strict rhyme scheme, which allows the poet to consider and focus on the power of the line more fully, an important lesson for a poet preparing to break into open form. "Living in Sin" moves from the general to the particular and centers on the subject of relationships.
Though the lovers in the poem live an ordinary life together, they try to create a false sense of perfection between themselves if only momentarily, suggested in "last night's cheese and three sepulchral bottles" (SP 19). The wine may be needed to deaden the reality of their day to day living. Daylight, however, exposes to those who have awaken to the reality of life the grime on windows, the dust on the table-top, or "a pair of beetle-eyes" (SP 19) crawling across dirty dishes in the kitchen. Important in this poem is that it is seen predominantly through the female’s perspective. It also attempts to address the propaganda that is frequently fed into women’s heads about how perfect their lives could be once they find a man: "She had thought the studio would keep itself;/no dust upon the furniture of love" (SP 18). Since these are the opening lines of the poem, their attack on the very foundation of that propaganda is more profound. This, in turn, allows the reader to view the couple through the lie that the woman has accepted as a way of life as the story unfolds.

Though the couple is not married and "living in sin," a shocking lifestyle for the time, they still divide work in a traditional way: he goes out for cigarettes while she makes the bed, dusts, and prepares coffee. Rich repeats in this poem the symbol of the woman waking up to
suggest her consciousness awakening as well as the awakening to the reality of the dread and pain associated with an everyday life: "she woke sometimes to feel the daylight coming/like a relentless milkman up the stairs" (SP 19). The word "relentless" creates a depressive, monotonous feeling, and the sound of those footsteps on the stairs adds to the heaviness of the atmosphere. In contrast to the clangy, rhymy "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers," Rich seems to be learning in this poem that imagery and rhythm can create many things like repetition. While the poem relies heavily on iambic lines, the absence of a hard rhyme scheme creates a poem more conversational in tone. Rich plays with line length in the poem as well. One of the most interesting is the longer line, "and let the coffee-pot boil over on the stove" (SP 19). The extended line, then, reflects the action created within the line: boiling over.

Whether the woman in "Living in Sin" will break out of her traditional cycle of life and myth is never answered. The poem, however, sets down a growing concern throughout Rich's career: her determination to observe a woman's day to day existence, which denies her individuality and wastes her talents. The purpose behind such an observation is to awaken all of us to this decay of the soul and to prevent the continuation of an unlived
life. The poem also exemplifies Rich's desire to find a form which will release her from ornamental, artificial writing.

In "Autumn Equinox" (SP 22-26), Rich more distinctly exemplifies a woman's life that remains un-lived because she is living the traditional myth of a woman. The beautiful blank verse poem frequently uses an extra syllable in a line, which creates a falling rhythm, reflecting the downward season of autumn and emphasizing the depressive tone of the poem. Thus, Rich is experimenting not only with the power of lines in this collection, but also with finer points like the power in varying syllables. The equinox, like the woman's "after fifty" life, is an intersection of time when day and night are of equal length, but when night begins to take over the day. The woman, whose life is more than half over, has led a passive existence, but has filled the proper, prescribed role of a woman: "I never was a scholar, but I had/A woman's love for men of intellect,/A woman's need for love of any kind" (SP 23). In this poem, Rich faults the narrow world of marriage for repressing the woman's life; and by using the woman as narrator, she allows her history to unfold more intimately. The choice of narrator, then, must have
revealed to Rich, the writer, the power of a woman telling her own story.

Although the narrator of this poem suggests that her physician-father is liberated and would willingly train his daughter for a nontraditional role as a doctor, her description of that rare opportunity actually reveals a father's control over his daughter's life and his desire to transform her into a son:

Father would have me clever, sometimes said
He'd let me train for medicine, like a son,
To come into his practice.

(SP 23)

Rich warns of the "false power which masculine society offers to a few women, on condition that they use it to maintain things as they are, and that they essentially 'think like men'" (Blood, Bread, and Poetry 5). The opportunity in the poem, then, is mere lip service, and it is not surprising that the woman chooses, as her mother did, the "correct" and "pinched" life of marriage: "Wearing the lace [her] mother wore before [her]" (SP 24). The power of tradition, too, is impressed by "aunts" who "[nod] like the Fates" (SP 24) in full agreement and encouragement of this chosen path. The woman slips into a silent existence as her husband's partner "in a life/Annual, academic" (SP 24). However,
like the woman in "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers," she shows signs of anger and rebellion as she carries out her expected role as her husband's supporting partner:

I bit my fingers, changed the parlor curtains To ones the like of which were never seen 
Along our grave and academic street. 
I brought them home from Springfield in a bundle And hung them in defiance. 

(SE 25)

That rebellion and silent rejection of her role, however, seem as ineffectual and tragic as Alice Hindman's, a character in Winesburg, Ohio. whose years of a sexually repressed life find hideous relief when she runs naked in the rain one night after "a strange desire took possession of her" (Anderson 119).

The dialogue between the partners in this poem also reminds one of the dialogue between the husband and wife in Robert Frost's "Home Burial," suggesting Frost's continued influence on Rich's work. The problem in each poem is gender-related. Men and women cannot understand the point of view of each other, the poems suggest, and no one understands the self:

Night, and I wept aloud; half in my sleep, 
Half feeling Lyman's wonder as he leaned Above to shake me. "Are you ill, unhappy? 
Tell me what I can do."
"I'm sick, I guess--
I thought that life was different than it is."

(SP 25)

As in other poems, Rich uses sleep as a symbol of the woman's half-awareness of her "self." Though the narrator of "Autumn Equinox" never comes to full awareness of the self, the reader can easily blame her repression on patriarchal definitions of roles that deny individuality. The end result of objectively viewing the well-ordered life in Rich's poem is a changed attitude. The way of life that we may have taken for granted loses much of its appeal after we see how it represses the talents of another human being. Rich's intention for telling this woman's story is twofold: to create empathy for a woman who has accepted this way of life and to confront us if we have made that same mistake. The confrontation may, in turn, force us to change our lives. Rich pries open our eyes and expects us to see, maybe for the first time, and change.

In "The Perennial Answer" (SP 34-39), Rich delves more deeply into the issues of men dominating women's lives, and the desire to control one's life, despite the difficulties this may create: "Better to know the ways you are accursed, /And stand up fierce and glad to hear the worst" (SP 34). Phrases throughout this collection
also foresee Rich's growing need to break from strict form: "our gates are falling down" ("Letter from the Land of Sinners," SP 34) and "Escape from frozen discipline" ("The Perennial Answer," SP 36). Also more explicit in this second collection is a determination to explore one's own path: "at last I was alone/In an existence finally my own," Rich writes in "Perennial Answer" (SP 38), after the death of a woman's husband, symbolizing the painful release from male authority. The awkwardness in the lines above, however, indicate that Rich's evolving subject matter of liberation is misplaced in strict forms.

Release from the controlling world of the patriarchy is always a painful act for Rich. "A thinking woman sleeps with monsters" (SP 48), she says in the title poem of Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law, the collection which begins Rich's break from strict form. The poem, she explains, was "an extraordinary relief to write":

In the late fifties I was able to write, for the first time, directly about experiencing myself as a woman. . . . Yet I began to feel that my fragments and scraps had a common consciousness and a common theme, one which I would have been very unwilling to put on paper at an earlier time because I had been taught that poetry should be 'universal,' which meant, of course, non-female. Until then I had tried very much not to identify
myself as a female poet. Over two years I wrote a 10-part poem called "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law" (1958-60), in a longer, looser mode than I'd ever trusted myself with before. It was an extraordinary relief to write that poem. It strikes me now as too literary, too dependent on allusion; I hadn't found the courage yet to do without authorities, or even to use the pronoun "I"--the woman in the poem is always 'she.' (On Lies, Secrets, and Silence, 44-45)

One senses in this revelation about the self an underlying fear and conflict. Rich suggests that the female is expected to deny her gender while living in a patriarchal society. Fearing rejection from that society, she accepts her nonexistence. Her conflict arises when her desire to investigate her life as a woman becomes stronger than her ability to deny its importance.

One way Rich makes it possible to investigate her life as a woman more freely is by exposing a male's vulnerability as in her poem "The Knight" (SP 43-44):

A knight rides into the noon, and only his eye is living, a lump of bitter jelly set in a metal mask, betraying rags and tatters that cling to the flesh beneath

(SP 44)

Thus, in this poem, Rich exposes the idea that the "patriarchy exerts a destructive impact on men as well as on women" and that "Repressing large parts of their
awareness, men share women's fear of leaving the superficially safe, if ultimately empty, patriarchal roles" (Werner 61). Also, "Despite the persistent image [many have] of [Rich] as a man-hater" (Werner 61), in "The Knight" Rich pleads for the male's release from his hideous confines as well:

Who will unhorse this rider
and free him from between
the walls of iron, the emblems
crushing his chest with their weight?
Will they defeat him gently,
or leave him hurled on the green,
his rags and wounds still hidden
under the great breastplate?

(SP 44)

By symbolizing the knight in armor as the patriarchal world, Rich implies that it is archaic and masks male as well as female identity. The poem also poignantly points out that an individual's consciousness and feelings are denied in a patriarchal world, symbolized by "the great breastplate," which covers the heart with a hard surface. When Rich asks in the last stanza of this poem, "Who will unhorse this rider/and free him?" (SP 44), she may be crying out for her own release as well as for the males oppressed by the weight of archaic thinking. The message is clear that the patriarchy must come down off its "high horse" so all can be liberated. For the poet's voice to
be freed, Rich is suggesting that strict structures also must be shattered.

In the late fifties, Sylvia Plath wrote "The Colossus," which reiterates this same female curiosity and struggle with the patriarchy: "Scaling little ladders with gluepots and pails of Lysol/I crawl like an ant in mourning/Over the weedy acres of your brow" (Collected Poems 129). By identifying with an ant, Plath reveals her vulnerability and lack of power in the presence of the patriarchy. Other American women poets, from Bradstreet and Dickinson to contemporary poets Linda Gregg and Louise Glück, have expressed a sense of fear, caution, and anger in their poems as they try to enter the great patriarchal mythological landscape of poetry. And Ostriker claims that "To enter or be entered by a myth makes plural vision possible, even necessary," (Writing Like a Woman 136). Like Rich, women writers know they can't avoid confronting the male myth if they want "to be taken seriously as a writer" (Ostriker 132). And wanting "to be taken seriously as a writer" is clearly obvious in Rich's work.

Like the black slaves following the Emancipation Proclamation, attempting to feel free while entering a hostile society, Rich comes out from behind the wall of formal structures and expresses fear, disorientation and
uncertainty in her poetry. Robert Hass aptly identifies the plethora of emotions that happen to poets as they waiver between closed and open form:

freedom from pattern offers us at first an openness, a field of identity, room to move; and it contains the threat of chaos, rudderlessness, vacuity. Safety and magic on one side [closed form], freedom and movement on the other; their reverse faces are claustrophobia and obsession or agoraphobia and vertigo. (116-117).

Much of this uncertainty and confusion appears in Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law, Necessities of Life, and Leaflets as Rich slowly extracts herself from patriarchal thinking and forms while experimenting with new forms and unleashing thoughts and feelings she's repressed in the past. In Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law, for example, Rich admits, "My predecessors blind me" ("Merely to Know," SP 53), or in "A Marriage in the 'Sixties" she recognizes that "particularity dissolves/in all that hints of chaos" (SP 60).

Rich's vulnerability, but determination to expose herself to change in her life and in her poetry, is most dramatic in "The Roofwalker" (Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law, SP 63-64). As she views the "half-finished houses" (SP 63) in the opening of the poem, the image of the buildings' wooden skeletons suggests structure and an interest in form. But those forms are "half-finished":
therefore, they have infinite possibilities for change. Her uncertainty and fear as a maker of poetry is revealed in her identification with the makers of the buildings: "I feel like them up there: exposed, larger than life, and due to break my neck" (SP 63). This time, though, she wants to map out her own life:

Was it worth while to lay-- with infinite exertion-- a roof I can't live under? --All those blueprints, closings of gaps, measurings, calculations? A life I didn't choose chose me: even my tools are the wrong ones for what I have to do. I'm naked, ignorant

(SP 63)

In the last lines of the poem, a surprising turn occurs. As Rich identifies herself as a maker, she transforms herself into a man:

I'm naked, ignorant a naked man fleeing across the roofs who could with a shade of difference be sitting in the lamplight against the cream wallpaper reading--not with indifference-- about a naked man fleeing across the roofs.

(SP 63-64)
The "naked man fleeing/across the roofs" is both a liberating and conflicted image. Nakedness suggests freedom as well as vulnerability. The vulnerability is further suggested by the word "fleeing." It appears someone is chasing the man. Fear, then, is infused in the process of creation, a very real response for a woman creator in the patriarchal community of poets. By transforming herself into a man, Rich, as a maker, responds to the traditional role of maker as man. In "On Female Identity," Judith Kegan Gardiner explains why women writers face conflicts in a creative role:

The problems of female identity presented in women's poetry and prose are rarely difficulties in knowing one's gender: more frequently, they are difficulties in learning how to respond to social rules for what being female means in our culture. (189)

In later poems, as Rich explores her role as creator, she considers the state of androgyne, which "implies a range of nonpolarized perceptual and behavioral options" (Martin in An American Triptych 231). However, in her continuing evolution of the self, Rich has since rejected "the use of the word androgyne because she feels it is grounded in opposition and does not adequately express the fluidity and variety of experience; she argues that the word lesbian more accurately describes a woman who
commands her own energy" (Martin in An American Triptych 231).

Finally, "The Roofwalker" resists strict measure and seems to follow the natural speech patterns of the poet. Line breaks become more suggestive, too, as she experiments with the possibilities within line structure. For example, the line, "chose me: even" (SP 63), uses a four-beat measure with the colon dividing the four syllables exactly in two. The word "even," intentionally or not, is a pun on what Rich is now rejecting: strict measure.

In the title poem of Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law (SP 47-51), Rich tries not only to consciously break from the patriarchal formality she has used in the past ("Time is male," SP 50), but also tries to break from the kind of woman who has bought into the roles that the patriarchy has prescribed for her:

You, once a belle in Shreveport,
with henna-colored hair, skin like a peachbud,
still have your dresses copied from that time

... 

Nervy, glowing, your daughter
wipes the teaspoons, grows another way.

(SP 47)
The woman's role as a daughter-in-law requires a certain behavior from her: to be dutiful to some man and to his mother. As the woman hears an inner voice that says, "Save yourself" (SP 48), she awakens to the awful reality for a woman of intellect: "A thinking woman sleeps with monsters" (SP 48). The poem explores the painful isolation the new woman feels, and the new form that Rich now writes in suggests more convincingly her disorientation and her exploration into the uncharted self. Snapshots, however, suggest a static compilation of a life. Photographic squares of images always leave gaps in understanding the continuity of that person's history. And the gaps are what Rich seems to be charging toward in her following collections: she wants the story of women's lives to find clarity and to fill the void in the history that she grew up on, but which denied her an identity. She sees herself outside of society for the purpose of breathing life into the women who have been forgotten.

It's not easy giving up old habits, and Claire Keyes recognizes that in "Snapshots of a Daughter-In-Law" Rich is still "located on the side of a masculine tradition in literature" because "Behind the daughter-in-law in Rich's volume there is a mother-in-law called to task" and "woman-hating is part of a cultural pattern which treats
as either a joke or a virago" (36-37). Rich's inability to break completely from masculine thought in this volume also suggests the power the patriarchy has over a woman's thought process as she tries to write. Rich says in "In the Woods" (Necessities of Life, SP 70-73): "Writing these words in the woods, /I feel like a traitor to my friends, /even to my enemies" (SP 71). Because she fears speaking the truth that she is awakening to, she must write in a secluded place like the woods. Rich also suggests in this poem that as we break rules that try to suppress us, we suffer guilt feelings because we are going against the authorities. And because her "friends" mostly follow the authorities ("enemies"), her loneliness is intensified because she has taken a stance to move outside the authorities' thinking. Thus, guilt might be construed as a good thing and something to reckon with if women expect to continue to expose their authentic selves.

Necessities of Life and Leaflets received cool reviews, and they may be less satisfying collections poetically for the very reason that during Rich's transformation from working in strict to working in open form, she underwent feelings of vulnerability, anger and uncertainty. Her poetry during this time halts, stutters and frustrates. As a rebel against the authority of
form, she also felt tremendous loneliness. It therefore is not surprising that Rich identified with someone like Emily Dickinson, who chose to live outside of society's expectations of her and who gained her greatest satisfaction from creating poetry. In "I Am in Danger--Sir--" (Necessities of Life, SP 84-85), a poem about Dickinson's life, Rich emphasizes the fear and uncertainty of women who live on the edge. In the lines "Till the air buzzing with spoiled language/sang in your ears/of Perjury" (SP 85), Rich suggests that women need, besides a new form to write in, a new language that identifies their female experiences more precisely, a theme that develops more fully in some of Rich's later work, especially The Dream of a Common Language.

In addition to exploring Dickinson's lesson that a woman finds freedom in a life lived alone, Rich discovers in Necessities of Life that freedom is always available in nature as well. Thus, the theme of her extraction from society to places alone in nature appears frequently in this period of her poetry, as in "The Parting: I" (SP 80-81):

You can feel so free, so free,
standing on the headland

where the wild rose never stands still,
the petals blown off
before they fall
and the chicory nodding

This open, natural imagery breaks from her early imagery that emphasized boundaries and lines. In form, the free line opening up accommodates well this new breaking open of feeling.

Rich is learning in *Necessities of Life* and *Leaflets* the power of form breaking, the freedom always available in nature, and the need to find a feminist lanaguage. During her beginning phase as a separatist, indicated in these two volumes, Rich contemplates herself in the male world and imagines how she might reenter it. In "After Dark" (*Necessities of Life, SP 82-84*), narrated to her father, a symbol of male nurturing through control, she realizes that "Blood is a sacred poison" (*SP 83*). The oxymoron "sacred poison" indicates again the conflict felt by the female who is connected to the male world, this time also biologically, and who is seeking her female identity. Parts of that male world are valued, however, despite their caustic effect on the female psyche. When she says, "We only want to stifle/what's stifling us already" (*SP 83*), though, she admits the need to annihilate that dominating male influence in her life despite the valued portions: "old man whose death I
wanted" (SP 82). As many critics are now realizing, much of women's poetry about fathers are representative poems about the patriarchy like Plath's "Daddy."

As Rich views the destructive forces of the male world on her, extracts herself from that world, and gains more sense of who she is as a woman, she says, "I grow protective toward the world" (SP 83). This transformation in Rich's thinking represents well Bellah's understanding of the "American moral imagination," where "One accepts the necessity of remaining alone in order to serve the values of the group" (46-47). And no other American woman poet has made it more her goal to dedicate herself to encouraging and directing woman's lives than Rich. The cost, however, according to Bellah, is loneliness, "always just a step away from despair" (46-47). In "Autumn Sequence" (Necessities of Life, SP 85-88), for example, Rich recognizes the cost of her voyage of dedication to women's lives: "There must be a place, there has come a time--/where so many nerves are fusing--/for a purely moral loneliness" (SP 87). In "Moth Hour" (Necessities of Life, SP 90-91), that loneliness is hard felt as Rich retreats further and further from others: "I am gliding backward away from those who knew me,/as the moon grows
thinner and finally shuts its lantern./I can be replaced
a thousand times, a box containing death" (*SP* 91).

In *Leaflets*, Rich further distances herself from the
patriarchal world that is having less and less power over
her visionary plans. The detachment momentarily leaves
her lost and without bearings. In "Orion" (*SP* 95-96),
for example, she is "a dead child born in the dark" (*SP*
95).

*Leaflets*, written during America's involvement in the
Vietnam war, emphasizes the themes of war as a male
occupation as well as of the violence that exists between
men and women. In "Jerusalem" (*SP* 101-102), she dreams
her son is "riding/on an old grey mare/to a half-dead
war" (*SP* 101), an image that suggests war is archaic, but
continues; and in "Charleston in the Eighteen-Sixties"
(*SP* 102-103), she retrieves a woman's diary entries to
reveal that subtle violence between the sexes has existed
throughout history:

He seized me by the waist and kissed my throat...
Your eyes, dear, are they grey or blue,
eyes of an angel?
The carts have passed already with their heaped
night-soil, we breathe again . . .
Is this what war is?

(*SP* 102)
Though passionate, the use of the word "seized" suggests a violent movement, which matches the ambiguous line, "Is this what war is?" And the question of the eye color reveals the lover's lack of sensitivity for the woman's individuality and ironically reflects the uniform color of Civil War soldiers. In "In the Evening" (SP 97), a modern couple experiences a cold war between them: "Your hand/grips mine like a railing on an icy night" (SP 97). In either case, Rich emphasizes her continuing theme of the distance between the sexes and much of the imagery in this volume is cold, dark and rainy.

The theme of language becomes a preoccupation in Leaflets as well, and Rich proclaims that she "want[s] to choose words that even you/would have to be changed by" ("Implosions," SP 110). We can surely guess that the "you" here is male; thus, she continues her effort to have a dialogue with men. Her intention is to find a new language; and, like Williams, she begins to concentrate on the power of individual words, exemplified by the opening up of the poetic line. White space becomes more pronounced, as in "Nightbreak" (SP 113-114), where words look scattered and isolated on the page:

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I don't
collect what I can't use I need
what can be broken.
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(SP 113)
Punctuation is sometimes dropped; spacing gains new power. This poem, too, reflects the imagery of news casts during the Vietnam conflict: "a village/blown open by planes" (SF 114). Therefore, an appropriate, shattered form reflects more powerfully and convincingly contemporary life, a theme that Williams focused on in Book V of Paterson, where he found contemporary art a visual model for open form in poetry.

As Rich tries to break from patriarchal thinking and structures, one interesting thing remains constant through her work: the desire for or inability to break from writing a long poem or epic, which is a masculine tradition. In "Ghazals: Homage to Ghalib" (Leaflets, SF 120-128), for example, she uses a strict, classic form, which originates "in eastern literature, especially Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Urdu and Pashto . . . whose theme was generally love and wine" (Preminger 323). "Rich's interest in the form originated in the late 1960s, when Aijaz Ahmad solicited poetic versions of his literal translations of Ghalib's ghazals from prominent American poets, including Rich, W. S. Merwin, William Stafford, and Mark Strand" (Werner 136). The form, consisting of couplets, is also connected with mystical thinking, a new turn for Rich, which allows her to
experiment with associative imagery. The couplet, or an unrhymed, two-line stanza, still appears frequently in Rich's later poetry, perhaps a residue of having worked with the ghazal form. But the two-line stanza, which Werner claims "emphasize[s] the silences underlying discourse, the gap between expression and experience" (139), does not finally remain as a dominant choice of stanza-making for Rich as Williams' triadic stanza did for him.

Although *A Will to Change* will not be discussed at great length in this study, it is important to note that it is less static and cautious than *Necessities of Life* and *Leaflets* and opens to a more personal voice. The problem in *The Will To Change* may be buried in the volume's title: anyone willing her change might be forcing something that is not yet ready to bloom. In "November, 1968" (*SP* 145), for example, she suggests that something has broken open, but it is not named: "Stripped/you're beginning to float free" (*SP* 145). However, the narrator in the poem doesn't feel a release, but is watching something else freeing itself; therefore, the sensation of freedom isn't fully felt: "I watch you/starting to give yourself away/to the wind" (*SP* 145). That seems to be the problem with the entire collection. The poet never lets herself enter into the world. She
seems too bent on getting free, but never lets go, and
determination alone does not finally liberate a person.

One reason why Rich may feel hemmed in is because she
discovers that she is trying to use "the oppressor's
language" ("Our Whole Life," SP 166) to free herself. In
"I dream I'm the Death of Orpheus" (SP 151-152), she
says, "I am a woman in the prime of life, with certain
powers/and those powers severely limited/by authorities
whose faces I rarely see" (SP 151-152). That she feels
"severely limited/by authorities" (SP 151-152) indicates
her awareness of the patriarchy's power over her actions,
and her inability to completely shake free from that
power. She implies that more work is needed to find a
kind of liberation that includes peace of mind.

"Shooting Script" (SP 173-182), consisting mostly of
one and two-line stanzas, residues of the ghazal form, is
another long poem attempt that has little poetic
enjoyment. For example, single lines like "A monologue
that waits for one listener./An ear filled with one sound
only./A shell penetrated by meaning" (SP 173) are vague
and lead nowhere. The broken form perhaps leaves her
meandering for meaning. The reader never gains any fresh
insight into something nor feels rewarded for having
traveled through the poem. However, some lines within
the long poem "Shooting Script" indicate Rich's belief
that her language and form are changing, a change which will move her poetry into the direction she is hoping for: "A cycle whose rhythm begins to change the meanings of words" (SP 173) or "You call this a poetry of false problems, the shotgun wedding of the mind, the subversion of choice by language" (SP 178).

It is not until Diving into the Wreck (1976), I believe, that Rich accomplishes her greatest single poetic achievement, both as a volume of poetry and in the single, title poem. The volume, which is consistently praised by feminist critics, won the National Book Award in 1974. Nancy Milford praises "Diving into the Wreck" because Rich "enters more deeply than ever before into female fantasy; and these are primal waters, life-giving and secretive in the special sense of not being wholly revealed" (201). Wendy Martin believes that "Adrienne Rich's effort to achieve a new understanding of her personal and political needs is perhaps best expressed in Diving into the Wreck (An American Triptych 188).

In Diving into the Wreck, Rich confronts the patriarchy with a clearer eye and is not afraid to vent her anger. Three poems that stand out in Diving into the Wreck are "Trying to Talk with a Man" (SP 185-186), "The Phenomenology of Anger" (SP 198-202), and "Diving into the Wreck" (SP 196-198) because they represent well
Rich's last efforts to confront the patriarchy and to question why she feels so alienated as a conscious woman. "Trying to Talk with a Man" repeats her ongoing suspicions of the wall that exists between men and women: "Sometimes I feel an underground river/forcing its way between deformed cliffs" (SP 185). And when she utters, "Out here I feel more helpless/with you than without you" (SP 185), we are reminded of Dickinson's lines, "I cannot live with you" (CP 317). Like Dickinson, then, Rich seems to be saying that men and women can't yet exist equally together. And the real split between the sexes in Rich's eyes comes full force in her lines, "The only real love I have ever felt/was for children and other women" ("The Phenomenology of Anger," SF 202). In this poem, Rich uncaps submerged rage:

I hate you,
I hate the mask you wear, your eyes assuming a depth
they do not possess, drawing me into the grotto of your skull
the landscape of bone
I hate your words
they make me think of fake revolutionary bills
crisp imitation parchment
they sell at battlefields,

(SP 201)

Now Rich defiantly opposes the patriarchy by breaking free of strict form and by pointedly renouncing it:
shallowness revealed in words like "mask," "fake," and "imitation." Here, Rich "decides to fight back, breaking the taboo that bound Bradstreet and Dickinson; the taboo that requires women to submerge their fury" (Martin in An American Triptych 193). Rich attacks the insensitivity of the patriarchy that is responsible for gunning "down the babies at My Lai/vanishing in the face of confrontation" (SP 200). As she tries to shake this patriarchal thinking from her head, she asks, "Madness. Suicide. Murder./Is there no way out but these?" (SP 200). "Denied anger, hatred, and despair become madness, murderous rage, or suicidal self-hatred" (Martin in An American Triptych 192).

Rich's way out of the despair and anger reveals itself in "Diving into the Wreck" (SP 196-198). The long descent into the ocean represents a long descent into history and one's own unconscious for the purpose of "rebirth" (Cooper 18):

The wreck is a layered image: it is the life of one woman, the source of success and failures; it is the history of all women submerged in a patriarchal culture; it is that source of myths about male and female sexuality which shape our lives and roles today. (Cooper 19).
Rich reminds us that we can all take this journey because "The ladder is always there" (SP 196), but few want to take this dangerous journey into the self: "We know what it is for, we who have used it" (SP 196). In this poem, too, the "merman" (SP 198) is like "The Knight" (SP 43-44) in her earlier poem, clad in repressive armor. The "mermaid," however has "dark hair" which "streams black" (SP 198), suggesting more freedom in her movement. Rich may be suggesting that the male side of ourselves represses while the female side liberates. The two sexes are separate, divided by a colon on one line, but they appear to be mirror images of one another: "I am she: I am he." Rich discovers the unblemished root of the sexes, suggesting that men and women were created equally, but that only society and the patriarchy have distorted that equality:

The mermaid and the merman must both adjust to the environment as a common denominator. Here the tensions of subject and object, mind and matter, male and female are dissolved; the poet discovers "where the spirit began" in the Judeo-Christian heritage of a divided world where light is separated from darkness, earth from water, the creatures of the air, land, and sea from one another. . . . At the primordial center, there are no divisions between subconscious and conscious, subject and object sacred and profane, inside and outside, good and evil, or feminine and masculine.

. . . Blake and Whitman also wanted to create a unifying vision that would heal the social and emotional fractures, and like Rich,
they realized that cultural polarities are intensified by artificial social distinctions between women and men. (Martin in An American Triptych 190).

For those who don't have the will to take the journey down the ladder, Rich is always there, retrieving lives of women for the purpose of celebrating those lives and building a feminist tradition in American poetry. In her volumes following Diving into the Wreck, like The Dream of a Common Language; A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far; Your Native Land, Your Life; and Time's Power, Rich seems to be saying that there is not enough time to waste on confrontations and abandons that kind of poetry. Instead, these later volumes are a refining of her feminist vision in poetry, where she rides on her own power and creates a landscape populated with women from many walks of life, where she still chooses not to be the center, but the creator of this landscape.

As Rich moves further away from strict form, frequently her poetic tonality turns flat. She favors an honest, straight forward line over one that simply turns a pretty phrase, such as in "One Life" (TP 43-44): "But even this is a life, I'm reading a lot of books/I never read, my daughter brought home from school/plays where you can almost hear them talking," (TP 43). Or in "A Woman Dead in Her Forties" (TDOACL 53-58), she says, "In
plain language: I never told you how I loved you/we never talked at your deathbed of your death" (*TDOACL 57*).

In addition, Rich frequently organizes her poetry in stanzas of equal length lines, but not in hard stress patterns, and she favors two-line stanzas, a leftover from the Ghazals perhaps. One other remnant of strict form that remains in her later work is blank verse or a ten-syllable line. Her choices indicate the freedom she feels to move in and out of closed and open forms, always at ease choosing her own line measure, and empowered by that freedom of choice.

Rich always reminds us that the journey to change is dangerous, as in "Phantasia for Elvira Shatayev" (*TDOACL 4-6*), the retelling of the tragedy of a women's climbing team that died together in a storm on Lenin Peak: "We know now we have always been in danger." (*TDOACL 6*). The collection as a whole, in fact, concerns many women's deaths like Marie Curie's, who died from exposure to radium: "her wounds came from the same source as her power" (*TDOACL 3*) or an ordinary and not famous woman's, who dies of breast cancer: "You are every woman I ever loved" (*TDOACL 56*). The title, *The Dream of a Common Language*, emphasizes that to find a common language is still in Rich's "dream" process; it is not a reality yet. That common language is one that will allow not only men
and women to communicate with one another without prejudice, but it can also bridge the gaps that keep women separated from one another.

The subject of lesbianism is one area that Rich knows separates women. She says, "Feminist research and theory that contribute to lesbian invisibility or marginality are actually working against the liberation and empowerment of women as a group" (Blood, Bread, and Poetry 50). In these later collections, Rich speaks more freely of lesbian relationships in an effort to free all women: "Two women sleeping/together have more than their sleep to defend." (A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far 3). Another subject that Rich has felt silenced about is her Jewish heritage, which she speaks more freely of in these later collections as well:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{split at the root} & \quad \text{white-skinned social} \\
\text{christian} & \quad \text{neither gentile nor Jew} \\
\text{through the immense silence} & \quad \text{of the Holocaust} \\
\text{I had no idea of what I had been spared} & \\
\text{still less of the women and men my kin} & \quad \text{the Jews of Vicksburg or Birmingham} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(YNL, YL) 7

Certainly, it took Rich's hard look at the patriarchy's power over her to discover she must break from that kind
of narrow thinking. She identifies as a poet that strict form-making connects her to the patriarchy. In a desire to free herself, she breaks from that kind of poetry as a statement against this repressive power. In her liberation from such forms, she finds the freedom she needs to speak of her lesbianism and her Jewish heritage. In her transformation from using closed to using open forms, she suggests that certain forms have the power to silence an individual. She assigns this transformation of the self to something much like the Puritanical "calling" into a profession:

The faithful drudging child
the child at the oak desk whose penmanship,
hard work, style will win her prizes
becomes the woman with a mission, not to win prizes
but to change the laws of history.
How she gets this mission
is not clear

(YNL, YL 23)

In another poem from Your Native Land, Your Life, she says, "Sometimes, gliding at night/in a plane over New York City/I have felt like some messenger/called to enter, called to engage/this field of light and darkness" (36).

Adrienne Rich's transformation of the self encourages others, women especially, to do the same. She reminds us that the patriarchy's hold over us is weakening and, as
in her most recent collection, *Time's Power*, that "It's midsummer/and greater rules are breaking" ("Children Playing Checkers at the Edge of the Forest" 15). Unlike Robert Lowell, who returned to closed form after his great break from it in *Life Studies*, Rich moves further and further from strict form making as she forges ahead in her career. She says in "One Kind of Terror: A Love Poem":

> Well, I am studying a different book taking notes wherever I go the movement of the wrist does not change but the pen plows deeper
> my handwriting flows into words I have not yet spoken
> I am the sole author of nothing

*(TP 53)*

When she says, "I am the sole author of nothing," she means that others are important to her work, more specifically women; they are the fuel for her art. She envisions herself as a translator of women's stories, and her poetry greatly transforms how we view the American landscape in poetry. The voices that come from her poetry teach convincing lessons on a powerful female energy that can "join across all national and cultural
boundaries to create a society free of domination, in which 'sexuality, politics, . . . work, . . . intimacy . . . [and] thinking itself will be transformed" (BBP 211).
CHAPTER IV

James Wright: A Landscape for All People

High water is not trite in southern Ohio. Nothing is trite along a river. My father died a good death. To die a good death means to live one's life. I don't say a good life.

I say a life.

James Wright
(This journey 82)

American poetry lost an important voice when James Wright died in 1980. His good friend Donald Hall said of Wright that "many friends have lamented this maker; has any American poet been subject to so many elegies?" (8). Most feel especially close to Wright because he was a compassionate man, but to be a compassionate man in a patriarchal society can be an isolating, lonely experience. This is because male roles in many societies prescribe an aggressive, dominating stance. Frequently, in his poetry, Wright reveals his vulnerability about being a gentle man, sometimes using humor or profane language defensively to hide that vulnerability.

Most critics, in fact, have focused on Wright's gentleness and tenderness, but few focus on his interest in male aggression and violence. Wright's frequently anthologized poem, "Autumn Begins in Martins Ferry, Ohio," is an example of his interest in male aggression:

140
In the Shreve High football stadium,  
I think of Polacks nursing long beers in  
Tiltonsville,  
And gray faces of Negroes in the blast furnace at  
Benwood,  
And the ruptured night watchman of Wheeling  
Steel,  
Dreaming of heroes.

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

Therefore,  
Their sons grow suicidally beautiful  
At the beginning of October,  
And gallop terribly against each other's bodies.  

(CP 113)

Robert von Hallberg is one critic who does recognize  
Wright's interest in male violence:

These workingmen are too proud to go home and  
deny love to their wives: the cycle of  
repression and violence begins there. Unable to  
satisfy themselves or their women, they concoct a  
suburban cult of masculine aggression--at least  
as spectators. ... everyone knows how  
repression leads to violence even in the best of  
us. (138)

The poem also recognizes that men inherit acts of  
aggression from the fathers in the last stanza about sons  
who "grow suicidally beautiful" and who "gallop terribly  
against each other's bodies" (CP 113). ...

The topic of inherited male aggression is an  
important element in this chapter because it represents a  
powerful theme that appears in the works of other male
poets, like Lowell's "The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket." Those poems educate us about the difficult struggle men subject themselves to when desiring to break from patriarchal roles, as I believe Wright did, and to live a balanced, compassionate life. Therefore, Wright's struggle to remain a compassionate man and to resist the power of the patriarchy is a main focus of this chapter.

Another focus of this chapter centers on Wright's desire to remain connected to his hometown of Martins Ferry, Ohio and the common citizen despite his extensive formal education and his cultured lifestyle developed in his adult life. Unlike Lowell, Boston-bred with a well-known literary name, Wright came from more simple surroundings. Curiously, they both ended up attending Kenyon College. Wright, however, paid for his college education at Kenyon on the "GI Bill." He explains that he "had never heard of Kenyon College" and that "It dawned on [him] while [he] was in the army in Japan" that he "might be able to go to college" (Smith 9). Since Kenyon was the only school that accepted him of the ones he applied to, he went there and "did not know of John Crowe Ransom or any literary tradition" (Smith 9).

Considering Wright's beginnings, it seems only natural that in his poetry he would give notice to American citizens who might otherwise go unnoticed. In
Auden's foreword to Wright's first volume of poetry, *The Green Wall*, which he selected for the Yale Younger Poets Award, he defines Wright's concerns as follows:

Aside from love poems and poems addressed to relatives, the persons who have stimulated Mr. Wright's imagination include a lunatic, a man who has failed to rescue a boy from drowning, a murderer, a lesbian, a prostitute, a police informer, and some children, one of them deaf. Common to them all is the characteristic of being social outsiders. They play no part in ruling the City nor is its history made by them, nor, even, are they romantic rebels against its injustices. (In Smith 46)

Though Auden sees Wright's citizens as not having part in the City's "history," I believe Wright felt strongly that these are the very people that create the life and history of a place. More concisely, William Matthews sees Wright's people as "the faded, the defeated, the dead. And for everyone, a vast loneliness" (103). Wright's complaint, then, is against a country that can promise so much, but deliver so little. He laments the loss of Whitman's dream "of a culture inclusive enough to nourish the growth of all its citizens" (Dougherty 91).

Few Whitman followers in the twentieth century, however, can believe that America has ever fulfilled Whitman's vision. Canadian Sacvan Bercovitch believes that Americans are in "an endless debate about national destiny, full of rage and faith, conservatives scavenging
for un-Americans, New Left historians recalling the
country to its sacred mission" (In Girgus 6). Certainly,
Wright adds momentum to the "endless debate" about
reforming our society, inspiring us because he wants
first to reform himself and then others.

As Whitman did while strolling along the streets in
his dear "Mannahatta" (LOG 507), Wright, too, absorbed
the lives of less celebrated people while growing up in
Martins Ferry. In the collective landscape of American
poetry, Wright's portraits are significant because they
include citizens on the fringe. In addition, Wright's
portraits especially complement and expand on Whitman's
portraits, forcing us to reconsider forgotten segments of
society which many prefer to ignore. This familiar
apathy woven throughout our society is evidenced in
Whitman's and Wright's work. One reason, in fact,
Whitman may vie for our attention so strongly in Song of
Myself is because he suspects that we all need to be
jolted into consciousness. In "Whoever You Are Holding
Me Now in Hand" (LOG 115-117), for example, he warns that
he will demand much from us: "The whole past theory of
your life and all conformity to the lives around you
would have to be abandon'd/Therefore release me now
before troubling yourself any further" (LOG 116). And
Wright laments in "The Minneapolis Poem" (CP 139-143)
that "The old man Walt Whitman our countryman/Is now in America our country/Dead" (CP 141).

While Adrienne Rich's purpose is to lend a voice to women who might otherwise live in silence, Wright's purpose, in the very act of creating his portraits of people, begins, for the most part, with strict observation. As he views others with a curious eye, trying to figure out who they are and how he feels about them, their lives unfold before him. In that act of observing, Wright discovers that observing is not enough and that we must also do something to assist others and to change ourselves. In all of his collections, Wright's process of viewing a particular person from many angles changes him and contributes to his evolutionary moral system. Throughout his poetic career, he develops that moral system into one that encompasses the ethics of "a grown man" (CP 208).

I believe the study of Wright's personal ethical revolution is especially important because it reveals the process of undoing patriarchal thought by a man. It is more common to study women writers who have gone through that process; therefore, Wright's struggle to assert his nurturing, feminine side teaches us that men as well are harmed by the dictates of the patriarchy and that they can change. Robert Bly, in his excellent article on
Wright, "James Wright and the Slender Woman" (AWP 29-33), calls this being in touch with "The Mysterious Hidden Woman" (29). Perhaps partially for the purpose of developing his feminine nature, Wright devotes much of his poetry to observing women's lives. Interestingly, like Williams', Wright's observations are a mixture of curiosity, sexual innuendo, and compassion.

Through these observations of women's lives and his desire to break from patriarchal thinking, Wright adds an important element to creating a balance between the male and female sensibilities in American poetry. Throughout his career he questions and is fearful of the male violence around him. He recognizes, but tries to resist, his tendency as a male toward aggression; however, sometimes he falls into the trap of tolerating male violence. This tolerance for violence reveals his own patriarchal mindset, which, in turn, informs us of the unique and difficult role men have in trying to disengage themselves from that kind of authoritarian role. His voice is important here because he risks, as a male, confronting traditional, patriarchal standards that encourage manipulation and domination of others. The conflict between what he's expected to think as a male and how he intuitively feels leaves him confused. Despite this, Wright was willing to remain vulnerable and
open to his gentle nature. Surely, this must be why he felt a special kinship to Whitman. Bly reveals a story about Wright, which took place in the late 50's, that expresses Wright's vulnerability and his kinship to Whitman:

James could feel in Whitman a delicacy and vulnerability that he now valued even more than he had before, but that admiration was not at that time welcome in some academic circles. I remember that he arrived at the house one Friday night looking depressed.

'What's wrong?' I said.

'Oh,' he said, 'I went to a party last night at Allen Tate's, with a lot of English Department people. In the course of it, I made a mistake. I said something complimentary about Whitman. I should have known better.'

'What happened?'

'There was a silence in the room. It was interesting that not one of the men said anything. Finally one of the Department wives burst out and said, 'Just name one poem of Whitman's that is good--just one!' speaking for the offended husbands. (In APR 29).

Bly's retelling of his conversation with Wright makes us see the rigid resistance felt by those who wished to follow and explore Whitman's open form style and thinking. This story also sets down an important phase in not only Wright's career, but also in the evolution of American poetry's as Bly outlines:
[T]he psychic placidity, part blindness, part arrogance, that had characterized the entire fifties was continuing, the interest in William Carlos Williams increasing, and the obsession with T. S. Eliot declining, the internal debate over which experiences were European and which were American had returned, and the fascination with English metrical verse, which was still strong in 1950, had begun to fade. (In APR 29).

Doughterty explains that post World War II poets "wanted to find a different way to write, a way that would replace autonomy with relevance, objectivity with involvement, dispassionate intellectualism with felt human emotion" (20) and believes that "Wright's growth as a poet is a useful paradigm for the development of poetry since the Second World War" (141). I also believe that Wright's evolutionary moral system reflects the rising American social consciousness that occurred throughout American society during his writing career.

One way to understand the struggle Wright went through to develop a mature moral system is to study closely his first two volumes, The Green Wall and Saint Judas. Dramatic changes occur between these two volumes in both thematic and poetic development. Wright's confusion about male violence, for example, is more evident in The Green Wall, and his poems about George Doty, who was accused of rape and murder, occur in both volumes and stand as examples of Wright's changes in
thinking and in his poetic process. In "A Poem About George Doty in The Death House" (CP 25-26) from The Green Wall, for example, Wright uses his questioning eye in an attempt to try to understand Doty, but describes Doty's brutal act politely:

A man I have wondered of
Lies patient, vacant-eyed.
A month and a day ago
He stopped his car and found

A girl on the darkening ground,
And killed her in the snow.

(CP 25-26)

It may be that Wright failed to express the reality of the murder because writing about a murder in strict form (iambic trimeter) alienated him from the reality of his subject.

In an interview, Wright admitted that he believed Doty "stumbled into something evil, a murder he had committed, but [he] didn't think that [Doty] understood anything about the legal proceedings" because he was a "stupid retarded taxi driver" (Smith 20). Wright's explanation that Doty "stumbled into something evil" reduces Doty's guilt, the horror of the murder, and reveals Wright's compassion for the retarded man. Wright's interest in the criminal and his violence, however, moves him dangerously away from the deserved
compassion for the victim. Readers may question the inequity of that interest.

The form Wright has chosen for this poem does not reflect the horror of the murder persuasively. The iambic trimeter line may be a major problem here. "And killed her in the snow," which rhymes with "A month and a day ago," (The extra syllable in this line also seems awkward), falls too light-heartedly on the ear to support such a serious theme. In *Saint Judas* Wright chooses a pentameter line to discuss the same subject in "At The Executed Murderer's Grave" (*CP* 82-84), which slows the rhythm of the poem, creating a more serious tone. He also incorporates softer rhymes in the later poem, such as in section 7: face/safe and grass/disastrousness (*CP* 84). In this case, then, it is clear that form choice does affect how something is conveyed. Opening the line and using softer rhymes are common, early strategies attempted by other poets, such as Rich, who are beginning to break from using closed form. These early poems suggest that Wright consciously set out to find a proper marriage between form and content.

In addition to problems of form choice and the deletion of pertinent information about Doty's violence, "A Poem About George Doty in The Death House" avoids the topic of rape. In fact, it's not until the last line of
the poem that a reader who is uninformed about Doty's crime gets any clue that something sexual may have occurred: "Crumbled his pleading kiss" (CP 26). In stanza five of the poem, Wright exclaims that Doty is a "Poor stupid animal" who "rose/For love" (CP 26). To introduce the topic of love into a story about rape and murder is a dangerous turn. The focus on Doty's love avoids the truth that the victim was brutally murdered, and not loved.

Mary Daly believes that "rape has been a source/form/confirmation of male bonding" and that "[c]asual, blatant admissions erase the reality" of rape and that choosing language like "making love" (362) to describe rape is an example of how others try to erase the reality of that violence. "A powerful weapon in the arsenal of erasers," claims Daly, "is the mystique of romantic love" (363). Thus, Wright's describing Doty's violent act as one filled with love, denies its horrifying implications.

In an interview, Wright describes Doty's crime more graphically: "[A] taxi driver named George Doty from Bellaire drove a girl out in the country and made a pass at her, which she resisted, so he banged her in the head with a tree branch and killed her" (Smith 20). That statement, "banged her in the head," is also insensitive
to the victim's reality. In another example, Wright further diminishes Doty's violence in "A Poem About George Doty..." by deflecting to a scene of "Hardy perennial bums" (CP 26), who suffer from hunger outside of Doty's cell. Wright's intention here is to point out that society makes prisoners of those inside as well as outside of the cell. Wright tries to make us believe that Doty fell under some curse by "the blundered birth/Of daemons beyond sound," so his act of murder is less his fault. Interestingly, the alliteration and archaic language in this line breathe with traditional poetic conventions, a clue that Wright is strongly engaged in traditional thinking. At the end of the poem, Wright again stands on shaky ground:

Now, as he grips the chain
And holds the wall, to bear
What no man ever bore,
He hears the bums complain;
But I mourn no soul but his,
Not even the bums who die,
Nor the homely girl whose cry
Crumbled his pleading kiss.

(CP 26)

Because Wright has more compassion for the murderer than for the victim in his poem, the reader feels challenged to follow suit. The confrontation for the reader is disturbing. Wright differs from Rich on this one main
point: Rich asks us to remember the forgotten lives of women of integrity while Wright asks us to forgive people whom we find difficult to love. We respect Wright for his depth of human understanding and love though we may not feel with the same intensity that he does. His compassion for unlovable people sets him apart from others and, in turn, risks others' rejection of him, making him unlovable as well.

Wright's moral judgments create for all of us challenges to our own ethical system, and his poetry stands as evidence of his own struggle to find a form that best suits his subject matter and passionate voice. Most would agree with Wright that To a Blossoming Pear Tree is his "best book" (Smith 39), though he admitted to Peter Stitt that Saint Judas was his "own favorite" one (Graziano and Stitt 91). A younger Wright, after completing Saint Judas, however, assessed his second book differently in his letter of August 13, 1958 to Wayne Burns, his dissertation director:

Well, I finished Saint Judas, and I know that it is a hell of a lot truer and clearer---i.e., better---than The Green Wall. But, look here: the hideous fact, which I wish to holy Christ I could forget, gouge out of my mind, smash in my skull, is that even my second book is still second-rate. Oh, yes indeedy, it is technically proficient, it is capable, it is adequate, it is smooth---in short, it makes me sick.

(Doben 89)
Wright's disgust with technical proficiency reveals that even in his early writing he did not feel comfortable working in closed forms. Younger poets practicing their art today can be inspired by the knowledge that To a Blossoming Pear Tree was achieved after years of studying and practicing in traditional forms and that education and experimentation are valid ways to achieve one's best art. Wright also translated poetry from Spanish, introduced to him by Bly, who was "convinced that the future of American poetry depended on immediate assimilation of [those] influences" (Dougherty 14). After The Green Wall and Saint Judas, Wright abandoned writing in closed form exclusively. Through his struggle to change his art, he came to believe that each poet's journey to find his/her form is connected with the necessity to change one's life:

One could learn first the necessity of trying to master a craft and then to recognize that . . . there was a danger of glibness, of an excessive facility. Then one could learn to try and keep one's language and one's rhythms open to new possibility. Of course this kind of poetry can lead to clumsiness, which is embarrassing and asinine and unintentional. I suppose that there is no escape from the charges of sentimentality and asinity so long as you are willing to try. It has seemed to me in my own life, in my own attempt to write, and within my own narrower limits . . . but within my own limits it seemed to me necessary and sensible to discover new ways of writing for oneself. The discovery of such
new ways surely has something to do with
discovering the possibilities of one's life.
(Smith 28)

What Wright reveals so honestly and affectionately is
that a writer must risk being embarrassed and making a
fool of him/herself to discover what is most important in
the context of his/her work. Wright does not claim,
however, that a fool can be an artist! Pound also
addresses this subject: "Before deciding whether a man
is a fool or a good artist, it would be well to ask, not
only: 'is he excited unduly', but: 'does he [/she] see
something we don't?'" (ABC of Reading).

Wright points out, too, that he wanted to have
control over his writing and to make his own rules:
"What I had hoped to do from the beginning was to
continue to grow in the sense that I might go on
discovering for myself new possibilities of writing"
(Smith 18). Those discoveries of "new possibilities of
writing" occur in what Hall sees as "three high moments":
(1) "the height of traditional . . . structure" in The
Green Wall and Saint Judas; (2) the breaking from strict
form in The Branch Will Not Break, "a puntative opposite,
where simple images embody almost unbearable tension
between deathward suffering and the desire to endure, to
love, and to enjoy the world's pleasures"; and (3) the
"best poetry," which came at the end of Wright's career in *To a Blossoming Pear Tree* and *This Journey* (*AWP* 5). Thus, the struggle to change creates for Wright his "best poetry" (*Hall* 5).

A good example of Wright's ability to "see something we don't" (*Pound*) and his developing moral system appears in "She Hid in The Trees from The Nurses," (*CP* 18-20) from *The Green Wall*. In this work, a young girl in an asylum tries to escape the rigidity of the "whistles of attendants" (*CP* 19) that call everyone in for the night:

But why must she desert the shade  
And sleep between the walls all night?  
Why must a lonely girl run mad  
To gain the simple, pure delight

Of staying, when the others leave,  
To write a name or hold a stone?  

(*CP* 20)

By setting her apart from the others, Wright makes us relish her brief escape and resent the closed world of the institution. Separation and salvation, themes of this poem, become important elements in all of Wright's work. Edward Butscher recognizes that "Wright envisions his creative role in dualistic terms of outcast and savior from the very beginning" (124), which also defines Wright as Bellah's "moral individual" (46-47), setting
himself apart from his society with the hope that he can save others.

Another section of "She Hid in the Trees . . ." represents Wright's curiosity about an individual and his desire to reconstruct for himself that person's life:

Surely her mind is clear enough
To hear her name among the trees.
She must remember home and love
And skirts that sway below her knees.

(CP 19)

This stanza also represents some of Wright's "clumsiness" (Matthews 101), forced on him because "metrical pressures cause some bad mangles" (Matthews 102). The poem stands as an example of the unevenness in Wright's early work.

The last two lines of the stanza above are awkward, and the rhyme scheme of the second and fourth lines of the stanza verges on a snicker. The poem loosely follows an abab rhyme scheme. "Enough" and "love" are interesting words in opposition, since rhymes force comparison of words when brought together through sound. Yet these words are so far apart in actual sound to the ear, they leave a flat ring in the air. The last line of the stanza seems forced as it requires rhyme at the end. "Trees" and "knees" are curious words to bring together if a poet wants to be taken seriously, and Wright wants
to be taken seriously. What may come to the reader's mind, unfortunately, is a knobby knee because of the tree imagery presented earlier. In addition, "And skirts that sway below her knees" is a sentimental, inane statement.

In addition to forcing a line for the sake of the strict form, Wright also reveals in this poem his inability to understand a young girl's life. The girl in the poem briefly escapes and finds a desired distance from others, yet it is hard to believe that she misses long skirts and the like. Someone stuck in patriarchal thinking might romantically insinuate that young girls desire those things because that kind of dress is that of a "respectable" woman. Wright's imagery is much more successful elsewhere in this poem, befitting a delicate intent; "spiders skating over a pond," for example, is reminiscent of some of Whitman's delicate imagery in *Song of Myself* as in "Where the katy-did works her chromatic reed on the walnut-tree over the well" (*LOG 63*).

As in "She Hid in the Trees . . .," Wright devotes a large portion of his time in this first volume to observations of women's lives. "Sappho," "A Gesture by a Lady with an Assumed Name," and "My Grandmother's Ghost" set the standard here. "My Grandmother's Ghost" (*CP 40*) presents a beautiful sonnet with delicate imagery as in the sestet:
Even before she reached the empty house,
She beat her wings ever so light, rose,
Followed a bee where apples blew like snow;
And then, forgetting what she wanted there,
Too full of blossom and green light to care,
She hurried to the ground, and slipped below.

(\textit{CP 46})

Though beautiful, the poem reveals little of a personal
nature about his grandmother. Hence, the poem could be
about any woman. A good example of a successful poem
about a grandmother that creates a truer portrait of an
old woman through vivid imagery is William Carlos
Williams' "The Last Words of My English Grandmother" (\textit{SP}
139-140):

\begin{quote}
Wrinkled and nearly blind
she lay and snored
rousing with anger in her tones
to cry for food,
\end{quote}

(\textit{SP 139})

It appears that early in his work, Wright's chosen
forms obstruct what he wants to express. One poem in \textit{The
Green Wall} that does use specific imagery vividly,
creating a truer portrait of a character, is Wright's
"Lament for My Brother on a Hayrake" (\textit{CP 18}):

\begin{quote}
I have seen my younger brother wipe his face
And heave his arm on steel. He need not pass
Under the blade to waste his life and break;

The hunching of the body is enough
To violate his bones. That bright machine
Strips the revolving earth of more than grass;

(CP 18)

It may simply be that Wright more easily identifies with
his brother. The longer, ten syllable line also
complements the depressed themes of the poem and more
closely reflects the haunting, lyrical rhythm that Wright
is most praised for in his later work. The entire
sentiment of "Lament for My Brother ...," however,
seems a bit far fetched. Yes, his brother works hard on
a farm, but what else is worth commenting on? This poem
seems to lack a purpose or satisfying discovery. In the
second stanza of the poem, there is a lovely rhyme with
"shroud" and "cloud," which connects the words on many
levels: in meaning, sound, and imagery. The words are
also separated deftly by four lines. Therefore, the
poetic strategies that Wright uses in this poem seem more
aesthetically satisfying. But what does the ending of
the poem mean? "The summer bear him sideways in a
bale/Of darkness to October's mow of cloud"?

Wright admits that around 1976 he sat down and reread
his Collected Poems and "couldn't remember having
written" some of the poems and "some of them [he] didn't
understand" (In Smith 18). This unclear thinking, which
appears in some of these early poems, is evidence of the
poet/apprentice tangled in language while learning his craft.

Several poems in The Green Wall reveal Wright's uncomfortable stance in working within strict poetic structures. He counters the strict structures he wants to be released from by creating imagery that has more freedom of movement. Unable to find the liquid movement he desires in his earlier form (which he eventually does find in his later lyrical poetry), Wright discovers movement through ghostly imagery, which appears in poems like "My Grandmother's Ghost" (CP 46), "The Angel" (CP 37-39), and "The Assignation" (CP 39-42), all of which deal with the subject of the dead. One example of this is in "The Angel": "Posing no storm to blow my wings aside/As I drift upward dropping a white feather" (39) or in "The Assignation" (CP 39-42):

Across the road I saw some other dead
Revive their little fires, and bow the head
To someone still alive and long ago.
Low in the haze a pall of smoke arose.

(CP 39)

Wright also uses imagery to try to break free in "Morning Hymn to a Dark Girl" (CP 30-31). The exotic imagery is new to Wright's repertoire of poems. The poem, too, has many awkward, sometimes unintentional bad
lines, yet they work against syllabic precision, creating a wilder music:

Betty, burgeoning your golden skin, you poise
Tracing gazelles and tigers on your breasts,
Deep in the jungle of your bed you drowse;
Fine muscles of the rippling panthers move
And snuggle at your calves; under your arms
Mangoes and melons yearn; and glittering slowly,
Quick parakeets trill in your heavy trees,
O, everywhere, Betty, between your boughs.

(CP 31)

The poem's landscape of exotic imagery connects the dark woman with a jungle, suggesting a wild, more sexually free landscape, which seems appropriate to Wright because she is a prostitute. Connecting a dark woman with the exotic and sexually wild is a stereotypical viewpoint encouraged by the patriarchy; however, the use of exotic imagery, reminiscent of a Gauguin painting, frees the poet to explore the different power in varying landscapes. Though images like "Mangoes and melons yearn" seem inappropriate, this poem is alive with color and movement. The last line is richly effective: "Crocodiles doze along the cozy shore." The line, too, is alive with sound, and sections like "Quick parakeets trill" or "And gracing darkly the dark light, you flow" indicate momentary breakthroughs in Wright's range and ability to knead the language into resilient tones. These early poems reveal Wright's pleasure with language and
his desire to find a form that will allow him to use that language more effectively and flexibly.

The Wright poems that most people have come to admire are the ones about the downtrodden, forgotten people of society, the dominant themes of *The Green Wall*.

"Mutterings Over The Crib of A Deaf Child" (*CP* 36-37) is a good example of Wright's ability to take a sad or impossible situation and transform it into a poignant moment of human insight and celebration. Every other stanza of the poem is enclosed with quotation marks. The arrangement suggests either a dialogue between two people or possibly a conversation someone is having with him or herself. The quoted sections voice a worry about the child's ability to survive in a hearing world, and the other sections reassure that voice:

'How will he hear the bell at school
Arrange the broken afternoon,
And know to run across the cool
Grasses where the starlings cry,
Or understand the day is gone?'

Well, someone lifting curious brows
Will take the measure of the clock.
And he will see the birchen boughs
Outside sagging dark from the sky,
And the shade crawling upon the rock.

(*CP* 36-37)
The ambiguity as to whether two people are talking together or one person is "muttering" to him or herself creates several reassuring possibilities in examining human dilemmas. One is that others in our lives can reassure us and that we can do that for others. Wright, in fact, makes it clear that that should be a mainstay of human behavior. He also reminds us, if we interpret this poem as a monologue, that we have the power to reassure ourselves. In the poem's closing, Wright not only finds a solution to the dilemma of the speaker, but discovers that in the struggle to survive, we can find reason for rejoicing despite the darkness. In an effort to close the poem, however, the speaker's resolution seems too easily accepted. One problem may be the poem's form, which creates the forced response at the end:

He will learn pain. And, as for the bird, it is always darkening when that comes out. I will putter as though I had not heard, And lift him into my arms and sing Whether he hears my song or not.

〈CP 37〉

"The Green Wall" may symbolize for Wright the divisions and silences between people. Wright empathizes with those who are afraid to risk making themselves vulnerable to others. An example of this is depicted in "The Angel" (CP 37–39):
Under an arch I found a woman lean
Weeping for loneliness: away from her
A young man whistle toward the crowds;
Out of an open window pigeons flew
And a slow dove fluted for nothing—the girl
Blew to the air a melody lost on me.

(CP 38)

Frequently, this wall occurs between men and women as
in "The Assignment" (CP 39-42), a story about a dead
woman who haunts earth, expecting her earthly love to
keep his promise to love her: "You swore to love me
after I was dead,/To meet me in a grove and love me
still" (CP 41). And in "The Shadow and The Real" (CP
29), Wright expresses how sexual tension between men and
women creates walls of unreal expectations and lost
connections:

I rose, and crossed the room, to find
Her hands, her body, her green dress;
But where she stood, the sun behind
Demolished her from touch and sight.
Her body burned to emptiness,
Her hair caught summer in the light;
I sought, bewildered, for her face,
No more than splendid air, gone blind.

(CP 29)

In Saint Judas, Wright dramatically refines his
ethical standards and moves boldly toward a "directness
of statement and uncompromising emotional honesty"
(Daughtery 48). As Wright approaches that "emotional
honesty" (Daughtery 48), his individual voice becomes more personal, and his strict form begins to slacken. Though Wright works predominantly in iambic lines in this volume, he begins to free himself from "associations of diction and thought he associated with iambic" (Donald Hall in AWP 4).

Overall, the poetic music in Saint Judas is more pleasant to the ear. The lines become less strained due to technical changes, which include the manipulation of line length and the softening of rhyme. It cannot be coincidental, then, that Wright's ability to speak more honestly occurs with his increasing detachment from strict form making. This gradual release from exactitude affects his ability to speak more freely.

Thematically, another interesting change in Wright's focus occurs in this volume. Centering on male experience, especially man's inability to express his love, Wright acknowledges the huge price one pays for holding back those feelings. Ironically, Wright also discovers a huge price is paid when making oneself sensitive to others' feelings. Of the two ways to live one's life, Wright makes it clear that it is far better to open oneself to others.
In "In Shame and Humiliation" (CP 69-71), Wright deliberately separates "man" from the other "beasts" and acknowledges that man's anger and violence are the most vicious on earth:

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

(CP 69)

Through most of the poem, Wright ridicules man's ineptitude ("A man limps into nothing more than sleep.") and because Wright keeps repeating the word "man" and uses the pronoun "he" throughout, he makes it clear that men are being analyzed as a separate species. When Wright exclaims that "Serpents, women, and dogs dance to deny his face" (CP 70), he suggests that he means those "beasts" are above him. However, because our arrogant human interpretation of the order of species places humans above serpents and dogs, we twinge at the thought that women are put separately on that level. Also, the choice of serpents and dogs, suggesting venom and things inferior, transforms women into hags. Therefore, by separating men and women, Wright actually elevates himself. He also arrogantly reveals his deadly sin of
"sudden pride" in stanza seven. In the same stanza, Wright ambiguously proclaims:

What makes me man, that dogs can never share,  
Woman or brilliant bird,  
The beaks that mock but cannot speak the names  
Of the blind rocks, of the stars.

( Cp 70)

Wright may be alluding to Adam, who, in the Old Testament, was given the privilege of naming the things of the earth. This section also suggests that men have the power of language, which is a privilege of the poet. By using the conjunction "or" ("Woman or brilliant bird") in stanza seven, too, Wright suggests that women have "beaks that mock but cannot speak," which is a pejorative image, raising the importance of man because women lack the gift of speech. This arrogant attitude actually alienates women, which I believe is less Wright's intention than to humble himself. Rhetorically, then, the poem is "irritatingly prolix" (Miller Williams 243); and, ironically, Wright is guilty of his poem's complaint about man.

"In Shame and Humiliation" stands as a good example of Wright's ability to identify questionable male behavior, while still a prisoner of that behavior. Pertinent, too, in the poem, is Wright's desire to
examine male anger and violence, perceiving they have set him apart from others. He also defines the male role in society differently from the female's and tries to understand how he should respond to that prescribed role. In a similar fashion, Rich separated herself from the world to examine how women function in a patriarchal society; it is fitting that Wright should do that for himself, too.

In poems like "The Cold Divinities" (CP 65-66) and "Paul" (CP 49-50), Wright is more successful in conveying man's alienation from woman and his failure, but desire, to express his feelings more intimately. Wright's feelings about women, however, often appear ambiguous and sometimes are woven with underlying anger. "The Cold Divinities" is certainly autobiographical. During the writing of Saint Judas (published in 1959), Wright and his first wife separated, and in the poem Wright mentions "My wife and child." Throughout the poem Wright laments repeatedly things he "should have been delighted for," largely blaming himself for the failed marriage. In an intimate portrait of Wright's life, Donald Hall details a visit Wright, his wife, and children made to Hall's home in Ann Arbor in the fall of 1958. The memory indicates the cold wall Wright could place between himself and
others when he fell into one of his periods of depression:

In the morning, he [Wright] walked outside in the frost of early morning without eating or speaking. He leaned against an old oak tree and smoked Pall Malls for two hours, while Liberty ate breakfast, fed Franz and Marshall, packed, and loaded the car. Continually I slipped outside to try to talk with him; he mumbled and shook his head. . . . Feeling the cold, I would go back inside to warm up; then I would look out the window, see him there alone, and go back. When Liberty finished her chores they drove away.

(In AWP 4)

Liberty is left alone and expected to care for the children herself, though most of Hall's sympathies go out to Wright. Hall's attempts to ease Wright into speech are thwarted. In "The Cold Divinities," Wright makes it clear that a man suffers greatly when he separates himself from his wife and child. And the prescribed role for men in many societies requires this separation. Wright, however, admires the bond between a mother and her child:

I should have run to gather in my arms
The mother and the child who seemed to live
Stronger than stone and wave.

(CP 66)
The scene verges on a romantic vision of madonna and child, but beneath the tranquility lies anger and controlled rage at the loss of love. Wright cannot explicitly express those feelings, but his imagery conveys those subconsciously buried emotions not yet acknowledged within himself:

Lovely the mother shook her hair, so long
And glittering in its darkness, as the moon
In the deep lily-heart of the hoilowing swells
Flamed toward the cold caves of the evening sea:
And the fine living frieze of her Greek face;
The sea behind her, fading, and the sails.

(CP 66)

As the evening dwindles and light fades, a cold feeling comes over the scene. Words like "cold" and "frieze," which can be heard as "freeze," suggest numbness. The scene is colorless because it is evening, and images like "moon" and "lily" infuse a cold feeling into the scene, owing to their whiteness. The woman's face is "Greek," suggesting perfect beauty. The image, however, also suggests a cold statue since classical imagery is frequently derived from statuary and architecture, as suggested in the word "frieze." Additionally, in stanza five, Wright states that the mother and the child "live/stronger than stone," adding another allusion to statuary. The title, too, "The Cold Divinities,"
emphasizes the emotional "coldness" that has placed a
wedge between the two. And divinity means perfection, a
humanly impossible state, suggesting further alienation.

Finally, "The Cold Divinities" makes use of a variety
of poetic strategies that create music, a direct aim in
this poem because the sea and the rolling waves are
important background images. The poem, in fact, reminds
us of Whitman's "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking,"
where the sea is the backdrop for the "he" bird's lament
that his mate is lost as well. In Wright's poem, stanza
three exemplifies his use of expanding and contracting
lines, imitating the movement of waves. In addition, he
sprinkles assonance throughout and drops the use of
familiar, direct end line rhymes:

I should have been delighted that the cries
Of fishermen and gulls
Faded among the swells, to let me
Gather into the fine seines of my ears
The frail fins of their voices as they sang:
My wife and child.

CP 66)

One of the loveliest images in the poem appears in this
stanza: "The frail fins of their voices." Through the
image and the repetition of "f" sounds, Wright conveys a
streamlined, audiovisual movement. The repetition of "1"
sounds, also scattered throughout the stanza, suggests
liquid movement; words like "gull," "swell," and "frail" create a soft melody as they bounce off one another. Wright seems to be learning more about the power of the line in many of these poems. It is here he learns that he can draw out his music by using irregular patterns.

In a cluster of poems, which includes "Paul" (CP 49-50), "Complaint" (CP 49), and "The Accusation" (CP 71-72), Wright uses images of dead women, as he frequently does in The Green Wall. All of the poems convey the regret of a husband or lover unable to express his feelings to a woman when she was alive. Those feelings, though, are ambiguous because Wright's description of these women is woven with an underlying distaste for some aspect of them. In "Complaint," for example, Wright uses humor to describe the disgusting habits of the woman: She "smacked the kids for leaping up like beasts" or pitched "the chickens' heads to hungry dogs." In "The Accusation," the woman is ashamed of her birthmark, which the man calls her "disgusting scar" (CP 72), though he claims he loves her more for her imperfection. In "Paul," as in these other poems, a man's regret that he did not care more deeply for his wife doesn't surface until she dies:

I used to see her in the door,  
Simple and quiet woman, slim;
And so, I think, Paul cared the more
The night they carried her from him,
The night they carried her away.

(CP 49)

The narrator suggests that the man showed no love for his wife when she was alive. The man, in fact, has difficulty expressing any kind of emotion, even grief, a frequent problem for many of Wright's male characters: "And did Paul shriek and curse the air,/And did he pummel with his fist/Against the wall, or tear his hair...?"
The poem is poetically less sound because of its awkward repetition ("And then he walked into the snow,/Into the snow he walked away") frequent, direct rhyme, and its affinity with cliché ("You don't miss something until it's gone."). The dry predictability of the closed form creates more distance in the poem. We wonder, too, about Wright's fixation with dead women, thereby connecting him to a tradition of male writers, like Edgar Allan Poe, who made dead women a frequent subject of choice.

In addition, in "Paul," the narrator connects women's beauty with death: "She was lovely, she was dead" (CP 50), strongly reflecting the patriarchy's desire to efface women, which Wright seems to be mocking here. In other words, "There is no woman like a dead woman." But Wright effaces women, too, in "In Shame and Humiliation"
when he separates them from men and places them in a category with the other beasts of the world.

In "At The Slackening of The Tide" (CP 62-63), Wright sees "a woman wrapped in rags/Leaping along the beach to curse the sea./Her child lay floating in the oil" (CP 62). His desire to "drag [him]self" (CP 62) from the scene is also a desire to be relieved of the terrible pain of seeing the mother grieving over her dead child. Wright admits that he pays a great price to be compassionate and sensitive towards others' grief. The great weight of that compassion may in part be because men aren't conditioned to display that kind of sensitivity in a patriarchal society.

As Wright escapes the prescribed role of the objective, rational male, he appears awkward about his sensitivity to others. To shelter his feelings, he sometimes incorporates profanity into his poems. In "A Note Left in Jimmy Leonard's Shack" (CP 53-54), for example, he says, "Well, I'll get hell enough when I get home," after having gone out of his way to let a man know his brother has drowned. In his last volume of poems, This Journey, Wright shockingly ends the poem "The Sumac in Ohio" (8) with "and you can go straight to hell" after he savagely blurts out that the sumac "is viciously determined to live and die alone," a painful reality that
seems to have more to do with the human condition than with that of trees.

"Often in interviews, Wright mentioned his debt to Horace," addressing him as "his literary father" (Daugherty 33). Horace, however, is a model of refinement, and Wright sought other "literary fathers" to shape his poetry after. Daugherty, who is to date one of the most intelligent critics on Wright, points out the "literary antecedents" (32) in "The Morality of Poetry" (CP 60-61)

Addressed to fellow poet Gerald Enscoe, this joins a distinguished tradition of American seaside meditations on the function of the imagination. Obvious literary antecedents include Whitman's "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" and Stever's "The Idea of Order at Key West." Like Whitman and Stevens, Wright finds that the origin of poetry is the cultivation of a disciplined imagination that responds to, but is not intimidated by, the raw material of experience. (32)

Wright poignantly faces his need to break from the tradition he loves, writing "The Morality of Poetry" in iambics as homage to the past: "Before you let a single word escape, / Starve it in darkness; lash it to the shape / Of tense wing skimming on the sea alone" (CP 61), reflecting "Horace's maxim, 'prune your verses'" (Daugherty 33). Wright feels "immense irrelevance" (CP 61) as he meditates on rules by which he once constructed
poetry, but no longer serve the kind of poetry he knows
he must begin writing: "I thought to send you careful
rules of song" (CP 61). His self-deprecating receives an
extra sting from the mockery of "Woman or bird," who
flaunts "to nothingness the rules [he] made." In
addition, Wright turns that anger outward to the "woman,"
perhaps because he feels threatened by her. In an effort
to be free, he releases himself from strict form, not in
form, but in thought: "I let all measures die. My voice
is gone" (CP 61). Interesting, too, is that Wright uses
the imagery of diamonds, as Rich does in The Diamond
Cutters, to express the belief that his language is
powerfully changing and will emerge more valuable within
time:

My words to you unfinished, where they lie
Common and bare as stone in diamond veins.
Where the sea moves the word moves, where the sea
Subsides, the slow word fades with lunar tides.

(CP 61)

Wright acknowledges that language must now grow out of
the natural, organic state, an idea that identifies him
with Whitman. He ends the poem in quiet celebration,
lamenting that he must relinquish the seductive,
beautiful language of archaic poetry:

I send you shoreward echoes of my voice:
The dithyrambic gestures of the moon,
Sun-lost, the mind plumed, Dionysian,  
A blue sea-poem, joy, moon-ripple on wave.  

(CP 61)

Wright's voice here is an "echo," slowly dying out. But his new voice has yet to utter a sound. His mind, too, is entwined with the old imagery of Dionysus and is "plumed," suggesting ornamental thought. Paradoxically, Dionysus serves the new as well, representing the power and fertility of nature. The "dithyrambic gestures" (irregular, frenzied expression), look forward to the new and counter the iambic speech Wright has chosen for his poem. The tension between the two forms of expression increases at this juncture in Wright's work. For any poet, Wright reminds us, it is hard to give up the beautiful for the honest grit of real life.

Strategically, Wright chose to position his two strongest poems in *Saint Judas* back-to-back at the end of his volume. "At The Executed Murderer's Grave" and "Saint Judas" are poems of bold transformation in Wright's evolutionary moral system. In "At The Executed Murderer's Grave," Wright corrects his earlier, naive approach to the rapist/murderer George Doty. This poem works as an act of humbling and reconciliation more pointedly than "In Shame and Humiliation."
The beginning of "At The Executed Murderer's Grave" could be construed as the opening to a criminal's confession: "My name is James A. Wright." A person's name is the first question an attorney or law enforcement official will ask someone in a deposition. By stating his real name, Wright makes it clear that he doesn't want to hide behind such wasteful ideas as "the narrator of the poem." Wright admits that he is "sick of lies" (CP 82) and tells as honestly as possible that Doty "demanded love from girls, /And murdered one. Also, he was a thief." (CP 83).

It is always painful for Wright to admit he loves the unlovable and begs to be released from this unexplainable love: "Doty, if I confess I do not love you, /Will you let me alone?" (CP 82). We respect Wright for admitting his faults ("I burn for my own lies." (CP 82) and for clinging to his earlier belief in The Green Wall that Doty is a man, too, and "nobody had to kill him either" (CP 83). Wright also identifies with the sins of the fathers in describing Doty, using the pronoun "we": "We are nothing but a man" (CP 84), he states. In another strategic move, Wright separates himself from the authorities and their violence, but ironically not yet from the authority of strict form:
I waste no pity on the dead that stink,
And no love's lost between me and the crying
Drunks of Belaire, Ohio, where police
Kick at their kidneys till they die of drink.

(CP 83)

Wright's concern with authority figures in society
comes before his revelation that authority exists, too,
in the closed forms he has chosen to write in.
Therefore, his changing moral system (evidenced in his
questioning his pity) occurs at a faster pace than his
understanding of its relationship to the forms he chooses
to write in.

"At the Executed Murderer's Grave" is a lesson in the
power of compassion, awakening us to our human
responsibility to develop a depth of compassion for all
people. Wright also chooses in "Saint Judas" (CP 84-85)
to dwell on these same themes. He suggests in the poem
that human kindness has the power to transform someone as
despicable as Judas (at least to the Christian world)
into the Good Samaritan. Wright opens his poem with a
violent scene: "When I went out to kill myself, I
cought/A pack of hoodlums beating up a man." (CP 84).
The authorities in the poem, the Roman soldiers, are
depicted as equally insensitive and violent as the
hoodlums: "soldiers milled around the garden stone/And
sang amusing songs" . . . "all the day/Their javelins measured crowds" (CP 84-85).

All of the men in "Saint Judas"—hoodlums, soldiers, and Judas—have committed some kind of crime against others, thereby making themselves equal. But as the poem develops, we begin to forget that Judas is the narrator. He forgets his name early in the poem, and so does the reader. This contrasts with the beginning of "At The Executed Murderer's Grave," where Wright blurts out his own name. Thus, Wright suggests that his life is the only one he has a right to judge, a theme repeated in "On Minding One's Own Business" (CP 58-60).

Through Judas's confession at the end of the poem, he reminds us of his crime of betrayal. In that act of remembering his crime, Judas finds salvation through his tenderness toward another man:

Then I remembered bread my flesh had eaten,  
The kiss that ate my flesh. Flayed without hope,  
I held the man for nothing in my arms.

(CP 85)

Wright's poem supports the interpretation that Judas's betrayal of Christ made possible the salvation for all people. It is an act that changed the entire Western world. In choosing the sonnet form, "Wright exploits the problem-solution structure inherent in the Petrarchan
sonnet effectively" (Dougherty 43). He also breaks the pentameter line in the first and fourth lines of the sestet in which he "celebrates Judas's sainthood at the instinctive charity of a man who has decided to seal his own damnation by committing the unpardonable sin" (Dougherty 43).

By titling his entire collection *Saint Judas*, Wright pays homage to Judas's life, emphasizing his ongoing interest in examining that violence is a connecting force among men, a subject he delves more deeply into in *The Branch Will Not Break*. This scrutiny of men's lives leads Wright to the belief that his life and poetry must be extracted from patriarchal authority and thought to allow growth and change.

Between the publication of *Saint Judas* (1959) and *The Branch Will Not Break* (1963), Wright's life changed dramatically as did his poetry. He and his wife Liberty divorced, and Wright's young sons moved with her to San Francisco (Graziano and Stitt 146). Wright began translating the German poet George Trakl and Spanish poets, namely Pablo Neruda, collaborating frequently with Robert Bly. America was going through dramatic transitions as well. John F. Kennedy became president in 1960, shifting the country from a leadership by its
oldest President to one by its youngest. In 1963, on the heels of *The Branch Will Not Break* being published, Adrienne Rich published her volume, representing her break from strict form-making, *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law*. In that same year, John F. Kennedy was assassinated.

During these radical years, America was relearning an important lesson: that lives are resilient and can gain energy and power from difficulty and change. Wright's title, *The Branch Will Not Break*, reflects an attitude of defiance and resiliency charging through America during the decade of the 60's. A branch, too, suggests that it is connected to a larger system. Wright's intention was not to abruptly break from the tradition of poetry, but to grow outward, into a new tradition that gains its nurturance from knowledge of the past and inspiration from contemporary life. "I am a traditionalist," said Wright, "and I think that whatever we have in our lives that matters has to do with our discovering our true relation to the past" (Smith 20).

Peter Stitt recognizes that Wright's third volume of poetry "turns from the city to the country, from society to nature, from human beings to animals" (Graziano & Stitt 13). Wright's separation from society identifies him more closely with Bellah's "moral individual" (46-
It also provides him relief from that society and the opportunity to explore the psychological ramifications of his new life alone. Additionally, the breakup in form encourages self-analysis; and in many of the poems in *The Branch Will Not Break*, intuitive imagery emerges. Further, Wright's German and Spanish translations dramatically affected his change in imagery:

From these poets, especially Trakl, whose imagery influenced Wright profoundly, he learned to use surreal imagery. This kind of image had lurked in the background of the early poems, but Trakl and the Spanish American poets provided examples by which Wright could confidently explore the implications of his intuition. (Dougherty 14)

Yet Wright complained in an interview that critics labeled him a surrealist, using as an example, "Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy's Farm in Pine Island, Minnesota" (CP 114). Wright states flatly, "It is not surrealistic" (Smith 29). Wright continued to reject that kind of description of his poetry, defiantly writing in his last volume, *This Journey*, "Against Surrealism" (28).

Another label many adhere to Wright's poetry is the "deep image," described by Charles Molesworth as

a type of automatic writing as an artistic goal; the individual poet becomes almost a passive medium through whom images charged with archetype
significance emerge—something remotely akin to Coleridge's concept of the Aeolian harp." (In Dougherty 15).

While Molesworth connects Wright's imagery to a male tradition, Bly explains that it belongs to "A feminine being whom [he calls] the Mysterious Hidden Woman" (In APR 29). "The Mysterious Hidden Women," Bly continues, has a great deal to do with the poems in The Branch Will Not Break, and with the mood of that whole era. Her appearance contributed as much to the spiritual life of the sixties as the more visible and accepted facts of the baby boom, the spread of television, the contraceptive revolution, the paperback revolution, the music of Elvis and Chuck Berry. Her presence shines inside the Beatles and she is the being who presides over Woodstock. Her complimentary being, Kali or the Stone Mother, the Stones offered to supply. (In APR 32)

Bly points out that Wright rejected the whole idea behind a technique involving "the deep image," thinking the claims "so absurd that James did not think it worthwhile to answer them" (In APR 33).

Wright does become more open and sensitive to women's lives in this volume, but continues the theme of male violence. He expands his vision to include political crimes of the past and present. "Stages on a Journey Westward" (CP 116-117) reveals Wright's expanding interest in history and the development of America. In
section 2 of the poem, Wright admits that he believes he has inherited the past crimes of the fathers:

In western Minnesota, just now,  
I slept again.  
In my dream, I crouched over a fire.  
The only human beings between me and the Pacific Ocean  
Were old Indians, who wanted to kill me.  
They squat and stare for hours into small fires far off in the mountains.  
The blades of their hatchets are dirty with the grease  
Of huge, silent buffaloes.  

(\textit{CP 117})

In a later poem, part of Wright's "\textit{New Poems}" in the \textit{Collected Poems}, Wright rejects the idea that he is guilty for the past: "I had nothing to do with it. I was not here," he says in "\textit{A Centenary Ode: Inscribed To Little Crow, Leader of The Sioux Rebellion In Minnesota, 1862}" (180). Wright recognizes the Indians as a segment of our society that we have viciously mistreated. He also correctly realizes that they are the true Americans: "Little Crow, true father/Of my dark America" (180).

In this collection, Wright, always at odds with America, views the country as "out of phase with nature" (Stitt in Smith 69):

\begin{quote}
Where is the sea, that once solved the whole loneliness  
Of the Midwest? Where is Minneapolis? I can see nothing
\end{quote}
But the great terrible oak tree darkening with winter.

(CP 111)

Throughout *The Branch Will Not Break*, "Wright is disturbed by his separation from the glories of nature and longs to be integrated into them" (Stitt in Smith 71). One of his most memorable poems depicting this attitude is "Lying in a Hammock At William Duffy's Farm in Pine Island, Minnesota" (CP 114):

Over my head, I see the bronze butterfly,
Asleep on the black trunk,
Blowing like a leaf in green shadow.
Down the ravine behind the empty house,
The cowbells follow one another
Into the distances of the afternoon.
To my right,
In a field of sunlight between two pines,
The droppings of last year's horses
Blaze up into golden stones.
I lean back, as the evening darkens and comes on.
A chicken hawk floats over, looking for home.
I have wasted my life.

Wright is the intruder in the scene, observing nature as an outsider. Colors charge the scene: bronze, black green, and golden. Through the movement of color, from bronze to golden, Wright suggests that nature gains value with him through his observation. We would not expect "The droppings of last year's horses" to have special significance, but Wright convinces us that they do. In his ending, Wright suggests the tragedy of human waste.
Wright said, "Actually, behind everything in my general thoughts and feelings was the idea that one of the worst things in American life is waste. I think that our tendency to waste is a truly dreadful one" (Smith 29).

The scene in "Lying in A Hammock . . ." emphasizes the importance of standing apart from life to observe and learn something about oneself. In a discussion of Hy Soboloff's poetry, Wright said, "The new poet is engaged in a search of his own;" he is struggling to learn "how to be true to his own self" (Smith xx). In the same discussion, Wright said:

But there really seems to be a true path back to the lost paradise, back home to the true child in one's self, back to the source of healing strength--back to the Kingdom of God which, we have been told, is within us. (Smith xxi)

Wright's playfulness in "Lying in A Hammock . . ." responds to that desire to return to the healing powers within and to "the Kingdom of God," which surely is nature.

Wright's new form opens, too, the opportunity to explore that psychological landscape within. For example, in "A Message Hidden in an Empty Wine Bottle That I Threw into a Gully of Maple Trees One Night at an Indecent Hour" (CP 115-116), Wright faces the dismal fact that he is "growing old" (CP 116). That same theme of
growing old appears in his short, sharp poem, "In the Cold House" (CP 130):

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

A leap occurs between the second and third line of the poem, indicating how Wright frequently stepped off from an image to examine his interior self.

Unlike Lowell, who discovered that his beginning journey within was a frightening experience and therefore abandoned that kind of self-scrutiny in his later poetry, Wright reassures us of the riches we might find in such a journey. Rich claims, as in "Diving Into The Wreck," that this kind of self-investigation is essential for the liberation of the individual. Ironically, in "Miners" (CP 118-119), Wright explores a submerged landscape much like Rich does in "Diving Into The Wreck," but Wright's landscape is a suburb that only seems submerged due to its murky lifestyle:

The police are probing tonight for the bodies
Of children in the black waters
Of the suburbs

(CP 118)
The poem in four sections moves from the suburbs, to the Ohio River, to a vein of coal in Bridgeport, Ohio, then back to a home in the suburbs. The poet seems to intuit his poem's journey from location to location, but holds all stanzas together by the themes of human loneliness and disconnection. The poem surprisingly ends with

Many American women mount long stairs
In the shafts of houses
Fall asleep, and emerge suddenly into tottering palaces.

(CP 119)

The scene is surprisingly poignant about women's lives and one of the less judgmental descriptions of women to appear in Wright's works. Perhaps in intuiting the poem's journey and letting go of the necessities of strict form-making, the poet also lets go of patriarchal thinking, discovering in the process that his true nature is compassionate toward women. Wright suggests in the poem that women might gain brief relief in their dreams from their waking, oppressive lives (suggested in "shafts of houses"). The associative connection is with the vein of coal mentioned in section 3. However, the "tottering palaces" suggests the precariousness of that brief
escape and the violent crash that will occur when the 
women waken to their real lives.

In "Mary Bly" (CP 133-134), a poem that examines the 
effects of females on a male's life, Wright is 
transformed by the observation of a mother and child. 
The poem is about Robert Bly's child:

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

(CP 133)

The poem opens with Wright's depression. In the act of 
observing the child, his spirit gains momentum. The poem 
then moves into the kind of imagery that depicts Bly's 
definition of "The Mysterious Hidden Woman" (In APR 29):

I feel the seasons changing beneath me, 
Under the floor.
She is braiding the waters of air into the 
plaited manes
Of happy colts. 
They canter, without making a sound, along the 
shores
Of melting snow.

(CP 133-134)
The poem is thirteen lines long and suggests the movement of the sonnet since Wright's dramatic turn ("I feel the seasons changing beneath me") occurs in the eighth line. The lines of the poem, however, are irregular, allowing Wright greater freedom to explore the line and to open himself to associative imagery rather than to close himself off in rhyme's necessity. The child's movement suggests "braiding the waters" and the internal rhyme with "plaited" emphasizes audiovisual texture. And Wright may be connecting "manes" with "colts" because he is observing a child. The colts add friskier movement to his imagery as well, drawn out with the word "canter." The ending image of "melting snow" suggests a warming of Wright's icy spirit at the beginning of the poem. The ending, "Of melting snow," parallels both in rhetorical structure and in number of syllables the line, "Of happy colts." Intuitively, the poem satisfies us on many levels: on its subject matter, its imagery, and its music. This is a skilled, open form poem, obviously born from Wright's understanding of traditional verse, but diverse enough in nature to suggest a new development in his work.

The metamorphosis Wright experiences in this volume occurs mainly when he deals with nature. In "Two Horses Playing in The Orchard" (CP 126), he exclaims, "I
feel/Like half a horse myself." Or in "Beginning" (CP 127) he says, "The wheat leans back toward its own
darkness,/And I lean toward mine," suggesting an
identification with, but a distinct separation from
nature.

Wright continues to examine the lives of "the faded,
the defeated, the dead" (Matthews 103) in his later work.
He also observes the violent and sometimes ridiculous
nature of men, but slowly extracts himself from belonging
to that kind of thinking:

America goes on, goes on
Laughing, and Harding was a fool.
Even his big pretentious stone
Lays him bare to ridicule.
I know it. But don't look at me.
By God, I didn't start this mess.
Whatever moon and rain may be,
The hearts of men are merciless.

(CP 121)

As witnessed in this poem, Wright continued to write
occasionally in closed form, finding that what he loved
in his work was making choices for his own art and having
the power to ease himself from form to form. This
movement from form to form occurs frequently in his last
volume, This Journey.

Overall, Wright's shift to open form remained
permanent. After that shift, he begins to speak more
freely of his belief that humans can be happier with someone they love. *Two Citizens*, who are Wright and his second wife Anne, for example, announces that Wright observes the world now through love stemming from a relationship with a woman. He learns the valuable lesson about love with another first from nature as attested to in "A Blessing" *(CP 135)*, one of his finest poetic achievements. The poem is about love between "two Indian ponies" and Wright's momentary communion with their love:

They ripple tensely, they can hardly contain their happiness
That we have come.
They bow shyly as wet swans. They love each other.

*(CP 135)*

Wright's communion with one of the horses "causes feelings almost like erotic love" *(Dougherty 68)*: "I would like to hold the slenderer one in my arms,/For she has walked over to me/And nuzzled my left hand." In this poem, he is not afraid of the female nature he encounters. In fact, he praises it and is attracted to it.

Wright's description of the pony as a "young girl" transforms her into human form: "Her mane falls wild on her forehead,/And the light breeze moves me to caress her long ear/That is delicate as the skin over a girl's
wrist." Bly states that in "A Blessing" "The feminine is insisted on" (In APR 32). He adds that "It is not a nature poem so much as a poem of longing" (In APR 32). The poem might also be interpreted as Wright's desire to acknowledge the feminine nature within himself. The ending especially attests to our ability to reach rapture when in communion with nature and the "Mysterious Hidden Woman" in us all (Bly, APR 29): "Suddenly I realize/That if I stepped out of my body I would break/Into blossom." Wright's desire is to break out of his male body and to enter the feminine spirit. He doesn't achieve that entirely in the poem because of the qualifying "if" in the next to the last line. However, Wright is aware of a new power blossoming within himself.

Wright said, "relaxation and gentleness in a poem produces (sic) in some people real anxiety and rage" (In Bly, APR 30). I believe he meant that some find it uncomfortable to be near a man who is in touch with his feminine side. "A Blessing" risks the boundaries of male/female identity and suggests, in some ways, Walt Whitman's desire to be extracted from any determined role, be it male, female, human or animal. On the other hand, some could argue that Wright's transformation of the animal into female form is a kind of sexism in which
Wright envisions himself as the overpowering male presence.

*Shall We Gather At The River* and *Two Citizens* will be discussed only briefly here, but each depicts important poetic risks attempted by Wright. Wright begins in these volumes to test the boundaries of his poetic skill. Much like Lowell's and Rich's volumes that immediately followed their break from strict form, *Two Citizens* frequently fails poetically. William Matthews, however, interprets *Two Citizens* as spiritually successful: "Throughout *Two Citizens* everyone is forgiven before the poems begin, even Wright himself" (In Smith 110).

Two poems in *Shall We Gather At The River* represent some of the risks Wright begins to make as he moves out into open form: "Poems To A Brown Cricket" *(CP 166-167)* and *"To The Muse"* *(CP 168-169)*. Risks, it should be emphasized, are necessary, but not always successful, in open form. "Poems To A Brown Cricket" exemplifies one of the dangers of risk in open form pointed out by Bly: "One literary danger in all poems that go out toward the edge is the danger of sentimentality" *(APR 31)*. Wright goes near that edge in the lines "We shall waken again/When the courteous face of the old horse David/Appears at our window" *(CP 166)*, which risks the edge Bly speaks about. The image of a brown cricket,
too, seems too endearing, forcing the poem into a preciousness that can nauseate. The end of this poem poses another problem that occurs in some of Wright's imagery: "Here, I will stand by you, shadowless,/At the small golden door of your body till you wake/In a book that is shining" (CP 167). The associations don't enrich the scene, and the connections fall frivolous on the ear.

In "To The Muse" (CP 168-169), Wright risks a new way of seeing the muse, transforming our traditional view of her, while remaining traditional because the muse is considered female. Pamela Di Pesa explains that the vision of the muse has gone through many transformations during literary history:

As an idealized image of divine inspiration, the muse was once an integral part of a total cultural 'set'. But long after the belief in divine influence on the poet had disappeared, the muse lived on as a symbol of whatever forces inspired or moved him. For the Romantics, the muse may have undergone a transformation, appearing as Keats's Psyche or Wordsworth's 'natural presences', but her basic identity remained unchanged. (In Brown and Olson 59)

Wright's transformation of the muse identifies her with darkness, a reverse of the heavenly interpretation of her: "Muse of black sand,/Alone." (CP 169). He remains a traditionalist, however, because he defines her as
female. Di Pesa further explains why the female muse belongs to the male literary tradition:

As long as our idea of a poet implies inspiration, the muse will continue to be significant. . . . But the muse as a symbol is one thing; the particular figuration of this symbol as a woman is another. And it is understanding the reasons for the female muse that presents some difficulty. . . . Given the fact that there have been comparatively few women poets, we may legitimately assume that there was never much pressure exerted on the muse to change her gender. Perhaps there simply have not been enough women poets to support a male muse. (In Brown and Olson 60)

Wright moves between his own definition of the muse and the traditional one in "To the Muse." Traditionally, it is thought that the muse visits the poet at "her" own will, suggesting "her" power over the creative process. However, in Wright's poem, he attempts to control his own poetic inspiration at the poem's dramatic close:

I don't blame you, I know
The place where you lie.
I admit everything. But look at me.
How can I live without you?
Come up to me, love,
Out of the river, or I will
Come down to you.

(CP 169)

Wright desires control and self-empowerment; however, the poem suggests in its closing the act of submission to gain inspiration, religious in connotation. On a darker
note, it also suggests an act of suicide to gain entry into a kind of creative hell.

To A Blossoming Pear Tree is a rhapsodic celebration of Wright's communion with nature and his submission to the muse's power. In turn, it is a rhapsodic wail of compassion for the defeated. The title poem of the volume exquisitely exemplifies Wright's supple language and his new lyrical form. The poem contrasts the beauty of nature, just "beyond" his "reach" (TABPT 60) in this vignette, with the grit of a man's life. Wright separates these polar observations in his first two stanzas:

Beautiful natural blossoms,
Pure delicate body,
You stand without trembling.
Little mist of fallen starlight,
Perfect, beyond my reach,
How I envy you.

An old man
Appeared to me once
In the unendurable snow.
He had a singe of white
Beard on his face.
Give it to me, he begged.
I'll pay you anything.

(TABPT 60)

In the poem, Wright repeats his past observations that insensitivity and violence cut through every level of
society. The police mock and "some cute wiseacre" might "[smash]" the old man's "dentures" (TABPT 61). The poem ends as "To The Muse" ends in _Shall We Gather At The River:_

> Young tree, unburdened  
> By anything but your beautiful natural blossoms  
> And dew, the dark  
> Blood in my body drags me  
> Down with my brother.

_(TABPT 61)_

The tree is burdened only with blossoms, suggesting a "branch that will not break," an image of resiliency. The man, like the tree, is burdened. But the man's burden is his humanity toward the derelict. The comparison creates a buried image of blossoming in the man, representing his sudden compassion for another.

As Lowell did in _Life Studies_, Wright begins adding "prose" pieces to his last two books because he "felt like trying to learn how to write a clearer prose" (Dave Smith 39). Wright adds that his interest in prose "grew out of" (Dave Smith 39) the notebooks he kept, something Lowell admitted to as well. Wright said, "I don't think that, in any deep sense, it makes a damn bit of difference whether or not one is writing in prose or in verse, just so he's trying to be imaginative and true to what he is hearing" (Dave Smith 38). Wright suggests
that poets have many more choices for constructing poetry in the last half of the twentieth century than any generation of poets before. Wright interprets this flexibility of choice as liberating:

\[\text{This doesn't mean that it has to be either iambic or noniambic because there are other metrical and musical possibilities in our American language. I don't mean that the specific pattern of the line has to be repeated either. But it has to have, somehow, a musical shape. At least that is what I have tried to achieve. I think that, essentially, a poem is distinguished from a prose piece in terms of song. A piece is to be identified and enjoyed as a poem is so far as it is closer to a song.} \]

(Dave Smith 38)

This Journey, Wright's last volume of poems, was published posthumously, but "Wright had finished almost all the poems before his condition [throat cancer] disabled him" (Dougherty 133). Wright continues to celebrate in this volume the smallest or lowest of things and their desire to survive. In "The Vestal in the Forum" (15), he says, "Not a spring passes but the roses/Grow stronger in their support of the wind." In his continued journey to understand himself, Wright is honestly self-critical, "I worry too much about things that should be/Left alone" (TJ 66). In this volume, he is done with the masks of the past, the tight verse that held his true voice at bay because of its relationship
with traditional thought. In "Small Wild Crabs Delighting on Black Sand" (TJ 44-45), he says, "Do they want to know me? I have no more faces to give them" (TJ 44), suggesting the one face Wright presents to others is his own.

Wright seems more at ease with male affection in this volume. In "Small Wild Crabs . . .," for example, he expresses his love for his wife (his second wife Annie) freely: "And now they are gone. And they do not laugh./But you do,/My delight, whom I can see/In the dark" (TJ 45). The ocean scene balances a similar one in his earlier poem, "The Cold Divinities" (CP 65-66), which expresses the alienation between Wright and his first wife.

In "Honey" (TJ 82), Wright celebrates the love that can exist between men, unfortunately a subject that few men write about: "My father died at the age of eighty. One of the last things he did in his life was to call his fifty-eight-year-old son-in-law 'honey.'" In addition, Wright comments on the difficult struggle men can experience throughout their lives:

These two grown men rose above me and knew that a human life is murder. They weren't fighting about Paul's love for my sister. They were fighting with each other because one strong man, a factory worker, was laid off from his work, and the other strong man, the driver of a coal truck, was laid off from his work. They were both
determined to live their lives, and so they glared at each other and said they were going to live, come hell or high water.

(TJ 82)

Wright deliberately uses the adjective "strong" to suggest their toughness as well as the prescribed role men must fulfill in a patriarchal society. They fight as a response to their frustration and fear of being unemployed. In addition, the fighting might suggest the only way they know of showing their affection for one another. In contrast, two unemployed women might hug each other and cry together as a response to the same situation. Wright's understanding of the difficult struggle men have to show their affection is poignantly effective.

Wright's examination of men's lives balances Rich's commitment to retell the stories of women. "Wright's growth as a poet is a useful paradigm for the development of poetry since the Second World War," as Dougherty recognizes (141). His evolutionary moral system and determination to speak honestly stand as an example of the human ability to change oneself. He teaches us in his journey to renounce the patriarchy that American citizens must move toward reconciliation within and among themselves.
CONCLUSION

RENUCNIATION AND RECONCILIATION

"The bird that would soar above the level plain of tradition and prejudice must have strong wings."

Kate Chopin
The Awakening

The purpose of this study was to discover why particular American poets in the latter part of the twentieth century resisted using closed forms. In their effort to free themselves from language that masks their authentic voice, Robert Lowell, Adrienne Rich, and James Wright repeat in their prose and poetry that closed forms prevent them from exploring their individual psychology. Each discovers that closed forms represent patriarchal mentality. In the new forms that Lowell, Rich, and Wright created, their intention was also to liberate others. In her description of Rich's work, Wendy Martin defines a strain of American poetry with Puritanical roots. Her definition also outlines much of the poetry written by women since World War II:

Adrienne Rich is a political poet whose ideology is rooted in early American experience. Her prophecy of the community of women and of female energy free from patriarchal repression parallels the Puritan vision of the city on a hill triumphant over Old World corruption. Women are opposed to male domination just as the colonists
were opposed to the taxation and social repression of King Charles. . . . The voyage to the New World was sustained, in part, by the Puritans' refusal to accept British social and economic oppression; feminism has been fueled by women's resistance to male control of their lives. (In An American Triptych 169-170)

Much of the poetry of social protest written by men like Whitman, Williams, Lowell, and Wright opens up new possibilities for examining male and female relationships. Like Rich, these writers recognize that patriarchal thinking represses the lives of everyone, not just women. Rich and Wright, who represent the arduous task of undoing patriarchal thought, present hard lessons for Americans. Lowell, however, exemplifies the impossibility for some people to fully escape patriarchal thinking. Lowell, Rich, and Wright remind us that we have yet to achieve equality among all citizens and that we isolate ourselves from one another with growing abandonment. That suspicion of one another, at the very least, creates hostility and despair.

Lowell, Rich, and Wright freely voice their disgust with this American acquiescence. Rich exclaims in "Ghazals: Homage to Ghalib" (SP 120-128): "To resign yourself--what an act of betrayal!--to throw a runaway spirit back to the dogs" (123). In an act of rebellion and survival, Lowell, Rich, and Wright began a journey
inward to discover new ways of thinking that would break from patriarchal rules that shaped their early lives. Each discovered in different ways that their oppressor was the patriarchy. Their journeys were an act of self-empowerment, and behind their desire for change was the intention of liberating others. For Lowell, however, his activism in social protests fell short where women's rights were concerned.

Too many years have gone by since the publication of Life Studies (1959), Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law (1963), and The Branch Will Not Break (1963) to view open form as radical. Open form has become a sturdy "branch" in the tradition of poetry. In fact, open form is the preferred form taught in writing workshops in American colleges and universities. However, the division between open and closed form still exists. The New Formalist movement fails to see poetry holistically, as part of an evolutionary process. Timothy Steele's Missing Measures: Modern Poetry and The Revolt Against Meter (published 1990) works to debunk the authenticity of open form. He rejects the idea that open form is an outgrowth of traditional forms and pejoratively defines it as "novelty," that is "aesthetically free of tradition and history" (244). Certainly, the study of Lowell, Rich, and Wright indicates their interest in history and their
desire to illuminate and question the histories of the
patriarchy. From this, Lowell, Rich, and Wright hope to
reform our thinking, making us conscious of our
responsibility to one another.

Therein lie two of the greatest arguments against
open verse today: It has become slack in its form, and
it has become solipsistic, lacking concern for others.
Brad Leithauser in his article, "Metrical illiteracy,"
and Wayne Dodd in "The Art of Poetry and the Temper of
the Times" address those concerns for the direction of
poetry at the end of the twentieth century.

Leithauser claims that "there is a widespread
perception that we are not living in a golden age of
poetry, and that mediocrity prevails in the periodicals
and on the bookstore shelves" (41). He also recognizes
that during the time Lowell, Rich, and Wright were
producing their breakthrough volumes, "American poetry
was passing through a great age (. . . depending on the
anthologist's predilections, by the Beats or the New York
School or the Whomevers)" (41). Leithauser suggests that
during a time when much experimentation was going on in
poetry, excitement prevailed and sometimes greatness was
realized. Experimentation is the key word here, but not
the only one. Leithauser brings up a good point about
the education of the poet. It is the kind of education that Lowell, Rich, and Wright adhered to:

There was a time when poets might naturally, as a part of their culture, be steeped in verse, a time when anonymous ballads could flourish and perhaps even help a society find and define itself. . . . It is clear, however, that today, when that steeping process is no longer naturally imposed, young people who wish not merely to read but actually to absorb someone like Pope, so that lines will volley unexpectedly to mind, must perform an arduous, solitary task. (43-44)

Some of Leithauser's suggestions about education border on elitism, especially when he says, "Yet the poet who has not gone to school suffers more than a narrowing of the breadth of his own verse" (45). I think, overall, that Leithauser raises the important idea that a poet with a voracious curiosity about the history of poetry will create with more richness and possibility at his/her side. Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson stand as the best models for this kind of self-education, which contemporary America, unfortunately, does not respect as much as formal education. Above all, the poet must remain curious about all things.

Other than the education of the poet, the other major complaint against contemporary poetry and open form is its lack of social consciousness. Certainly, open form encourages the investigation of the self in its leaning
toward free association. Lowell, Rich, and Wright, however, writing during a time of immense social change, were charged by the times. They found it necessary to connect personal reform with social reform, which Wayne Dodd in his "The Art of Poetry and the Temper of the Times" addresses, using James Wright as a model for this change:

But Wright did not come to this . . . new method without struggle and soul searching, without personal change. He had to learn to see himself differently, both as a man and as a poet: to see himself as a perceivér rather than an imposer of order (or form) and meaning. Had to move from a poetry of imposed order to a poetry of possibility. (6-7)

What this poetry reflects is an attitude, an uncompromising seriousness about the difficult and noble art of imaginative writing. A seriousness that leads not to arrogance and a feeling of superiority, but to openness: openness to the imagination, openness to freshness, to originality, openness to the spirit voicing itself bodily forth on the pages we become. . . . writing that is discovering the unknown, existent and real and inexhaustible, in both itself and ourselves. (9)

The New Tradition, that began with Whitman, was encouraged by Williams, and practiced by many like Lowell, Rich, and Wright, opens itself to the possibility of discovery about ourselves and how we might live decently together. As more women poets enter the
community of poets, the balance between the male and female sensibilities will be encouraged. The idea that we are "Maternal as well as paternal" (Section 16, SOM) is becoming a more acceptable way of solving the division between the sexes. "Intolerance and mean-spiritedness are dangerous in literature as in politics and religion" (Dodd 11). A reconciliation within and among ourselves can be achieved only through the hard work of each individual. In Whitman's "Reconciliation," at the end of his Drum-Taps poems, he makes us understand that it might be possible to dissolve the wall between ourselves:

Word over all, beautiful as the sky,
Beautiful that war and all its deeds of carnage
must in time be utterly lost,
That the hands of the sisters Death and Night
incessantly softly
wash again, and ever again, this soil'd world;
For my enemy is dead, a man divine as myself is dead,
I look where he lies white-faced and still in the coffin--I draw near,
Bend down and touch lightly with my lips the white face in the coffin.

(LGG 321)
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