

An Urban Pastoral Wedding:
The Influence and Development of Coterie Poetics
in American Avant-Garde Poetry

by

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A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Approved September 2012 by the
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ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

December 2012

ABSTRACT

This dissertation makes the case to reclaim the typically negative term, *coterie*, as a literary term for poetic method (Coterie Poetics) and offers the epithalamium as a valuable object for the study of coterie conditions and values. This examination of the historical poetics of the epithalamium, or wedding poem, shows how the Classical and Early Modern form was reappropriated by gay postwar poets and those in related social circumstances. This study applies and builds on theories developed by Arthur Marotti (*John Donne: Coterie Poet*), and Lytle Shaw (*Frank O'Hara: The Poetics of Coterie*) and subsequent critics to develop a Coterie Poetics, the markers and terms for which I have arranged here to demonstrate conscious "sociable" poetics. It is thus to our advantage to study coterie conditions and methods (e.g. informal personal address and coterie dialect) to open readers to insights into twentieth-century poets that have deliberately exploited reception among those in private and public spheres, just as their Early-Modern precursors did—often as a matter of survival, but also as formative practice. The key figures in this study wrote significant epithalamia or made major theoretical claims for Coterie Poetics: John Donne (1572-1631), W. H. Auden (1907-1973), Paul Goodman (1910-1972), and Frank O'Hara (1926-1966). O'Hara's poetry is approached as the apex of coterie poetics; his personal immediacy and obscure personal references should alienate and exclude—yet, they invite.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have depended on the support of so many people throughout this process that I will never forget their guidance and toughness on my behalf.

Of course, I must thank Elizabeth Horan, Cynthia Hogue, and Robert Sturges for supporting this dissertation. Thanks to Elizabeth for all the copious, rapid notes and the prudent brevity when it counted. Thanks to Cynthia for her advice on how to focus on my strengths while not indulging in them. Thanks to Bob for his encouragement to structure my work symmetrically, even mediievally, to help the material under control.

For certain, I would not have had a chance of getting to this point without the mostly informal support that made the journey thrilling and hopeful and pragmatic, all at once. Thanks to Mark Cruse for making the next stages seem plausible. Thanks to Iliana Rocha, Meghan Brinson, and Beckian Fritz Goldberg for creative and theoretical feedback. Special thanks to Rob Stauffer, who generously extended any conversation and generally made life sweeter in Arizona.

I would like to thank the scholars and poets that, from afar, generously shared information made crucial suggestions: Virginia Tufte, Heather Dubrow, Lisa Jarnot, Kevin Killian, and Lytle Shaw. They made each risky step seem possible.

To those at Arizona State University that supported me with funding and the opportunity to achieve the Katherine Turner Dissertation Fellowship, I am grateful for your support.

Finally, I thank my families across the country that put us up while we did most of this from a distance.

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CHAPTER 1

TOWARD A COTERIE POETICS

Preface

This dissertation addresses the critical and literary development of *coterie poetics*, a relatively recent notion in literary criticism but a persistent concern for poets addressing their private circles and public obligations as what might commonly be called “masters of ceremony.” While most poets have been members of coterie circles at some point in their lives, certain poets can be particularly representative and key contributors to the coterie poetic methods and creative ethos. These poets, though they might have regretted their coterie origins, cannot quite shake them. John Donne (1572-1631), W. H. Auden (1907-1973), Paul Goodman (1910-1972), and Frank O’Hara (1926-1966) offer instances of such representative figures which the following pages support through a combination of discussion of biographical data supplied by various critics and literary historians, which enriches my close readings of their contributions to coterie poetics. Each of these poets has produced significant work that underlies my theoretical and poetic justification for an emphasis on occasional poetry. I argue that their work has strongly influenced a number of their contemporaries as well as subsequent waves of coterie poets. Although the focus of this work is on critical appraisals of twentieth century poets and poetics, the present work considers closely the movement towards coterie poetics in Donne scholarship that was initiated by Arthur Marotti in the mid-eighties, with

findings that are crucial to understanding the effects of coterie circumstances on Donne's lifetime poetic production.

The method involves some degree of identifying and matching the coterie names to the appropriate historical correspondence, but the primary goal is one of recognizing the markers of coterie as potential poetic methods developed in coterie community circumstances. I am not the first to note the similarities between deliberately anti-professional poets, often described as "coterie poets" of vastly different circumstances and time periods. As Brian Epstein states it:

In recent years, a promising trend has emerged as a number of critics and scholars, including Michael Davidson, Alan Golding, Libbie Rifkin, Daniel Kane, Reva Wolf, Beret Strong, Terence Diggory, Lytle Shaw, and Oren Izenberg, have begun to look more closely, analytically, and sociologically at the importance of community to twentieth-century avant-garde poetry and its development (*Beautiful Enemies* 7).

By applying the work of literary critics and closely reading representative poetry, this book attempts to refine and organize what others have done less systematically. This study seeks a potentially wide-ranging application of coterie poetics as a tool of literary study. Also, this study follows a significant trend that scholarship has overlooked. From at least the middle of the twentieth century, the most occasional of occasional poems, the epithalamium, has been reappropriated by gay postwar poets and those in related social circumstances. That reappropriation of the epithalamium shows a dual resistance with respect to

heteronormativity even as the poets skillfully retain openness to “outsider” reading of their work. Here, I argue, is where the case for studying coterie conditions and coterie poetic methods results in important new insights for twentieth-century poetry, as that openness and dual resistance reflects the poets’ self-conscious, deliberate exploitation of the reception of private and public spheres.

The major interpretation, central to this dissertation, is of Frank O’Hara’s “Poem Read at Joan Mitchell’s.” My reading of this poem maps out a border between private and public, avant-garde and the traces of poetic traditions marked within. It is also presented as a major point in the development of the art and poetics of Frank O’Hara, which I see as the apex of coterie poetry.

New Kinships: a Brief and Partial Family Tree of Twentieth-century Coterie Poetics

Practically all of the canonical English poets and their minor counterparts experimented and finally produced their literary work in coterie settings. Understanding coterie poetics over a significant span of time reveals patterns among poets in terms of group allegiances and affiliations, while affording analysis of how the individual practices of poets might develop with respect to these interpersonal relationships. Occasional forms such as the epithalamium and the masque, the use of which seems to have peaked in late sixteenth and early seventeenth century England, present demonstrable ties to the postmodern relationship and to coterie. These ultimately minor forms proved immensely

attractive to major twentieth century poets such as Auden and John Ashbery (b. 1927). Their adaptations of these sometimes forgotten forms in usually loose and fluid alignments stand out as models for other premeditated, regular social arrangements that are likewise anticipated in the work of Paul Goodman. Goodman's writing and championing of occasional poetry, along with his social theories, exercised a direct influence on the direction of postwar poetics, as modern and postmodern poets have written their occasional poems with and against such traditional occasional forms.

Traditionally taught models of epithalamia are found in their Early Modern English revival by Edmund Spenser and John Donne. These poets were, in turn, reviving Latin Catullan (Catullus 84-54 BC) mode at a time when English literature, culture and language was still in a period of high flux, with poetics undergoing a corresponding testing of forms. Katherine Philips (1632-1664) offers one of the better-known examples of a writer who wrote occasional poems from a (likely non-genital) lesbian perspective. Her work, which includes several epithalamia, sheds much light on that of Donne, of which she produced various imitations that reflect and respond to this same period in which marriage as friendship is valued. Phillips' perspective on marriage as evident in her poetics matters gives us a sense of how fluid the terms of love and friendship have been in centuries past. Her approach also reflects on that of twentieth-century homosexual poets who have appropriated heterosexual marriage conventions in the language of friendship.

W.H. Auden, likely the last English world poet, who had personal, historical and broadly sentimental ties to England, displays an agonistic relationship with Shakespeare and Milton. After his move to America in 1939, Auden was also “gay uncle” to young New York poets such as James Schuyler, John Ashbery, and Frank O’Hara. Auden’s handling of his sexuality was his largest influence on O’Hara, though Auden’s coterie verse hybrid, *The Orators*, was a straight world remade to O’Hara (and to Ashbery).

Auden’s long-term, deeply problematic relationship with Chester Kallman is a model and anti-model for the young gay New York poets. Their world contrasts with that of the San Francisco poets of the late forties, such as Robert Duncan, Jack Spicer, and Robin Blaser, who seem to have imagined themselves to be knights in an evocation of Malory or Chretien. Even as Duncan and others might have wished to recreate a mystical circle of poets, based somewhat on the homosexual circle, *Georgekreis*, of Stefan George (a world-famous German poet and reactionary who sought to shut out all that was not in the service of art and aristocratic beauty) these young gay men became students, at Berkeley, of Ernst Kantorowicz, the great medievalist and former member of the *Kreis*. This mentor, a figure of political and worldly authority, perhaps dashed some of the romance from the Romance, but higher levels of literary confidence and more open sexuality followed as Spicer reassigned his birth date to the day, the occasion, when he met Duncan in 1946 (Killian 11). This sort of action closely aligns with other gay poets who productively seek alternate kinship structures that reverberate throughout their poetry.

Frank O'Hara is the most fully realized coterie poet and the most clearly indebted to Paul Goodman. O'Hara also modeled his sense of aesthetic community on the French Surrealist poets of the previous generation, especially Guillaume Apollinaire. Apollinaire's epithalamium, with its complex sense of time and commemoration, is a direct model for O'Hara's. Deliberately or no, O'Hara's poem elegizes what will be lost with the marriage of the betrothed, who provide subject of the poem. Among the markers of coterie in O'Hara's epithalamium, "Poem Read at Joan Mitchell's," developed in Chapter 7, those that reveal kinships with his coterie brethren, and especially Auden and Donne, are showcased within a larger set of observations about how the work of O'Hara and other self-identifying homosexuals of his generation and subsequently have enriched the poetic form through their coterie practices.

Coterie: A Provisional Definition

Against the negative connotations often assigned to the word *coterie*, recent scholarship has demonstrated that intimacy among socially or academically alienated young poets is crucial to their attaining mature development as artists. Evidence of such intimacy comes to us in the occasional forms of letters and poems, though often after anthologies have decontextualized the poetry to the point of misrepresentation and misreading. This dissertation is designed to measure the effects of misreading on reading postwar poets.

Etymologically, *coterie* derives from the French:

a. F. *coterie* ‘a company of people who live in familiarity, or who cabal in a common interest’ (Littré), orig. ‘a certain number of peasants united together to hold land from a lord’; ‘companie, societie, association of countrey people’ (Cotgr.), f. *cotier* = med.L. *cot riu*s, *coteriu*s cottar, tenant of a *cota* or cot. Cf. F. *cotterie* ‘a base, ignoble, and seruire tenure, or tenement, not held in fee, and yeelding only rent, or if more, but *cens* or *surcens* at most’ (Cotgr.). By Walker and Smart stressed on the last syllable as French: the latter has the *o* short; whence the 18th c. *cotterie*, and its riming in Byron with *lottery*. (*OED*)

Throughout its stages of pejoration and revaluation, usage of *coterie* has reflected societal shifts in attitude toward aristocracy and class structure. Although I do not aim for such a reading, the postmodern pleasure of false etymology (e.g. Duncan finding “mage” in image) for *coterie*, does not have a direct relationship with the Polari (gay slang) term, *cottager* (one that seeks anonymous contacts in public places) but it should.

To define *coterie* as a site of literary production, it is necessary to differentiate the tendencies of *coterie* groups from the products of *coterie*s. Criticism relating to *coterie* offers useful terms and concepts which I have appropriated and revised and subsequently developed versions of my own. The aim is to indicate the fluidity of terminology so that the terms signal or gesture toward social poetic structures in the informality of *coterie* relationship formation as well as the self-conscious adaptations of *coterie* effects by these poets.

The following terminological section develops a working definition of coterie poetics based on cumulative scholarship in which the following preliminary definitions and key terms (indicated below in bold) aim to explain what makes coterie poetics legible.

Terms and Concepts Regarding Coterie

A functional definition of coterie should stress, first, its modes and manners of operation, and secondly its values, with further components of identity reflecting the individual's sense of belonging to a self-selecting group whose practices produce demarcations between insiders and outsiders. In all of these senses, coterie operate analogously to the *kinship structures* found in traditional, mainstream societal models (see Lytle Shaw, drawing from Levi-Strauss and others in *Frank O'Hara: Poetics of Coterie*). The kinship structures created in coterie groups provide support and protection for the coterie members while also opening an emotionally charged competitive space that resembles sibling rivalry under one roof. The work of Goodman reminds us, however, that these relationships are fluid, like the understanding of redefining sexuality, as otherwise alienated young poets become parts of families away from families. Such travel or migration was, according to Paul Goodman, necessary to advancing literary and cultural production after 1950: "The essential [task of the] present-day advance-guard is the physical reestablishment of community. This is to solve *the crisis of alienation*" (177).

Alienation from traditional linkages is productive, as Marxist critic Raymond Williams points out, leading to kinship or social matrix based in a common medium (*The Country and the City* 150). Goodman believed that the relevant new poetry, in these communities would be occasional poetry. Citing Goethe, who called occasional poetry the highest kind, Goodman's essay on the "advance-guard" inspired ambitious anti-establishment poets to enable flourishing sites of literary production. The cultural capital associated with Goodman's writing lent credibility to his utopian claims as outsiders, even poets themselves in their maturity, could well have regarded such communities and kinship structures with suspicion. As largely peer-based groups form sociological bonds akin to families, and as most coterie groups are youth-based, or at least youth-directed, coteries will very often develop around or with the help of **gurus**—established authority figures who may or may not direct productive group relations.

The intersection of low-income lifestyle and high-rent, high culture event-seeking proves a serious trope for coterie poetics. Accordingly, a coterie forms as a site of *extended adolescence* that includes shared poverty or other potentially alienating circumstances. "Extended adolescence" here is not meant pejoratively—although the cliquishness of and "in-group slang" of coterie groups can make them subject to fear and scorn. Auden's circle in the late twenties and early thirties exemplifies this phenomenon. Auden's enigmatic pronouns and schoolboy slang at once captured the generation that took his name and anticipated his inability to remain within that character that he'd developed in the

land of his birth and schooling (Auden immigrated to New York in 1939 and became a naturalized citizen by 1946).

As the buffer of closed quarters provide intense personal relationships, new kinship structures emerge as more dear than the attachments into which individuals are born. A member of a coterie seems to refuse to engage the wider world and can appear to be antidemocratic. In what might be termed a *coterie muse*, each of these circles takes on its own character, which can be felt in the letters between Donne and his far away friends (he cannot summon the muse without them) and, more recently, in Frank O'Hara's wedding poem to friends, which anticipates the end of a muse-poet relationship lost to that heterosexual pairing. These closed-off worlds come and go as political and social realities undo ties that can only be remade so many times.

Another point of comparison between Donne's age and that of postwar American poets appears in the *anti-materialism*, that appears in the work of John Donne and other Early Modern coterie poets in the early stages of print, and is similarly present for in the mid to later twentieth century, in the United States. That anti-materialism is often linked to ill regard for incapable readers. It is especially instructive when poets seek alternate lineages and "converse" with dead poets, which leads to and reinforces affiliations and affinities, as my analysis of the late stages of manuscript circulation demonstrates. Studying Early Modern manuscript circulation provides a useful and necessary model of coterie poetics of the twentieth century with regard to refusing the commerce of print publication. Study of Frank O'Hara's manuscripts furthermore shows how the material

conditions of the poet's circumstances affect the methods of transmission and contexts of their delivery. The materials that testify to these, letters and ephemera, are in the archive at the University of Connecticut and the New York Public Library.

The examples of O'Hara and Robert Duncan reveal conflicted and contrasting approaches of poets with regard to anti-materialism. Duncan may have detested the growing professionalism of poetry—protesting by deliberately not publishing for fifteen years—but like Auden, he desired certain comforts, and grew more domestic with a younger partner as he aged. By contrast, Frank O'Hara and Jack Spicer preferred to live modestly, even in poverty, although these two examples bear the caveat that both died at the age of forty. Further, O'Hara and Ashbery exhibited deliberately refined taste in their glossy art magazine productions while the next waves of New York Poets were deliberately low-tech and cheap in their publication modes and methods. Relevant to all of these writers' perspectives on materialism is Michael Davidson's discussion of the avant-garde that includes New York, San Francisco, and Black Mountain's overlapping groups: Davidson claims that these groups inherited from Modernism the anxiety of the negotiation of commodities in the material world (*Ghostly* 1). The material is felt in ghostly traces and inherent contradictions of critiquing commodity culture that these groups inextricably inhabit.

Sexuality is a primary aspect of coterie relationships. I will demonstrate how the homosocial kinship structures that are the products of the desire for social and sexual freedom are inevitably the sites of sexual tension. Robert Duncan, for

instance, produced his first mature works, *Medieval Scenes* and *The Venice Poem*, in a séance atmosphere among primarily gay poets. *The Venice Poem* embodies the literary product of *collaborations* (which, according to Auden, Mendelson, and Kaiser are like intense love affairs) and the emotional loss that ignited the production of the poem. Parity and peer relationships suffer differences in local power and become shifting sites of influence and misreading, as I show in my final chapter, pointing to Libbie Rifkin's observations about Ted Berrigan's circle as a reconstitution of heterosexual values in a nonconformist site, the East Village in Manhattan. While Berrigan was an acolyte of O'Hara's, he was not actually socially close with him, so his coterie leader position, akin to O'Hara's, was of father/guru figure, as opposed to O'Hara's intense peer and mentor-based relationships.

Homophobia and its corresponding persecution affect the evolution of coterie poetic discourse. This is evident in the study of coding that my dissertation develops in introductory chapters on a key coterie figure, W.H. Auden, and on the resistance to such coding in the work of those coterie figures more open about sexuality and desire, Paul Goodman, and Frank O'Hara. The development of modern or postmodern wedding poetics features traditions that are traced in Chapter 7, "An Urban Pastoral Wedding." By analyzing poems that include the toasts and commemorative wedding poems that move from the Early Modern Period (mainly Donne's three epithalamia) into the late Modern period (Auden's "In Sickness and in Health") bore settling into the postmodern (epithalamia by O'Hara). This structure shows how coterie poetics is a *poetics of legibility*,

meaning that commemorators of occasions are writing with posterity in mind all while including the personal details of the occasion. In this sense, Duncan uses “*polysemy*,” or multiple simultaneous layers of meaning, a term developed by Dante and appropriated by Auden and Sedgwick.

As coterie poetics becomes subject to peer and professional criticism, there can be drawback with regard to *legibility*: Spicer, for instance, resented O’Hara and Ashbery’s legibly gay personae when he openly derided the camp tenor of works such as O’Hara’s “I do this I do that” poems. The social marks of sexuality are not as fixed as Spicer might argue: I will show that as *homosexual* is not the final label for any of these coterie groups, their legibility is in flux.

Identification with a coterie can be damaging. A poet seeking identity and a recognizable voice may feel trapped within an unfair association. Certainly *obscurity* was an anxiety for Auden despite the relative success of that very obscurity. Loss of meaning is also a regular subject of paradox for Donne—e.g., “The Undertaking,” in which the language of alchemy expresses anachronism: “It were but madness now to impart / the skill of specular stone / When he which can have learned the art / To cut it can find none” (ll. 5-8). Donne’s similarly themed “The Triple Fool” and “The Bracelet” are discussed in a separate chapter. Frank O’Hara, however, seems to have forsaken concerns about anachronism, for his audience is immediate. The very coterie qualities of obscure personal names and places grow inviting when in concert with O’Hara’s (and Donne’s) qualities of grace (or Hazel Smith’s term, “hypergrace,” discussed below).

Still, one might see coterie elements as that which survives: paradoxically, the resistant, coterie elements of the poetry, within the matrices of poetic orders, make them obscure but are signs of hope that future orders will understand. Think of the legions of Joyce critics breaking down the hyper-ordering. What is it there for? Posterity. Coterie conditions seem to create an experimentally curious space where free play is limited enough to recognize patterns in the transmission. Knowledge, gnosis, not in the Bloomian sense (or his wishful views) is transportable. As it is trans/portable it is also bury-able. Resistance, difficulty, nearly guarantees burial. But it also allows for potential archaeology. In our long slow lives neglect makes apparent the inevitability of burial, as North puts it: "Coterie anonymity integrates the reader's eye, the scribe's hand, and the author's voice in a way that print anonymity does not" (162-163).

Where there's disconnect or irreparable damage to the available, direct evidence of literary ancestors, poets may seek or develop an *alternate lineage* such as Auden and Spicer found in Rimbaud. Related to this is the "*fantasy precursors/collaborators*" as explained by Gilbert and Gubar. Such projections may be both acute and productive. Another aspect of the most successful coterie poet is that of being desirable as friend/partner/collaborative reader, which is evident in using or developing the *language of friendship*. Such language, which appears and derives from studies in Sappho, largely characterizes the positive, energetic and enduring poetry and poetics of Frank O'Hara, as is evident in the demonstrated regard for O'Hara in the contemporary poet, Mark Doty, who characterizes his readings of O'Hara as ever-engaging conversations.

As collaborations must eventually be enacted, the *performance* element is critical to the coterie effect. Because Donne was writing in a period where the expectation for poets and especially for aspiring bureaucrats like himself was not to publish the products of their verse-making but rather to make and circulate their poems as gifts for particular audiences, Donne was allowed the freedom to treat his work with the flexibility and the impermanence of performance. Once the poem has been delivered and read (i.e. “performed”) in the temporal moment of its occasion for a restricted audience, it has fulfilled itself, in a sense, as a singular, unrepeatable performance. This transitional nature of manuscript culture resembles closely the exchange of oral expression, as is evident from Walter Ong’s ideas on performative manuscript (qtd. in Pebworth, “John Donne, Coterie Poetry, and Text as Performance”). What heightens this sense of personal performance is the charm of the self-contradiction in poems that imply the singular, dramatic performance of an “amateur” virtuoso who tailors the work to the occasion and to an “ethos of performance” (65) that is identifiable in coterie poets across cultures and is marked in these corresponding periods.

Coterie martyrdom – legends of poets perform their roles for them—Jack Spicer and Frank O’Hara were dead before they could have the late career blues of an Auden or a Donne. As each died relatively young, prior to the popularization of the Sexual Revolution and Stonewall, neither lived into obsolescence. Paul Goodman and Charles Olson (also near-exact contemporaries) became far more civic (or public) and far more systematic to be coterie martyrs themselves. As Spicer and O’Hara deliberately hewed to their coterie values and

were relatively young and charismatic, their arguable decline at the very ends of their lives had little effect on their reputations, at least among those who knew and depended on them for guidance. The posthumous reputations of these and indeed, many poets can be driven in part by the manner in which they passed. Yet Frank O'Hara—whose death after a buggy accident on a Fire Island beach has been the subject of unreliable speculation and a sort of mysticism—has very little to do with Frank O'Hara as he was in life.

Finally, *commemoration* of the *occasion* makes coterie poetics viable and necessary to overcome alienation and social flux. The *social fluctuation* of coterie(s) includes: rapidly evolving, overlapping kinship structures; intimate attachments and detachments, and finally, stability in their instability. The poets described thus far were aware of their works' transtemporal potential. O'Hara's favorite work of Auden's, *The Orators*, opens: "Commemoration. Commemoration. What does it mean? What does it mean? Not what does it mean to them, there, then. What does it mean to us, here now?" (*English Auden* 61) Spicer and O'Hara leverage capital supplied by Paul Goodman's espousal of occasional poetry as the poetry of the advance guard, or avant-garde. Heterosexual poets such as Robert Creeley and Charles Olson also build on intimacy and personal address by way of Goodman's writings.

Contemporary Theorists of Coterie Poetics

Studies of the relationship between coterie formation and literary production (mainly among English, French, Italian, and German groups and

ideas) have focused on a few major coterie periods and key specific groups that have not only advanced the experimental and avant-garde, but also provided models for subsequent coterie formation and patterns of ethos. Books such as *d'Holbach's Coterie* make a case for positive readings of frankly elite groups (here, the late 18th century French Enlightenment) maintaining levels of self-protection for the sake of theoretical exploration of art, science, philosophy, and politics, while the mixed results of other elite cult formations such as that of *Secret Germany: Stefan George and His Circle*, acknowledge the extremes of social and cultural power that, among other things, anticipated the Third Reich. The cultish aura and deeply negative associations have left a once national poet largely unread and hardly spoken of—except, curiously, among younger gay poets of the forties and fifties, like Jack Spicer and Robert Duncan who sought such a deliberate circle, *Georgekreis* of their own.

Those once taken for granted as great (elite male European idea-makers) have been leveled to their foundations as punching bags beaten repeatedly in the name of anti-phallogentrism. In the long twilight of theory perhaps it is time to be better pluralists for the sake of understanding influence and its anxieties. We owe debts to theory for what we now take for granted—that we worship literary idols at our peril—and in that spirit we cannot forget the formalist and elite cultural influences on the most avant-garde.

John Donne: Coterie Poet (1986), by Arthur Marotti, is a groundbreaking study of the effects of coterie circumstances on a specific poet's subject matter and approach throughout his career. This New Historical or historicist approach

is among the early critical approaches to coterie study and to the eventual development of coterie poetics. Others have developed and critiqued his work within the early modern critical framework; still others have built on this strain of thought as it relates to other coterie contexts outside the Early Modern /Renaissance period. Marotti's work, not necessarily the poetry of John Donne, is the valuable critical tool available to evaluate mid-century Modern and avant-garde poets who were producing work in coterie circumstances, often imitating early precursors. Still, in the course of this project I refer to Donne poems that happen to have direct coterie influence on the modern and avant-garde poets amid their coterie circumstances.

In the past decade, literary scholars of postmodern poetry such as Lytle Shaw, Daniel Kane, and Libbie Rifkin have each reconsidered the pejorative sense of the term *coterie*, which they have each used in the process of developing and defining the marks of coterie poetry. Central to these formulations are the writings of postwar poets such as Frank O'Hara, Charles Olson, and Jack Spicer, each of whom chose to thrive in such small artistic communities in New York, North Carolina, and Northern California, respectively. It is no accident that each of these critics cites, and that each of the postwar poets focused on in this dissertation read the work of Paul Goodman, the poet-polymath whose highly influential essay on occasional poetry in the *Kenyon Review* in 1951. Goodman's work and posthumous reputation provide, I will show, a cautionary tale for the fate of coterie poetics. To Frank O'Hara Goodman was the meaning of New York, and Goodman's ideas were for O'Hara and for other poets an intellectual

justification to carry on in avant-garde communities, to live in the moment and write for one another. This ethos of intense amateurism hearkens to the origins of print culture and anticipates the tension between professionalism and anti-materialism in the arts, specifically poetry. Goodman lived it, for better and worse, from deep obscurity to great fame to sudden obscurity once again, despite his crucial role in the development of postwar poetry and coterie poetics.

Among the critics of postmodern poetry who have developed methods for studying coterie poetics there are a number of important discoveries and practices to which the present work adds. In *Career Moves: Olson, Creeley, Zukofsky, Berrigan, and the American Avant-Garde*, Libbie Rifkin examines how poets were “making it,” or surviving, culturally and materially into the seventies, all while maintaining a perpetual fringe status. An analysis of what she calls the “narratives of career” gauges the pressures of how the title poets struggle to control their status as they oscillate between fringe existence and commercial or public success as professional or academic poets.

Daniel Kane’s concept of a “**poetics of sociability**” has much in common with Rifkin and with other critical efforts at interpreting a group poetics. According to Kane, the second generation scene includes four commitments. The first is to collaboratively produced poems, while the second is to a collaborative book, “which threatens privileged authorship and the fetishization of the book as organically connected to a single person in favor of a more collective vision,” while the third involves intersocial text, “poems drenched with proper names of these writers in the ‘scene’ and/or serving as initiative rites welcoming new poets

into the community," and the fourth presents public poetry as a primary mode of reception (*All Poets Welcome* 334).

Predating the aforementioned scholars of postmodern poetry is the innovative work of textual scholars Arthur Marotti and Ted-Larry Pebworth, each of whom present support for reading Early Modern poets such as John Donne, showing how they are productively understood as coterie poets. Their insights are vital to the study of postmodern poetics, I argue, first because of their focus on manuscript circulation and secondly because Early Modern coterie poets directly influenced modern and postmodern poets in ways that reflect their coterie poetics, as is demonstrated in Chapter 7. Auden's emulation of Early Modern coterie poetics—the use of intimate dialect, ambiguous pronoun referents, and levels of personal coding that Auden called “games of knowledge” — is adapted by his poetic “nephews,” Frank O’Hara, John Ashbery, and Jack Spicer.

Donne's status as a major poet is largely the result of a revival of interest in his work, sparked at least in part by the writings of T.S. Eliot (1888-1965) on Early Modern metaphysical poetry. But Eliot was not necessarily interested in the coterie circumstances of Donne's early poetic production. Indeed, Eliot's attention to Donne led to Donne's being revised, anthologized, and **decontextualized** to the point of profound misreading, in a trend that Arthur Marotti, in his 1986 work, *John Donne: Coterie Poet*, successfully reversed, opening Donne studies and the study of coterie poetics.

Lytle Shaw's 2006 study, *Frank O'Hara: The Poetics of Coterie*, points the way to how insights from Donne enable understanding of coterie practices

among O'Hara's New York circle of poets who likewise circulated their poems, collaborated on plays and developed experimental mixed media. As all of these practices call for a critical awareness of coterie ethos, I build on Shaw's insight by turning to specific coterie features such as the use of proper names, dedications, camp dialect, and direct address of the reader. All of these are deliberately employed and not incidental to the literary product, in an insight that affects all readings of motives for writing, the reception of the poems, and the long-term perception of these works should they end up in anthologies and outside the circle of poets.

What Lytle Shaw does well is to distill the cumulative trends toward a coterie poetics. He also develops a series of valuable categories as exemplified in Frank O'Hara's appearing as the model of a coterie poet. In contrast to Marjorie Perloff, who has written about O'Hara's unfortunate legibility in his coterie tendencies, Shaw sees O'Hara's use of personal names, camp dialect, light occasional verse, and chatty tone as a valuable, deliberate practice. While Shaw might say that one cannot limit poets as dynamic as Frank O'Hara or John Donne with the term "coterie poet," I contend that the layers of coterie involve greater and lesser inclusions. Like other poets writing to and for one another in intimate circumstances, O'Hara writes to and for the dead poets as well, reflecting the practice of poets with confidence sufficient to write their ideal circle, inscribing themselves into a long discourse that is as dead (or alive) as the state of their reputations might suggest.

Major approaches in studying O'Hara come from the work of Marjorie Perloff, whose valuable manuscript research, which explores the breadth of O'Hara's interests, more than justifies O'Hara as a poet worth studying. In *Frank O'Hara: Poet among Painters*, the first full-length critical work on O'Hara, Perloff cites the inclusiveness in the major and minor writers, Early Modern and contemporary, that he chose to emulate. Now, as the necessity of justifying claims to O'Hara's worthiness of literary study has diminished, the benefit of notebook and manuscript study emerges in Perloff's tracing his idiosyncratic path of study at Harvard in the late forties. Perloff provides evidence of his intense desire to be at the cutting edge of art and music as well as literature in the syzygy of a period when the literary canon is at once hallowed and being revised. Perloff also indicates O'Hara's responses to particular professors, whom O'Hara seems to have admired, evident in the multiple dedications to such "masters" in his poems.

My comparative case study of O'Hara in this chapter builds from the approaches that Perloff establishes as I aim to show how the material conditions of the poet's circumstances affect the methods of transmission and the contexts of their delivery. In so doing, I apply the strengths of Perloff's and Marotti's attention to manuscript detail while incorporating and commenting, where appropriate, on the recent insights of Shaw, Kane, and Rifkin. Such collation provides the foundation for my original contributions to the concept of coterie that is developed in my chapters on the wedding poetics and the genealogy of the influence of Goodman. In all, the observations about coterie that appear in the first chapter that are further illustrated and problematized in discussions of the

practices of coterie in Donne and O' Hara, at once explain the markers of coterie poetry and introduce the main poets of this study as key figures.

CHAPTER 2

MARKERS OF COTERIE POETRY

Legible Markers

We are able to read coterie poems as coterie poems if the marks of coterie are understood. Beyond valuation of the poetic qualities, the following signs mark coterie sites of production:

Personal names, famous or not, pervade. Frank O'Hara exults in the dynamic effect of what Shaw calls "a syntax of references" (19). From the obscure *personal names* addressed in the poems of Frank O'Hara to the address of dead poets by Jack Spicer's *After Lorca* (1957) the use of proper names produces the paradox of *dedications* and conversations in poetry. The details of the occasion intimate the events of the poem, imparting a sense of the real and a sense of belonging while the clear fact of one's distance from these events and alienation from these unknown people make the distance acutely felt.

Personal names in dedications often participate in larger strategies amid a coterie poetics, such as when Spicer used one dedicatee per poem and no repeat dedications in his *After Lorca* and elsewhere. Similarly, Leland Hickman (1934-1991), in his long-term autobiographical work, *Tiresias* (1980) imitates the pattern in a nod to a previous member of particular communities (gay coterie poets). Spicer had been following Goodman and perhaps O'Hara in embracing a coterie approach to community poetics. His involvement is evident in *Mattachine*, with its levels of membership and inclusion, which resembles not only the cell structure of Communist groups, but also the earlier *Kreis* that

inspired Spicer's early coterie work with Robert Duncan and Ernst Kantorowicz. Spicer's dedication to small communities borders on self-destructive direction, which coterie poetics can entail. Like the Early Modern poets, the figures in the Mattachine Society—or Foundation, depending on leadership —saw power in the anonymous. That power carries over into the literary-artistic work of semi-closeted pre-Stonewall poets. Mattachine, partly conceived by Harry Hay, one of the earliest public faces of homosexuality, took its name from “medieval traveling performers who satirized the ruling order from behind the safety of masks” (Meeker 82, 83). Like its namesake, the Mattachine Society and perhaps many a coterie could hardly withstand the splintering divisive politics of assimilation, acceptance, and activism.

Code/Polari/Camp Dialect/ Language of Spycraft (“passing”). Coding is legible, and its markers often induce suspicion in an uninitiated audience. At the same time, code lends itself to plausible deniability and the “open secret” of a poet's sexuality. While Auden's youthful poems presented models of camp dialect (especially for O'Hara), Auden would distance himself from his public school in-joking with his Montmere group. The latter was a private fictional world consisting of Auden's friends, including Christopher Isherwood and Edward Upward. And yet Auden would retain the camp posture, which he developed in coterie circumstances, up to his last occasional poems. This chapter will navigate such contradictions as inherent and even necessary to the development of sexual identity and stages of the closet. This appears in the examples of Robert Duncan and Jack Spicer, who were both openly sexual in

their poetry and who were strong proponents of community-based poetics. Yet Duncan warned against the excesses of coterie cultish exclusivity, in his 1944 essay, “The Homosexual in Society,” and Spicer derided, *Some Trees*, the volume with which Ashbery won the Yale Younger Poets Award in 1956, referring to it as “Thumb Twees” (Killian 65). Similar inside jokes are among the strong coterie markers that are legible in the early Auden, especially in his coterie work, *The Orators*, whose legibility he later wished to erase. This desire is interesting especially because Auden’s attitude toward these works was mixed, perhaps more because of the coterie patter in them, than because of their camp sexuality.

Coterie poets will use **intimate address** to imply ongoing close thoughts with a minimum of contextualization for greater audiences. Frank O’Hara represents this in his anti-manifesto manifesto, “Personism,” in which he declares that a poem of his ends when he decides he might as well pick up the phone.

To praise a specific occasion event with **signs of the occasion**, the poem must include:

- **the precise date**
- **the recognition of the occasion**
- **intense particulars, and**
- **recognition of temporality**, such as what begins and ends on this occasion.

All of the above manifestations of the event appear as expressed by the semipublic, semiprivate figure of the occasional poet.

Modes of Coterie Poetry

Though traces of coterie origins can be noted in post-coterie poetry (thus there's a continuum of degree here) coterie poems in active circles are typically occasional, epistolary, and/or collaborative. For the sake of brevity, I have focused primarily upon wedding poetry and poetics, which include especially clear markers of coterie poetics. In a broader analysis, I would likely analyze representative poems (e.g., O'Hara's letter-poem, "Ashes on Saturday Afternoon"; Schuyler's elegy, "To Frank O'Hara"; and Helen Adam's coterie ballad-opera *San Francisco's Burning*). I should note something of these forms, as elegies are not exclusively coterie poems, but testify to the strength of coterie ties. Sheer effort and enthusiasm and keen social awareness align both Donne and O'Hara, especially in how they are remembered as friends first, although neither could escape the draw of poetry as a method of personal communication, one that they, strong friends that they were, were still prone to the manipulation and cultivation of personae via their thoughtful exchanges. Both were especially remembered for their friendship. The power of their capacity to live and perform as powerful personalities bound kinship-like coterie closeness among varying, shifting circles of friends which continued to guide the nature of their reception after their deaths. The fragility and intimacy of their communications, the performative level of poems written for occasions, encouraged an intensified devotion in others. Performance and occasional poetry create a seemingly temporally limited effect of the single performance while adding to the mythos of these occasions. The mourners of these poets are immediately segregated into

those who knew him and those who could and cannot. The interviews can only be conducted for so long. Eventually, direct ties are lost. The comparison of these poets and their reception histories while at first unlikely allows for a reflection upon poetic identity and canon formation. A future analysis of elegies should include those found in Joe LeSueur's *Homage to Frank O'Hara*, an impressive outpouring of works dedicated to and collected in his memory.

CHAPTER 3

JOHN DONNE: FROM COTERIE TO CANON

Preface

This chapter explains how the critical history of the term, *coterie*, and how its proper study productively develops from scholars of Early Modern poetry, primarily John Donne and his contemporaries. Such an approach is crucial to understanding the shift in critical attitude toward poetic community and coterie literary production that began with textual scholarship of the mid-eighties. In establishing the relationship between Early Modern coterie poets and twentieth-century poetics, which has occurred to several few current scholars, John Donne appears as a representative coterie poet. It isn't just that Donne qualifies among the coterie categories, but that his name and work are signaled in the key text that initiated coterie analysis, *John Donne: Coterie Poet*, by Arthur Marotti (1986). What Marotti (and others) have accomplished has the deepest importance for contemporary poetics as we reconsider both the original context of manuscript transmission and a complete new understanding and rethinking of the value of the term, *coterie*.

SOME BACKGROUND ON DONNE

John Donne was born in London in 1572. His family was Roman Catholic, financially successful, and had fairly radical Jesuit relations whose political circumstances were dire enough to convince the ambitious, energetic, and daringly intellectual young law student (conventionally known as "Jack

Donne") to surely but by anguished degrees convert to Anglicanism. He had entered Oxford especially early so that the Oath of Allegiance to the Church of England would not be necessary. In this incredibly dangerous period of the 1590s, Donne was in an especially precarious place. His eventual conversion to Anglicanism is understandable, but it came with great personal loss and his career ambitions, high even for a man in his position, would regularly be arrested by circumstance or grave social error. In the end, he would find great success in the church, as he was perhaps most famous for his sermons rather than for his rakish youthful poems, which anchor his reputation today.

Donne's financial circumstances were never exactly dire but his political situation was for most of his life uncertain. His father died when he was very young. As his mother was devoutly Catholic and raised her son to be so as well, Donne received a Jesuit training that honed a naturally keen legal mind as he prepared to enter one of the Inns of the Court, an experience that impacted his skills as a poet and developed his potential as a brilliantly witty, ambitious courtier. Donne's famous wit was not always an advantage. Although he was charming and a favorite object of patronage, his wit failed him well enough to delay any court advancement until he was middle-aged. Only with royal prompting did he decide to take his career into the church. In this capacity he would, after extraordinary professional delays, become Dean Donne.

After time abroad, in 1591-2 Donne returned to study law at Lincoln's Inn, after some shuffling, and in an atmosphere of what can be seen as a finishing school, or post-adolescent period of bonding along with the development of his

sometimes gymnastic skills in producing convincing yet wildly argued paradoxes and satires. His famous satires demonstrate a young man modeling his poetry after Ovid (in the wit, not the mythology) and stretching his legal-analytical muscles to the edge of casuistry. His religious thinking is not precisely ecumenical, but he could not, even at his most partisan (as in his *Pseudo-Martyr*, his prose diatribe written in 1612 against the Jesuits from whence he came), be accused of strict dogma. Yet he could reflect the legal paradoxes in his regular self-contradiction and regular self-assessment.

The letters of Donne, especially those verse epistles among his close friends, reflect a strong dependence on and great capacity for friendship. As often as he traveled in military and diplomatic capacities, culturally Donne was Londoner his whole life. He famously opens a verse letter to his dear friend, diplomat, and fellow poet Henry Wotton: “Sir, more than kisses, letters mingle Soules; / For, thus friends absent speake” (Donne *Norton* 54) which John Stubbs, a recent Donne biographer focusing on the poet’s developing spirituality, shows how

[l]etters were special for Donne. He came to see friendship as his second religion, and within that doctrine, letters were ‘sacraments.’

Writing allowed an interfusion of selves. (110)

Like his fellow young men, writing such correspondences reflects a mixture of personal connections and the engagement of displays born of boredom and frustration: “Here’s no more news than virtue” (*Norton* 53). Like other poets suffering the effects of exile (from Ovid to Auden) the energy of immersion and

the stress of absence were productive of much of Donne's poetry, which, according to textual critics like Peabworth, were "performed" in manuscript.

Donne's several brushes with authority include a secret marriage in 1602 that got him imprisoned—his brother, who had hidden a Catholic priest, was likewise imprisoned years earlier, but did not survive. John Donne's resulting banishment/absence from court produced some of his most compelling love poems (e.g. "The Sunne Rising") which contain the emotional complexities of a man thoroughly in love with his mate and with the court world's social life in which he had thrived. The marriage, called the "error of his life" by his first biographer, Sir Izaak Walton, was of course not simply that. Donne had to wait until the new king, James I, was crowned, before he could think of seeking court favor again. James would not quickly grant him favor, convincing Donne after many years of disappointment as a courtier, to seek a career in the church. Donne accepted ordination in 1614, and after the death of his wife in 1617, he seemed finally to accept his vocation, and his career indeed flourished.

One cannot be certain about the chronology of Donne's poetic production, especially since his early years are less well-documented and the publication history so entangled. However, even as the phases of Donne's career are less simply divisible, there is continuum from the early to the late Donne, wherein the early poet reveals rakish qualities but also the racking conscience. The latter Donne is famously sensual and witty in his addresses to his Lord and to Death (e.g. "Batter my heart, three-personed God"), and yet he retains markers of his coterie origins, which Marotti and others have shown are never quite shaken. In

fact, the coterie origins of his earliest mature poetry mark the poetry and his relationship to poetry and other people for the rest of his life. This reconsideration of term, *coterie*, is largely the subject of this project, and it is within Donne criticism that stronger contextualization improves readings of the work of such a widely anthologized poet—especially one with such a mixed, if intense following.

As a coterie poet (among many) he was a poet whose “toyed” would end up in circulated manuscripts, copied and recopied, with potentially disconcerting results (mangling, misreading, loss). The insecurity and instability of texts within the circles was difficult enough, but not so difficult that Donne would publish very much in his lifetime.

His wedding poems, or epithalamia, are among the strongest, most original representatives of the form, notably toying with gender in one of his favored tropes of alchemical metaphor and hermaphroditic wordplay. More fully explored in the chapter on this poetic mode, the epithalamia of Donne span and mark his career succinctly—his first is largely accepted as a mock-wedding, likely performed in drag at Lincoln’s Inn. His latter two are of the same year but under vastly different circumstances. One upon a wedding on St. Valentine’s Day, 1613, succeeds in its ingenuity and its use of avian allegorical imagery and gender-bending. The “Eclogue” of Dec. 26, 1613, is curious and clever, but it is forever associated with a scandalous, murderous match, with all the other poems, written by his contemporaries, commemorating the affair.

Ambitious and fairly characterized as control-obsessed, his sense of

posterity hung not only in death itself but in its image. Ever concerned with his posterity, at the end of his life he posed for his own effigy to be made into a plaster version of himself. Curiously, this sculpture was the only part of St. Paul's Cathedral to survive great fires, an emblem of his forceful, consistent presence.

While the chronology of his poetic production may be uncertain, the resounding effect of his manuscript circulation and posthumously published collection of 1634 is peerless in its transformative effect. The intimacy of direct personal address, ingenious metaphor, and ostensible intellect was imitated widely in what has been termed "Metaphysical Poetry."

Donne hardly published his poems, though they were widely circulated among friends and admirers and eventually beyond direct personal relations. Typically, Donne's implications against publication have been taken to figure him as especially anti-print. He was not atypical, actually, and his relationship with print was as anguished as any of the other subjects that vexed him. At times of financial stress, he was tempted to publish, had done some collecting, and made movements toward it, but that it never happened was as much due to circumstance as purism.

Regardless of his publication history, his persona and his approach to poetry have had profound effects on what defines a poet's role and attitude toward poetry can be. In his intimately addressed and dedicated poems and correspondence, Donne presents a figure of a well-educated gentleman of his time in expressing the stigma of print (and the opinions of the upwardly mobile

gentleman in the Inns of the Court atmosphere). Donne also is an unusual example of a “major” English poet. As Auden puts it,

[Donne] simply regards poetry less seriously than do such contemporaries and near contemporaries as Sidney, Spenser, Jonson, Herrick, and Milton [...] Not only does Donne seek to avoid the stigma of print, but he almost never identifies himself with the poet's role as vatic prophet. He stands virtually alone among major English poets in apparently feeling little sense of poetic vocation and in almost never asserting the transcendent power of poetry. (qtd. in Marotti 64)

This view, while compelling to Auden and others, was still the product of the anthologized, mythified Donne, which recent critics, beginning with Marotti, have revised. In the process, this new direction has revealed an understanding of coterie poetics applicable to subsequent coterie circles, including that of the mid-twentieth century, who would not avoid but exploit the fact that they were coterie poets from small communities.

Critical History of Donne and Coterie Poetics

The bulk of Donne scholarship dwarfs that of all the other poets here discussed; in the past fifteen years, a series of Variorums has been directed by Pebworth and others with volumes separated formally and generically (and exhaustively) in many thousands of pages, providing textual histories, critical histories, and annotated texts to reasonably assess the critical history of the output

of Donne and his critics—and to deal with the convoluted print and manuscript history. My very selective critical history arranges the major critical statements to frame the significant coterie-related criticism that altered thinking on Donne’s poetry for good. Donne’s reputation has fluctuated perhaps more than other poets of like status. Determining the value of his work has been controversial, inspiring passionate support and detraction, even in the same admirers. Where Aldous Huxley calls him an intellectually complex “man of action,” (qtd. in *The Complete Poetry and Selected Prose of John Donne* vii) one can see that in each cadre of favorable critics – an admiration for the liveliness of this poet, his feeling intelligence. Its extremes, called “metaphysical” by Dryden and Johnson a century and a half later, was pejorative (as would be “coterie”). Those like Ben Jonson, one of Donne’s great encomiasts, expressed mixed admiration because of what he saw as a meter rough enough to “deserve hanging” (qtd. in *Norton Critical* 179). Yet in that roughness, Jonson saw what he thought was the best poetry of its kind. Exactly what that kind of poet, and in what context to understand him, has only recently been revised to consider his actual cultural context, one that makes him a “coterie poet,” as is explained in this section.

Coterie, which has had consistently negative connotations, has trailed poets such as Donne, whose poems were so peer and patronage dependent. The larger implication, as indicated in following statement, by the venerated late 19th century, early 20th century critic, George Saintsbury, is that there is something idolatrous and false in a coterie, one that leads to misinterpretation (my italics added):

There is hardly any, perhaps indeed there is not any, English author on whom

it is so hard to keep the just mixture of personal appreciation and critical measure as it is on John Donne. It is almost necessary that those who do not like him should not like him at all; should be scarcely able to see how any decent and intelligent human creature can like him. It is almost as necessary that those who do like him should either like him so much as to speak unadvisedly with their lips, or else curb and restrain the expression of their love for fear that it should seem on that side idolatry. But these are not the only dangers. *Donne is eminently of that kind which lends itself to sham liking, to coterie worship, to a false enthusiasm; and here is another weapon in the hands of the infidels, and another stumbling-block for the feet of the true believers.* (xi)

What he describes above surely does sound like a way to misinterpret Donne. However, an appreciation for coterie influence and stylistic markers in fact reversed several misapprehensions of how to read Donne's work. In the past two decades, critics have seen an opportunity to revise how to read coterie poets and not necessarily dismiss elements fairly described as coterie qualities or coterie poetics. Saintsbury's 1896 statement also reflects pejoration into negative or anti-coterie flourishing that may have inspired the decontextualization in the first place: thus the desire to get him out of the weeds of fancy and personal appropriation and into the properly scrubbed, public anthological sphere. At the

end of the 19th century, Donne was somewhat idiosyncratic as a choice for major English poet, before T.S. Eliot championed Donne's intellectual-feeling style, not to mention long before New Historical criticism and historiography reclaimed him within historical and sociological context.

Criticism of Donne began to shift in the 18th century, as public opinion fell to the negative, most famously with Samuel Johnson's famous characterizations (echoing Dryden's) of Donne as a "Metaphysical Poet." The adjective clearly leaned toward pejorative, and this trend was potentially another contributor to misreading Donne is his difficulty and distinct audience:

About the beginning of the seventeenth century appeared a race of writers that may be termed the metaphysical poets. . . . [they] were men of learning, and to show their learning was their whole endeavor; but, unluckily resolving to show it in rhyme, instead of writing poetry they only wrote verses. . . . they cannot be said to have imitated anything; they neither copied nature for life, neither painted the forms of matter, nor represented the operations of intellect. . . . Of wit [i.e. *discordia concors*] they have more than enough. The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together; nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons, and allusions; their learning instructs, and their subtlety surprises; but the reader commonly thinks his improvement dearly bought, and, though he sometimes admires, he is seldom pleased. [qtd. in *Norton Critical* 193-194)

Pope, who called the same activity *concordia discors*, smoothed Donne's verse to suit his and his contemporaries' neoclassical ears. Donne's self-described "rough verse" was deemed inexpert. W.H. Auden, perhaps still influenced by Johnson, felt discomfort with Donne's informal, personal, or social elements mixed in with the high spiritual. This is why Auden's relationship with Donne is present but strained. He preferred Herbert.

Much of the groundwork of the study of coterie and its effects upon poetic production and performance can be found in Arthur Marotti's major work on the Early Modern English poet, *John Donne: Coterie Poet* (1986). Marotti determined that the long-term anthologizing and selective discussion of Donne's works had decontextualized them to the point of serious misreading—little-
questioned influential criticisms can be seriously questioned, as Marotti does Cleanth Brooks's reading of Donne's "The Canonization" (*Norton Critical* 77-78)

And if unfit for tombs or hearse
Our legend be, it will be fit for verse;
And if no piece of chronicle we prove,
We'll build in sonnets pretty rooms;
As well a well-wrought urn becomes
The greatest ashes, as half-acre tombs,
And by these hymns, all shall approve
Us canonized for love (ll. 29-36)

This widely anthologized, canonical poem is held to contain a paradox in which "the poet daringly treats profane love as if it were divine love." Seeing the poem

in something like its original context, Marotti argues that

Donne's readers knew that he was expressing his personal longing for the public world he pretended to scorn in this lyric and they would have read the poem as a more ironic, hence more aesthetically complex, work than the one the formalist critics and scholars utilizing literary and intellectual history have interpreted.

(157)

These lines also demonstrate the tension between the playing with lyrical "toyes" that courtly, social poets like Donne and Philip Sidney considered trifles and the strain of using such a thing as verse to maneuver within private and semiprivate circles. These pieces have consequence contrary to or dependent upon the pleasure of their exchange.

It seems that Donne could not help but retain the methods of coterie, of seeking advancement, even as his poetic production diminished—he was inclined to write upon occasions, even writing a poem in Latin to Herbert the day he was being ordained in 1621 (275). Marotti shows by examining the long-term effects of coterie poetic production developed in one's youth.

Marotti points to the "plainspeak" of Donne's way of addressing his audience. This is a direct form of address and not necessarily a simpler method of expression—Donne certainly can be difficult—and it stems at least partially from the coterie atmosphere of his Inn of the Court experience.

His creation of a sense of familiarity and intimacy, his fondness for dialectic, intellectual complexity, paradox and irony, and appeals

to shared attitudes and group interests (if not to private knowledge), the explicit gestures of biographical self-referentiality, the styles he adopted or invented all relate to the coterie circumstances of his verse. (19)

But his intended audience could appreciate his friendship warmly communicated in shared experiences and values, and those that personally received the most complex of his works could feel complimented by the expectation of comprehension, a coterie value expected among the audiences of contemporary poets as well.

Marotti's work (and soon others') revised received wisdom that had come from a decontextualized, ahistorical tradition. The masculinity, or "masculine persuasive force" that had been so well-appreciated, was perhaps misunderstood. In a coterie atmosphere, Donne was

[o]utside the codes of complimentary politeness, he freed his wit, his language, his critical impulses, and his feelings in the kind of verse that the Inn's atmosphere of 'liberty' encouraged. These poems show the shared values and the shared experiences of poet and readers. (37)

It was this force of personality that undeniably marked his poetry.

After Marotti's work, more needed to be said about the performance element of the coterie effect, as others, such as Peabworth, have contributed since. Because Donne was writing in a period where the expectation for poets, especially those that were aspiring bureaucrats, was not to publish the products of

their verse-making but make gifts or circulate them for particular audiences, he allowed himself the freedom to treat his work with the flexibility and the impermanence of performance. Once the poem has been delivered and read (i.e. “performed”) in the temporal moment of its occasion for a restricted audience, it has fulfilled itself, in a sense, as a singular, unrepeatable performance. Walter Ong (cited in the Pebworth article) comments on the transitional nature of manuscript culture, which resembles closely the exchange of oral expression. What heightens this sense is that part of the charm of the self-contradiction in the poems implies the singular, dramatic performance of an “amateur” virtuoso that tailors the work to the occasion. If one does not recognize Donne as a coterie poet, one misses the implications, textually, of text as performance.

Ted Larry-Pebworth focuses on the concern about the immediate performance of the text. Donne’s social position had direct effect on his poetic method and interest in the future of his poetry. The relative flippancy overstated or not, resembles the attitude of a mid-20th century American poet, Frank O’Hara (as noted by Shaw).

Shaw cites Marotti’s work as an influence (22-24) as well as Pebworth’s work on text as performance. Pebworth demonstrates the similarities between manuscript transmission, or delivery, and the oral performance. The reception of a poem depends on the reading enacted by the one to whom it is addressed, therefore it takes part in a temporal event. Scribal variance, adjustment, and error on the part of those circulating the poem after it has been sent is another stage in temporality that separates it from the relatively static and silent printed media.

This extemporaneousness is something of a pose, the product and the reception of that product—Ben Jonson admired and yet felt the need to upbraid Donne for his meter—produces intimacy that Donne took advantage of, personally. Conflicted over the subject of publication, he often considered it, and yet he feared that option's destructive possibilities as when in "The Triple Fool" he states, "I am two fools, I know, / for loving, and for saying so / in whining poetry" (ll. 1-2). The purging of pain via poetry is limited enough: he is a triple fool when others set his songs to music, "publishing" his triumph but losing him his original audience and pleasure. Also, Donne largely sloughed off the arch Petrarchism of the period, though, depending on his audience, could produce the voice of the appropriate Petrarchan lover in his poetry.

The tension between the personal and the public, and the transition from one to the next, was a struggle for each of the coterie poets explored in this dissertation, and continues to be a struggle for defenders of their most coterie-based work. Marotti, however, seems to have been thorough in establishing the necessary perspective of John Donne as a coterie poet.

This is not to say the first coterie readings were without their blind spots. Guibbory, who otherwise admires Marotti's breakthrough scholarship, points to Donne's representation of a woman in parts. Marotti argues Donne's poems represent anti-Petrarchan criticism of the poets and not of the female bodies. However, certain "Elegies" ("The Anagram" and "The Comparison") directly show an ugliness and disgust with the aged end of the continuum of the female body, disgust that does not register as much against overwrought poetry as against

most female bodies. Donne's wrought inconsistency sometimes led him into misogynistic territory—more so than the fairly soft, conventional misogyny of typical of male poets plaintive over woman's inconstancy.

Further gender issues are explored and built upon the first coterie criticism, particularly by Wall, Hirschfield, Schenk, and Dubrow.

In her 1993 work, *The Imprint of Gender*, Wendy Wall, here discusses sonnet circulation here, but developing the gendered reading of manuscript circulation and certain forms (including epithalamia):

Instead of accounting for the sonnets' stylized and sexualized writerly qualities—their tractability, permeability, and lack of closure-by seeing them as demonstrations of postmodern textuality, I suggest that we interpret these features by framing them within the institution of patronage and the codes of manuscript exchange it promoted. In generating a logic of desire in the poems that was everywhere interwoven with their exchangeability, sonnet writers reproduced the conversation of the coterie in poetic form (53-54).

As a relatively brief introduction to coterie criticism and John Donne, I have sought to establish the key critics and a bit of Donne's work as example. Later in this dissertation, Donne's value as a figure of coterie poetics is assessed in light of one particular form, that of the epithalamium, which performs the best cross-section of coterie concerns and values with which to evaluate the life of that particular form from its ancient origins to the mid-twentieth century.

CHAPTER 4

W.H. AUDEN AND THE SEMI-CLOSET

Preface

Not unlike Donne criticism, biographical and literary criticism on Wystan Hugh Auden is far-ranging and hardly within the purview of this chapter or dissertation. Also, not unlike Donne, Auden had a long career and was uncomfortable regarding an early career that made him quite famous. Each had a coterie past from which he felt compelled to escape and yet could not in his mature poetics. Where Auden and Donne differ most significantly is their approaches to poetry and poetic vocation. Without doubt Auden was a professional poet and a figure of mastery for younger poets; he was the world's last internationally significant English-speaking poet. Donne was among the last amateur poets that became canonical.

Biography (Highly Selective)

W.S. Auden, coterie figure of camp sensibilities and incontrovertible guru figure to so many, also happens to be the last world poet in the English language. He was born in York, England in 1907 to a doctor father and a very religious mother, growing up upper middle-class in a Birmingham largely less than upper-middle class. That landscape, post-industrial and prewar, dominated the valleys of his imagination and most of his early poetry, that which would give him inordinate early fame. He had a love of machines and mines that developed from knowing them in their broken, shuttered forms. In a 1927 poem (numbered "III"

in *The English Auden*) the lines are filled with images of an “industry already comatose,” including “ramshackle engine” and the “dismantled washing-floors” and the ever-present “poor soil”(22).

Though a major poet of international fame and a proponent of formalism, he felt ever the liminal figure—not only between wars but between empires (English and American—he would become an American citizen in 1939) and between acceptance as a major voice and limited acceptance as a semi-closeted man. By 1973, the year of his death, his camp sexuality had lost its audience and his intensified religiousness left his young admirers finally cold. He died in a hotel room (as he suspected he would) where his life partner, Chester Kallman knew in an instant Auden was dead. The old-looking poet, worn fast with intense living and prematurely aging skin, would never have slept on the side on which he now seemed to sleep (cf. Davenport and Mendelson).

Before he closed his eyes on the world, he had continued his regular, intense schedule of work, editing and chairing international readings and setting about his public intellectual pace, but for a time after his death, his relevance was no longer assured. The underlying gripe was that his best work had been written in England before he left on the eve of the Second World War.

When Auden left England in 1939 both he and his friend and colleague, Christopher Isherwood, drew hostile responses from the left and from a sense of nationalism on the precipice of war. This division and response would remain present in the subsequent reception of his work. While Auden retained such a

variety or range of followers as to guarantee an afterlife among poets, the critics followed a bit more slowly than the poets.

Auden's following proceeded along two paths: his formalist fellow travelers, like Merrill and Wilbur, that sought to emulate the smooth technical efficiency, especially of the late, American Auden. These poets likely took to heart Auden's insistence on "reticence," which will be discussed later in this brief chapter. The other followers were along the lines of the New York Poets, like O'Hara, Schuyler, and Ashbery, who found in Auden their gay-uncle figure and a slightly discouraging personal acquaintance.

As a precocious young adult, he was accepted via the force of his personality because of his reception as a genius among his peers at Oxford, surpassing the aesthetes and Bright Young Things of the previous class and retaining the benefits of the doubt his class (upper-middle class, public-schooled English) afforded. It was not the Auden Era for nothing. A contemporary wrote:

When Auden went up to Oxford [...] homosexuals were aesthetes. Auden [...] was not an aesthete. He had no wish to be an Oxford Wit [...H]is homosexuality was not an adornment of his nature but a routine expression of his attitude to life. Homosexuality had become normal. (qtd. in Edsall 196)

The neo-Wildean aesthete of the twenties did not appeal to the more conflicted, Freud-obsessed Auden. His lyrics are infamously oblique (which, despite coming to good effect, embarrassed him). His longer works, *Paid on Both Sides* and *The Orators*, feature not Oxford wit but clan warfare and played out in schoolboy

games. Guilt and anxiety come at least partially from having missed the Great War. He remained donnish much of his life, as his schoolboy interests reflect. He ever loved the role of advisor, regardless of capacity. According to Mendelson, in 1928 Auden speaks of himself as having no politics. According to Beret Strong, Auden went from personal to public poet, from apolitically aesthetic to Leftist (though not ever quite Communist) leading voice by 1934 (Strong 124). His instinct for leadership was among his powers, though it regularly made him a target.

Many have noted the oblique language of spycraft and frontiers, “familiar to his familiars” and enticing to a reading public for whom Auden represented something entirely new. It’s fair to say Auden found himself on uncertain ground with respect to his sexuality, which had apparently troubled his self-worth as a young man and would seemingly trouble his late life persona as a time when he had made peace with his sexuality but not with his youthful Montmere coterie voice (defined below in the private languages of spycraft).

Auden was a lay analyst his whole life, recommending remedies and determined to see any and all physical maladies or diseases as sourced in the mind. However, though he was for a while convinced by Freud, he moved on, and in so doing alienated his deepest admirers and excessive emulators with his turn to more religious analysis. This shift in perception had a profound effect on his poetic reception and it was not until relatively recent critical work that his effect on his admirers and critics come to be better understood. I focus, of course, on his influence as a coterie poet upon younger avant-garde poets.

Collaboration

In addition to a relatively open sexuality and camp-codedness, Auden's example of extensive collaboration anticipates the intense and joyful collaborative ethos of the avant-garde at which he was straddling a frontier. "Collaboration has brought me greater erotic joy [...] than any sexual relation I have had" (qtd. in *Later Auden* 471).

The vital collaborations (though there were countless others) were mainly with Chester Kallman, his longtime partner (whom he married and wore a ring for in the early forties) and Benjamin Britten (1914-1976). The former, as stated earlier, was the long-term love of Auden's life. He had talent though so greatly overshadowed by Auden that their relationship could border on farce in the fulfillment of the stereotypes of parasitic gay relationships. It was never that one-sided, and they were deeply co-dependent, but in most material, bourgeois standards Auden was the more financially independent as well as the more loving one. Kallman, also stereotypically, met the requirement of loving opera to the point of obsession. Auden, consummate artist that he was, could hardly be said to understand opera perfectly and in this Kallman could be expert and ultimately equal partner in a few fairly well-received productions of their making (e.g., the 1951 Stravinsky opera *The Rake's Progress*, for which Auden and Kallman wrote the libretto).

Auden's relationship with Britten was that of the sexually experienced elder tour guide for the shy and sexually repressed young man (cf. Mendelson).

Auden had no qualms directing the lives of others as lay therapist (anticipating Paul Goodman's career amateur as Gestalt therapist).

As collaboration is a major source of coterie literary production, I don't mean to ignore the collaborations with Isherwood (his most famous peer). They collaborated on plays in Berlin, where Auden, supported by his father, was anxious to explore his sexuality. Berlin was nicely idiosyncratic for Auden who could be cold about things French but proud of his Germanic (or Icelandic) origins:

Paris, since the late nineteenth century the inevitable destination for many aspiring artists and writers, and in the 1920s a refuge for Prohibition-fleeing Americans, was by now past its palmiest days even for those less inclined than Auden to Francophobia. Berlin, moreover, was the place where some of the most progressive movements in painting and theatre, architecture and cinema, and other pure and applied arts were located. Even more enticingly, it had a richly deserved reputation for sexual permissiveness and for the diversity of its sexual underworld. (Page 8)

Berlin's social, psychological, and sexual awakening for the most part confirmed his orientation (despite notable, again idiosyncratic exceptions). It also would be an ebbing point of his spirituality, from which he would "recover" slowly as he returned to his mother's Anglo-Catholic roots. His struggle follows in the discussion of *agape* below.

Vision of Agape

Though influenced mainly by the younger, more obscure and mysterious Auden, the English Auden, O'Hara and other young American poets knew the American Auden, who for the rest of his life drew closer to religion in the time since his arrival in 1939. The personal relationship with the poet at first in New York and eventually in European contexts (poet James Schuyler traveled and lived in Italy with Auden and Kallman after Kallman had made it nearly impossible for them to live in New York) contrasted with the more enigmatic young English poet named Auden. While not directly religious, later poets continued to follow the lead of Auden's role as "queer poetic uncle" (Bozorth 4). Ostensibly, the atheistic Auden was left in England.

However, one powerful moment, a spiritual event, anticipating his long conversion, occurred for Auden in England in 1933. His vision of Agape (one of several classical terms that would guide his poetic vision the rest of his life) was put into prose in the sixties, but was occasioned by the poem, "A Summer Night," which contains the language of circles and rings of, how he says it, "those I love," upon all of whom the moon looks. Mendelson helpfully sees this not as a nostalgia or only having to do with poetic commonplaces of immortality, but a transformation of Love in which a moment of unity is pushed

forward in time, so that the coherent moment of unity is no longer in the past but in the present. Now the divisive barrier does not block us from a desired imaginary past, but instead will rise up in

the future, as the later moment of the parting of friends. (*Early Auden* 171)

Though Auden only later wrote out his vision of Agape and how “A Summer Night” contains in it seeds of its conception, Mendelson, with some detective work, found the image of marriage beginning to have a profound effect upon Auden in his choice of literary reviews. The *Book of Talbot*, a “worshipful biography” about explorer Talbot Clifton, written by Talbot’s widow, seems to have represented great love that is “persistent” rather than “passionate,” which Auden approaches with some awe in his review of the book, which he read not long after the powerful, mystical vision. He felt non-sexually toward this group of like-minded individuals in his vision; he could feel this for those unrelated to him and that are not objects of erotic desire. Auden writes of this obliquely, which is typical for his early-thirties poetics.

Perhaps for the first time in his life, Auden feels the overpowering bond of love, erotic or not, that can be summoned in the aesthetic products that are the results of intimate occasions – these feelings can be reenacted.

Auden’s appreciation of agape aligns with his humanism. He was drawn to Otto Rank’s “here and now” aesthetic and therapeutic sensibility, but their public literary expressions of Eros fully diverge into the reticence of Auden and the explicitness of Goodman. As discussed in the Goodman chapter, the literary progeny of Auden and Goodman (however odd that that sounds, both poets are products of the elder poets, though not due to any union between Auden and Goodman), Adrienne Rich and Frank O’Hara mix their emulation: O’Hara is

openly sexual and campy, Rich openly sexual and direct, and thus anti-coterie (or at least anti-codedness) as the political implications are too great to tell things slant or in the language of spycraft. Exclusion is open.

Wedding Poetics

Auden from an early age saw himself in a hierophantic position, feeling the need to minister to sexual (and other types of) calamities amongst friends. His own long, deep problematic relationship to marriage and wedding rites and “the commoned life” are examined in the full epithalamium chapter below.

Key Critics and Reception

Probably the most valuable critic is Auden’s executor and literary biographer, Edward Mendelson, who wrote *Early Auden* (1981) and *Later Auden* (1999). Mendelson was not as daunted or personally invested in Auden as a number of biographers have been, though they did meet late in Auden’s life. He had (has) an ear for the poetry but also a command of history and philosophy amenable to those who charged him with such control. In 1968, before meeting Auden, Mendelson wrote a defense on how to read *The Orators* (1932), which even Auden had given up on as a coterie relic of a young poet eventually unknown to him. Auden felt it required a “key,” but younger poets found its campiness, coding, relative obscurity, and sexuality deeply appealing.

Because of Mendelson’s comfort with the range of Auden’s work he was allowed to write two volumes of literary biography that has grown essential to any

studying Auden's career. Crucial to any analysis of Auden's occasional poetics is the section in the latter volume (*Later Auden* 154-156) in which Mendelson gives an instructive reading of Auden's "In Sickness and in Health" and the definite ties to John Donne's, "The Litanie," which Auden imitated for the structure and, in Mendelson's opinion, the tone and syntax. He cites how Auden had been pushing that poem on many of his friends at that point, somewhat belying his claims of not seeing Donne as a model for his poetry. Also highly significant are the extended selections of analysis of Auden's *Christmas Oratorio*. This piece is written ("innocently") by Auden for the public while encoded for Chester Kallman, his younger male lover and erstwhile spouse. The code-shifting, the dual-mindedness is, in the author's opinion, not entirely successful, but represents the tendency in Auden's work to signify to multiple audiences.

The first full-length study of Auden sexuality and its relation to his poetics is *Auden's Games of Knowledge: Poetry and the Meanings of Homosexuality* (2001) by Richard Bozorth.

Key here is how Bozorth applies (then) recent theory—especially Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet*—to his study of Auden's troubled relationship with his coterie past. The study allows us to see how Auden developed his gamesmanship so that he later reinvented his earliest personae to make them nearer to universal to suit the increasingly public persona of his later years.

Bozorth directs his study, opens it, with the appeal and danger in the coding and espionage, the intrigue of spycraft, and how its gamesmanship established a pattern for Auden in how to "speak" to different audiences in a

single poem. Auden's poetically productive relationship among his Montmere friends—those who shared a privately encoded and modestly published fictional world developed in the early thirties—nearly got him in real trouble due to his tenuous connection to real “Cambridge Spies” in the real Cold War of 1951 (Bozorth 1).

As was his wont, he was both of and outside his circles:

Auden was a latecomer to the coterie discourse of Mortmere, but it is this kind of uncertainty that his early verse incites in the reader. Mortmere provided him with discursive resources to resist censorship and write about the unspeakable. But it also worked to unsettle the reader's assumptions about meaning through semantic and syntactic instabilities that link the duplicity of signs not to abstract or ontological conditions so much as to social ones. In grafting Montmere onto his own private landscape, Auden created a textual arena where the reader is forced to think like a spy because the poet is one himself. (Bozorth 30)

Bozorth points to the tensions between the minoritizing and universalizing models of same-sex desire that characterize Auden's problematic relationship with his poetic corpus and its audience.

His earlier development of a queer aesthetic, most hermetic and coded in his play, *The Orators*, is not utterly dismissed as it had been by Auden and critics, but like Mendelson, sees its value in being radically reconsidered and revised (especially since it was among Frank O'Hara's favorite works).

Bozorth also notes Auden's Shakespearean sonnet obsession with truth and lies seems to have appealed to the "early" Auden of the 1930s, before his powerful turn toward Christianity, which can be categorized as the "later" Auden. The poems of his youth were directed toward the others in his group, those that might guess at the correspondences. Yet, as it is to read John Donne's poetry, the distinction is reductive and the "later" version of both poets seems to have a gamesman-like relationship with his earlier self. The profoundly problematic, youthful homosexual love for later Auden becomes a divine, metaphysical longing. It is this transference that can be seen in the wedding poem that Auden wrote to his lover, Chester Kallman which expresses the direct desire for stable, if culturally subversive, social roles, an expression which was later erased when the poem was redirected toward a heterosexual couple later in Auden's life and career.

Auden and the New York School of Poets

Though this section is not quite chronologically correct (i.e., last) it does provide the proper segue into the next chapter on Frank O'Hara, who admired and slightly feared W.H. Auden, along with one of his closest friends, John Ashbery, and other nearly as famous poet, James Schuyler.

Frank O'Hara and John Ashbery submitted manuscripts for the 1956 Yale Younger Poets prize that Auden, one of several competitions he would judge between 1947 and 1959. Auden stood gatekeeper to an exclusive and likely public future for the poet whose first book was chosen. Other winners in the

period, chosen by Auden, include Adrienne Rich, James Wright, W.S. Merwin, and John Hollander, all poets of notable success.

Poets chosen for such prize typically saw their careers take off. Ashbery and O'Hara's manuscripts never reached the cluttered desk of Auden, who was of a mind not to choose a winner for that year. It was their luck to be in New York and have made acquaintances with the elder poet, though that would not have been enough for him to have a look – his secretary at the time was fellow “New York Poet,” James Schuyler, who had typed up Auden's most recent book, *Nones*, while in Ischia, arranged for Auden to have a look (Gooch 200).

For a winning selection (Ashbery over O'Hara) the introductory essay by Auden was notoriously tepid. It warns against odd-for-its-own sake surrealism, though both poets famously demurred—Ashbery lived in France for a decade and O'Hara swore he would his French like “a rhinestone dog collar” (qtd. in Gooch 261). Both of course, admired and even were a little intimidated by Auden, especially in his physical presence in New York, but they were also confident—even optimistic—enough to tread their own paths. It is curious that Ashbery remained (persevered, persisted) along still avant-garde directions, and though infamously difficult, he is considered by many to be the representative poet of the last thirty years (it did not hurt to be championed by Harold Bloom, however damaging that may be for Ashbery's post-Bloomian reception).

1928's *Paid on Both Sides*, a simultaneously archaic –Old English alliterative poetics pervades—and, as Bozorth puts it, “performs semiserious diagnosis of the homoerotic group bonds supporting the male power structure of

modern England." By *The Orators* (1932) Auden shows he's begun to work through political implications of same-sex desire as he "deploys literature as a distinct mode of psychosexual and sexual-political inquiry" (12). This is the Auden for the New York-based, often gay young poets seeking such inquiry through such skill.

These New York Poets would grow restless with Auden's direction as he aged in their presence. In his 1957 review of Auden's most recent poetry, the heterosexually-oriented Kenneth Koch (1925-2002) made typical criticisms of the trending attitude among those that preferred the younger, elliptic Auden "from the very first coming down" rather than the poetry at that point in 1957. The most recent Auden poetry felt "like intellectual exercises which he is using his talents to decorate. We don't feel the movement of his mind, we don't feel the hesitations and desires that have made so many of his intellectual poems so satisfying" (qtd. in Epstein "Auden and the New York School Poets" 26). Epstein's article actually does early good work on just how important Auden was to the New York School poets, which had been nearly forgotten because of the formalism of the poets that had more obvious debts to Auden and because of the much more famous dissent against Auden's direction offered by the influential poet-critic, Randall Jarrell, whose anti-Audenism had a distinct effect on Auden's reception in his later years.

Queer Poetics

Despite John Ashbery's notorious caginess, he cannot escape an open indebtedness to Auden, whom he credits as being the first major influence on him (cf. Wasley, Epstein). Ashbery admires especially the Caliban section of Auden's *Sea and the Mirror* – in the chapter that Wasley calls “the Gay Apprentice,” analyzes the significance of this curiously mirrored dialectical relationship which Auden voiced through Caliban while imitating the prose of Henry James. That voice speaking directly to a specified audience member, “the gay apprentice,” is commonly taken to be Chester Kallman, whom Auden identifies in a letter (Mendelson *Later Auden*). This practice operates at an even further dialectic remove in Ashbery, who as a young poet wrote his senior thesis on Auden, whose efforts in the long poem especially influenced the young Ashbery. Wasley cites Ashbery's Audenesque feeling on poetry as a product of Eros and repetition – in fact, Ashbery's 1982 long poem, *Litany*, refers to the repetitions and rituals while the poem itself undermines the structures of religion or of Auden himself whose *Orators* and *Sea and the Mirror* are parallel/mirrored structures of each other. Ashbery inserts his queer poetics among the crumbling structures—e.g., he happens upon, or comments upon “insane buggery” in the *Litany*, discussed later in this dissertation.

Shakespeare's *Tempest* is, as Kirsch says in the introduction to *The Sea and the Mirror*, a skeptical work, as is Auden's poem upon it. Kirsch quotes an Auden lecture at the New School: “*The Tempest* is a mythopoeic work, an example of a genre that encourages adaptations” (ix).

Ashbery's reading of the *Sea and the Mirror*, in an undergraduate thesis at Harvard, shows us:

an Audenesque Ashbery whose attentions are directed outward at the world and not exclusively in toward the self, and who sees poetry as exerting a moral influence on that world. [P]erhaps most importantly, in his reading of Auden we can see Ashbery developing a conception of poetry as what the elder poet calls 'embodied love' [Auden CP 272], a notion that is crucial in understanding Ashbery's poetic ambitions. Like Auden, Ashbery sees poetry as concerned with the ethical relation between private people and construes the relationship between poet and reader as a romantic, even erotic one, founded on a desire for contact, communication, and community. For both poets, poetry serves as an expression of longing in the face of loss, and as a space of hopeful exchange in a world of alienation and isolation. (*The Age of Auden* 9)

This Auden, in the poetry, was not necessarily the public face of the poet. In a situation perhaps calling for innovation, or sensitivity to the possibility, Auden chose not to consider same-sex attraction on the part of the Bard of Avon, despite privately likely believing it. Auden's infamous inability to openly state anything publicly of the potential alterity in the sexuality expressed in the sonnets belies fear of some kind of exposure, which (in the early coded poetry) resonated for Ashbery, as has what Shoptaw, Epstein, and others have noted about Ashbery, his

persistent *reticence*, though not over his sexuality, per se, but an appreciation of where the mirrors are.

CHAPTER 5

FRANK O'HARA: THE APEX OF COTERIE

This chapter is designed to showcase Frank O'Hara as the prototypical (successful) coterie poet. For such a poet as O'Hara, the public develops a taste for what might be "rare" or fragile due to the poet-artist's disinclination to archive materials. O'Hara was infamously inexpert on his own poetry, selective in his poetic models and interests, and focused his archival intensity upon the artists who were his contemporaries. Among countless examples, in one instance, just after O'Hara's death, his close friend and poet Kenneth Koch happened upon one of O'Hara's most famous poems, "A True Account of Talking to the Sun on Fire Island," which directly imitates Vladimir Maykovsky's apostrophized sun and certainly echoes Donne's "The Sun Rising." Like the occasion of his death such recovery seemed all the more serendipitous, the loss more tragic. Though not in this case deliberate, they are certainly coterie effects.

Critical Biographical Sources

Of course, this chapter necessarily owes a great deal to Shaw's critical work, *Frank O'Hara: The Poetics of Coterie*. However, the primary biographical sources for this dissertation include *City Poet*, by Brad Gooch, and *Some Digressions on Poems by Frank O'Hara* by Joe LeSueur. Each of these are crucial to establishing the contexts of O'Hara's life and career.

Besides the full-length works of literary criticism and the poetic dedications (e.g. Berkson's collection of poems in memory of O'Hara), however

important, there are really only two full-length significant biographical works on the poet. Each of these has its reasonable criticisms. Brad Gooch's biography (*City Poet: the Life and Times of Frank O'Hara*) from 1993 is the product of a great number of interviews and is the key source for the family details and perspective typically lacking in works focused on the New York School scene. It is to Frank O'Hara what R.C. Bald and Edward Mendelson are to Donne and Auden. As such, it is probably as much depended upon here.

In a 2008 podcast, Mendelson, perhaps in nodding politeness, compliments Gooch's biography, perhaps because it is such a valuable source. Even discounting homophobic reactions, it was not universally admired. An especially tough critic of the book is the source of a great deal of autobiographical material and one of Frank O'Hara's closest friends and longtime roommate, Joe LeSueur, who considered the Gooch book, which LeSueur calls "a cold, deadly account of Frank's life" (291).

While Joe LeSueur figured he wasn't going to produce any great novels, he did recognize his role as Frank O'Hara's Boswell. He and Bill Berkson (poet and much-younger lover of Frank O'Hara when O'Hara died) were his de facto literary executors. They produced valuable, if inconsistent material—primarily, the jointly edited, or "curated," 1978 collection of mixed media reminiscences (*Homage to Frank O'Hara*). Not long before he died in 2001, he finished an oddly moving and highly subjective memoir, *Digressions on Poems by Frank O'Hara*, on the circumstances and actors in the drama of O'Hara's personal lyrics. LeSueur himself is in some ways more important for its perspective,

however sharply his views tend to slant. Mark Doty on his blog openly admires the memoir:

as we got to talking we learned that it was Robert, a friend of the late Joe LeSueur's, who'd found on Joe's desk after his death the manuscript of a book of reminiscences about O'Hara and his poems. Joe hadn't felt confident enough about the book to publish it during his lifetime, but Robert loved it, and gave it to Jonathan Galassi, who edited the manuscript. And thus we got the best book about O'Hara I know, *SOME DIGRESSIONS ON POEMS BY FRANK O'HARA*. Its off-the-cuff, casual memories of who was doing what and sleeping with whom and what was going on while a particular poem was composed are wonderful; they give you the texture of the conversation and presence of the man himself. (Blog entry: June 18, 2009)

I must admit, LeSueur's writing is not fine critical material, but it's a chatty and frank reflection on the circumstances of poems. I must also admit the structure—poem, date, recollection, digression—grows repetitive; the chapters feel a bit like headstones or the whole of it recalling long past circumstances like recovering where the bodies are buried, in a late-life confession. Yet it's addictive and compelling as gossip can be – as gossipy things were to O'Hara, and his model, Auden, who wrote a "Defense of Gossip," in 1937, in which he calls the act "creative" and a notably useful art:

All art is based on gossip—that is to say, observing and telling. The artist proper is someone with a special skill in handling the medium, a skill which few possess. But all of us to a greater or less degree can talk; we can all observe, and we all have friends to talk to. Gossip is the art form of the man and woman in the street, and the proper subject for gossip, as for all art, is the behavior of mankind. (536)

Auden's noted reticence about his own biography, and hypocrisy about gossiping and snooping doesn't match O'Hara's pleasant, personal directness, conveyed in the details of this mundane and sublime memoir. It carries the "deep gossip" appreciated so earnestly in Allen Ginsberg's (1926-1997) elegy for Frank O'Hara, "City Midnight Junk Strains" (Berkson, LeSueur 148-149).

Biography

I'll follow an O'Harian convention and introduce his life with its infamous ending. Struck down by a dune buggy on Fire Island in August, 1966, he fulfilled some stereotypes. So, a burst of posthumous fame tagged with an infamous death framed a legend for Frank O'Hara, leading New York Poet, openly if not strictly marked as homosexual in the love poetry. His friends mourned his sudden passing in a relatively private, well-attended ceremony that, as usual provided a motley assortment of the beloved's kin and acquaintance.

As a person that felt friendship to be stronger than blood kinship, he was lamented with the intensity of dozens of best friendships. Larry Rivers, the New

York artist, object of much of O'Hara's frustrated desires, and subject of many poems, lamented: "Frank O'Hara was my best friend. There are at least sixty people in New York who thought Frank O'Hara was their best friend [...]. At one time or another, he was everyone's greatest and most loyal audience" (Berkson, LeSueur 138). Though lost that day, his poetry retains a quality of loyal intensity that keeps people reading him, long after this funeral, long after his acolytes and their readers have passed on.

John Ashbery, in many ways O'Hara's peer but with a lifetime of public success ahead of him, read "To a Harbor Master," which was likely known to most in the audience at his funeral. He could hardly finish, for its lines are particularly apt:

I wanted to be sure to reach you;
though my ship was on the way it got caught
in some moorings. I am always tying up
and then deciding to depart. In storms and
at sunset, with the metallic coils of the tide
around my fathomless arms, I am unable
to understand the forms of my vanity
or I am hard alee with my Polish rudder
in my hand and the sun sinking. To
you I offer my hull and the tattered cordage
of my will. The terrible channels where
the wind drives me against the brown lips

of the reeds are not all behind me. Yet
I trust the sanity of my vessel; and
if it sinks, it may well be in answer
to the reasoning of the eternal voices,
the waves which have kept me from reaching you.

(Collected Poems 217)

Beneath that address was the real (or initial) object of that poem's lament—Larry Rivers as the object of Frank O'Hara's desire and O'Hara's doomed attempts to make him his. The complexity of that moment perhaps isn't unique but is strikingly the product of coterie culture. The intensity of his final scene was not manipulated by O'Hara, precisely, since he preferred happy scenes and to be buried alone (Gooch 4-5). Yet, it was inevitable.

The facts of the early life of Frank O'Hara are simple and familiar, but they are mostly the products of second-hand interviews and basic research. Born in 1926 in Baltimore but raised in a small Massachusetts town, his parents were troubled, his mother was a lifelong alcoholic he grew to resent, and he was largely raised by the women in his life other than his mother. The face and voice of what was (problematically) known as the New York School of Poets, Frank O'Hara was not a native. He spent wartime years in the Navy, studied at Harvard, early established himself among the Boston avant-garde, but grew into his cosmopolitan poverty lifestyle-persona, which is quintessentially New York. Because of his reputation and his camp poetic strengths, his poetry was not always taken seriously outside of a small band of deep admirers, to whom he

dedicated his aesthetic attention and intense friendship. O'Hara himself preferred the company of the artists he wrote about and supported and at times curated for in his positions in the art world, most definitively at the Museum of Modern Art. His death in 1966, at age 40, haunted the poetry world and had the effect of deifying him among his close admirers.

You don't hear much about the internals of his upbringing or his time in the Navy during World War II, or even much about his time at Harvard for Frank O'Hara's great strength and narrow brilliance was to stay of a moment to make a fresco of it before the medium could dry. He toyed with even traditional forms and probably didn't resent them, exactly, but he would not be pinned down to any particular movement, regardless of a reputation as a founding poet of the "Poets of the New York School." We can admit such monikers are useful and at the same time retrospective and scaffolding of critical prose upon creative work, especially the "Action Painting" O'Hara performed for his friends in person or in manuscript or, ideally, on the telephone. One leaves his poetry with a sense of regret that these poems written in quick retrospect are only peripheral to the genius he possessed for friendship. O'Hara's talent for friendship gave him the space in strong circles in serial procession from Cambridge to downtown New York and through a course of intense, significant women that operated as muses of a kind. Of course, he became an urban poet, despite his relatively rural upbringing.

Perhaps as loaded as the imprecise designation, poet of the "New York School," is the term, *coterie poet*. I don't find the term among the poetic lines of

O'Hara, but he was certainly known as a coterie poet and retained the baggage and minor status that it carried. There's attractiveness to genteel poverty—graceful poverty—in the fields of English (which sounds like a varietal cleverness in poverty thrives within systems that allow for proximity. (cf Williams and Davidson on anti-materialism). Coterie thus sustains itself, typically pretentious but powerful among the inevitable elite. Goodman was a career amateur, and his New York localism was a feature for O'Hara before they'd actually met.

How much of O'Hara's urban world was fantasy projection? Is his amateurism one of his primary attractions? Why is this appealing? We may be attracted to a lifestyle with a guided tour in moments of hush and thrill that let us know we're in, for a while. He's attentive and clever and rarely serious for very long. In regard to O'Hara's "In Memory of My Feelings," Lytle Shaw notes that this poem is, while a coterie poem, less concerned with lots of proper names and personal detail; in fact:

the poem is metacommunal in the sense that it explores the extent to which the self of an experience is also the self of one or several collectivities that frame the experience, conditioning its meaning. These collectivities are not simply present groups but pasts out of which one emerges. (89)

O'Hara's poem contains versions of O'Hara at, as he puts it, "My 10 / my 19 / my 9, / and the several years. My / 12 years since they all died" (*Collected Poems* 254).

Poetry and Poetics

Frank O'Hara adopted for himself, self-consciously and in anticipation of the temporality of his work, a coterie aesthetic, or poetics, where the diction and situation would be deliberately singular, quotidian, and/or obscure. There is a deliberate effect in this sort of alienation: the reader may experience immediately what it is like to read a poem of his far into the future. And yet, there is an intimacy to the poetics of coterie that may, through the experience of more and more of the poetry, begin to produce a sort of inclusiveness.

O'Hara searches in his walking, talking meditations, his urban pastorals, appearing spontaneous and alive and full of contradictions—in “A Step Away from Them” (*Collected Poems* 258) in which he gracefully enjoys erotic potential and must address sudden, shocking loss of erstwhile friends and muses:

There are several Puerto
Ricans on the avenue today, which
makes it beautiful and warm. First
Bunny died, then John Latouche,
then Jackson Pollock. But is the
earth as full as life was full, of them?
[...]

A glass of papaya juice
and back to work. My heart is in my
pocket, it is Poems by Pierre Reverdy.

Of the three names here, Pollock is the only widely-known entity, and as a result of this poem the other two have an afterlife forever linked with the poem and these people.

Though Frank O'Hara regularly imitated and admired (and sometimes took the name) of French poets like Apollinaire and Reverdy, he was enamored by the directness of William Carlos Williams—he loved Williams and yet did not appreciate the “‘Cleanness thinned down to jingoism’ and their cult of the ‘He-Man’ ” that followed in his wake (qtd. in Perloff 45).

What's distinctive about O'Hara, and it is both an affect of coterie and impossible to emulate, is his friendliness, his sense of what Joan Acocella, journalist and dance critic, calls his “sense of blessedness:”

Boyfriends aside, he finds a thousand things to like. Ballet dancers fly through his verse. Taxi drivers tell him funny things. Zinka Milanov sings, the fountains splash. The city honks at him and he honks back. This willingness to be happy is one of the things for which O'Hara is most loved, and rightly so. It is a fundamental aspect of his moral life, and the motor of his poetry. (489)

There are countless examples of his friendly energy, his insistence upon improving the circumstances for those engaged in the “private” conversations of the poem. He insists in a manuscript poem, “When I die, don't come, I wouldn't want a leaf / to turn away from the sun [...]. There's nothing so spiritual about being happy / but you can't miss a day of it, because it doesn't last” (*Collected Poems* 244).

In a poem his fellow New York poet Kenneth Koch called “perfect” (CP 536n) he implores:

Why do you play such dreary music
on Saturday afternoon, when tired
mortally tired I long for a little
reminder of immortal energy?// (ll. 1-4)

Am I not

shut in too, and after a week
of work don't I deserve Prokofieff?//
Well, I have my beautiful de Kooning
to aspire to. I think it has an orange
bed in it, more than the ear can hold. (ll. 10-15)

In his frenzied, insomniac, financially precarious, deepening alcoholic condition he finds in his life small things—however currently priceless as a de Kooning painting once owned by Frank O’Hara would be—and this is an abundance, more than one ear can hold.

O’Hara’s poetry embodied his poetics to the pleasure of his contemporaries and for today’s readers. One embodies his attitude/posture in reading the poetry. Because of his intimate tone, personal address, and a host of other coterie “methods” or markers, his poetry sustains that loyal impression. He overcomes the exclusionary tendencies in coterie groups as his readership grows. “Having a Coke with You” (*Collected Poems* 360) is among his most anthologized poems for its pleasing projection for the reader, regardless (or in a

pleasing profusion) of details. Having that coke: “is even more fun than going to San Sebastian, Irun, Hendaye, Biarrits, Bayonne.”

Frank O’Hara succeeds perhaps as that fantasy collaborator, much like what Gubar calls “Sapphistries” for Sappho. The utter absorption of O’Hara’s poetry into the second and third wave New York poets’ literary output and thinking (cf. Rifkin; Shaw; Notley) decontextualized the personal, often sexual contexts of O’Hara’s occasional and personal poems.

Auden’s executor and key biographer, Edward Mendelson, has noted (in a 2008 podcast) that O’Hara, contrary to reputation, was attracted to form and had formal sensibility. All of the “odes” and “elegies” of O’Hara seemed not to match any of the acknowledged conventions. But, though I don’t find Mendelson an especially strong reader of O’Hara’s poetic development, he is sensitive to form and makes a fair case that elements of the convention are there---from the suddenly cold weather (“suddenly / it started raining and snowing”) to the calling out to the fallen, “oh Lana Turner we love you get up!” Mendelson’s gauge of O’Hara’s early poetry is compelling due of course to Mendelson’s area of expertise. He briefly points to the poetic divisions in the atmosphere at Harvard (Yeats v. Eliot) but says the evidence of exercises are limited (I disagree---the poetry is full of muted riffs and imitations of canonical odds and ends). I hear in Mendelson’s reading of “Lana Turner” an echo of Auden’s “In Memory of W.B. Yeats,” which opens, “He disappeared in the dead of winter,” which may seem incidental, but he’s onto something when he hears the echoes of tradition even in O’Hara’s most immediately composed poetry.

As Gooch (169) notes, O'Hara was notably contrary; as a younger man, he leaned on Joyce's poems and Donne's prose. His Shakespeare was melodramatic and bloody (*Titus Andronicus*) hyper-witty (*Love's Labour's Lost*) and (in *Cymbeline*) to his mind, decadent as Ivy Compton-Burnett, the English novelist revived by Auden and adored by O'Hara (169). Gooch notes the young poet's undergraduate tendencies: "O'Hara needed to make Shakespeare part of his own private world of in-group references to appreciate him" (169).

Cultivated Amateurism

O'Hara's approach to publication was near indifference, according to John Button, a younger acolyte, and addressee of much of his later poems in a piece called "Frank's Grace":

He did not publish or appear publicly very much during his life; he wasn't particularly interested in his career. When asked by a publisher-friend for a book, Frank might have trouble even finding the poems stuffed into kitchen drawers or packed in boxes [...].

Frank's fame came to him unlooked-for. (Berkson, LeSueur 41)

This is remarkable not for someone that chose an avant-garde countercultural approach to culture, but for someone whose poetry was relatively approachable and perhaps commercial and for someone ambitious enough to enter contests (he won a Hopwood Prize in 1950) and who sought publication of critical essays on contemporary art and his aspirations to be a professional musician. Button's recollection is of one who knew Frank O'Hara as an established identity as an

older, freer spirit, not at the relatively ambitious stages of O'Hara's youth, so his perspective may lend a legendary light upon the dead poet's qualities.

A popular O'Hara moment (cf. Gooch 386-7) that tends to be remembered for its iconic value is the night (February 9, 1962) he shared the stage with, among others, Robert Lowell, who was considered the standard-bearer for verse-culture and was unlikely to be impressed with the more sociable, more stable representative of the impromptu performance. O'Hara, seeming to have arrived a bit late, read his poem, what would be known as "Lana Turner has Collapsed." He explained that he had just written the poem on the Staten Island ferry. The poem was a crowd-pleaser, making Lowell noticeably sheepish, which was probably as Frank O'Hara intended, according to Gooch.

Personism (1959)

Responsible for one of the most well-known prose works on one's own poetics, O'Hara hardly seemed to take the task very seriously (though that may have been at least slightly a pose, as he took his art criticism seriously). His *Personism* manifesto (or anti-manifesto, really) has the distinction of echoing many of the themes found in O'Hara's poetry. This piece of prose, formally requested of him so he wrote it on the fly and included the poet, LeRoi Jones, whom he happened to be sitting with that afternoon. O'Hara posed his anti-poetics in an anti-manifesto, mostly in reaction to the craze for self-important statements of poetic ethos, and he presented himself in terms of painting,

specifically “action painting” of Rivers and Pollack, though his Renaissance, classical, and even medieval models are often openly exploited

Personism’s overvalue probably comes from its easy length, very light touch, and its capturing (ostensibly) of the late fifties moment for the avant-garde. Its advice to “just go on your nerve” sounds dismissible and flippant but is right in his half-serious groove.

A Career in Art

Frank O’Hara’s primary occupation for most of his adult life was to curate and promote the avant-garde artists—such as Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline, and other Abstract Expressionists— he sought to champion. He was not unlike the Early Modern poets, like Donne, who were not poets first but deliberate, passionate amateurs delivering occasional and personal poems to friends and publishing inconsistently. Among O’Hara’s most widely known poems, “Why I Am Not a Painter,” like his Personism essay defines himself through apophasis and personal identification of the workspace.

Like his literary models, O’Hara resisted literary authority, but he did so often in the company of the non-literary, which is why he preferred the company of artists. Together, they could assure each other they could hate their master without retribution from the officials of verse or art culture. In a 1966 public television appearance (“Frank O’Hara) O’Hara expresses this (roughly) as a fine exchange between a poet and an artist that say: “I hate Yeats” and “Oh, yeah, I hate Picasso,” respectively. The video is curious, though, since it was recorded

the year of O'Hara's death and aired posthumously. By this time (or between those times) O'Hara had become legend. His personal description of his fellow New York Poets, that which was getting some readership, was really a description of a scene that had passed ten or fifteen years before. That year (1966) O'Hara had especially unproductive. His death wasn't very seriously rumored as suicide but it was infamous and unsettling. Also, it began a career which Auden described in Yeats: he became his admirers.

Of course, he had done so already, as had Yeats long before his death. But it may have been a strange local legend writ large that such a personal, clearly coterie poet such as O'Hara would have been so shockingly important, so worth committing to memory to his acolytes. His extemporaneous poems, those going on "his nerve," nearly overcame their being conversational. And yet, the poems generally defy memorization (as explained by Alice Notley below).

Critical History and Reception

Marjorie Perloff's *Poet Among Painters*, first published a decade after O'Hara's death, established credibility for study of O'Hara, whose popularity had endured fairly well by the time she published it. It is the first full-length treatment of O'Hara's poetry, which she admired for its "uncanny way of getting what John Ashbery called [...] 'the perishable fragrance of tradition' into his work" (Preface). By the revised edition, twenty years later, the cultural capital of the dominant poets (like Olson and Lowell) had largely been spent while O'Hara's work, organically but progressively diversified into broader audience approval

and critical seriousness. What she championed in O'Hara in the late seventies had become a valuable quality: personability. She had endured as a major critic writing on postmodern poetics while largely retaining the language of poetry as opposed to the more academically popular theory. Of course, she was hardly an outsider (longtime Stanford professorship, currently emerita) and could be seen as having a fairly limited view of the social situation she had so definitively proven in her first work. She had shown how one could take a coterie poet like O'Hara seriously, yet she retained the negative sense of term, coterie.

Mainly, the Perloff book looks into the poetics and makes claims for O'Hara's significance. While important, she is relatively indifferent to the coterie qualities so important to Shaw and this dissertation. She sees O'Hara's uses of form as primarily practice-level and his interest in Early Modern poets a product of his Harvard education but not so important as the voice he found later, one that has absorbed but not followed much in the way of English literary convention. I think she may underestimate his estimation of canonical poets, though they do come off mostly as unrecognizable (see use of Wyatt, Gower, Donne, Shakespeare). According to Perloff, O'Hara's strongest poems "fuse what he called the 'charming artifice' of Apollinaire (and a host of other French poets from Rimbaud to the Surrealists) with the voice of Mayakovsky, the colloquial speech of Williams or the late Auden, the documentary precision of Pound's Cantos, and the Rilkean notion of being 'needed by things'" (xxxiii). This gets O'Hara's sound though underplays the quality of his "charming artifice."

Multiple sources report the legend and durability of Frank O'Hara. In Perloff's updated introduction to her O'Hara study, she makes two notable observations: first, that it is Frank O'Hara that has had a durable afterlife while Charles Olson, who was the dominant avatar for the avant-garde, a guru figure that made the major statements of postmodernism, was anthologized and studied but whose poetry is not enduring; second, Perloff notes the legend of Frank O'Hara that makes him durable. This durability is of course curious when compared against the highly temporal, literally dated circumstances and content of the poetry.

The most direct claims for a coterie poetics comes in Lytle Shaw's *Frank O'Hara: Coterie Poet* takes a significant leap, one that this dissertation follows directly, which is to see coterie as not just a social appellation but a poetic method. I would find such a thought over-clever if it were not so convincing.

Shaw builds on what Perloff recognizes as valuable (proper names) but goes so far as to develop a poetics recognizing coterie not as a flaw but a feature. Shaw developed a briefer 2000 essay (in *Jacket Magazine*) in which he not only develops a positive notion of coterie poetics, but with some extension applies earlier, textual criticism of Early Modern poetry. Key critics, such as Arthur Marotti, and subsequent critics such as Heather Dubrow and Wendy Wall, recognized the poetry of John Donne and his immediate and posthumous admirers as that of a coterie poet. For such a canonical poet as Donne, this was innovative indeed. I have found Shaw's development of these ideas (in a somewhat different

order than I had myself found these patterns) a highly useful model for analysis and development of twentieth-century poetry and poetics.

As Shaw helps us to see, O'Hara and his poetry, like other poets that become involved in coterie relationships, demonstrate a type of deliberate kinship that pushes us to re-imagine the logistics of group formations. O'Hara's relationship with his community shows how each of those poets provided a haven for their literary adolescence, which resembles the Inns-of-the-Court finishing school atmosphere present for coterie poets such as John Donne, especially. Ashbery and Koch developed singular personae, while O'Hara's brilliant amateurism deepened: Hollywood provided the everyday melodrama and doubled as object of campy humor and as a useful palette for O'Hara's intimate, gossip-shaped style.

O'Hara, deliberately or not, cultivated his amateur status by hardly publishing, hardly collecting his work—much of it has turned up in manuscript, by sheer luck—and producing poetry to an intimate audience; these elements of the coterie have their origins in the Early Modern practice of manuscript circulation. What differentiates newer models of reading from the older ways—the “hyperscapes” of Smith as opposed to “philology”—is the mode of expression, but not necessarily the experience or even the conditions of production. London in 1594 was certainly a site of “hyperscape” patterns of sensory and intellectual stimulation and production, or “sensibility.” What may be valuable in postmodern literary production and the resultant criticism is that the markings of postmodern sensibility may be read into previous, pre-modern

(pre-postmodern?) periods. The oppressive danger of being a closet Catholic in the late sixteenth-century England resembles the threatening conditions of Cold War America in the middle of the twentieth century.

A felicitous term Smith constructs for the poetic persona of Frank O'Hara is "hypergrace." The term implies "bodily and mental composure, mediation between emotional intensity and campy self-irony, and a feminized conception of movement which relates to O'Hara's own gay sexuality," though the latter observation is somewhat problematic. At once the poet is many, best related in the poem, "In Memory of My Feelings," where he wrote his desired epitaph, "To be born and have grace to live as variously as possible." It's curious to consider "grace" in Early Modern and postmodern poetic sensibilities—for instance, Donne's edge comes from a personality honed among delicate balance of public and private exchange. It is used ironically in Donne's "Elegy to His Mistress Going to Bed" (*Norton Critical* 34-36) where "grace" is not a right but a privilege (to see his lover naked). O'Hara's grace implies the sense of Catholic prayer for grace, or beneficence from his family's God. Even if irreligious by the end of his life, there is still the sense that O'Hara knows that grace is a difficult quality to attain, even for the graceful.

Magee and Epstein, especially emphasize O'Hara's place in the "genealogy of pragmatism," citing the influence of Paul Goodman, "a self-proclaimed Jamesian pragmatist" (Magee 695n). His pleasing avoidance of dogma and embrace of popular culture act as gateways to the challenging poems.

In Perloff's 1976 article on O'Hara's special aesthetic attention, she notes the tepid critical response (by the relatively mainstream Galway Kinnell, for instance) that finds O'Hara's poetics "constricted" by its "personalia" (781). She notes his posthumous success (a National Book Award for Hall's *Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*) but sustained critical expressions still fall into the "whimsically charming gadfly" realm, at best.

Afterlife

Contemporary poet, Mark Doty, has several places discussed his regular visits to O'Hara's grave. In this place, he feels he has the dead poet's vital audience to converse with. He was felt after his death and that has spread outward into success

Gooch notes that O'Hara became, through some local celebrity and inclusion in Donald Justice's Anthology, for the incoming generation of poets in New York, nearly too iconic to know:

Ted Berrigan, who in some ways quite rightly could declare himself to be the world's foremost Frank O'Hara authority and was steering himself in that direction as early as 1962, never really became pals with Frank (403)

—which is very much like Auden was for the other New York poets (especially Schuyler and Ashbery) and him. This kind of role, meaningful as it could be for the young poets he (very loosely) mentored and actually taught in occasional classes in the early Sixties, had a distancing effect on his relationships and in his

poetry. According to multiple accounts, his drinking grew more consistent and his poetical output limited.

Another curious retrospective, “O’Hara in the Nineties,” by Alice Notley, plays on how clever and admirable and strangely unmemorable O’Hara was/is. By “unmemorable” I don’t mean unworthy of memorizing but nearly impossible to recall accurately. For all the seeming immediacy and pleasing energy, the challenge of recalling whole poems is/was too great for her Alice Notley, who as a second-wave New York Poet, was an ardent admirer and emulator of O’Hara. She comes away, years later, still an admirer of O’Hara’s attitude, poetic and social. No matter how dejected or elated or personable or admiring, he does not come off as afraid to speak. This energy has been located by others as a social energy of a confident artist in his social milieu. This is the product of a coterie atmosphere cultivated and captured by Frank O’Hara.

A key to knowing the significance of Frank O’Hara he succeeds as one that seeks in life to *affirm* – as does Donne, Auden, and Ashbery. For the latter, this is crucial to “queer optimism” (Snediker). In the *Collected Poems*, it is found in “Meditations in an Emergency” (discussed below) and in his epithalamium, “Poem Read at Joan Mitchell’s,” which is a key poem in the analysis of coterie poetics, in which he declares: “it is most modern to affirm someone” (*Collected Poems* 265). This is related to but stronger than Goodman’s *perseverance* (via Spinoza via Butler). It is to have a positive self-image, provide an intimate audience, and to parlay coterie values long after the coterie have come undone.

CHAPTER 6

PAUL GOODMAN, COTERIE GURU

Because a subsequent section devoted to Paul Goodman is self-contained, it has its own continuous (and long) treatment later in this dissertation. I should mention a few things here, however.

In around 1960, Paul Goodman rather suddenly became famous for writing *Growing Up Absurd*, a book-length screed against institutional authority, which emasculated a growing segment of disaffected youth. It became a sort of bible for the New Left, with which Goodman would be uncomfortably lumped. Whether in favor of his youthful following or not, his book was practically assigned reading for the college-bound youth of the time.

Before Paul Goodman's late-career shift in trajectory, he was often a part of the downtown New York City intelligentsia, writing dozens of works in numerous fields. This is where he became well-known enough to show up in the poetry and letters of Frank O'Hara, who found Goodman's espousal of community, avant-gardism, and occasional poetry. Paul Goodman is a crucial figure for this study, mainly for the following reasons:

- Because of what he represented to a young Frank O'Hara: New York City and its thriving smaller communities. O'Hara, at least partially due to the advice and seeming approval of Goodman, becomes the strongest representative of coterie poetics

- Because he so ardently espoused community among the avant-garde, which was exceedingly (and properly) inclined toward alienation from institutional culture.
- Because, like Auden, he is a coterie guru, one that is too much the alpha male to be directly influenced or remain in any communities for long.
- As an openly bisexual man, he was like Auden a model for young gay male New York poets as well as young lesbian poets such as Adrienne Rich, who only had so many models for uncloseted behavior.
- Most crucially, Paul Goodman is here not for *Growing Up Absurd*, but because he wrote “Advance-Guard Writing in America 1900-1950,” an article that encapsulated the trajectory of those who considered themselves “Advance Guard” poets, particularly Frank O’Hara, Charles Olson, and Jack Spicer, each of whom are key coterie/anti-coterie poets and key figures for this dissertation.

Among favorable critics he’s called a polymath; less favorably he was judged shallow. For most of his career, he was nearly unread. For someone with such limited posthumous success, he had a powerful effect on a few of the most influential poets of the century. It was only after that that he would become suddenly among the most well-known intellectuals in the US. As the decade ended so, for the most part, did his fame and career, which just about halted the day he died in 1972. His disappearance is more important than his former presence.

CHAPTER 7

AN URBAN PASTORAL WEDDING

Introduction

These poems typically referred to as *epithalamia* (etymology below) have a long and varied history as a pastoral, occasional form praising marriage, wedding days, or a particular couple to be married. Even the most avant-garde of poets may have the ironic grasp of poetic traditions (e.g. trained medievalists and significant gay avant-garde poets, Jack Spicer or Robert Duncan) as they navigate or direct their contemporary communities. Certainly projections radiate from each poet, at some level, with fears of death and loneliness turned outward at the consistently shifting, coterie circles threatening to break up.

Because of the overwhelming influence of Early Modern/Renaissance poetics on poets writing in English, inspiration for the best and worst of epithalamia arrives via the English Edmund Spenser (*Epithalamion* in 1595) imitating the Roman poet, Catullus (84-54 BCE) who wrote in his classical form in admiration of Sappho's earlier (and lost) wedding poems. The term, epithalamium, or wedding poem (derived from the Greek "epi-" and "thalamios," or "of/around" "the bridal chamber") is useful here (though it of variant spellings and revised depending on cultural context) and it can be applied reasonably, if a little loosely, to a Greek female poet's works of sixth century BCE, to male Elizabethan court poets of sixteenth-century England, and to twentieth-century European avant-gardists and Greek revivalists self-conscious of poetic tradition and its subversion. The oldest and most regularly revived of the ancient modes, it

is a personal song written and performed for the public. Or, we might say that the wedding poem makes personal detail more public, as we may be speaking of poems that initially never made it out of private, aristocratic ceremony.

Because of these mid-century poets' firm grasp of classical convention and the historical importance of understanding the key phases in the traditions, I begin the background at the beginning with the significant classical poets (Sappho and Catullus, especially) that were crucial the development of the form. Next comes the major revival in Early Modern English poetry, where I focus on John Donne though the name most directly associated with the "Epithalamion" is Edmund Spenser, whom Donne fashionably emulated and from whom Donne eventually diverged. The classical models establish Greek Sappho, whose poems are primarily fragments despite her enormous reputation and influence on lyric and epithalamic poetic form, as fantasy precursor against Latin Catullus, the rule-provider, via the lines we have and the codification by those that revived them in the Early Modern period—e.g., Scaliger's prose inscription of the "rules" based primarily on Catullus's wedding *carminas*, which were themselves largely modeled on the now fragmentary Sappho (cf. Dubrow, Tufte).

Clearly, epithalamia are complex sites of analysis. For some poets, like W.H. Auden, individual wedding poems were reappropriated to shift the address of relationships from his initial intended (same-sex) to the eventual married receivers of his blessing and dedication. His youthful resistance to heteronormativity would ease and his relationship with his own wedding poetry (written over his lifetime) would mellow into lighter, if not light verse, which he

always championed but relegated to material he could no longer take seriously. His internal theological battles as a strongly, if idiosyncratically religious poet came to a head in the early forties, where his mid-career epithalamium, analyzed later in this chapter, grapples with his desire to be married to his male partner, Chester Kallman, and to make a last stab at serious exploration of alternative and conventional married life and poetics. For a range of other gay poets never to get married approaches to wedding poetry vary. I have focused here on gay male poets, particularly, as their epithalamia (and anti-epithalamia) register acute feelings of painful otherness and also the desire to be masters of ceremony, though this is clearly a narrow sampling of what could be studied as wedding poetics.

Epithalamia are as much sites of celebration as they are resentment of what can no longer be (the relationships) nor ever be (married, on the part of the gay poets of the time). This isn't *ressentiment*, or "bad faith," except perhaps when most bathetic or hostile, say in Frank O'Hara's sometimes negative epithalamium, which with Auden's epitomize coterie poetics in all its complexity. Wedding poems reflect two key desires on the part of the poet: the role of master of ceremonies; and, in that role, to bestow wishes upon the couple, however cleverly, these wishes are framed or the range of possible feeling the poet may have toward the union. Indeed, an epithalamium is an elegy of sorts.

The shift in social position also makes for a valuable comparison with other poets whose relationship to the public shifted dramatically over their careers—Auden, especially. Auden is the twentieth century's epithalamist. Like

Donne, his relationship to his younger self grew conflicted to the point of self-censure and anxiety over editorial control. In this sense, a wedding is a kind of coming out. Theories from Plato to Donne to Auden have it that marriages are a third kind of existence, represented in phoenix imagery (as in the Valentine's Day wedding poem by Donne discussed later in this chapter) and in some minds, like G.W.F. Hegel's, "our objectively appointed end and so our ethical duty is to enter the married state...the life involved is life in its totality" (qtd. in Walker 198). This kind of totalization may be somewhat out of date, but institutions persist, primarily in a heteronormative direction.

For Auden, this meant alienation on several levels, but primarily of his first major readers. For Donne, not only was his reputed libertine past a concern to the man who would be Dean Donne, but also editing material for publication itself was a source of anxiety. His concerns included potential offense to patron-recipients of his poetry who read edited versions of occasional poems dedicated to them personally. Wedding poetry captures in its occasions the momentary anxieties and ambitions of their authors. Donne's difficult, sometimes tortured syntax and roughness of meter inspired Auden's approach to his most important wedding poem, "In Sickness and in Health."

Perhaps everyone writes an epithalamium (or epithalamion, depending mainly on the whim of the poet). Like elegies, only so many survive, like the so-called "great elegies" (e.g., Milton's "Lycidas," Whitman's "When Lilacs Last in the Door-yard Bloom'd," Auden's "In Memory of W.B. Yeats") that critics like Harold Bloom might claim for the/his canon. Though canon-making is dubious

employment, I still recommend the study of the stronger epithalamia as rich sources of poetic approach to traditional material (or lack thereof) and adjustment to public roles among private friendships, represented here in a range from Sappho to the later waves of New York-based poets like Anne Waldman (b. 1945) though the major representative coterie work, Frank O'Hara's 1957 epithalamium, is the showcase of this chapter.

Though perhaps rarer, modern or postmodern epithalamia don't fall into the conventional traps of tedious verse. Twentieth century gay poets, most of whom closeted and semi-closeted, were members of social communities often privately supportive or at least unsurprised by same sex desires of some members. Those gay poets, in particular, saw coterie members come and go, often by the inevitable pairing off of members into marriage. The close relationship between the poetic vocation and the social situations and occasions over which many of these poets had control inevitably led to a minor but significant phenomenon of writing wedding poems as members of the community, masters of ceremony, and cultural Others.

As these epithalamia are sites of innovations, there is room for gender play within a sexually-bonding institution. From a queer perspective, weddings provide a camp stage of strictly ordered masculinity/femininity, producing the occasional material items that are reassigned as desired (in private, in drag, in public). Wedding-related art (including occasional poems) can be sterile exercises/affairs that no one remembers, but they can also be gender-bending experiments, such as Donne's Valentine Epithalamion, which exploits the

period's interest in hermaphroditic/Neoplatonic sexual unison (addressing the patrons to be married as "she sun" and "he moon" while flattering his subjects). Auden certainly had his misgivings about Donne, but was drawn to his period's interest in hermaphroditic love, gender-pronoun play, and its relationship with modern homosexual self-perception. Of course, Auden was conflicted and somewhat self-contradictory on this topic (e.g., complaining of Proust's characterization of homosexuals as hermaphrodites, while employing the dream-play character of Man-Woman in his 1928 play, *Paid on Both Sides*). To narrate the journey between private and public poet, between privately "married" to Chester Kallman and publicly partnered with him, Auden takes on the voice of John Donne (specifically, his "Litanie" examined later in this chapter).

Optimism and Indifference

Though most modern and postmodern epithalamia typically have a narrator's mixed feelings embedded with the marking of the occasion, and are thus somewhat anti-epithalamic, Marianne Moore's Modernist treatment of the subject is fair to call a full anti-epithalamium (1925) that draws on all of history ("Marriage" *Complete Poems* 62-71). William Carlos Williams famously said it was unreadable, but his marital conduct may leave his clarity on the issue questionable. Moore famously never married—in fact, theories have it that "Marriage," her longest poem, was an elaborate rejection to a proposal. Eric Walker's 2005 essay on indifference and its relationship to marriage poetry points out that most of the scholarship on the history of wedding poetry is from the work

of Early Modern scholars, specifically that of Tufte, Dubrow, and Schenke (Note 1). This trend is similar to that of the study of coterie poetics, which is largely started by Marotti and developed by Wall and others. Here, I have worked to see how coterie poetics and formalist conventions have developed from the Early Modern period up until mid-century coterie poets seeking guidance from their peers and coterie forebears. Walker's goal: "My essay is about the pressure on the words poetry and marriage to pair off homologously, to behave isomorphically, and about the forms of resistance to that pressure, examples of which I locate under the term, indifference" (198). Through her poem, Moore shares strong desire to persevere without the necessary affirmation of another. It opens wryly:

This institution,
perhaps one should say enterprise
out of respect for which
one says one need not change one's mind
about a thing one has believed in,
requiring public promises
of one's intention
to fill a private obligation

Made up of a range of quotations on the subject, "Marriage" demonstrates her deeply Protestant convictions, which Auden shared and admired, as well as her poetics (particularly syllabics) which Auden gladly appropriated for himself.

Counter, perhaps, to this indifference is the “queer optimism” of poets like Ashbery (whom Frank O’Hara says in his wedding poem is “always marrying the world”) and O’Hara himself, whose poetry, while capable of significant grief and anxiety, exhibits positivity. In an unscientific bit of research, it appears that positive terms, like “happy” and “yes” and “good” roughly double the negative ones (e.g., “no” and “sad” and “wrong”) across O’Hara’s oeuvre. To be optimistic is to affirm – as John Ashbery both affirms and denies his presence in his poetry, and as he affirms his voice, as he overhears himself in public, as it were, he also has lived a semiprivate life recognizable but not wholly available to the reader through his poetry. As Epstein and Wasley have shown, Ashbery, along with O’Hara and Schuyler, found their models in Auden and each served in his way as Auden’s “gay apprentice.” Much of Ashbery’s admiration of Auden is available to us in his undergraduate thesis that focuses on Auden’s *The Sea and the Mirror*.

Like many of the avant-garde and postwar New York poetry scene, Ashbery’s affinity is for the English Auden before his 1939 emigration to the US. They perhaps saw him as a model of one that “did not totally regret life,” as Frank O’Hara put it. Auden openly explains his poetic response to Shakespeare’s *Tempest* as his ars poetica, as he thought the *Tempest* was Shakespeare’s. *The Sea and the Mirror* also enacts the early stages of Auden’s long-term relationship (qua marriage) with Chester Kallman, which was both a realistic and cautionary model for young gay poets. These poets appreciated the young Auden that was precocious and yet saw how critics targeted his interest in games and school life

as signs of immaturity, as is pointed out in Sherry's *The Gay Artist in America*, is basically homophobic. Because it was internalized in Auden in such a way that he led a semi-closeted but public life, the younger poets could (largely) move on from Auden's resignation as sinner.

A Selected History of the Epithalamium

After an initial definition, this section opens with the Greeks, as most such retrospectives do, to establish the history of the epithalamium as a way of examining modern (particularly mid twentieth century) poetics and community, particularly that of the closeted and semi-closeted avant-garde. Relevant Early Modern epithalamia are selected next (from a vast pool) to mark the revival and innovations in the form (from its significant but indirectly relevant medieval shift) that achieved a high point due to theological and formal sophistication. This quality is most relevant among those poets seeking to reconcile faith and humanistic impulse, material survival in a transitional period between patronage and professionalization, and the adjustment to public life after coterie, post-adolescent literary development (cf. Tufte, Marotti, Wall, Schenk, Dubrow, and other critics of the period). There is a rather long jump into the twentieth century, which appears to be the closing or reversal of the transitions made in the Early Modern period—professionalism had grown less important, small- and self-publication had exploded, and a different development and motivation for writing wedding poems had come to pass, one that inspired or directed by coterie guru figures like W.H. Auden and John Donne. The focus on the twentieth century is

primarily upon Auden and then Frank O'Hara's wedding poems from gay perspectives. The last section of this chapter includes a gallery of postmodern wedding poems from a greater range of perspectives (and sexuality and gender).

Historical Poetics of Wedding Poetry

The form has had its fashions and refashionings, revivals and long fades; it can be represented by the most memorable examples of lyric poetry, bordering private and public life; most examples, of course, are dull as tax laws. Most occasional poems are derivative and dreary exercises by poets seeking to attach their names to that of more famous acquaintances. Even as the great majority of such poems are difficult even for grittiest textual scholars to wade through, the most valuable commemorative poems seize on details that might have been lost, addressing peers and their beloved subject-objects in pieces of fine social property. These poems are valuable in that they form an archive of not only cultural but aesthetic contexts for contemporary readers and those recorders of ages hence. Successful poets in the genre, including Early Modern English poet John Donne and twentieth-century Anglo-American poet, W.H. Auden, mark the private and public boundaries they struggled with over the course of their careers, from youthful players/participants to elder observers cautious of incurring societal wrath by virtue of their associations:

- Donne's earliest epithalamium is certainly youthful, if difficult to date, and performs a mock wedding between male participants in a faux marriage rite.

- Auden’s earliest bends gender and has a master of ceremonies that is called “Man-Woman” or what we might call “master-mistress” of ceremonies.
- Donne’s last epithalamium was one of several poems that nearly cost him his station, as it was in support of an infamous married couple.
- Auden’s later epithalamia avoid extremities altogether and are light personal addresses to an engaged niece who was to “common” her life as Auden and his partner did.

The middle periods for both poets represent high points, poetically, which will be shown later in this section.

This section also looks at how the development of the epithalamium and its revivals reflect the positions of their poets, who each wishes to be a “master of ceremonies.” This position reflects a level of control over the content of the poem and the recording of the occasion’s events and participants.

Sappho (and Other Greeks)

As is familiar to those studying the genre, epithalamia and its lyric cousins derive from a living, community-driven aesthetic that has its likely origins in Sappho’s sixth-seventh century BCE lyrics. Its reinventions and recurrences throughout English literary history are not so seemingly organic. Certainly today there’s hardly expectation of a newly commissioned epithalamium for our diffuse and sprawling culture of blending and de facto division. Recurring throughout

poetic history is the role of master-mistress of ceremonies, which appeals to the contemporary postmodern feminist performance poet:

I cast my lot with the poets who have a very distinct lineage: those who are allied to Lesbos (the fountainhead of Greek song) in the seventh and sixth centuries BCE. Sappho [...] established her cult on the island of Lesbos, and her school predated Athens [...].

What is so extraordinary is the modernness of Sappho's poems--- her fragments [...]. I am drawn to the view of Sappho as leader and chief personality in an institution of poetry and aesthetics because it activates a paradigm in my own life: the poetics school we've founded at the Naropa Institute [...]. I choose a hypothetical version of Sappho's life, in particular, that activates me. (Waldman 130)

Sappho's language of friendship and same-sex desire have made Sappho a cultic figure of women, gay poets, and students of the history of poetry; she has provided so many sites/scenes of projection that it's easy to fall into the clichéd views that she is at best a reflection in a labyrinthine hall of mirrors. And, however one views the accuracy of Waldman's characterization of Sappho, the ancient poet has had the benefit of contemporary cultural forces, something her work did not have for an incredible span of time, where Barnstone explains that because of her dialect, and because of her gender, she was not among those ancient poets read between the 5th and 15th centuries. Barnstone also notes her alteration of dialect:

There seems to be a slight difference in style between some works of Sappho which may have been written for a more public audience (e.g., the ‘Wedding of Andromache and Hektor’) and the poems which are more private and personal in character. The former show an inclination to admit Homeric forms and prosody; the latter are purely in the Aeolic dialect. (*Ancient Greek Lyrics* 42-43)

Perhaps she is the “mistress of ceremonies,” if I may risk chauvinist phrasing. Despite the modest number of lonely fragments we have, through Catullus’s imitation and her regular adaptation into new eras of projection, Sappho is likely the crucial poet to understand as a poet of friendship and of marriage. She gets significant space here as a crucial poet of privacy and friendship and representations of that barrier, the Hymeneal and the wedding arch.

The following is a basic set of expectations or varied precedents in Sapphic wedding poetry (adapted from Tufte and Dubrow and supported with lines of Sappho’s):

(1) summoning human and divine participants (specifically Hymen, the god of marriage); “Lift high the roofbeam, / Hymenaeus, / lift high, you carpenters: / Hymenaeus, / the groom is coming, Ares’ equal, / greater far than mortal man” (28)

(2) sensual details of proceedings, such as the sights and sounds of burning pine torches and other features of the wedding, including the wished-for arrival of the evening star, Hesperus, praised and looked

forward to (weddings take place in the evening, in ancient Greek tradition); “Most beautiful of all the stars / O Hesperus, bringing everything / the bright dawn scattered” (26)

(3) commending the soon-to-be wedded couple with natural and mythological comparisons

(4) empathizing with and addressing bridal anxiety, yet calling upon her to come forward into new life (this also includes lamentation for loss of virginity, loss of community and communal lifestyle—fear of change, of crossing the threshold – each elemental to wedding poetics)

(5) teasing from a place of experience or wisdom (this may include mockery; bawdy verses/Fescennine, knowing jokes about what’s to come) addressed mainly to the groom and others: “The foot of the doorkeeper / are seven fathoms long, / his sandals made of five oxhides, / ten cobblers worked to stitch them” (28) “To what shall I best liken you, dear bridegroom? / Most of all to a slender sapling I liken you.” (29)

(6) detailing the arrangements of the nuptial chamber, including how Aphrodite, the Graces, and the Loves play their parts, which includes singing of the couch and wedding chamber (thamos) – speak of song of the threshold

(7) stressing consummation in her role as wedding advisor

(8) praising the match and offering blessings for their futures: “There is a bowl of ambrosia / was mixed and ready / and Hermes took the pitcher

and poured wine for the gods. / They all held glasses / and made libations,
praying all good things / for the groom” (35)

(9) closing the ceremony by saying farewell and urging the departure of
all. “Farewell, O bride, farewell O honored groom, farewell” (30)

(10) most important to this section: the poet is a master/mistress-of-
ceremonies

These rules grew loose, and they have come through many channels, but she is the
model epithalamist, a literary precursor.

As gay poets sought fantasy lineage (see especially Duncan and Spicer
and several others elsewhere in this dissertation) Sappho represents a “fantasy
precursor,” as described by Gubar for women disconnected from history by
language and distance and time all the more profoundly. Gubar quotes American
author, Willa Cather, whom I’ll quote a bit more fully here:

There is one woman poet whom all the world calls great, though of
her work there remains only a few disconnected fragments and that
one wonderful hymn to Aphrodite. Small things upon which to
rest so great a fame, but they tell so much. If of all the lost riches
we could have one master restored to us, one of all the
philosophers and poets, the choice of the world would be for the
lost nine books of Sappho. Those broken fragments have burned
themselves into the consciousness of the world like fire. All great
poets have wondered at them, all inferior poets have imitated them.

Twenty centuries have not cooled the passion in them. (Cather
147)

The Cather piece from which this is taken just previously decries the sad lack of women poets. Sixteen centuries passed before an English poet named her and in fact produced the first lesbian voice in English (Donne). Sappho was for the Early Moderns a mirror of their preoccupations regarding classical learning and poetic agency. In his “Sappho to Philaenis” (*Norton Critical* 44-46) Donne’s Sappho reflects his feeling intellect, coursing through the logical desires and poetics of a woman poet desiring herself in a same-sexual moment. Correll cites his “Pygmalion” Elegy (“Tutelage” or “Upon a Woman whom the Author Taught to Love and Compliment”) as an example of how he has applied his “masculine persuasive force” to collect a woman’s scattered, underdeveloped courting methods and direct them properly in the well-directed sophistry she now employs. Correll’s point is that Donne’s female voices are typically silent and that the critical consensus (fronted by leading Donne critic, Helen Gardner) is that this Sappho is not representative Donne. It opens, “Where is that holy fire, which verse is said / To have, is that enchanting force decay’d?” These first lines are about inability to write—and about loss of lover. Donne elsewhere, in letters, expressed the need of company, his closest companions, to write, though his ostensibly heterosexual seduction poems don’t suffer from this, creatively or sexually. Ovid’s Sappho, which Donne developed his work out of, may explain the definitively lesbian persona.

In Barnstone's translation of Sappho (*Complete Poems of Sappho*), she is compared to her aesthetic cousin, the Shulamite of the *Song of Songs*. This has potential interest in the history of wedding poetry and the sexuality of church-state congress, especially since the sensuality of the *Song of Songs* is reinterpreted over the course of the Middle Ages to reflect tension not between homosocial men and women, as in Sappho, but the tension in the church thinking between virginity and marriage. This is inherited by the Early Moderns like Donne, who reads the Church fathers and Ovid (whom they also literally "moralized") and yet is open enough in his coterie to express youthful sensuality and anxiety in contemporary London.

Euripides (ca. 480-406 BC) and a Note on Anti-Epithalamia

Virginia Tufte made great contributions to our understanding of the historical poetics of the wedding poem. Perhaps most compelling is the concept of the "anti-epithalamium," which she sees earliest in *The Trojan Women*, by Euripides. The epithalamium here is madly sung by Cassandra who sings for herself, and cries out over the deaths of her countrymen.

Anti-wedding and anti-conjugal poems can be found anywhere, but the term is perhaps less useful than others in the classical sense listed below. Key to Tufte's definition (cf. *The Poetry of Marriage* 37-55), which include some or all of the following elements:

- 1) Proper ritual, customary elements are absent.

- 2) Epithalamic orders reversed (torches dim and die out, attendants and Graces do not dance but weep).
- 3) Evil omens deliberately summoned.
- 4) Epithalamia perform dramatic irony, foretelling evil of which attendants are unaware.

Primarily the anti-epithalamium's markers of include curses are of an ill-tide, a poor match, a marriage certain to fail on some level for its timing is so very bad, and on a national level. These bad matches include others like Jason and Medea and, of course, Paris and Helen.

Same-sex epithalamia as anti-epithalamia might qualify if the proper binaries are arranged, but the markers are typically slippery or slight for gay poets writing to and for themselves. Boehrer's essay, "'Lycidas': The Pastoral Elegy as Same-Sex Epithalamium," notes the difficulty in assigning sexuality to that particular elegy. Auden's troubled status as a sexual outsider and to his own countrymen a deserter, he composed his highly successful elegy on Yeats by building on and refuting the pathetic fallacy of Milton's elegy and the fallacies contained in the public's attitude for Yeats. The Auden of New York, who'd written coterie, camp poetry that inspired American gay postwar poets like O'Hara, Ashbery, and Schuyler is the same Auden that embraced a freer lifestyle in New York but slowly, severally renounced his poetic origins that were the basis of admiration.

Aristophanes (ca. 446 BC – ca. 386 BC)

Peace and *Birds* (especially the latter) have representative, influential wedding poems. According to Tufte (et al) *Peace*'s epithalamium establishes the rustic wedding tropes against which urban poets would be working in revivals of the form. These have been designated as town and country plays in contrast. In his comedy, *Peace*, the tone and how to read it anticipates Donne's first wedding poem in that it seems to ape ceremony in a rustic, comedic take on epithalamic convention which (admittedly in translation for me) seem a mix of material pleasure and country types: "Come here, wife, to the fields / And pretty as you are / Lie down prettily with me" (qtd. in Tufte *High Wedlock* 11). The more complex wedding poem at the end of the *Birds* seems nearly too high-toned in its address of "the highest of gods" by contrast: "He is coming! / Bringing a wife, her beauty inexpressible" (*High Wedlock* 8). Notable also is the focus on the groom in these examples—the groom's concerns and attitudes will be important again, especially in the case of Edmund Spenser, who would write his own wedding poem.

Theocritus (Third century BC)

Primarily for "Idyll" commonly designated as "XVIII" (Tufte *High Wedlock* 15-18) and the introduction of the pastoral to lyric poetry and of course wedding poetry, Theocritus was of great interest to English poets. The wedding of Helen and Menelaus is the subject of this wedding song. A chorus (or in Dryden's phrasing, "comely choir") of twelve Spartan virgins, friends of Helen, tease a sleepy Menelaus about turning in too early. In fact, they sing of how one

more night with them would hardly harm him, as he would have her to himself, a great and noble young man, forever after the next morning. The whole piece is more subtle and rhetorical and less chant-like (only a quick “Hymen, Oh Hymen” in the penultimate line) than previous works, thus, as the pastoral grew into the Early Modern period, the pastoral dresses the sophisticated in rustic accoutrements but is clearly literary in character.

Catullus (ca. 84 -54 BC)

Like Theocritus, the Roman Catullus was a neoteric poet, leaving epic themes for technical innovation and minor forms. According to Lee, his work is quite personal, and:

mirrors himself, and in it we can clearly see that Lesbia, his brother, his friends, and poetry were the four loves of his life. If he has a message, it can be summed up [...] in that untranslatable word *pietas*, with its overtones of duty, devotion, respect and even pity [...]. But his *pietas* goes unrewarded. Lesbia spurns him; his friend betrays him; he loses his brother. (Catullus xxiv)

Unlike Sappho, whose work is more inspirational (or fantastic) and fragmentary, a great number of the poems of Catullus come to us complete in many forms—including admiration for the well-educated and highly skilled Sappho (cf. Catullus poems 35, 51 in which he admires and imitates her meter and praises her as an example of a well-educated woman). His earthiness and explicit expressions of

lust have made him problematic for pedagogues but his skill and influence are undeniable.

Three of his carmina (61, 62, and 64) have long been known as epithalamia and stabilized the form. Despite some notoriety for his frank sexuality, Catullus has with little dispute been considered a master of forms, including both the personal and the formal, and we see him as an occasional as well as the poet of private lyrics. They are ambitious forms for ambitious poets to imitate. He also claims the mantle of Greek lyric poetry.

Spenser's *Epithalamion* follows in the tradition of Carmen 61, though with vastly different motives. Spenser's is a personal poem steeped in traditions of classical and Christian wedding poetry. Catullus mainly praises marriage itself. The whole of Carmen 61 catalogues the typical epithalamic requirements, as a "dramatic choral ode in Greek style and meter [...] celebrating a real Roman wedding" (164). Catullus acts as *choragus*, who directs and comments on the events of the wedding.

Carmen 62 as a briefer poem had perhaps more influential elements on English tradition (according to Tufte):

- 1) Amoebaeon form – choirs of youth and maidens engage in singing challenges: "Vesper is here, young men, stand up" (*The Complete Poems* 71)
- 2) The debate between marriage and virginity

- 3) Personification of Hesperus (evening star) called upon in the Greek epithalamia and in Sappho's other fragments) "patron of marriage, uniter of wedded couples, and enemy of virginity" (28).
- 4) Expanded nature similes in the debate upon a maiden's virginity. The women say: "Just as a flower that grows in a garden close, apart, / Which breezes fondle, the sun strengthens, showers feed; / Many boys have longed for it and many girls: / But when its bloom is gone, nipped off by a fingernail, / Never boy has longed for it and never girl" (ll. 39-44). The men say, "Just as the unwed vine that grows on naked ground / Can never raise herself, never produce ripe grades, / But bending down frail body under her prone weight / With topmost tendril's tip can almost touch her root; / Never has the farmer tended her and never oxen: / But if she happens to be joined to a husband elm, / Then many farmers, many oxen have tended her: / A maid too while untouched grows old the while untended, / But when in due time she has made an equal marriage, / She's dearer to a man and less trying to her parents" (ll. 39-56).
- 5) "The tripartite division of bride's virginity" – her maidenhead is a third hers, a third to each her parents', and when she marries her maidenhead is given to the son-in-law as dowry (cf. Tufte 28-9).

The celebratory energy and cheer and the apparent emulation of Sappho set the tone for the revival of the form by Spenser. Catullus produced what turned out to be the manual for wedding poetics as defined by his deep admirer, Julius Caesar Scaliger (1484-1558) whose definition of "epithalamion" (cited here via Heather

Dubrow's Appendix: "Scaliger on the Epithalamium") was typically the one passed on by critics. It is as prescriptive as such things get. For example:

The argument of the groom commences from the mutual desire of bride and groom. Of his pursuit, his heartaches, his celebrations of her in songs, sport, and deeds of arms, all done for the sake of the maiden, you will write explicitly. But do not expose *her* feelings in this way; rather subtly direct them. (Dubrow 274).

As the larger work out of which Scaliger is writing is called *Poetics*, and is itself a manual, this tone shouldn't surprise us. And yet it orders one what to do so pedantically as to invite innovation, which the better English epithalamists, particularly Donne, took to do. This layout by Scaliger attempts to arrest what should and should not be done by way of classical models. Catullus retains the formal expectations literalized, manualized (if I might coin a term) as standard, for which there certainly was a market. In fact, Dubrow also explores the market not necessarily for specialized literary modes but conduct manuals, including that of marriage conduct: "Manuals specifically on marriage were virtually unknown in medieval England, but they enjoyed a tremendous popularity in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a vogue that may itself attest to a preoccupation and with concerns about the subject of wedlock" (10).

Carmen 64, the longest poem Catullus wrote (408 lines), is an *epyllion* infused with ancient myths in a narrative progression. It is a mix of praise, foreboding, and the lament about contemporary irreligiousness. Guy Lee says it is

likely what Catullus considered his masterpiece (*The Complete Poems* 166); however, it has had inconsistent reception over the centuries.

Auden—of course like most of the upper class and privately schooled forced to study Latin— mentions Catullus (in his *New Year Letter*) not for his epithalamia, but for the music of his insults: “Conscious CATULLUS who made all/his gutter language musical” (*Collected Poems* 204).

Donne (after Spenser): Early Modern Revival

If it were not for Edmund Spenser’s wide learning, his range of styles and poetics embodied in his poetry, and thus his choice to commemorate the occasion of his wedding with an epyllion-length *Epithalamion* of 1595, we would not have John Donne’s epithalamia to study. Yet, though Edmund Spenser is fairly credited with reviving the wedding poem from its classical roots, John Donne’s epithalamia will be discussed here more thoroughly for the following reasons:

- Spenser’s very long wedding poem may be *sui generis*, however initially influential it is, since it’s directly addressed to its recipient, his intended wife.
- Spenser, though certainly a coterie poet taking advantage of coterie poetics in parts of his career, is an example of a professional poet that Donne simply is not.
- Spenser is not as useful a guide in terms of influence on 20th century poets that Donne was. However well appreciated, he was not troubling anyone.

- Donne was on Auden's mind during Auden's composition of a key crisis-inspired epithalamium ("In Sickness and in Health"); Donne was on O'Hara's mind when writing his major crisis poem ("Meditations in an Emergency") that directly addresses the anxiety hanging over his epithalamium analyzed later in this chapter .
- Donne's epithalamia play with gender in a way that may have influenced Auden in ways similar to the ways Shakespeare's did.
- Donne's epithalamia were produced at early, middle, and late stages of life much in the way that Auden's were, reflecting very similar discomfort with the coterie origins they could not escape.

So, in discussing the innovations in wedding poetry in the English Early Modern period, I focus on Donne and not Jonson or Spenser because though clearly coterie poets these men were also professional poets notably divergent in poetic purpose from Donne. He is a more direct precursor to 20th century poets like Auden and O'Hara, especially in that his lack of vatic calling was curious to Auden and his Meditations directly influence O'Hara in moments of crisis. Donne was a recently viable figure (made so especially by T.S. Eliot) and was thus in the consciousness of these poets that wrote key epithalamia in this analysis of coterie poetics.

Donne's first epithalamion is often argued to be satire upon Spenser's more famous wedding poem, which is a model of structures and (highly numerological) unity; this is not out of keeping with Auden's desire for order and the direction of his major wedding poem, "In Sickness and in Health," as

Spenser's long poem (in the spirit of Catullus's Carmen 61) is written in celebration of his own personal nuptial event(s).

Lewalski categorizes the "three distinct personae" seen in his epithalamia: "the city wit, the Spenserian Hymen-priest, and *Idios*, the private man" (197, 202). The epithalamia to Donne were clearly a way of getting ahead, socially, identifying those with money and power and taste. His latter two epithalamia were for patrons, are more artistically assured, but they are so entwined with contemporary (nuptial) politics, that the poems tend to get overshadowed.

"Epithamion Made at Lincoln's Inn" (ca. 1595)

The first "epithalamion" by Donne, it is the relative mystery of the occasion— the other two epithalamia are clearly dated and contextualized—invites a coterie reading of its origins. It certainly plays on Spenser's poem, though not in the twenty-four sections (of the hours, clearly) but in eight stanzas, four for day, four for night. It may be more tasteless and more death-obsessed—reasons Tufte qualifies it as an "anti-epithalamium" —than the other of his epithalamia, which have more conventional if better-wrought epithalamic themes.

This Lincoln's Inn poem may have more of the plainspoken tendencies Marotti cites, those found specifically in the coterie atmosphere, those that got those outside the circle in serious trouble during the reign of James I. In another poem, "To Mr. I.L. ("Blest are your North parts" (*The Complete Poetry* 145)) he refers to her as "My Sun" - friend is hosting her, and is asked to pass along his "paine" (i.e. give his regards to her).

He calls the same woman the "Saint of his Affection" and covers the Petrarchan tropes—at this point "in expressing affection for a friend or a mistress, he therefore used the formulas proper to formally polite social relations, adopting a manner that clashed with his intention of plainspeaking familiarity. He had not yet successfully integrated these two rhetorical modes." The Lincoln's Inn epithalamion may represent this unsuccessful integration. Marotti refers directly to this epithalamion's tone as that of "comic aggression" (49). Lines 88-90 show the image of the bridegroom "tenderly" disemboweling his sacrificial lamb of a wife.

In attempting to locate Donne's position in the poem, Novarr finds Donne's attention paid to gold and "angels" (i.e. gold coins as well as the winged versions) to be read as crass. Without doubt, one can see Donne, especially the young John Donne writing this poem, as conflicted about station and the upward mobility of those "mechanicals" of non-noble origins (Marotti 40). As in several of his satires, Donne is one among many warning the others about leaving. Fear of loss is expressed in the satiric crass materialism but also counterpoint to the "perfection" repeatedly promised/requested by the narrator—and a common theme between Donne and a contemporary epithalamist not discussed here, Ben Jonson (Tufte *The Poetry of Marriage* 208).

Others theorize this is indeed the result of Donne's responsibilities as "Master of Revelry," and thus would be an opportunity for cross-dressing and a chant of the epithalamic refrain, which split the stanzas into four each of day and night: "To day/To night put on perfection and a Womans name." It was written in

Donne's Lincoln Inn period, where the circumstances were likely homosocial and written well before he was married to Ann Donne, whom Donne would marry only to have his career quashed by his ill-timing and major personal offense to the girl's father and his employer. Though not absolutely certain, it does anticipate gender play in the middle epithalamion, discussed next.

“Epithalamion Upon Frederick Count Palatine and the Lady Elizabeth married on St. Valentines Day” (1613)

This, as the latter epithalamion, is a winter celebration. The shift is to hail Bishop Valentine rather than Hymen, to make all the participants birds (as in Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*, and similar medieval poems) with the bride and groom as phoenixes. As noted by critics like Dubrow, the setting (“All the Aire is thy Diocis”) downplays the physical church, though the poem is religious, and focuses on the bride's interest and equality. We still have the waking of the bride and other epithalamic elements, but they're not dictating the pace (e.g., it goes past the usual day to night structure – there's a new day).

Most famous perhaps are the lines: “Here lyes a shee Sunne, and a hee Moone here” (l. 85) and while this isn't referred to directly, the spirit of gender equality and the sanction of sexuality certainly resonates.

“Eclogue.1613. Dec. 26”

This latter epithalamion praises an ominous match, which was a problem for all involved. It's longer, near epyllion-length, and features the character of

Idios (read widely as Donne himself, who was largely a private aspirant with no presence at court) debating *Allophanes*, one living day to day in court (though another side of Donne). Its problems are masked in what Lewalski calls “symbolic praise,” which might have been ingenious enough to carry the poem with cleverness, but its oppressive burning imagery anticipates the ignominious match of the Earl of Somerset. Tufte and Dubrow, in their respective books on the subject, find the shift the result of not just the difficulty for Donne personally but the trend in Stuart epithalamia to be more troubled. The results include strong examples but a clear trend toward the decline of the form.

The 20th Century Epithalamium

The poets of the 20th century that write wedding poems are concerned with union and order, perhaps, but largely from the position of one seeing the end of a smaller-scale sense of order, or circle of belonging. In the 20th century, alienated poets may see in wedding poetry the end of their briefly successful communities. The approach to wedding poems in the urbanized, internationalized scene is to celebrate and lament simultaneously. There may be the institutional and the oppressive in the bourgeois expectations of conformity—yet people still get married. Notwithstanding the mockery of the mode, the wedding poem could not die. Seeds of irony and urbanity are found in Catullus and in Donne, certainly. The classical “ribald Fescennine / jesting” (Catullus 62 lines 119-120)—and sexual teasing is curiously absent in the epithalamia I looked through, however limited the sample; the directly sexual side seems lost in the 20th century.

Auden's and O'Hara's epithalamia may qualify for a new term; rather than easily broken into the epithalamium and the anti-epithalamium, these are meditative poems with curious performance histories. These two in particular show an internalized choral effect, especially in the address to those not present, those availing themselves of the speed of modernity. Also:

- Auden by mid-career not using the term “crooked” about his sexuality like he had as a youth (cf. Mendelson, Bozorth).
- Auden and his apprentice in Frank O'Hara fell into a kinship. Whatever their differences politically and religiously, each was a gay poet seeking unity via social community. This dynamic at least partially yielded the (in)famous camp personae each was famous for.
- The appeal to Auden of the ambiguity in the poetry of Shakespeare compares curiously with the appeal for O'Hara, who preferred the lyrical dynamism of the problem plays but always preferred the challenging poetry of the younger Auden, which was dynamic, ambitious, and coded marked for the “initiated,” like O'Hara.
- Auden had been inspired by Donne's “The Litanie,” which is dated to one of Donne's serious illnesses (1608/9). In a letter to Henry Goodyer, he plays down the very Catholic form, since the Saints are among the stations in the poem: “Since my imprisonment in bed, I have made a meditation in verse, which I call a Litany; the word you know imports no other than supplication, but all Churches have one forme of supplication, by that name.” (qtd. in Baker-Smith 171). Donne's much more famous

“Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions” were produced during an even more dire illness. They also happen to have impressed Frank O’Hara, most expressively in his “Meditations in an Emergency,” among his most famous poems and almost called “Meditations upon an Emergency” (*Collected Poems* 532n).

O’Hara and Auden at roughly the same age (early thirties), anticipating decay and facing brutal rejection, found comfort in Donne’s meditative self. Auden’s epithalamium is, of course, much more serious and a challenge to address briefly enough. O’Hara’s epithalamium may perhaps inspire inventive reading but whose internal conflicts are worn much more lightly.

Auden’s “In Sickness and in Health”

Auden’s epithalamium was written as a direct address to Chester Kallman. Eventually, it would be repurposed, in severally traditional ways, as a poem dedicated to a heterosexual couple who happened to be having marital problems. As a constant and exacting formalist, Auden also wrote occasional and religious poetry, though the personal devotional poetry of Donne and others made him uncomfortable in a way that resembles Samuel Johnson's discomfort with heterodox yoking of ideas, especially the religious and sexual:

Poems like many of Donne's and Hopkins', which express a poet's personal feelings of religious devotion or penitence make me uneasy. It is quite in order that a poet should write a sonnet expressing his devotion to Miss Smith because the poet, Miss

Smith, and all his readers know perfectly well, that had he chanced to fall in love with Miss Jones instead, his feelings would be exactly the same. But, if he writes a sonnet expressing his devotion to Christ, the important point, surely, is that his devotion is felt for Christ and not for, say, Buddha or Mahomet, and this point cannot be made in poetry; the Proper Name proves nothing. A penitential poem is even more questionable. X poet must intend his poem to be a good one, that is to say, an enduring object for other people to admire. Is there not something a little odd, to say the least, about making an admirable public object out of one's feelings of guilt and penitence before God? ("Postscript: Christianity and Art" *The Dyer's Hand* 458)

Like Donne, Auden is as inconsistent—or paradoxical, or evolving—as he is witty. A key term in the above quotation is "Proper Name." While it seems to bother him to include Mr. Smiths in poetry, he did so in his youth with his friends in their obscure, Montmere patter, described by Isherwood as "like a poker game—between telepathists in which everybody is bluffing and nobody is fooled. We too, in the everyday world, have our social pretences. For us, too, there are fantastic realities which we conspire to ignore" (qtd. in Bozorth 34) which circulated among Christopher Isherwood, Edward Upward and other young Oxfordian writers of Auden's own circumscription. Also, as noted in the Auden chapter previous, he sought different audiences at the same time, gaining erotic and social energy in his private life and lived as a public critic-poet, applying the current, the

historical, the scientific provide scaffolding to his lyrics. His gamesmanship (thoroughly examined in Bozorth) developed as his feelings about his sexuality adjusted. The profoundly problematic, youthful homosexual love for later Auden partly developed as divine, metaphysical longing that troubled his desire. Such transference can be seen in the wedding poem Auden wrote to his lover, Chester Kallman: once an expression of a direct desire for stable, if culturally subversive, social roles, the poem is redirected toward a heterosexual couple later in his life

Auden seems in retrospect a principally gay man; however, he did marry and have a few engagements. In his later years he even asked Hannah Arendt to marry him, but like his other real and quasi-relationships with the opposite sex, it was mystifying to most. He was engaged before going to Berlin in the early thirties, where he would find himself, sexually. That early engagement was called off. In 1935, he married Erika Mann, daughter of Thomas Mann, in a lavender marriage that aided her escape the mortal threat of Nazism. During the forties, he was also in a sustained a sexually active, heterosexual relationship with a woman, though it appears anomalous.

He wrote wedding poems, and wide-ranging occasional poems, most of his life. Some versions of literal or de facto epithalamia appear in vastly different, distant stages. Again, like Donne, the approaches to wedding poetics reflect his deepening religiousness as well as his shifting relationship with a changing public and his more conservative private domesticities and social position. His first occasional poem for others recognizes the political values of such weddings at the

dawn of war (it recognizes the marriage of “a Borghese and a Mann”) akin to his own political wedding.

Auden also states the purpose for the rather official epithalamium in “Dichtung und Wahrheit” (a section of Auden’s *Horae Canonicae*) which Auden completed in 1959:

Without personal love the act of kind cannot be a deed, but it can be a social event. A poet, commissioned to write an epithalamium, must know the names and social status of the bride and bridegroom before he can decide upon the style of diction and imagery appropriate to the occasion. (Is it for a royal or a rustic wedding?) But he will never ask:---"Are the bride and bridegroom in love?": for that is irrelevant to a social event. Rumors may reach him that the Prince and Princess cannot bear each other but must marry for dynastic reasons, or that the union of Jack and Jill is really the mating of two herds of cattle, but such gossip will have no influence upon what he writes. That is why it is possible for an epithalamium to be commissioned. (Auden *Collected Poems* 655)

The German title of this section is “Poetry and Truth,” taken from the Goethe autobiography that toys with the notion of truth in a way that likely pleased the Auden that wrote, “The Truest Poetry is the Most Feigning” in 1953. The line is the clown-wit Touchstone’s from Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* and echoes the performative requirements of truth.

As shown below, Auden would write for others, mainly, except in a sort of encoded address to his (inconsistent) lifetime partner, Chester Kallman whom he met in New York in 1939. After a serious bout of anxiety over his status as emigrant (read: deserter on the eve of war) and confirmed bachelor (read: gay man who would not have the chance to marry procreatively) he wrote his poem, “In Sickness and in Health,” to Kallman, whom Auden married and briefly wore the ring for (Davenport 188). This wedding poem (in collections repurposed and addressed to another, heterosexual couple) is a struggle in fact, against absurdity and Eros and annihilation.

The much later “Eleven Occasional Poems,” written in the sixties and grouped post-occasionally, come after some internal reconciliations and domesticities. It is a turn not to spiritual light, however – it is, essentially, light verse written for a niece. This late wedding poem, “Epithalamium (for Peter Mudford and Rita Auden, May 15, 1965)” (*Collected Poems* 760) is fairly gentle, though heavy with the readings in epithalamic traditions. He calls on classical Venus and Hymen, recalls Adam and Eve, and in this situation it feels private and absurd; this is probably due to what he’d been reading, especially zoological, if not especially observant or calling to the animals as gods. It lightly mocks traditions and expresses the absurdity of marriage’s stateliness juxtaposed with personal idiosyncrasies.

He wishes them a fairy-tale (or “folk-tale”) ending, with a “State Marriage,” which is to say, a state-sanctioned marriage. His perspective is not the royal “we” (though it may echo); he is speaking as one who has also chosen “to

common” his life (cf. his 1963 poem about Chester Kallman, “The Common Life” 714). The desired common-ness is at a distance from what common means in Moore’s “Marriage,” in which she echoes, “See her, see her in this common world” though speaking of Eden and the central flaw in Eden (Eve). As mentioned earlier, Moore recognizes Eve’s independent streak that tends to ruin marriage for latter Eves. A modern innovation: that Eve and her partner should “be alone together” (l. 35). This in fact is what Auden and Kallman did have. They had co-dependence resembling marriage but did not spend all year together. What Auden does in his wedding toast is that these people are seemingly fine with “commonness.” Among his “Eleven Occasional Poems,” written in the late sixties to several personages, is an “Epithalamium” to his niece and her beau, that “they opt in this hawthorn month / to common [their] lives” (CP 760) in all the heteronormative ways, but from the point of view of someone who knows love that has passed beyond the physical.

In ending with the Proper name (as relates to each particle, scientifically) he echoes not only the taking of the other’s name but also the problem Auden had with mixing proper names in religious poetry, as Donne had. The twentieth century epithalamium is rarely a religious matter, but this piece adds to Auden’s preference for leaving proper naming to that “One from Whom / all enantiomorphs / are super-posable, yet/ Who numbers each particle / by its Proper name” (lines 59-63). Though it regularly shifted, Auden’s certainty of propriety is fundamental to his poetic production. He wouldn’t write explicitly about sex or his sexuality, except in strictest company. He hardly could write flippantly on

religion. Part of his problem with Donne is Donne's mixing of the personal and the religious, the inclusions or intimations of proper names and readers did not settle well with Auden, who would prefer Herbert as a religious poet. Still, Donne figures importantly for Auden, whom it would amaze that Donne was not prophetic, vatic, or professional.

How Donne wrestled religious subjects could excite Auden, who would recommend Donne's "The Litanie" (*The Complete Poetry* 249-257) to friends as Auden composed his mid-career epithalamium, "In Sickness and in Health." Donne's poem arrives from places of abjection, with knotty lamentations of the red clay earth of the flesh. It was a more proper inspiration than Donne's epithalamia, which likely did not inspire Auden because of their mix of the holy and the social.

'In Sickness and in Health' is a large-scale rhymed essay on the theology of marriage [...] a study in the metaphysics of belief written in a 'metaphysical' style blatantly imitating Donne. It opens in bewildering synaesthesia [...] It ends in an updated version of Donne's 'The Litanie,' a poem Auden was urging on his friends at the time. (Mendelson *Later Auden* 153)

Auden is battling sexual, poetic, and religious group identity at a time, in the early forties, where his Christianity was deepening, his place in literary history was growing ever assured, and his sexuality was inevitable. Also this was a time where his "marriage" to Chester Kallman, which he anticipated to be long-term, was at its most troubled and insecure. Reading his epithalamia over the course of

his career, one greets high challenge with “In Sickness and in Health,” however worth the trouble it may be.

The poem’s structure echoes Donne, deliberately, though it is not based directly on a Donne epithalamium, though it shares the knottiness and uncertainty of Donne’s Metaphysical (and coterie) style. Its rhyme scheme is roughly ABABCCDD in octaves, with the first four lines often containing off-rhymed line endings (e.g., “hears/theirs” “lives/loves”) and the two following couplets with mainly masculine endings. The pattern implies the contrast of potential chaos against the comfort of order, especially in circular power: many of the pairs are admonitions – “Describe round our chaotic malice now, / The arbitrary circle of a vow” (lines 79-80). The title refers to the Anglican wedding service. It opens, epideictically:

Dear, all benevolence of fingering lips
That does not ask forgiveness is a noise
At drunken feasts where Sorrow strips
To serve some glittering generalities (1-4)

Mendelson feels the need to clear this up a bit, due to its metaphysical twistiness: “love speech that does not confess the speaker’s guilt is sentimental gush” (*Later Auden* 153). At the moment, I cannot improve on that, especially. We shift into a glittering generality, however war-burdened—and Marvell-Eliot borrowed—the lines are: “Now, more than ever, we distinctly hear / The dreadful shuffle of a murderous year” (5-6). This of course mixes the political and personal to the point of blasphemy—recently, he’d come as close as ever to murdering another

man, the object(ive) of this poem, Chester: “And all our senses roaring as the Black / Dog leaps upon the individual back” (7-8).

Of course Chester Kallman was in no way Auden. He had hardly the ambition or the endurance of Auden. But he was loved by him the rest of their lives—the younger Chester died just over a year after Wystan, in 1975, having been the less loving but more emotionally and financially indebted one. Kallman was far less cautious as well, and after enough struggling with what love for such a person does, and meditating upon Kierkegaard’s unresponsive God and the philosopher’s Christian existential celibacy, Auden would write:

Let no one say I Love until aware

What huge resources it will take to nurse

One ruining speck, one tiny hair

That casts a shadow through the universe” (25-28).

Itinerant and self-absorbed as he could be, it takes incredible energy to think even slightly upon another amidst erotic struggles.

Though obviously a sexual person, Auden chose to admire the most famous lovers, Tristan and Isolde, as “great friends.” Auden drew on Rougemont’s *Love in the Western World* and applied its ideas to his epithalamium primary to this study, “In Sickness and in Health.” Complementing its litaneutical finish, the poem includes negative stereotypes of the older gay male, the Don Juan in Rougemont, or “cottager,” in Polari, or gay parlance. The Tristan myth, which current scholarship argues is itself an especially artificial construction of

heterosexual desire (cf. Sturges) is vital to Auden's attempts at reconciling and locating the homosexual versions of the heterosexual marriage:

Nature by nature in unnature ends:
Echoing each other like two waterfalls,
Tristan, Isolde, the great friends,
Make passion out of passion's obstacles,
Deliciously postponing their delight,
Prolong frustration till it lasts all night,
Then perish lest Brangaene's worldly cry
Should sober their cerebral ecstasy. (33-40)

Tristan, at one point, is forced into marriage that he will not consummate, a resonant theme among poets struggling with sexuality and the forces of heteronormativity. The forces of a mythical, yet powerful, society and melodramatic fate keep them apart. Even when they are lovers, it is often in a forest, out of time and place from the court of King Mark and local society (her confidant Brangaene), the loss of which eventually becomes too much.

The latter half of this epithalamium finds (as noted in Mendelson, Bozorth, and surely elsewhere) "by grace of the Absurd," a notion out of Kierkegaard as well, who wrote in *Fear and Trembling* of Abraham's terrible duty but faith in the face of seeming absurdity. And so is love in this age, in Auden's mind, and this is enough:

Rejoice, dear love, in Love's peremptory word;
All chance, all love, all logic, you and I,

Exist by grace of the Absurd (75-77)

At this point, beyond logic, there is love. One must perform, from either direction, as one should in best and worst times, to make because “without conscious artifice we die” (76). In the lead-up to the above lines he commands the reader to, despite clumsiness, senseless suffering, selfishness and being over-careful, and “always in the wrong,” out of the chaos one is commanded to the absurd: “Rejoice.”

So, lest we manufacture in our flesh

The lie of our divinity afresh,

Describe round our chaotic malice now,

The arbitrary circle of a vow. (77-80)

Thus the latter half is a litany of what in this world could be worthy of such a command. As such we have the arbitrary circle that in the latter lines is addressed:

That this round O of faithfulness we swear

May never wither to an empty nought

Nor petrify into a square,

Mere habits of affection freeze our thought

In their inert society, lest we

Mock virtue with its pious parody

And take our love for granted, Love, permit

Temptations always to endanger it. (97-104)

Echoing much of the marriage matters, Auden is comfortable in offering a sort of prayer, minding his love-object and the other potential audience (the heterosexual married couple) to take nothing for granted: temptations can be enough to strengthen such bonds by their endangering them.

The closing lines continue the prayer: “Preserve us from presumption and delay, / And hold us to the ordinary way” (111-112). Like all prayers (and poems) futile to induce immediate, direct action, the prayer to ordinariness may be read as Auden’s middle-way direction, away from where his “progeny,” preferred. As Shakespeare (and countless other self-fashioning poets) had in the sonnets conveyed his poems as offspring, so likely is the image of such self-fashioning and progeny and encoded language for poets like Auden, especially, who passed on such practice and pleasure to his poetic progeny in New York.

Frank O’Hara’s “Poem Read at Joan Mitchell’s”

In the midpoint of his most confident period, Frank O’Hara prepared a wedding toast that reads now like a muted lament. It is an occasional piece, the performance of which we have missed. This sense of loss, however small, is elemental to such occasional poems.

An Elegy in Every Wedding Song

As dynamic coterie poetry of the archetypal coterie poet, Frank O’Hara’s primary wedding poem, conceived, written, and performed to his coterie circle during February 15-17, 1957, is our focus. It’s a toast to his dear muse, the artist,

Jane Freilicher and her fiancée, Joe Hazan. It is francophilically anti-Auden, and Audenically anxious over the imminent splitting of his circle.

More than incidentally, Chester Kallman Auden's longtime muse, partner, and a source of his gravest misgivings about his sexuality, may be indirectly responsible for O'Hara's wedding poem, "A Poem Read at Joan Mitchell's" (*Collected Poems* 265-6). As discussed in Gooch's *City Poet* and in Mendelson's *Later Auden*, Kallman was a source of some anxiety over the young man's indiscreet lifestyle. Not too long before the performance, O'Hara and his roommate, Joe LeSueur, were in Kallman's presence, not for the first time at bars like the San Remo which were both respites from heteronormative pressures but also a source of anxiety over identity amid the gallery of potential gay stereotypes and, in the wrong mood, previews of lonely lives. They were given an unpleasant image of themselves and the potential destructiveness in the sexually anonymous and vocally promiscuous Kallman:

The catalyst was an evening a few months earlier spent at the San Remo with Auden's lover, Chester Kallman, who was notorious at the time for picking up sailors, less luckily, undercover police officers trying to entrap homosexuals [...] 'Auden had to buy off so many judges that he finally got him out of the country,' [Edward Fields tells it]. On this particular evening Kallman was regaling everyone with a particularly graphic story about bringing a hustler back to the apartment at St. Mark's Place. When LeSueur and O'Hara finally exited the bar and climbed into a taxi, LeSeuer

annoyedly remarked, 'Promise me something. If you ever catch me talking the way Chester did tonight, get a gun and shoot me.'

[...] A few months later, LeSueur noticed that O'Hara was no longer engaging in the sexual exploits he had do often dared [before]. O'Hara's decision was not to renounce sexual encounters altogether but simply not to [...] sleep with strangers. Instead he embarked on a life just as promiscuous, in which he went to bed with his friends. For all his complaining about his supposed lack of will, O'Hara followed through on this vow as rigorously as any member of a religious order. (Gooch 292-293)

The turn toward a social sexuality, a sort of monogamy among friends, was silently assented to and kept until the end of his life, according to Gooch.

Kallman may be a sexual scapegoat for both men in different stages of private and personal expressions of their sexuality. 1956-7 was a period of particular sexual identity crisis for O'Hara—not as a homosexual man, but as a certain kind, in his mind. The potential re-stratification of kinship structures, the pleasant flux of shifting relationships, were valuable and deeply meaningful to someone so devoted to friendship and mentoring. However, the consequences of leaving heterosexual possibility behind include the impossibility of procreation. In his poems of longing traces of sadness, of mortality if not regrets, that pertain to his sense of consequence.

Therefore, also near the surface is the regular fear of inconstancy, anti-epithalamic and perhaps anti-conjugal in its blows against marriage, runs

thematically through the epithalamia of Donne, Auden, and O'Hara, though for Donne and a great number of epithalamia there's notable uncertainty regarding women (Dubrow 155).

In the other direction is the cultural force of nuptial poetics, which is why O'Hara never called this an "epithalamium" of any spelling. In fact, in reading LeSueur's commentary on the context for this poem, the term feels superadded by some regrettable stay in the world of literary criticism. O'Hara's (and LeSueur's) attitude conveys what has been termed by Eric C. Walker a "Muse of Indifference," or resistance to the power of institutional heteronormativity. This is what anti-marriage advocates would advance, like the infamously radical Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, of the English Romantic period, who became, eventually, the Godwins (i.e., eventually married).

A detailed look at the poem will show it as a rich source of signifiers of the urban coterie aesthetic:

At last you are tired of being single
the effort to be new does not upset you nor the effort to be other
you are not tired of life together (lines 1-3)

This opening functions as a toast (from the master of ceremonies) to the nearly-wedded couple, both satirical and belying regrets at the prospect of this new configuration. It has the personal, relatively informal touch of a close circle member and at the same time the recognizable acknowledgement of the occasion of marriage. This is the passage caught in time, a recording of a single performance. It resembles Donne's satires and his epithalamia, the informality

and erudition of which are designed to charm and disarm, not hiding the passive-aggressiveness of saying goodbye to the objects of this toast as singular entities. Now, as they become a (more permanent) couple, the city will be “louder” (“being together you are louder than calling separately across a tele-/phone one to the other” (5-6). The poet serves a function in his toast (“I’m sort of the bugle, / like waking people up, of your particular desire to get married” (16-17) as epideictic performer of the marking of the occasion, as master of this ceremony and the direction of this group.

O’Hara drolly appreciates the value of acknowledging another “Only you in New York are not boring tonight/ it is most modern to affirm some one “(10-11). Affirmation is deeply desired in poetic collaboration and in the best reading (as in Ashbery’s feelings of affirmation in his study of Auden’s *The Sea and the Mirror*, noted earlier). However, this permanent divide means no future collaborations or occasions to (be a) muse.

A sharp contrast is made between momentary surprise and terminal surprise: “and Joan was surprising you with a party for which I was the decoy but you were surprising us by getting married and going away” (13-14); his preference is obvious.

The poem sets its date (“the day before February 17th” in 1957) and the poet is trying to will upon them all a more appropriate season, spring, as opposed the dreariness of New York City in February:

the exhaustion from parties and the exceptional desire for spring which the ballet alone, by extending its run,

has made bearable, dear New York City Ballet company, you are quite a bit like a wedding yourself! (41-44)

O'Hara urbanizes these spring rites "the only signs of spring are Maria Tallchief's rhinestones and a / perky little dog barking in a bar" and camps them up with admiration. The O'Hara epithalamium, according to Shaw, shows a poet valuing figurative over literal nuptial acts. Spring can't come (it's still February) and O'Hara's voice is (I'm not the first to notice) notably negative about it. Unlike Donne's Valentine's Day epithalamion, its spring is hardly up for a sudden triumph. In fact, if LeSueur's memory serves him (*Some Digressions* 122), the poem was commissioned and composed (as always, on the fly) the day after Valentine's Day, 1957. The chatty energy of the poem belies the death that comes from the breaking up of an old dynamic. He explores, even in this moment of toasting, the devotional wish of a singular island of humanity:

This poem goes on too long because our friendship has been long,
long
for this life and these times, long as art is long and uninterrupted,
and I would make it as long as I hope our friendship lasts if I could
make
poems that long (52-55)

As performer, he allows that he may be running long, indicating the brevity of time together and his wish to extend it contrasts with its potential future as a poem read outside of this occasion, which concretizes the date while betting on its own endurance.

The aforementioned Maria Tallchief was a prima ballerina, (among those who have notably short-lived careers) and others like her are compared. He hopes for more discussions of “the respective greatness” of Diana Adams (born in 1926, the same year as O’Hara) and Allegra Kent (ten years younger). It’s a relatively small point, but it underscores the elegy this poem is becoming. It’s consistently a mix of the classical ribbing of the affianced, as old as Sappho, as well as a personal poem of loss. Though not so lightweight as homophobic critics may have portrayed him, he is a poet of happiness, a “great American poet of friendship,” as Epstein puts it (*Beautiful Enemies* 86).

Another compelling section in Epstein’s long work on poetic friendship is where he notes an O’Hara letter to John Ashbery (John, Ash, Ashes, among his names in O’Hara’s poetry) in which he encloses two commonly cited examples of occasional poetry: “Poem Read at Joan Mitchell’s” discussed here, and “John Button Birthday,” which are often cited as most representative as occasional poems. In the letter sent to Ashbery, the poems perform once more for those who could not be there.

and now there is a Glazunov symphony on the radio and I think of
our friends who are not here, of John, and the nuptial
quality of his verses (he is always marrying the whole
world) (71-74)

O’Hara did not feel himself, until maybe later in life, a strong performer—his texts would be his performance, as Donne’s would be. Donne allowed himself the coterie poet’s freedom of treating texts as scripts for performances, with all the

flexibility and impermanence that such a concept implies (Pebworth 62). In fact, the extension that the poetry provided would prove its limits when O'Hara realized he might just pick up the phone (O'Hara *Personism: A Manifesto*).

Francophilia

Even as O'Hara sought out model wedding poems for his own wedding poem, O'Hara emulated Apollinaire's role as coterie toast-maker as well as poet. The selection may have been a little random, or the product of a hasty search for models, but O'Hara admired Apollinaire's poetic presence enough to sign postcards not with his name but the French Surrealist's.

Underlining O'Hara's desire to be "uninterruptible" is lack of punctuation which O'Hara emulated both from reading Apollinaire's and from reading the last chapter of Joyce's *Ulysses*. There are no periods and, outside of exclamation and question marks, there are no hard stops anywhere in the poem.

There's a structural move typical of Apollinaire, where the last word in a line may repeat the elements of the line itself and lead into the next line. This occurs in Apollinaire's "Zone," one of his most famous poems:

Religion alone has remained entirely fresh religion

Has remained simple like the hangars at the airfield

That O'Hara uses this method often suggests that Apollinaire is never far from O'Hara's mind, as can be found in "Poem Read at Joan Mitchell's," which overtly imitates Apollinaire's occasional poem toasting the event of his friend

Andre Salmon's wedding. But O'Hara's poem also developed from movements and language found in "Zone":

the effort to be new does not upset you nor the effort to be other
together city noises are louder because you are together
being together you are louder than calling separately across the
telephone one
to the other (2-5)

Each line potentially spills into the next. The first and second lines above reflect the trickiness of being "together," and the amplitude of common voices: though a thought is complete at the end of the first line above, an alternate (or simultaneous) reading might have these overlapping run over from line to line, as in "to be other/together city noises are louder." O'Hara seems to anticipate what will be lost by stating, fairly negatively, that there is to be a new togetherness and a new otherness. The second and third lines above can be read multiple ways that also reflect the move made by Apollinaire: 'because you are together/being together you are louder;' or simply, that the city noises are louder because they are together (complete thought); being together they are louder than as separate entities. It is rather easier to follow than describe, which testifies to the potential for excellence in poems that are utterly coterie. That these are a group of young people getting together for an occasion is understood and exploited by the poet.

Shaw notes the regular negativity of the poem, citing Frielicher's appreciation for a wedding poem and her concern over the conflicted, subdued tone (Shaw 53-54). O'Hara cultivated intense friendships and circles that were

destined to shift and cause distress, no matter how indefatigably he sustained such relationships. LeSueur notes in several places how she went from a major muse (subject/object of more than twenty poems) to just about a non-subject.

O'Hara's wedding poem opens not with improvisation on the poem it ostensibly imitates ("Poems Read at Andre Salmon's Wedding") but on the first line of "Zone," which is likely more important to O'Hara:

O'Hara: "At last you are tired of being single"

Apollinaire: "You are tired at last of this old world"

O'Hara then riffs on what it means to be new, in light of "this old world," which is in his background. "Zone" engages the freshness of Christian faith which is human among the very ancient remains of human activity and materiality.

"Zone" is an energetic poem that engaged O'Hara since discovering the French Surrealists.

O'Hara, raised Catholic and educated in Catholic school, rejected most of the institution that would not have him as he was. However, he betrayed attractions to much of what Apollinaire was attracted to. Apollinaire may have provided what Auden could not, though Auden provided O'Hara with a gay poetic lineage and examples of wedding poetry laden with same-sex desire. Apollinaire provided a model of aesthetic spirituality and Catholicism, while also being anti-establishment—though, Shaw (54) points out, Apollinaire heads inevitably toward heterosexual and "normal" marriage. O'Hara calls her desire to get married "peculiar." Perhaps too finely one might note an institution called peculiar to ring of slavery.

O'Hara's overt reference to John Donne, "Meditations in an Emergency," is his poetics of coping with love beyond his control, his love for the painter, Larry Rivers. The most meaningful of Donne's writing for Frank O'Hara turned out not to be his occasional poems; Donne's *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*, particularly the famous Meditation XVII, with its dramatic, performative power and language of the unity of humankind appealed to O'Hara:

No man is an Iland, intire of it selfe; every man is a peece of the Continent, a part of the maine; if a Clod bee washed away by the Sea, Europe is the lesse, as well as if a Promontorie were, as well as if a Mannor of thy friends or of thine own were; any mans death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankinde, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee. (*The Complete Poetry and Selected Prose* 446)

Unity in mankind and the sense of catholic truth similarly appealed to Auden, who often feared loneliness in multiple letters and journals he kept as he kept friendships but remained in motion. Rivers was a major passion but a futile long-term possibility (not that O'Hara was interested in "marriage") as he was not homosexual. O'Hara was irreligious and devoted to French Surrealist poets like Pierre Reverdy, but like them couldn't fully shed trappings of Catholic thought and culture, in fact asking, however irreverently, he would become "religious as if I were French?" (Reverdy would convert to Catholicism in his late thirties).

O'Hara's Francophilia was never acceptable to Auden, who said so in commenting on O'Hara's and Asbhery's entries in the 1956 Yale Younger Poets

Prize that Auden judged (Wasley 667). Auden and Kallman, despite strains, were a model same-sex couple, and Auden certainly allowed himself the trappings of wedded life. As here, never would O'Hara have been conventional, and his chosen circles of intense friendships may not have had any greater or lesser failures compared with those that got married, but what a wedding poem like this address are the contingencies of a lifestyle ending. Though it sounds fairly mundane, a little tired, perhaps, it's not certain for whom, really, he speak in the last lines of his toast:

we peer into the future and see you happy and hope it is a sign that
we will be happy too, something to cling to, happiness
the least and best of human attainments (84-86)

Is this not a Whitmanian Brooklyn Ferry moment, potentially, a hundred years' hence? Has he not literalized the wishes of all epithalamists previous?

The World is a Wedding: Delmore Schwartz's Thin Fiction and Merciless Anti-epithalamium for Paul Goodman

Well—is the world a wedding? The answer to this question arises from studying the continuum between coterie poetics and those public personae that I've been describing as “masters of ceremony.” One such master, as complex as any so far discussed, shows a perspective on coterie that goes off in directions wholly distinct from the gentle light ironies that had come to characterize Auden, as evident in his “Occasional Poems” section composed in the sixties. By that time, Auden had so seemingly reconciled his Anglo-Catholicism and his sexuality

that the products are relatively mellow. Standing in contrast to what Auden would offer in this decade is the literature produced and inspired by what Paul Goodman had articulated in his influential *Advance Guard* essay. That material in its accumulation appears frankly bitter in its relation to the burden of standing against social currents. The other epithalamia examined here, written by gay poets to the couples, gay and straight, in their social circles, are selected for different shades of a similar disposition: outsider, loved and honored and given the honor of master-mistress of ceremonies, but outsider, nonetheless.

Nowhere is the articulation of bitterness in an epithalamium more troubling than in a rare sample of prose within this study: Delmore Schwartz's "The World is a Wedding." This is the darkest circle I have read yet; it's anti-epithamic—or certainly anti-coterie—in a dramatized and minimally fictionalized version of the members of Paul Goodman's circle. Both the narrator and a member of the circle quickly diminish the guru-figure, that master-of-ceremonies. Schwartz (1913-1966) had a New York Jewish upbringing that somewhat resembled Goodman's. His work actually resembles Goodman's in being accused of a flatness or unevenness in tone. Further, both men fell from great heights, had troubled relationships to class structures and a tendency toward loneliness.

Schwartz was likely most famous for his anti-marriage, "In Dreams Begin Responsibilities," which grew out of the miserable marriage of his parents, who had divorced when Schwartz was not yet ten years old. The painful circularity, in the most negative sense, augurs Goodman's eventual disappearance from the cultural scene.

The story's perspective develops, illustratively, from the protagonist's sad sister, reminding us of what literature can do at a little distance: Schwartz cut his intimates to the quick and lacked the energy to be light about it. As these young people linger in close, extended childhoods, this "story" punctures the lightness which Goodman (or in this story, Rudyard) took life. Schwartz says that when Rudyard opens a statement with "In my opinion," it is doubtless to be dogma. Methinks Goodman said as much himself. Schwartz has Rudyard say, "'We ought to remember the profound insight stated in the sentence, 'Joy is our duty,'" and remarks that Rudyard "was able to enjoy everything" (37). Developing a portrait of Rudyard as relying on women for his self-justified and selfish ends, we are shown how he left his first wife to care for house and children on nearly no money so that he could indulge his erotic side away from family, and largely away from women. He glorified his wife in certain ways, and loved his sister in still other ways, but he never let constant failure get in the way of their outsized, selfless support of a lifestyle and cycle of failure and acceptance that were the impetus of Goodman's fairly self-reflective, self-doubting late work.

Through the third person omniscient narrator, "The World is a Wedding" sees things through the eyes of a woman who cannot get married. Each section's title ("What's wrong with me?" "How much money doe she make?" etc.) relates her frustration with that position of distantly supporting while never receiving any sexual or emotional satisfaction among the boys who meet in the apartment that she pays for. The opening of the story is excessively omniscient, but it lays out

Schwartz's premise in its dire pronouncement on the significance and future of communities:

In this our life there are no beginnings but only departures entitled beginnings, wreathed in the formal emotions thought to be appropriate and often forced. Darkly rises each moment from the life which has been lived and does not die, for each event lives in the heavy head forever, waiting to renew itself. (34)

The circle of human beings united by need and love began with the graduation or departure of Rudyard Bell from school, just at the beginning of the Great Depression. Rudyard was the leader and captain of all hearts and his sister Laura's apartment was the place where the circle came to full being. Thus, in a way, this refusal to become a teacher and to earn a living was the beginning of the circle. As James Atlas states in the Preface to the Schwartz story collection:

'The World Is a Wedding' [is] about Paul Goodman and his circle. The two writers met in 1934, when Goodman was living with his sister in Washington Heights and struggling—with far less success than Schwartz—to establish himself as a writer. But Goodman had the advantage over Schwartz of an admiring group that gathered around him to proclaim his genius. Moreover, he had acquired a certain worldliness that intimidated his rival, a knowing manner encouraged by his friends. 'That he seemed ill at ease in Paul's home is understandable,' one member of the circle noted, 'the atmosphere was satirical and many of the jokes were almost

impolitely private.’ That he was beginning to publish meant little there, since the world outside Goodman’s living room was irrelevant to the hermetic coterie that thrived on its own wit. (xvii)

Though crucial to the development of coterie/community poetics, the Schwartz characterization strongly implicates Goodman’s responsibility for a negative coterie with all its worst traits—especially that of arrested development.

Schwartz transfers other elements of Goodman’s life to different characters for reasons uncertain. The effect is to increase the pathos of an Oxonian-accented WASPy man who refuses to give into pressure to deny his same-sex desire. Goodman was among the young (culturally) Jewish intellectuals who had a hard time keeping teaching positions due to his propensity for engaging students after-hours. He was unattractive, however, and strangely the opposite of the character Schwartz invents, so that making full sense of Schwartz’s choices proves puzzling until one considers how the cruelty of the situation within Goodman’s youthful circle offers all the stuff of attractive literary qualities. On the one hand, the story’s depiction of the capacity for suffering, irony, and tragedy make Schwartz’s pages impossible to resist. On the other hand, Schwartz’s characterizations are curiously uncertain. It’s as if there almost too close even to his exceedingly autobiographical fiction. Other characters contain Goodman’s view of the city, of community, to the point that it almost seems as if Schwartz had decided to splice Goodman into his disparate parts. It is curious that in *Humboldt’s Gift*, Bellow uses Schwartz as a literary/life model for his protagonist, Citrine. While the first half is elegiac and mournful and

celebratory of Humboldt, in the latter half of the volume, Bellow redistributes Humboldt's qualities and gifts negatively among his characters, so that Humboldt (Schwartz) is of such influence as to produce caricatures in his "progeny." Here we eavesdrop as Humboldt muses on what a third Goodmanesque character feels:

Jacob felt that he had come to the conclusion which showed the shadow in which his friends and he lived. They did not inhabit a true community and there was an estrangement between each human being and his family, or between his family and friends, or between his family and his school. Worst of all was the estrangement in the fact that the city as such had no true need for any of them, a fact which became more and more clear during the great depression. (50)

If this does not ape Goodman's ideas, I do not know what does. Written just before Goodman's Advance Guard essay came out, Schwartz's "World is a Wedding" undermines Goodman's occasional success and registers, once again, his perpetually self-contradictory interest in occasional poetry. The perspective from Schwartz's story shows how time and power underlie the coterie circles upon which this endeavor is based.

Goodman Wedding Theory and Practice

Paul Goodman was not a thoroughgoing epithalamist. Though he thought carefully about form, he could never be compared to someone like Auden. He wrote occasional pieces for others and infrequently addressed wedding poetics in

his lyrics. “Weddings do not need epithalamia, / use and law gird round them, yet poets / contribute to the ceremonies” (“Ode for an Adulterous Couple” lines 13-15). His wedding poetry does serve to illustrate how much of his writing, even the poetry, has the off-the-cuff, immediate qualities he espoused. It makes the work uneven enough that it disappears without its advocate and the controversies he stirred with his agency.

He does see an opportunity to mark this anti-marriage in an anti-epithalamion: “shall not I, therefore, make it the occasion / to say in poetry the public word / that countenances and ennobles / because we say it on authority?” (9-12). His “Ode for an Adulterous Couple” (*Collected Poems* 300) addresses the inevitable censure and limits of an affair: “nor will their hectic warmth knit or mature / anything enduring among our friends / but only discord and enmity--- / and yet they must, just to live on a while” (5-8). This occasional relationship has no real occasion to develop. It is fragile in world of delays, like the later-cited May “Northeaster,” which can snuff out a fling.

Goodman’s “A Little Epithalamion for a Wedding at Our School” (*Collected Poems* 301) retains the Spenserian spelling and daylong structure of that most famous wedding poem in English. Its refrain is “Amy and Lew in love” and it is tied to the times of the day (“through the long midday of [...] the speechless midnight of Amy and Lew in love”) in a compressed, homely thirty lines compared with most of the related epithalamia of this chapter.

Goodman’s few epithalamia meet expectations, though with not near the ambition of Auden’s or dynamics of O’Hara’s. Though I’m not sure I share the

enthusiasm, Goodman has had the support of significant poets, especially that of Hayden Carruth, whose efforts among others will be examined in the following section. Despite his crucial role in the story of coterie poetics and his embodiment of its spirit, he is not a strong coterie poet, and he has been relegated to footnote status. For all of his perseverance, for all of his intense celebrity, does not speak to anyone any longer. Though every few years new editions of Goodman's works come—edited by Taylor Stoehr, his executor and longtime editor—Goodman was quickly a non-entity, and the latter half of this dissertation will examine not only coterie success, but its failure as well.

Reception: a Gallery of Postmodern Wedding Poetics

"Audenesque epithalamiums!" – Ted Berrigan

The poets so enamored with O'Hara in the secondary and following waves of New York poets were often heterosexual, as both Notley and Rifkin have pointed out. Also, critics such as Watten and Shaw have observed that the poets of O'Hara's coteries engaged in misreading by emulation. These admirers have clearly listened so closely to the coterie ethos and the rhythms of O'Hara's lines and echoed them as soundly as the regular echoes of John Donne's waves of admirers. The irony of the above line from Berrigan is its ironic stab at convention, which he found to have been embodied in Auden's formalism. At the same time that O'Hara's admirers absorbed his "I do this I do that" tone and cadence in what might be described as slavish reproduction, the dialectical

dynamics shifted from the immediacy of personal exchange to a remix in cut-ups that Berrigan produced in his *Sonnets*, especially.

O'Hara and John Ashbery engaged with their great precursor, Auden, and resisted. Despite direct rejection by Auden of O'Hara's Yale Younger manuscript submission, and despite Auden's admonitions against leaning so heavily upon the French Surrealists, O'Hara was openly defiant and his oft-quoted camp retort: "I don't care what Wystan says, I'd rather be dead than not have France around me like a rhinestone dog-collar (qtd. in Shaw 59). The young Americans were no longer Audenesque.

The following poems represent angles of where wedding poetics turned after O'Hara's trying his hand at an epithalamium (which he never would have called it).

Jack Spicer "Epithalamium" ca. 1962

Jack Spicer, another highly deliberate coterie poet, sought alternate lineage among (long dead, mainly gay) poets. He was even more indifferent or, more accurately, *hostile* to publication than was Frank O'Hara. The context is summed up well here, where Spicer's circle convenes and a young man who would move in with Spicer, Ron Primack, explains:

'We were sitting around a table, and [Spicer] was there that day. Line poems were one of the little exercises people did then, and this was just one of them.' Two friends were getting married, and the roommates wrote a poem together—"Epithalamium"—as a gift.

(This marriage broke up soon after, George Stanley recalled).

Russell FitzGerald found some heavy parchment-like paper and copied out the poem in exquisite calligraphy. qtd. in Killian 247-8)

Spicer's contribution was:

heart of a mouse

We

they and us

bless your doorways

We can see that Spicer's fitting the natural, the chorus and couple (contained in "they and us"). Also, Spicer is being especially literal here, as epithalamium means literally 'at/upon the bridal chamber' in Latin, based on the Greek "epithalamion." Missing the (currently unavailable) rest of this wedding poem, it's still enough to see the curiously, communally produced wedding poem, with the role of central ego, the master-of-ceremonies, deferred. Of course, like Goodman and other coterie guru types, theoretical egolessness usually remains theoretical—the performance, in a lot of other situations, according to Killian, would have still been decided upon by Spicer, who could be among the most demanding of any poet of his circle of (typically younger) peers. Yet, here the spontaneity of one reader (John Weiner, who straddled New York and San Francisco poetics circles) produced final lines as a sung jazz improvisation ("Oh do /be, do be / do be / mine" was heard as doobie / doobie / doobie") that marked the occasion with musicality that "everyone" in this bar scene circle heard as a

“real poem” (248). Spicer’s deep sense of tradition clearly had a hand in production, but the poem wouldn’t work on paper and had to be performed, which is all the more apt for jazzy wedding song.

**Joanna Kyger “A Testimony for Ebbe and Angela on their Wedding
November 29, 1970”**

In the procession of these wedding poems over time, we have in Kyger’s wedding poem perhaps more as a master-mistress of ceremonies embodiment of Sappho along with her sensual literalization in the experience of nature, including animals. Her work is less allegorically shaped or driven as that of Donne and other bird choristers, yet she provides the singing that surrounds the event described. Kyger is *in* this wedding. She is marrying the world, perhaps in the face of the physical reality in the spirit of Ashbery qua John Clare. This human event in a rural setting represents the idealized reality that the poet hopes to realize. The female figure shines much as Helen does in Theocritus’s Idyll. In both poems, the sense of occasion and chant are contrary yet persistent and redolent of traditions.

We’d of forgotten if it wasn’t
still around
that profecy
into which I can step to fill
myself*not*I
Is only life

And what you do with it

The above (*On the Mesa* 53) implies the prophetically aligned requirements to enact the roles, however Rimbaud-like that may be (“I is another”) or as much like the multiple selves of O’Hara’s “In Memory of My Feelings” (*Collected Poems* 252) level of wistfulness, of mixed feelings amid the celebration it enacts. Also, it’s another postmodern wedding poem set in winter, though it is up on the Mesa in Bolinas (the anthology bearing this name). Widely ranging poems (in quality, especially) include that of Black Mountain-associated poet, Robert Creeley, who betrays that she is not only a central, energetic presence but also desirable (“Lovely? / So she is” *On The Mesa* 27) The wedding is at night under that shining light (perhaps Hesperus). The immediacy of the moment, heavily pushed by proponents of occasional poetry, is implied by the creative spelling.

Robert Duncan “Epithalamium” (1980)

From the perspective of an older gay poet to a young heterosexual couple, this privately circulated poem takes seriously the ceremony and praises the chance to make “secret daily allegiance” to another:

AN EPITHALAMIUM by Robert Duncan

NOW for each the ring of day after day and before
sounds in each morning noon and evening hours
that art, the care and governing intent, heart-beat
in its wildness and errant mind declare at home

and come in partnership to share, twain in that
secret daily allegiance to enduring time and keep
of earth's good orders the spirit of marriage enjoins—
we gather to celebrate how in a young woman and a young man
our joy in their joys would be remembered and alight
witness even in our fearful human shadowing stand.

Robert Duncan [cursive, signed in pencil]

It is brief (10 lines) but stuffed (nearly the 140 syllables of a typical English sonnet) and touches Duncan's concerns about physicality and the real and a place of regular physical infirmities that inform his poetics (like Donne, especially here—cf. *Gnostic Contagion: Robert Duncan and the Poetry of Illness* by Peter Leary) alive but “in our fearful human shadowing stand.” As one of the first materials I sought out personally, in a lovely day at the New York Public Library, it felt quite archived. That is, with Duncan's signature (in pencil, so more fragile, perhaps) being the only sense of a hand here, it felt much older than any of the other material I have studied here. Though Duncan's physical rings have transmuted into regular, lifelong sound in the poem, its moment has closed.

John Ashbery *Litany* (in *As We Know It*) 1982

This poem is hardly known for its ceremony, but ceremony is strewn about it in infamous dual columns. Its title implies the ceremonial processes so appealing to Auden in his later years, the ones from which Ashbery distanced himself. Ashbery's 1979 poem, *Litany* (cited as page numbers in his *Collected*

Poems) builds on the edifices of institutions and physical realities, aligning (yet always resisting) urban design and poetic tradition. It is constructed as parallel columns of text intended to be read simultaneously. The implications of the title are felt as the left column of the poem opens with formal resonances (“For someone like me / The simple things / Like having toast or / Going to church are / Kept in one place.” ... “I wish to keep my differences / And to retain my kinship / to the rest” ... “Flowers...are / Code names for the silence” (554)). The elements of the altar, the ceremony, the ritual of the call and response of the litany are resonant in slippery Ashberian ways. His poetry resists us, but there is humor in the darkly animal vision of the cake with lines running to and from it:

Even the ants on the anthill,
Black line leading to
The cake of disasters,
Loading outward to encircle the profit
Of laughter and ending of all tales
In an explosion of surprise and marbled
Opinions as the sun closes in
Building darkness (559).

Ashbery’s ambiguous pronouns and puns are inheritances of Shakespeare and Auden (perhaps with a note of Dickens’s Miss Havisham). Also his experiences as a gay poet so often in the act of leaving, stepping through the sense of loss in ways seem a graduation from his coterie period with Frank O’Hara—it would be anti-epithalamic, but there’s no threat of a wedding. Except, of course, in keeping

his regular distance to maintain kinships, “always marrying the whole world,” as his long gone friend Frank O’Hara says of him in “Poem Read at Joan Mitchell’s,” previously discussed in this chapter.

Epilogue: Post Stonewall, Post-postmodern Gay Marriage

Movement away from dyadic conventional sexuality and yet toward the legitimization of gay marriage seems like a potential site for a new poetry, one of uncertain ideals and desires, of the shifting notions of sex acts and positive sexual identity. I’m not sure I see Andrew Sullivan’s positions and the death of gay culture or know how far a supposedly bold sexuality will take us into a formal shift in occasional poetics.

I will have to increase my reading for future work in the subject, perhaps one entirely on the subject of contemporary wedding poetry. However, most of the popular selections for wedding poetry and even the schemas of wedding design are, frankly, not especially poetic. The posted options are pretty conventional choices with a predilection for uncertain pronouns (typically, Marlowe’s *Passionate Shepherd* is on these lists). Perhaps it’s just as rare to find fine stuff.

Perhaps more representative of today would be Andrea Gibson’s 2010 performance of “I Do (Gay [Queer] Marriage Poem),” performances of which abound. It’s personal and frank, partly sung and primarily railing against the injustice of the recently banned California Proposition 8 (that “Eliminates Right of Same-Sex Couples Marry”). It’s fiercely nostalgic, fiercely conventional, and it

opens a different discussion about the mass availability of recorded performance.

CHAPTER 8

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO PAUL GOODMAN?

The thrust will differ significantly from the previous chapters on key figures in coterie poetry, as key coterie figure Paul Goodman's star and influence might be called one of a kind. Goodman espoused the occasion and the value of community to the alienated creative young people (mainly men) who to his thinking should support one another to resist alienation and to produce vital art. His work and presence provided significant intellectual and psychological justification for key coterie poets (e.g. Frank O'Hara), who emerged in the postwar period, to write primarily in the moment, personally. This coterie-guru dynamic, which would not last very long among those postwar poets once they had to deal with him personally, anticipated a similar role Goodman would play on a national level, a role in which he would inspire the New Left and many thousands of college-age youth of the early sixties. These too he would alienate by the late sixties, which initiated his fade from social and literary history. Despite the tireless editorial efforts of his executor, Taylor Stoehr, he has yet to have a posthumous return to favor.

Goodman was born in 1910 in the New York City. That city continued to dominate his mind and hardly leave him, regardless of where he slept. As a Jewish intellectual from New York, he was both representative of the stereotype and yet never more than a partial guest of the party that exhibited the stereotype. He was an anarcho-syndicalist and a Jeffersonian romantic; he was a bisexual man open and risk-taking to the point of exhibition. He was largely ignored for

much of his career, hitched to a star when his major work on the alienated young man, *Growing Up Absurd*, came out in 1960, right as alienated young men were receptive to its message. The pacifism and anarchism that had alienated his colleagues during the second world war was embraced by a generation coming of age and feeling alienated by institutions Goodman long abhorred and the military war machine that Eisenhower (or his speechwriter) would call the “military-industrial complex” in his farewell address in early 1961.

Goodman espoused community and inspired key poets with his essay, “Advance-Guard Writing in America: 1900-1950,” which appeared in *The Kenyon Review* in 1951 (here I refer to the version *Creator Spirit Come!* (144-164)). This essay (henceforth referred to as “the Advance Guard essay”) explained the value of occasional poetry—with its marking of the day, the personal address, the in-the-moment circumstances—to the disaffected, alienated, young, avant-garde artists whose company he sought his whole career. Yet, he would alienate these same young people when they could not meet his expectations, which managed to be romantic and hard-headedly intellectual at the same time. He was widely known, a public intellectual when that could still be pulled off (in the sixties). For a time he was the object of affection, usually for those that had not met him. Those that did meet and spend time with him, especially in his later years, accepted the harshness of his opinions and the bluntness of his sexuality as par for the course of being his acquaintance. It wasn’t long after he died in 1972 that the expected retrospectives did not come.

The following pages have two primary purposes. The first stresses coterie as shaping and shaped by social context and influence on poets while the second purpose examines a specific influential article by Goodman. Related to both purposes, these pages show that Paul Goodman's career trajectory and ethos influenced several poets somewhat younger than himself, notably Frank O'Hara, Charles Olson, Jack Spicer, and Adrienne Rich. Each of these poets found in Goodman's work the intellectual and poetic justification for their avant-garde poetic community lifestyles and literary production. His was a sustaining voice for young writers who focused on writing for one another; this necessarily evolved into coterie poetics that we can look at today as a positive attribute (e.g. regarding Donne, O'Hara, and Auden) while also admitting and the ways coterie settings can be ephemeral or cruel or regrettable.

The latter pages of this chapter turn to how Paul Goodman's *Kenyon Review* article codifies and organizes coterie poetics around nodes such as the influence of a charismatic figure with multiple connections across disparate communities. Goodman influenced various poets in his ideas on occasional poetry, ultimately compelling them to sustain or establish their own intimate, literary communities, some of which took the shape of an avant-garde. Still others more broadly observed a deliberate amateurism, or at least an emphasis of living in the moment. By encouraging a tendency towards avant-gardism on the one hand and amateurism on the other, Goodman wielded influence over various people in multiple spheres, in a broad based multivalent relation to the larger concerns of coterie poetics.

Throughout the later 1950s and well into the 1960s, Paul Goodman's works were required albeit self-imposed reading for a range of public intellectuals and artists including Susan Sontag, Betty Friedan, Adrienne Rich, Tom Hayden, Hayden Carruth, and Frank O'Hara. Even this brief list of people who have long since eclipsed their "mentor" suggests how quickly after Goodman's death in 1972 this once influential figure apparently vanished from the intellectual landscapes he'd recently traversed.

With respect to these and other people whom Goodman influenced, he was an intimate or personal mentor only in the broadest sense, particularly with respect to the figures on whom this chapter concentrates. Susan Sontag regarded Goodman as someone she had to read, despite Goodman's disrespectful treatment of her ("On Paul Goodman"). For Frank O'Hara, Goodman was a distant ideal was diminished in personal contact (cf. Gooch and LeSueur). While Carruth remembered him fondly, no one seems to have remembered Goodman well and without serious qualifications, thanks to his stubborn, abrasive personality. Circumstances such as refusing to join the Communists in the thirties and forties and Goodman's confrontational, open bisexuality initially denied him access to the fame that he desperately desired. With the wide circulation of *Growing up Absurd* in 1960, his life changed course. It was read as a critical, broad, sociological cultural survey; today, one can see the quality of his perspective:

Our present round of Youth Problem has been dampened and delayed by war anxiety and disillusionment, yet even so it will have, it has already had, positive successes [...]. The young people

have latched on to the movement in art that is the strongest in our generation, the so-called Action Painting or New York School [...]. I have tried to show that this disposition to go back to the material elements and the real situation, is intrinsic and spontaneous in the art action and poetry action of the young groups. This means that they are not off the main track. It can be said that this Action art lacks content, it does not carry enough humanity. I think this is true. But it is just its eschewing of a stereotyped or corrupt content while nevertheless affirming the incorruptible content of the artist's own action, that is its starved and brave humanity a step beyond the nihilism of Dada [...].

Young people have hit, too, on rituals of expression in face-to-face groups, and in provoking the public audience as a face-to-face group, that are clearly better than the canned popular culture or the academic culture. But these things are in line with what the best sociologists and community planners are also after. It is a move against anomie and the lonely crowd. Naturally it is drunken and threadbare. (*Growing Up Absurd* 239-240)

As the above romanticizes the subject (youth), Goodman would test sexual political boundaries to the point of excess and, perhaps, abuse.

Goodman's erasure from public discourse certainly had something to do with his willingness to promote radical ideas on how to raise healthy children. Goodman's provocative and controversial positions on education and sexuality

included vocal advocacy of both free schooling and open childhood sexuality. Both were based in Goodman's long-held anarchistic principles, which played out in beliefs that both American communists (Stalinist or Trotskyite fellow-travelers) and anti-communists rejected:

For a few years, then, there did seem to be an advance guard in America that Goodman could be part of, and he wrote and published many new works. But the war spirit intervened, and by 1943 very few of his publishers were able to resist the tidal wave of patriotic conformity to authority and conventional taste. Vanguard Press printed three of his resolutely out-of-step books, and each of them was denounced by his former friends at the *Partisan Review*, where he was now blackballed as a seditious anarchist and a flaming queer. The scorn of Philip Rahv, Diana Trilling, Irving Howe, William Barrett, and Delmore Schwartz, unleashed in the mainstream press—from *the New Leader* to *the Nation*, from *Commentary* to the *Saturday Review*—proved more damaging to the reputation of an advance-guard writer than the usual jibes from reviewers. When Goodman presented Vanguard with a new manuscript in 1949, the answer was no. His books didn't sell, not even to the lunatic fringe. (Stoehr "Paul Goodman as an Advance Guard Writer" 84-85)

This disapproval or rejection from the Puritans of the right and the left mattered less as Goodman's deep anti-authoritarianism caught on with both the New Left

and the broader youth culture of the early and mid-sixties. But as the decade wore on, enthusiasm for Goodman's work began to flag. His underlying traditionalism, patriotism, and contrarianism meant that he wore out his welcome, or was ill-suited to last.

In all, Goodman's voice appears to have died with his mortal form: he stands as an odd man out. The act of remembering Paul Goodman, a seemingly marginal or less important figure from the past will let us better understand the shared perspective of the people whom he influenced, who created what has since become, if not uncontroversial, perhaps even mainstream, if you count the former counterculture among the faculty . The figure and case of Paul Goodman provide a way for understanding how a previously avant-garde coterie enters or becomes mainstream. Exploring this aspect of how coteries persist and even expand will help readers to locate and possibly predict, over generations, significant linking figures who might otherwise be lost or forgotten in the folds of time.

Background: a Range of Retrospectives

Contemporary theorists in education, linguistics, literary theory, queer theory and Gestalt therapy looking back on Goodman show a mixture of skeptical humor and roseate glow. In a recently released documentary on Goodman's influence, *Paul Goodman Changed My Life*, a parade of talking heads from television talk shows of the sixties and more recently interviewed versions of those people, from William F. Buckley to Judith Malina (co-founder of the Living

Theatre) from Susan Sontag to Noam Chomsky, each contradicting the previous speaker.

Lee's work, like this chapter is one of a number of attempts to revive, recover, or simply wonder what happened to Paul Goodman. It's among the latest retrospectives that have tried to locate and claim Goodman. One of the remarkable aspects of such efforts is that they have come from a broad range of fields and ideological positions, summarized as follows:

- In 1978, Joseph Epstein—cultural critic, author, and longtime editor of *Commentary* magazine—takes back all the nice things he ever said about Goodman. In the interim, he more than implies, he *grew up* and had a far different conception of *absurd* (“Paul Goodman in Retrospect”).

- In 1982, Hayden Carruth—respected poet-critic, longtime friend and critical support for Goodman—published an essay on Goodman's life and work that had taken Carruth a decade to finish. The result (“Paul Goodman and the Grand Community”) is itself an odd duck of criticism, in keeping with its subject.

- At various times over thirty years, Burton Weltman, James Kaminsky, and Edgar Friedenbergr take perspectives from the field of education as they muse over Goodman's prescience and his archaic approaches that made him, essentially, “biodegradable.”

- In 1972 and 1973, Richard Newton and Terence Langendoen—both academically-trained linguists—see Goodman as a humanist who refused to accept the transformations in literary theory, and especially the scientifically-

influenced Structuralism and Formalism. The case for Goodman as a linguist is weakened by his lack of vital ideas in common with Chomsky and others.

- In 2002, nearly thirty years after Goodman's death, Kevin Mattson explores the relationship between Goodman's anarchism and the New Left in the sixties. He observes that Goodman is critical of the new institutions that would replace the old.

- In 2003, Joe LeSueur's memoir covers his life with Frank O'Hara, which includes an obviously personal yet compelling chronology of the evolution of Goodman's influence on the New York poet. LeSueur's role as a lover first of Goodman and then of O'Hara (between 1950 and 1965) enhances and increases the complexity of the shifts in attachments among coterie poets and public intellectuals. LeSueur's account of Goodman's well-attended funeral implies a bright but quickly doused afterlife.

- In the early seventies, Paul Goodman died just as Adrienne Rich was coming into position as a major feminist poet, His open sexuality inspired her, though his males-only perspective archaically faced backward in ways she could not accept. Humm's 1991 interview with Rich sees Goodman as "unjustly ignored" in the time since his death (173).

- In her 1972 eulogy, "On Paul Goodman," Susan Sontag claims she had read everything that Goodman had published. Yet, he treated her so disrespectfully in person that she could not speak with him: "The grief I feel at Paul Goodman's death is sharper because we were not friends, though we co-inhabited several of the same worlds."

While each of these writers sees the subject as a profoundly public intellectual who was influential in several distinct fields, Goodman's influence or afterlife has been far stronger in literature and education than in psychology. Anachronistic for his own time, his man-of-letters, humanist persona does not match well with our current specialized and professionalized ethos. As a more child-protective culture has become dominant, Goodman's unorthodox approaches to sexuality and openness within families seem hardly becoming of practitioners of any current therapeutic stripe. Goodman's work has yet to receive much interest from subsequent generations of Gestalt therapists and Reichians, the two groups who were initially pleased to have a popularizer in Goodman but who became less engaged after Goodman underwent therapy and moved to apply Gestalt terms in his work.

It could be that the writers of encomia had been reached as young persons, as in the example of Joseph Epstein, who later rejected his overblown sense of Goodman's greatness. He looks at his earlier review of a book of which he claims to have no current memory, with proclamations like,

How characterize him? The Pied Piper of the American Welfare State? Our St. Paul of the Inspiring Radicalism? The Intellectuals' Martin Luther King, Jr.? In some loose sense Paul Goodman is all these things and more. He is an extraordinary man—decent, patient, incredibly learned—who has some extraordinary things to say about the way we in America live. (70)

Reading back over *Growing Up Absurd* and *Communitas*, probably Goodman's most enduring books, Epstein hardly recognizes the author's qualities or his younger self: "While the variety of Paul Goodman's accomplishments seemed to make him more appealing in his role as the social critic, the harsh fact is that he was not a very incisive psychologist, an original city planner, an interesting literary critic, or a good novelist, poet, or playwright" (72). Epstein plays it jaded, mocking Goodman's utopian notions of free sexuality as it might appear to the late seventies' scene in Times Square. The reproof is very personal. Note among the Goodmanian adjectives spun out by his youthful naïf self: *patient*. This more than implies Goodman's direct, intimate, personal approach now absent and embarrassing to him. This reaction was likely played out in parallel lives, increasing the momentum of the wider rejection of Goodman.

If Paul Goodman's work has a future, it's in literary study; and yet, someone like Hayden Carruth, who worked on his Goodman piece for nearly a decade, could not overcome Goodman's diminishment from the literary scene and popular discussion. More recently, critics have noted Goodman's "Advance Guard" essay as it presents its author as a crucial theorist and proponent of a particularly influential form, in the 1950s, in the United States, of a community-based and inevitably coterie poetics that ranges across multiple generations of avant-garde poetic communities and their various strains, which included his open self-identification as a bisexual poet.

By way of his Advance Guard essay (which itself does not touch upon sexual themes) and his living freely as an openly bisexual poet, Goodman was a

significant role model to many young poets. His poetry's frankness about sexuality encouraged lesbian and gay poets such as Adrienne Rich and Frank O'Hara. With regard to the latter, Frank O'Hara stands between Goodman and W.H. Auden, containing both the direct and the discreet. He does not use the kind of coding that appears in Auden's verse, although his work is deeply involved with the dialects of personal relationships. While O'Hara was like Goodman in being openly gay, his poetry was not as sexually explicit. While O'Hara was attracted to forms, the traditional did not interest him as it did for Auden and Goodman.

Rich found courage through Goodman's openness. Where O'Hara and Auden's coterie-coded and dialect were antithetical to her political commitment to visibility in the post sexual "liberation" seventies, there was something about the uncloseted Goodman that appealed to Rich as other gay male poets did not. Rich's breakthrough volume, *Twenty-one Love Poems*, is suffused with Goodman's spirit (and persona) as a *living* poet (page numbers refer to her collection, *The Dream of a Common Language*):

What kind of beast would turn its life into words?

What atonement is this all about?

—and yet, writing words like these, I'm also living

(“VII [What kind of beat would turn its life to words]” 29)

In the above opening lines, Rich echoes Goodman's widely repeated refrain: *don't practice what you preach; preach what you practice*. To live this way frees one from traditional constraints to a point, and for those like Goodman living any

other way is impossible. This freedom inevitably alienates, inducing loneliness for those unmoored and exiled in their own countries. Goodman sought to resolve the alienation in communities of the avant-garde, where a shared alienation strengthened coterie bonds. The pain of course inspires poetic production these settings, sustained by an appreciative audience.

A key figure for the alienated, disenfranchised artist is the Homeric character of Philoctetes, best known for being exiled on the island of Lemnos by Odysseus and for having a painful wound, both of which raise in him laments of his fortune. He is in Rich's Love Poem VIII:

I can see myself years back at Sunion,
hurting with an infected foot, Philoctetes
in woman's form, limping the long path,
lying on a headland over the dark sea,
looking down the red rocks to where a soundless curl
of white told me a wave had struck,
imagining the pull of that water from that height,
knowing deliberate suicide wasn't my metier,
yet all the time nursing, measuring that wound.
Well, that's finished. The woman who cherished
her suffering is dead. I am her descendant.
I love the scar-tissue she handed on to me,
but I want to go on from here with you
fighting the temptation to make a career of pain.

(The Dream of a Common Language 29-30)

Rich is attracted to the complex character of Philoctetes for whom the open wound and the scar is a source of alienation. She knows her poetic, productive power in that she can make a career, though that career might not be valuable if it limited only to pain. Rich adds a layer of complexity with a sense the great distance of time, making a fantasy-precursor here out of this female Philoctetes, who can hand her something as physical scar-tissue to appreciate how one could cherish this suffering. The wound of Goodman's Philoctetes is more present:

PHILOCTETES

"My past is a wound I will not close
but I keep it open and I clean it out.
"It will not infect me if I nurse it like a stranger,
yet I can't help sometimes shrieking in pain.//
"I have come to this island to enjoy in solitude
the foreign body imbedded in my quick,
but now you---ai ai ai ai ai ai aiiii
auuuuu opopopopopopoiiii."

(Collected Poems 388)

The presentness of Goodman's open lust in his poetry is present with his pain (Dickie 173). Goodman identifies, presents the image of feminized male that

bleeds.¹ As in Auden's "Letter to Wound," the idea of broken flesh and healing offer metaphors for the relation between the speaker's same-sex orientation and what makes a poet, as Auden's poem is part of the legibly homosexual (campy) coterie-verse piece, the *Orators*, with which Frank O'Hara sought to achieve his personal, poetic identity. Through that Auden persona and Goodman's essays and New York persona, O'Hara could fashion his more positive blend of Auden and Goodman, undercut with the significant pain of social and societal limitations. It is through Goodman's figure that O'Hara speaks, in a letter to a friend about Goodman's advance guard essay, as O'Hara indicates that Goodman allows him to "hurt himself into poetry" (qtd. in Gooch 187).

Somewhat like the narrator-protagonist of Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) Goodman displays an intellectual intensity, logorrhea, and insistence on living in a highly conscious present that make him at once dynamic but admittedly sloppy. As he lived comfortably in open paradoxes that would have undone a more programmatic thinker, Goodman inevitably contradicted himself as a community leader not especially adapted to community life itself and a figure of openness not especially well adapted to strong criticism. He also failed to anticipate easy criticism of his thinking, such as the accusation that he had spread himself too thin, as Carruth and Rich and many others in the scientific disciplines fairly alleged.

¹ See also Derek Walcott's *Omeros* and George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (193-194) for further employment of the Philoctetes story known from Homer's *Iliad* and plays by Sophocles, Aeschylus, and Euripides.

Saying Goodbye to Paul Goodman

Following Goodman's death in 1972, periodic attempts (themselves now showing their age) have sought to revive his works as worthy subjects of study. Taylor Stoehr, Goodman's literary executor, was an acolyte of Goodman's and is currently Professor of English at The University of Massachusetts (Boston). Stoehr has been editing Goodman's vast oeuvre for the past thirty-five years, publishing editions of philosophy, fiction, and poetry. Every few years, he has regularly published various collections of Goodman's fiction, philosophy, and poetry. Stoehr's first contribution to the study of Goodman's work is a preface to a collection of Goodman's literary essays, which was published as *Creator Spirit Come!* (1977). Stoehr's preface refers to paradoxical timeliness and datedness as epitomizing Goodman's value. Stoehr also addresses the difficulty in classifying Goodman's work. Writing five years after Goodman's death, Stoehr finds it unnecessary to quote from volumes such as *Growing Up Absurd* and Goodman's 1947 collaboration on city planning and architecture with his brother, Percival, called *Communitas*, for both of these volumes were still in print and in his mind part of the public imagination. Stoehr seems to want to get readers to read much more of Goodman—not just the two canonical books apparently everyone knows. As of the mid-seventies, then, Stoehr gives the impression that what Goodman produced during and after his fame's apogee (from 1960 to 1972) would remain in print. While Paul Goodman's figure has been forgotten, some of the direct and indirect products of his vision have flourished, critically, even as only the two aforementioned texts are cited, among his various works of critical prose.

The encomia and great expectations that arrived when Goodman died quickly withered. Among the ominous signs include Susan Sontag's eulogy, which offers a contemporaneous view of Goodman's death. It shows her response to learning of Goodman's death. She locates his death in a catalog of items that seem strange in the sense of being alien, far away, and unexpected, yet in keeping with the era's strangeness, as the catalog includes ample evidence of the era's fascination with the connections between the United States' international image as a harbinger of death and destruction. Her public comments reflect the times:

each morning someone brings me the Paris *Herald Tribune* with its monstrous collage of "news" of America, encapsulated, distorted, stranger than ever from this distance: the B-52's raining ecocide on Vietnam, the repulsive martyrdom of Thomas Eagleton, the paranoia of Bobby Fischer, the irresistible ascension of Woody Allen, excerpts from the diary of Arthur Bremer — and, last week, the death of Paul Goodman. ("On Paul Goodman")

The solitariness is reflected as well in the second volume of her diaries (). Paul Goodman was gone, and from a distance, it looked like such a great loss. And yet, as an exile, she began to feel more American through the eulogy: "It started with the Paul Goodman essay—feeling grief, and having the courage (and interest) to advertise it" (360).

Goodman's ethos resembles the perseverance that his hero Spinoza had already thought through, with his characteristic rationality. That perseverance

which likewise captures Butler's attention in her essay on Spinoza turns on his famous dictum, "to persevere to live" (*Politics* 111). I realize this a bit digressive, but I seek here to establish coterie values and coterie ethos in living expressively in the way Goodman admires Action painting (noted earlier).

Further, perseverance is crucial to Spinoza, as Butler explains:

For it turns out that to persevere in one's own being means that one cannot persevere in that being understood as radically singular and set apart from a common life. [...]. Desiring life produces an *ekstasis* in the midst of desire, a dependence on an externalization, something that is palpably not-me, without which no perseverance is possible (*Politics* 114).

Perseverance is the key. In coterie circumstances, the presence of the not-me is far less alienating. But one must perform (constantly) to sustain positive coterie circumstances.

Without Goodman's insistent presence, most were relieved of the guilt over Goodman's admonitions and his gadfly presence. Goodman's powerful, neurotic, affirmative drives are related to what Butler regards as important in Spinoza's writing: the desire to live well, which in Spinoza's time was a sort of purism that left him in exile among contemporary Jews. The contradictions of purists such as Spicer and Duncan (each important to Goodman and considered later in the chapter) in their conceptions of living and living well, are well-contained in the sense of Spinoza's, and thus Goodman's sense of perseverance. Perhaps he had performed, persevered so intensely that when he died his performance was

exhausted. No one could perform again Paul Goodman, who wrote persistently works concerned about the burdens of *civitas* contra *communitas*, championing the causes of community and occasional poetry although he seems to have been deeply alienated from his peers among Jewish intelligentsia.

Each retrospective critique of Goodman's accomplishments and shortcomings prefaces the difficulties of containing any such nodal and branching figure within the limited orbit formed by the members of a coterie. Accurate assessments of Goodman's shortcomings constitute the strongest rebukes with regard to his career.. One such well-earned rebuke comes from Joseph Epstein. Like many who had been deeply affected by Goodman, Epstein had been attracted to him during his undergraduate years, when Goodman seemed an earthy intellectual. Such youthful perspectives on and reactions to Goodman offer a value too often absent in present-day assessments. But in the immediate wake of Goodman's death in 1972, Epstein looks back and retracts his formerly effusive response to Goodman's *Growing Up Absurd*. With the retraction, Epstein effectively cuts himself and his readers off from appreciating or even knowing what it was like to have come of age intellectually in Chicago during the sixties, among the Chicago School social scientists at Northwestern and the University of Chicago, a group whose intellectual influence curiously persists in both sociology and in the teaching of the humanities, in the notion of "Great Books," for example. That atmosphere of Chicago thinkers such as Leo Strauss who have since turned to the right ultimately proved formative for Epstein as an essayist who has continued to celebrate these elder colleagues, such as Edward Shils, and

Walter Lippmann, maintaining their status. Goodman's wild sloppiness, which was consonant with Epstein's youthful confusion, stood in stark contrast to the meticulousness of Lippmann, Shils, and others. The trajectory of Epstein's disenchantment offers a familiar if not stereotypical story that's been replicated among many leftist men who have become quite conservative as they've aged. Among such writers, Paul Goodman stands as an easy target for repudiating the enthusiasms of their formerly unfocused lives.

Writing from the area of educational theory in 2000, Weltman does well to summarize the specific complexities and paradoxes that emerge from Goodman's multiple binary contradictory traits:

[Goodman was] a militant and a peacemaker, a utopian and a pragmatist, a revolutionary and a traditionalist. He was an anarchist who promoted government social programs, a socialist who called for market-oriented reforms, and a radical who looked to liberals as his natural allies. A flamboyant bohemian and a bisexual advocate of homosexual rights, Goodman was also a bourgeois father of three children. He was an avant-garde artist devoted to the Classics; a cultural pluralist who advocated a core curriculum and a cultural canon; a proponent of open classes and open schools who also promoted teacher-centered education based on a master-disciple relationship. Goodman rejected the constraints of traditional political categories, combining market-place choice with social cooperation, respect for authority with participatory

democracy, and commitment to universal cultural values with multiculturalism. He produced from these elements a theory of what can best be described as anarchosyndicalism that he came to identify with Dewey and progressivism, and that he claimed is the embodiment of the best ideals of both conservatives and liberals and the underlying American Way of Life. (Weltman 179)

This praise catalog leads to a further paradox: for all of Paul Goodman's inconsistencies, he was remarkably consistent. His energetic phrasing and deliberate iconoclasm appear constant throughout his career. Weltman's use of the term, *anarchosyndicalism*, locates Goodman among the previous generations of late 19th and early 20th century Jewish and Russian European intellectuals, figures such as Bakunin, whose embrace of collective anarchism, anti-Marxism, internationalism, and gradualism would persist in figures such as Noam Chomsky. The contrast with a figure such as Epstein, who turned from idealism to pragmatics, couldn't be starker.

Goodman and the Coterie Member as Confirmed Oddity

Edmund Wilson's critique of Paul Goodman is illustrative of how, for some of those around Goodman, the writer possessed a limbo-esque status. Wilson, in his letter to the journal, *Furioso* (88) wittily imagines Goodman to be a nobody, even "a hoax" following Goodman's negative review (*Furioso* 77-78) of Mary McCarthy's *The Oasis*, published in 1949. As satire, Wilson plays off his relief at discovering Paul Goodman to be an entertainingly absurd impossibility:

“It was audacious of you to pull the legs of the other minority magazines by putting over on them the woozy avant-garde fables and befuddling speculations on Kafka of the fictitious Mr. Goodman” (88).

LeSueur recalls Wilson’s judgment: “Paul Goodman is a hoax—he doesn’t exist” (*Digressions* 121). His recollection in his memoir is as revelatory as it is potentially inaccurate. He’s clearly looked up the materials in *Furioso* but recalls only enough to support his feelings on the subject. LeSueur writes reliably in recounting, on the one hand, the public facts of Goodman’s death and memorial service, while on the other hand LeSueur quotes from various sources suggesting that Goodman was not all that well-regarded even in his heyday. Further, it is important, to consider how LeSueur’s emotional investment figures into his consistent implication that he had an ancillary and personally devoted position to view of gay literary history. Relative to that view, here is LeSueur again, indicating how Goodman’s posthumous reputation seemed to have been secured in the wake of his death from a heart attack in 1972, a month before his sixty-first birthday. The memorial service went well, and many expected that Goodman’s posthumous career was assured.

Within a year, his *Collected Poems* was published by Random House, and not one but two biographers, Raymond Rosenthal and Taylor Stoehr, were set to write his life story. But disenchantment would set in, as LeSueur points to how the bubble of reputation has popped:

And then what? The biographies have long since been canceled.
Memoirs by his colleagues barely mention him (Was he really so

disliked, even hated, by his peers? It would appear so). In articles about the Jewish intellectuals of New York his name is skirted, as though he never wrote for the *Partisan Review*, *Commentary*, *New Republic*, and *Dissent*. (LeSueur *Some Digressions* 121)

The problem—as LeSueur sees it— is that Goodman has been dismissed for being irreconcilably perverse. Though LeSueur admits to being unsure of the details, this former lover of Goodman and former roommate of Frank O’Hara gets the emotional tenor right. Goodman is no longer. Wilson’s satire marks a change of tenor, as Goodman became such an object of derision by intellectuals such as Wilson. Rather than simply ignoring Goodman, Wilson apparently felt compelled to protest the other writer’s entire existence. Epstein and Wilson suggest that the former wunderkind Goodman now struck them as marginal, idiosyncratic, beside the point, ultimately deviant. Such accusations are routinely leveled, over time immemorial, against coteries, especially in their homosocial or same-sex aspects. What’s clear, too, is that even in his lifetime Paul Goodman was rejected in all venues with these familiar epithets attached. And yet, as a self-labeled man-of-letters, he kept writing.

He kept living as he wrote, with the support of his wife, who enabled his libidinal, peripatetic anarchism. He was published in major magazines and in small presses, but erratically. His articles and reviews like his letters and his private discourse are not merely bitter or partisan. His reviews do not shy from antagonism. He can be and is often generous, although that generosity seems to vanish, and Goodman seems all the more bristly in the absence of his personal

interaction. No fan of the Beats, Goodman uses the occasion of reviewing Kerouac's *On the Road* in order to lay into their mode with his typical authority:

Last summer I listened to Kerouac's friend Allen Ginsberg read a passage from his *Howl*; it was a list of imprecations that he began pianissimo and ended with a thunderous fortissimo. The fellows were excited, it was 'the greatest.' But I sadly asked Allen just where in either the ideas, the imagery, or the rhythm was the probability for the crescendo; what made it a sequence at all and a sequence to be read like that. The poet was crestfallen and furious; this thought had never occurred to him. And yet, during those few minutes they *had* shared the simple-minded excitement of speaking in a low voice and gradually increasing to a roar; it was not much of a poetic experience, but it was something. ("Kerouac's *On the Road*" *Creator Spirit Come!* 192)

Here Goodman is at once playing mentor while managing at the same time to be settling scores. Perhaps there was a mild case of projection in this chronically poor, intellectually messy, unkempt Bohemian who enjoyed those youthful enclaves but was, at the same time, growing older. As of the 1958 issue of *Midstream*, where the review was published, these famous men had managed to overshadow Goodman, who had yet to "arrive." This strikingly present member of the intelligentsia, like so many others, enjoyed a fleeting fame. He was soon to be swept into the past. Key to his disappearance includes his insistence on being

what was then considered a polymath, but what eventually came to be seen as amateur careers, which are explained in the next sections.

Dr. Goodman, Lay Therapist

Many vulnerable souls who felt unsure of their sexuality and who sought paternal/avuncular guidance found their way to Paul Goodman in New York. Although Goodman was not a medical doctor, he did earn a Ph.D. in Philosophy from the University of Chicago. The term “lay therapist” appears throughout Joe LeSueur’s memoir, and deserves attention. It’s clear that Goodman’s writings and practice popularized the eclectic *mélange* that was, in the 1950s, known as Gestalt Therapy. This activity provided Goodman with introductions and opened the way to friendships with various New York and San Francisco poets, groups that included many of the gay writers who were then circulating in various bicoastal/bisexual coteries. Lay therapy performs the ethos of amateurism: empowering and yet deeply flawed in retrospect.

Among the three people who wrote *Gestalt Therapy*, a group that included Fritz and Laura Perls, both trained psychologists, Goodman was the most literary writer. Gestalt’s instantaneity matched Goodman’s rapid and aggressive approach to writing and therapy, which included his inclination to find young men to fix and fix upon, albeit with uneven and often painful results. Exceptional in himself and as the source of inspiration, Goodman was meant to be outgrown, making him a pederast in the classical sense. His practice as a lay therapist has that Goodmanian mix of intellectually impressive and emotionally pitiable. Once his

libidinal-intellectual energy had been spent, there were no further claims and no more consummations.

Goodman often stated his debt to the controversial Wilhem Reich, who exercised a great influence upon Gestalt along with other branches of analysis and therapies opposed to behaviorism. Reich likewise proved influential in the sixties and the impact of his ideas extends into the present, in part because Reich shares the spirit and innovation of latter-day French psychoanalytically-based theorists such as Deleuze and Kristeva. The latter produced a number of items useful to the development of a theory of coterie poetics, including the consideration of the contextual lead-up to the production of text, which is, naturally enough, group-based in the theory of the coterie. So does Kristeva's understanding of how contextual energies are particular to coterie formations provide a proto-genotext that helps us understand how a kind of secondary adolescence recalls the safety and support of the primal scene. It is within this context that sexuality-kinship ties might well be understood as fruitful and safe, especially in the major coastal cities to which gays and lesbians can move and thus become to become "natives." Paul Goodman was keenly interested in making precisely this sort of world, both performatively, in terms of speech act theory, and sexually.

With respect to the connections between Goodman's life and writings, Gestalt therapy is far more accepting of homosexuality than is classical psychoanalysis. As Gestalt therapy was created by a man of letters, other men of letters became interested in undertaking it. Much like Gurdjieff's Rope Group's or Olson's Black Mountain, Gestalt fulfilled a desired niche for those often

persecuted individuals who felt that they had been overlooked, who'd been subject, in Goodman words, to "growing up absurd," that is, growing up amid an apparently reprehensible and illogical institutionalization of commerce as the dominant and shaping force with regard to values. Contesting that institutionalization of commerce were other, communal and psychoanalytically-inflected approaches (Rope, Black Mountain, etc.) based in a desire for productivity, literary and otherwise, from peripheral locations that provided and shaped novel literary approaches to psychological and sociological problems.

Writers on Gestalt Therapy describe its goals in ways that show a close congruence with the aims of the Rope Group. Thus Fritz Perls on the aims of Gestalt therapy, which he described as follows, as

one of the rebellious, humanistic, existential forces in psychology which seeks to stem the avalanche of self-defeating, self-destructive forces among some members of society... Our aim as therapists is to increase human potential through the process of integration. We do this by supporting the individual's genuine interests, desires, and needs. (qtd in Clarkson 19).

Orienting a subject toward positive and "authentic" self-image ideally helps the young person to survive the transition into a state of integration into broader society less the negative reinforcement of a mainstream culture that rejects their desires and potential contributions. This sounds fabulous but leaders like Goodman that break down personal barriers also attract controversy. Indeed, in retrospect, it's hard to look at some of Goodman's methods and not see a guru

figure taking advantage of insecure young men to whom he was obviously attracted. The openness of his sexuality appears self-serving, as it does to other successful yet troubling coterie-guru situations, as that in the Rope Group run by George Gurdjieff in the mid twentieth-century.

As a coterie site of literary production the Rope Group similarly sought the “authentic ‘I’” a concept which much attracted not just artists of the avant-garde, but teacher-gurus such as Goodman and Gurdjieff who sought disciples to whom they each provided levels of “therapy.” While Goodman seems to have been a fundamentally honest person, Gurdjieff’s motives and methods raised a host of reasonable suspicions wherever he practiced (Rauve 48-51) Gurdjieff’s acolytes included various members of the Rope Group, who cultivated a coterie existence that led to high literary productivity, from roughly the twenties to the forties. This included literary figures such as Jean Toomer, who was productive but rejected his pre-Gurdjieff success, and Katherine Mansfield, who was prolific in her stay at the Gurdjieff Institute but died while under care there. The subsequent infamy (and quackery) has inhibited serious study of a very productive group setting.

After Wilhelm Reich questioned the legitimacy of the strains of post-Freudian thought, he developed the Orgone Institute, which resembles Goodman’s ideas. Goodman used the occasion of an essay on Functionalism to comment on how his ideas about therapy coincide with Reich’s:

Again different is the method of Character Analysis, developed especially by Wilhelm Reich; here the treatment consists not in

wooing something forgotten back into consciousness, nor in training the ego, but in directly "attacking" the characteristic "defenses" which the patient has erected against his vitality and feeling. The seating is as follows: the patient lies exposed on a couch, naked or nearly so; the therapist sits alongside and over him, observes him, questions him, gives him directions, touches him if need be. The therapy is importantly physical, grounded in the theory that the character defenses-e.g. sullenness, defiance, impulsiveness, superficial compliance - are maintained by rigid muscles and other somatic inhibitions, and the patient is directed to expressive exercises that are often painful and always distasteful. The body lies as for an anatomy, the hope is to revive it. The patient is certainly "attacked" and is made to feel attacked; the hope is that his resistances to the therapy will come to a focus and can be worked through. The method was devised primarily for the recovery of physical energy, especially sexual energy, the best patients being young persons. The interpersonal relation, a kind of undissolved transference, tends to one of two opposite attitudes: either a violent reactive withdrawal if too much of oneself seems threatened, to a group-loyalty to the "Movement" that is often very dogmatic. All of this is in the plan of the passive patient and the active therapist. ("Meaning of Functionalism" 33)

Here, Goodman retains elements of the “Character Analysis,” for which Reich, an admired pupil of Freud, remains fairly well-known within the post-Freudian history of psychology. Goodman’s view of Gestalt specifically draws on Reich’s Marxism to analyze the social and political contexts that affect the psyche of the analysand. Goodman seems to have strongly approved of Reich’s controversial taboo-breaking therapy methods, yet Goodman eventually rejected those methods. Among the methods that Goodman did not reject was the emphasis on touching on the part of the analyst, surprisingly enough. Rather, Goodman, referring to Rank in the “Art and the Artist” essay, supported the breakdown of any such barriers between analyst and analysand, thus accepting one of Reich’s more controversial practices. While both Goodman and Reich might well seem dated in (for example) their lack of self-consciousness, the latter could be regarded as a kind of naiveté, albeit one that seems at once Romantic, self-deluded, patriotic, and blinding.

The perspectives articulated by members of the community of professional psychologists and psychoanalysts suggest that Goodman was something of a dilettante who’d somewhat hacked his way through a jungle of multiple disciplines while achieving rather little, given his multiple limitations. Goodman earned in all directions such resistance as is understandably articulated by the above critics. While it’s hard to fully grasp whether Goodman deserves literary death, given what Hayden Carruth and Adrienne Rich believed about him, for example, Goodmanism, understood as psycho-anarchism, could/can only go so far as a viable approach to understanding psychosexual and communal relationships

among postwar poets. Goodman may be more important for his contributions as a failed artist and successful guru, as was the case of Gurdjieff. Being in and out of the right postwar avant-garde circles enabled Goodman to charge with intellectual legitimacy the otherwise under-articulated desires of his acolytes and admirers. Goodman appeared at the right time to impress the right people, such as Olson, Spicer and O'Hara, as they were looking for an intellectual foundation for their coterie poetics.

Paul Goodman, Literary Man-of-Letters²

One way to understand the posthumous fame of Goodman is by surveying four representative responses to his work. The first involves linguists among his contemporaries, who detailed their responses to the last book that he published during his lifetime. Their approaches contrast that of Adrienne Rich, whose tribute to Goodman shortly after his 1972 death noted her appreciation of his openly gay sexuality. A second approach to Goodman involves Carruth, "Paul Goodman and the Grand Community," (1982). In this essay, published a full ten years after Goodman's death, Carruth describes Goodman from the perspective of someone deeply influenced by and invested in a literary hero whose reputation has declined with respect to both influence and investment.

² The awkwardness of this title is intentional. Goodman did want to be known as a man-of-letters in old-fashioned terms and perhaps in the way that Cocteau presented himself as *Poesie*. Cocteau figures largely in the advance-guard essay and in the poetic sensibilities of coterie poet, Jack Spicer.

Goodman vis-à-vis Linguists and his Defence of Poetry

Related to the “therapeutic” Goodman was the mixed but generally positive critical response that greeted the last book that he published in his lifetime, a series of essays called *Speaking and Language: Defence of Poetry* (1971). The text exhibits the fine bit of antagonism and humanism for which Goodman was well known to a reading public that was already familiar with his previous decade of social criticism. He’d propelled into a hard-won fame and earned the respect of intellectuals from across the political continuum; these people seemed ready and interested in reading work that Goodman wrote from his positions as a “conservative anarchist,” which he regularly called himself. Among his most influential critics at the time were linguists such as Richard C. Newton whose Functionalist and Chomskyan work Goodman had attacked in *Speaking and Language*. Even as Newton easily countered Goodman’s contentions that linguists were engaged in developing unnatural abstractions with regard to living speech, the writer’s death impacted Newton’s reply: subtitled “A Response and Tribute,” Newton includes condolences and respectful warmth. That response presages the admiration and, perhaps, disbelief that subsequently dominated Goodman’s reputation: “the subject of linguistics [...] makes Goodman simply stop making use of his usually subtle and interesting mind” (426).

As time has shown, Goodman’s espousal of such interests hasn’t obscured the sense among subsequent writers that his trade was mainly in literary work, with which Goodman was most intimately connected via his expressionistic

presence. As he disdained to reduce or arrange life into legible markers and text, he quarreled with the spirit of functionalism.

Further, Goodman's passion for the interpersonal relations and live interactions that he faulted linguistics with ignoring blinded him to what linguistics offered in relation to his emotional investments in community.

According to Perkins, in his lengthy critique of Goodman's *Speaking and Language*, Goodman's greatest failing in his attack on linguistics might well spring from his apparent inability to distinguish between competence and performance:

He chides Chomsky for restricting a child's ability to acquire language, for example, and use it 'to operating on strings of sentences, spinning out an algebra rather than taking it, as Kant does, as part of the total intellectual power of people that gives form to all their experience so they can have it as experience' [*Speaking and Language*] (100-101). In fact, however, as Chomsky has been emphasizing all along, the power to use language is not the power to manipulate strings of sentences; it is rather to employ creatively an abstract intellectual structure, which is indeed part of our 'total intellectual power' as human beings (Perkins 427).

Goodman seems unaware of how many of his attitudes about the goals of linguistic theory parallel those of Chomsky. Perkins appears emotionally as well as intellectually disappointed:

All of these defects of Goodman's book are especially disappointing because so much remains that is quite good, such as the criticisms of constructed languages. In fact, wherever Goodman addresses himself humanistically to language, as a critic of language and not as an adversary of linguistics, he offers powerful insights and suggests—in spite of himself, I suppose—interesting directions for linguistic research (427).

Key to Goodman's appeal is that he proposes to “defend literature and poetry as the indispensable renovators of desiccated and corrupt language” (qtd. in Carruth 251-2). This defense renders an anarchistic, emotional response to what those forces that may have dehumanized, or perhaps desexualized, thoughtful men, in his perspective and in his time. The subsequent predominance of theory in academic institutions and the hyper-specialization of the increasingly technocratic sciences will bear these instincts out.

While Goodman's prescience and his broad fluency are hard to deny, so is his constant overreach. Perhaps before his interest in Goethe, his systematizing tendencies were developed amid his presence at the University of Chicago in the thirties, when Aristotelians dominated that institution's curriculum. Goodman's own *Structure of Literature* presents an Aristotelian scheme for rethinking categories for literature. Although it was published in the mid-fifties, he'd written it some fifteen or twenty years earlier as a dissertation in philosophy. Levin sums up the mixed reception that it evoked, referring to how it engaged more in “abstracts and paraphrases,” summing up situations, seeking out parallels than

seeking “like the Russian formalists” to understand concretely the means and materials wherewith great writers obtain their effects (Levin 125). As Goodman discussed drama without reference to theater, Levin pointed to how Goodman examined the thing apart from construction. “He seems more interested in his own schematism than in the writer’s technique,” Levin concluded (125)

Admittedly, I struggle through some of Goodman’s writing for its reformulations. Here are new schemas for the city, for the bodies of literature, for social sciences. If one is not invested in the material produced within Goodman’s reorganizing tendencies, one cannot care what he says about, say, “Author Attitude” as a category of understanding literature. Not only must one be of a mind of Goodman, we must contain his categories that he might himself dispel. Hayden Carruth was long invested, as was Susan Sontag; their dispositions were special, however, and could not be replicated.

The question is whether Goodman was anachronistic, overly hyped and admired for his social criticism, or simply too ill in his last works to build a full defense in his last major work, *Speaking and Language: Defence of Poetry*. Also, Goodman’s breadth may have given him personal advantage in most intellectual discussions. He is especially impressive to those not expert in the fields he displays his knowledge. His ardent admirers reveal their skepticism, but also their romance with being told what to do by Paul Goodman.

As I watched the documentary, *Paul Goodman Changed My Life*, I saw him as someone to grow out of and never to return to: a feminist writer seems struck she didn’t see Goodman’s obvious chauvinism of forty years before; a

famous theorist admires Goodman's present yet anonymous qualities in the social and political landscapes; Goodman's wife is past defending her husband's rough trade sex life. In the amateur situations of the coterie family the children must move on. It turns out Paul Goodman was no John Donne. Yet he was a midwife to so many movements, to such questions of social consequence, the firmness of his theories and the quality of his product are ultimately secondary.

Ten years after Goodman's death, Carruth published his essay, "Paul Goodman and the Grand Community" (*Selected Essays & Reviews* 231-282). This represents the full wane of his posthumous reputation. The essay is elegiac, proclaiming the deceased subject's omnipresence:

Goodman was precisely *moderniste* in the European tradition, a companion of Kafka, Gide, Rilke, Brecht, Aragon, and Cocteau; especially Cocteau. He disclaimed the impersonal and conventional; he celebrated the personal and mythological. His procedure was that of dreaming awake, its wit as well as its profundity. He was absurd, practical, deeply moral, shocking, and polemical. He was a superb technician and had a philosopher's sensitivity to the humanity of language (somewhat akin to Heidegger, though I don't know if he had read him); at the same time he had little use for linguistics as such, or for structuralism or concretism or any other conceptualist theory of art. He was devoted to *meaning* (Carruth 232).

It would be Goodman's ill luck that literary theory had taken off just as Goodman's posthumous career was in the balance. In such a context, his antipathy toward abstract theories virtually assured that a shelf of Goodman would become something of a reliquary.

I have no wish to anticipate Goodman's biography, a task that in which Taylor Stoehr is engaged as he continues to edit, publish, and write Goodman-based criticism. Were it not for Stoehr's editing of Goodman's works, retrospectives such as this one would be impossible. Stoehr's editions include Goodman's novels, poems, literary theory, Gestalt therapy, along with Goodman's collection of works on anarchism (*Drawing the Line Once Again*) and social criticism (*New Reformation: Notes of a Neolithic Conservative*).

As a man-of-letters and an advocate of community-based literary production, Goodman was never able to fulfill the role he tried exceedingly hard to play. The trouble was, as is always the case, other people. He preferred freedom from institutional authority only so that he would dominate. And yet, he was sensitive and, ultimately self-destructive. His deeply felt alienation was necessary to his art and way of life, for which his career was justification:

[H]is estrangement from his own contemporaries was [...] more fundamental, perhaps more painful, more damaging. He bitched about it endlessly. I think even he, however, knew how much he needed that damage, that extreme intellectual and even personal isolation. [...] He was an alien among aliens. (Carruth 237)

Carruth's essay on Paul Goodman tries to impart a sense of Goodman's value and contrarities, he lets on that no one was reading Goodman in 1982. Among colleagues, there was the typical recollection of *Growing Up Absurd* (published in 1960) or the lectures among the slightly older contemporaries, but for Carruth Goodman is a gem lost. Carruth gives a narrative of his personal beliefs and expectations of Goodman's work, stating that at one point he worried that no one would pay attention to Goodman's great poetry because he was such a popular public social critic; he reconsiders, because he felt that American culture, such as it is, would include parts of all of Goodman's best literary work. Finally, though, Carruth thinks he may see the last of Goodman, whose work no one reads, the fact of which prompted the essay in the first place. The amount of work that goes into his recommendations staggers. Carruth engages Goodman's work with bemused inability to capture it. He loves Goodman's plain-speak (which is something of the avant-garde and of John Donne) and his particular Americanism, which seems to contradict his Europeanism. Carruth says that:

Goodman was so thoroughly American that my [earlier] remarks seems crazy. No other American writer of his time dared to be so patriotic in Goodman's fundamentalist sense. In the midst of his sophistication he was plain and straightforward, not to say homely; in the midst of castigating contemporary American civilization he would stop to proclaim, in tones of injury, his faith in the Jeffersonian archetype. He truly believed that the Lockean presence in the American Constitution made it not only one of the

world's most beautiful political documents but still the best hope of mankind. He took off his hat when the flag went by. And his love of the American scene, urban or rural, was clear in everything he wrote. He called himself a "Jeffersonian anarchist." [...]

Sometimes he seemed in danger of turning into an ordinary Anglo-American liberal, a fault his critics on the left were always glad to point out. At all events he made us see that radical and conservative, if they remain useful terms at all, are only so in combination. (Carruth 233)

In Carruth's view, Goodman's poetry from a traditionalist perspective shows respect for the past as Goodman "a radical who dreamed backward more than forward," was more comfortable with the dead than with a vague present (Carruth 239)³. That communing with the dead (akin to "the buried life" of Eliot) often operates in coterie situations, providing a sense of genealogy and shared identity among group members, whether poets (or perhaps historians) define themselves in relation to the past. For Goodman as for Rexroth and Duncan, openness in the avant-garde included openness to the dead, as evident in Goodman's concern for "the tradition of literature," which he called "a grand community and, much as I envy the happy and the young, I doubt that they have a good one" (qtd. by Carruth 244). The observation is suggestive with regard to Goodman's difficulties, his

³ This matches Donne in many ways, as Donne thought that the contemporary poets and writers were little use to him (in contrast with the Church Fathers) and that England had not really any poets to speak of.

embrace and rejection of youth, perhaps including his own youth, which he summoned and analyzed in memoir, fiction, and even in his social science.

Goodman as Guru

This guru-Goodman, an older poet among younger, worked fine for Frank O'Hara as long as he and Goodman were not in the same place. Goodman's Advance Guard essay is what O'Hara admired. O'Hara admired as well, but he did not admire Goodman in New York, it seems, though he looked forward to moving there, initially, because it was the New York of Paul Goodman. Goodman desired followers after long periods of marginality. After that long-term, difficult existence, he was broadly admired, but never could escape loneliness. He and Rexroth (and Stefan George and Ezra Pound and perhaps Gurdjieff's Rope group) offers variations on the hierophantic figure for young or minoritized in which leadered groups are ruled by those advocating leaderlessness, as was especially the cases of Rexroth and Goodman, who were open anarchists. The more successful of these father-figures establish psychological dependencies and self-supporting group dynamics that favor themselves. "Self-support" means both independent of institutional leadership and generally supportive of the leader's preferred dynamics.

The Rope Group's guru provides what seems like the most order to those not interested in traditional orders but willing to submit to personally-tailored orders, the power of which sustained by the piecemeal revelations of its order. That order was likely fictional as the fading institutions of old Europe, but it was

infinitely more attractive and sexualized. As Rauve's article, "An Interection of Interests: Gurdjieff's Rope Group as a Site of Literary Production," describes it, the give-and-take atmosphere provided by Gurdjieff's approach deeply affected talented writers searching for structure and support. Accounts abound of authors not knowing where to start in writing memoirs and receiving Rope-based guidance and prodding to get the work started.

The Gurdjieff-related materials present valuable comparisons between the Rope Group's mutual directions toward individuality and Goodman's powerful self-scrutiny and desire to administer wisdom to his disciples. One sees in each guru an Elijah Mohammed complex in which a high-powered auto-didact commands popular attraction and develops pupils that surpass the master that had no master himself. The effect on writers resembles William Burroughs' contemplation of Scientology. He eventually rejected it, but he found the structures and self-discipline attractive.

Gestalt therapy as developed by Goodman, et al, offers striking similarities with alternate religious or syncretic theories that were openly acceptable in the early 20th century (Blavatsky, Ouspensky, Gurdjieff, etc.). Most such groups may well appear anachronistic or attenuated to contemporary eyes, yet poets such as Robert Duncan and W.B. Yeats (among many, many others) were drawn to alternate spiritualities. Such was the case of Duncan, who'd been an outsider all his life but was at home in the spiritualism (Theosophy) of his adoptive parents.

The pattern of failure or perceived failure in the lives of these gurus conjoined with the difficult relationship between public and private matters

provides a wider understanding of why and how coteries failed. While a good many would prove insufficiently attentive to producing measurable results for the outside world, such was not to be Goodman's fate, given his personal attractions, his gift for making (if not necessarily keeping) friends, as well as his charisma and generosity. The attempt to make these elements of Goodman's effectiveness present, decades after his death, challenges subsequent biographers, such as Stoehr. One solution might lie in exposing, systematically, the subject's multifaceted life and relating this to a ranging oeuvre. Or, as I am proposing here, examining a specific, highly representative moment in his career, encapsulated in a single tremendously influential essay, reveals much about the nature of his influence as well as his subsequent, seeming disappearance.

The Advance Guard Essay and its Poetic Tributaries

This section attempts a fuller analysis than has yet been done of Goodman's "Advance-Guard Writing in America: 1900-1950," published in the *Kenyon Review* in 1951. Taylor Stoehr's 2003 retrospective is engaging, but it does not focus on the literary-historical value of Goodman's major prose influence on a range of younger poets. Critics tend to consult the Advance Guard essay to cite that source for Frank O'Hara's Goodman connection in a work on Frank O'Hara. The same is done for Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, Jack Spicer, whose poetic ethos were crystallized in an essay by a man who was about done being the literary man of letters he preferred to embody.

Studies of Goodman's influence focus on the Black Mountain School (Stoehr 2003). As Stoehr observes, as of 1951 Goodman was preparing to abandon his dream of being a man-of-letters. As Goodman's executor and singular scholar, Stoehr relates how he came to meet Goodman precisely as the latter was writing the *Advance Guard* essay. As Stoehr points out, Goodman's difficulties in supporting his family had become particularly pressing. His writing career, at that moment, seemed at an end. Throughout the fifties Goodman made a modest living not as a writer or journalist, but as a lay therapist. Throughout that essay, Goodman's self-image as a failed "man-of-letters" operates as the guiding organizational force, a lightly veiled personal account of shifting modes of his writing from Naturalism to Cubism. As a contributing member of the New York Left, the Jewish intelligentsia, in the thirties and forties, Goodman had consistently pushed his brand of anarchism. As a result, he was left out in the cold among the Social Realists whom he'd repudiated in principle and sometimes personally attacked. Also, as shown in the recent documentary by Jonathan Lee (*Paul Goodman Changed My Life*) and in Stoehr's recollection, Goodman felt blackballed for being a pacifist and neither Stalinist nor Trotskyite enough. Though it fits Goodman's long-term patterns, this is a particularly crucial point in his career. There could be no money in writing, it seemed. Still, he never stopped writing. His alienation only deepened.

Goodman's *Advance Guard* essay succeeds because of how it uses this backdrop of frustration and seeming failure as the writer assumes the stance of a potent, public critic, a kind of anarchosyndicalistic Matthew Arnold, as he

develops his stated thesis that “the advance-guard is only one species of art and is, in principle, not the best art” (*Creator Spirit* 156). This is principally because the *advance guard*, which is another and perhaps better term than *coterie*, defines and inhabits the cutting edge and immediate, and is associated to the postmodern, which in Olson’s coinage conveys action. From this tension between the contemporary coterie poetics and the poetics of the epic out comes Goodman, for all his personal problems, who saw a positive near future in occasional poetry and community, which favor the contemporary coterie ethos O’Hara and the other young poets could identify with.

Goodman’s essay is striking in five main ways:

- The assertions are clear and bear the attitude of an intellectual among intellectuals
- Nary a footnote may be found. In the spirit of the publicly-accepted intellectual, he assumes his word and the collective reading of his audience will be support enough for his claims
- He presumes that psychoanalysis is an accepted and current mode. This not only dates the essay; it might also prevent serious reading
- Despite a heavy reference load of scientific and humanities texts, and a tendency to seem inclusive of as many ideas as possible, there is a method of reiteration and formal structures. Goodman separates topics into chronological divisions. His transitions reflect the rhetorical relationship between paragraphs and contain the ideas. Despite the essay’s fairly massive scope and coverage, there are no digressions. All is clearly related to his principle idea.

- He is as romantic as he is pragmatic and as anarchistic as he is moral.

The artist, according to Goodman, is not responsible for the products of his creative labor:

How could he be responsible, if he does not know what it will be?
And further, the more powerfully spontaneous the working, the more he himself as a moral being will resist and declaim it; a poet says what he does not wish to hear said (of course he is responsible artistically, to let the coming figure form with the utmost clarity and unity). (145)

As the above quote indicates, the artist is responsible and yet free, moral without burden. Goodman sees this as consonant with the poetics of William Wordsworth in his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. Further, Goodman's 1969 *New York Times* essay on Wordsworth (here cited in *Creator Spirit Come!* 53-55) in which he quotes Freud on value of art-work in relation to problems (it "solves" them) and in relation to Wordsworth's living the poem, willing it, *persevering*, in the Butler-Spinoza sense discussed elsewhere in this chapter.

In Goodman's favorite Wordsworth poem, "Resolution and Independence," the aged leech-gatherer, who is lost to nature and lives to produce his mean product, provides a model for poetic production. For Goodman as for Wordsworth, the artist spontaneously overflows after practiced reflection within a state of nature. Also, that artist must endure, must persist, in the spirit of Spinoza and Butler. Only, in Goodman, the lay analyst, the Gestalt therapist, seeks the

humanistic truths of outside and in. Also, in the spirit of Gestalt presence, the artist is consistently enacting, living the art. Communities provide the least alienating settings for such living, though they may be spare or short-lived. At their best, these spaces are ideal for the growth of young poets developing their voices in coterie settings.

Frank O'Hara wrote about this aspect of Goodman's spirit of living the art. In O'Hara's *Personism Manifesto* as in his poems, there's a stress on how "you just go on your nerve" (O'Hara *Collected Poems* 498). Every ounce of Goodman's being was devoted to living in the moment, for better or worse. He advocated a contemporary movement in occasional poetry suitable to those also living in the moment, marking occasions, and building mutually supportive friendships so that this postwar generation might find its voice. O'Hara was maturing but not necessarily producing his relevant work when he read the Goodman piece.

Despite (or due to) Frank O'Hara's anticipation and admiration of Goodman before O'Hara became a New Yorker, the reality was not easy to get close to once he became a New Yorker for good. After they had finally met, they were not successful friends but the two of them shared unpopular, meaningful, needful views on sexuality and art and acceptance. The *Advance Guard* essay structures the narrative for this acceptance clearly. The avant-garde had been a regular feature of twentieth century poetics, and its place for young poets was crucial to resolve the problems of alienation that came from the academy and the outdated canonical thinking the avant-garde regularly obviated and replaced.

Well-reflected in the Advance Guard essay is Goodman's tendency to structure elaborate, systematic categories to effect his analysis. In keeping with his Aristotelian training, Goodman habitually developed large examinations of problems and created categories of analysis that did not prevail, as they can seem tedious exercises in system-making. It seems unlikely that anyone will establish a school of Goodmanism, yet in his relevance to postwar poets and their coterie poetics is vital, particularly in the theorizing how the avant-garde becomes mainstream, even or perhaps because each distinct "advance" that the essay establishes appears to be an allegorized version of the trajectory of the author's own (failed) writing career.

The stages, following the introductory section, include: Naturalism; The Revolution of the Word; Social Solidarity and "Irresponsibility;" Aftermath of World War II; New Directions Apparent Around 1950; The Nature, Disadvantages, and Disadvantages of the Advance-Guard.

In its opening, when Goodman says that "we may distinguish immature and mature advance-guard" (146) we may infer coterie categories discussed in the opening chapter, "Markers of a Coterie Poetics." Goodman also establishes the relationship of the avant-garde artist with respect to the state and to hegemonic forces: "Having caused offense and being punished, the artist first knows that he is an advance-guard artist" (146). As in *Growing up Absurd*, which would appeal to the greater public, the sense of this statement applied to the alienated young poets with conflicting breeds of radical thinking. While Goodman seems to be speaking mainly about himself, his observations appeared at a crucial moment.

Goodman's skill was to make alienation intelligible by providing that larger perspective only a few had so far understood. The Advance Guard essay taps diverging veins of poetic theory and production.

Among those immediately implicated in the essay's description of the artist in respect to the avant-garde were two contemporary poets: the historically-oriented Olson and the occasional poet in O'Hara. Olson might have seemed to be more mature than O'Hara, given the former poet's outsized ambition and scale.

And yet, Goodman's essay was written directly after Olson had rejected Goodman and before he had met O'Hara. Olson was only the most recent rejecting subject.

Whenever the mores are outmoded, anti-instinctual, or otherwise counter to the developing powers of intelligent and sensitive persons, there will be advance-guard work. Yet [...] advance-guard is not a direct attack on the inhibiting mores, except secondarily. On the contrary, it is precisely the intelligent and sensitive who, when they were precocious children, most absorbed and identified themselves with the accepted culture, with whatever value it had. It is only afterward that the nausea and anger set in, inwardly, unknown, pervading the creative work. If advance-guard were a direct attack, it would not be genuine art at all, and it would not ultimately become part of the stream of tradition; but as the response to an inner irk, it corrodes and pulverizes with

creative work, it suffers the conflict through, and it prepares the integrated normal style of the next *generation*. (146-7)

Goodman's description of the French avant-garde of his time, whose aesthetics directly influenced both O'Hara and Ashbery links to O'Hara's stylistic choices by way of the latter's imitation of Apollinaire's epithalamium, "Poem Read at Joan Mitchell's." That epithalamium, discussed in Chapter 7, operates as a traditional poem among counter-cultural radicals, as an elegy and a celebration of nuptials among the French and American avant-garde. Late in the poem, after elegizing the closing coterie life, the toast turns to a positive note: "we peer into the future and see you happy and hope it is a sign that we/ will be happy too" (*Collected Poems* 267). This poem might inaugurate the journey toward being "integrated" and mainstream in the next generation. Such a journey, according to Goodman, applies to his own current situation and to that of other artists involved with experimentation at the edge of mainstream art. Goodman celebrates such occasional poems in his explanation of the evolution of the "advance guard." He especially privileges occasional poems written by peers, singling out the relatively young and those with limited social significance/power, who are not as beholden to tradition. Such individuals are largely affected by sexuality and sexual competitiveness that Paul Goodman seems never to have abandoned. This factor and the long years of struggle and of feeling a failure distinguish Goodman from Auden, who enjoyed early success and renown, so that in effect, we may speak of Auden being mainstream, despite his being on the left (anti-establishment) prior to World War II. While Auden's youthful occasional poems and in fact most of

his poems reflect coterie sexuality, Auden's later occasional poems are light, are addressed to heterosexual couples and completely support heteronormativity.

Goodman's reference to the "intelligent and sensitive" young people contains an elitism that would germinate from Goodman and others in the subsequent generation of mainstream poets as they sought to supplant the establishment and become the de facto arbiters of taste. Goodman had predicted as much here a bit later in the essay (160) where he cites poet-filmmaker Jean Cocteau as the once shocking figure that was appointed to the French Academy. Though now a cliché, it was fairly prescient of Goodman to anticipate the direction of the American "advance guard."

The central sections of Goodman's influential essay psychoanalyze the historical development of alienated writing in the context of arguing that advance guard artistry develops from what Goodman calls "introjection," a Freudian term that Goodman uses to imply weakness or immaturity on the part of the alienated artist. The introject, in Goodman's hypothesis, has been rejected despite mastering tradition and form demonstrated by previous integrated mainstream major artists. As introjection attracts the alienated artist to the small groups of like-minded subverters at the fringes of their art, the artists developed out of traditions that stem, in the first instance, from naturalism, as Goodman explains in the second section of the essay:

We may see the creative, self-curative use of such a response to an inward pathological situation if we bear in mind that naturalism is fundamentally a stream of consciousness without evaluation [...]

It was only by their method of naturalism that they were able to call up the scene of horror and overcome the hypocrisy in themselves. (149)

The realism, the stark journalistic detail of naturalist writers produced (roughly from Stephen Crane to Theodore Dreiser), in Goodman's estimation, the first historical, direct portrayals of humanity, of what man does to man (Wordsworth's natural, "common" language is part of his appeal to Goodman as well). This, in Goodman's narrative, is the truth-in-art that artists cannot be responsible for and through which the next necessarily psychological stages of writing would progress. The mix of the clinical and the emotional in Goodman's tone reflects his own intelligence and sensitivity and his hypersensitivity to hypocrisy, though he does not openly state that his personal publication history parallels the stages of the "advance guard." Goodman's broadly accepted method of lay psychoanalytical approach marks it as part of the fifties as he carries it through the remaining essay.

In the next section of the essay, "The Revolution of the Word," Goodman considers the postwar 1920s, which he refers to as the "golden age of the advance-guard" (150). Here was a time when artists produced and public demanded new things:

this kind of art was almost able to transform itself into integrated art. [...]. History had gone beyond the revelations of the naturalists, and an artist could feel that if mankind dared so much, he could justifiably dare much further to solace his inner distress

[...]. To understand the golden age of the advance-guard, we must bear in mind the contrary facets: (1) the profound dismay at the breakdown of 'civilization,' and the inner disbelief in the previous programs of institutional change; the need to corrode the inner irk with a more thorough destructiveness; but (2) the buoyant hope and material prosperity, and the half-willingness of people in the victorious countries to venture a change. [...]. For advance-guard always rouses anxiety, but in conditions of expansion it is possible to tolerate the anxiety and allow the creative excitement to approach an integrated solution. (150-1)

Appearing throughout are Goodman's obsessions with poverty and the relationship between material conditions and artistic production. Like O'Hara, he regards the French poets and especially the Surrealists as literary heroes and aesthetic models whose call for a "Revolution of the Word" (as in Jolas's 1929 manifesto) called for the reorientation of the printed page and the shape of the poems. These concerns developed from and in coteries much as had been the case when writers during the Early Modern period in Britain became aware of the materiality of the book and the shapes of poems, with Herbert and others emerging from coterie experiment and taste-making.

As Goodman's literary history progresses into the thirties, he describes how experiments have lost their cultural cache. On the one hand, Goodman's difficulties with the thirties reflect his own lost chances in his refusal of Social Realism. On the other hand, the essay itself suggests the fruitfulness of that

rejection, as “obscurity,” “rebuffed as Ivory Tower,” had positive aspects for the artist: “this meant that now indeed he had no social role and he could call himself ‘alienated’ or estranged” (153-4). In the following section, Goodman begins to perform a rebuttal, whose significance has been overlooked among the essay’s readers. The possibility that advance guard art is not the best art, seemed not to be heeded directly (as of this reading) by the enamored readers of this essay. While Goodman’s primary points can be found in this section on the “aftermath of World War II,” the latter parts of the essay have been the more influential:

[A]dvance-guard is only one species of art and is, in principle, not the best art. [...]. The possible, and usual, period is one in which the integrated artist employs productively the destructive work of an immediately previous advance-guard—and this is common within an artist’s own career, his own youth being his advance-guard. But where the advance-guard dies, the language dies” (156).

Here, we see that “advance-guard” art is an essential and necessarily organic cycle of artistic production. At the same time, however, Goodman indicates that it is not highly “integrated.” In rejecting a route to success that might come through “commitment” to a given political platform, or a form of patronage, or attendance to the market, Goodman virtually guaranteed that persistence would be among the determining hallmarks of coterie poetics, as is evident in his point to how “New Directions” circa 1950 involved community-minded poets:

To persist at all, being an artist, [...] the advance-guard artist tries to create a new relation of artist and audience. The art of the artist is to invent ways needfully to throw himself on the mercy of the audience. By this aggression he saves the audience from its numb shock. (157)

For most readers the last section is the most developed and influential one in Goodman's essay, with its discussion of three types of advance-guard tendencies, or "directions" (157). First is the development of literature that brings to the surface the criminal and anti-social elements of the underground. Second is the shocking of audiences accomplished by the advance guard turns toward academic acceptance. Here, Goodman uses the extended example of Jean Cocteau's career. The third and utterly crucial aim that Goodman espoused would have a lasting impact among the poets of his time. Alluding to "physical re-establishment of community" (160), Goodman espouses the calling of what he calls an *integrated artist*. "As soon as the intimate community does exist—whether geographically or not is not essential—and the artist writes for it about it, the advance-guard at once becomes a genre of the highest integrated art, namely Occasional poetry, the poetry celebrating weddings, commencements, and local heroes" (160-1). Before one can object to such a claim, Goodman cites the image of Integration, Goethe, the uber-man of letters, as a great champion of the occasion. Having read through enough stale epithalamia and crusty dedications, I can attest to how stultifying the occasional material can be. However, he, via Goethe, makes his clear point, that occasional poetry is the highest kind, which

echoes through the poetry and coterie patterns of Frank O'Hara, Jack Spicer, and Charles Olson, among others.

As Goodman was determined to see himself as a "man of letters," he may sometimes seem to be under Goethe's spell. The following sample of Goethe on occasional poetry and on sustaining an excellent work certainly would have interested Goodman:

If you treat, at present, only small subjects, freshly dashing off what every day offers you, you will generally produce something good, and each day will bring you pleasure. Give what you do to the pocket books and periodicals, but never submit yourself to the requisition of others; always follow your own sense. // The world is great and rich, and life so full of variety, that you can never want occasions for poems. But they must all be occasional⁴ poems; that is to say, reality must give both impulse and material for their production. A particular case becomes universal and poetic by the very circumstance that it is treated by a poet. (Goethe 18)

The pragmatism of Goethe's statement, which is perhaps welcoming among the vastness and grandness of Goethe's intellect, is also a sufficiently broad

⁴ A note on "Occasional Poems" from the translators: "The word 'Gelegenheitsgedicht' (occasional poem) properly applies to poems written for special occasions, such as birthdays, weddings, &c., but Goethe here extends the meaning, as he himself explains. As the English word 'occasional' often implies no more than 'occurrence now and then,' the phrase 'occasional poem' is not very happy, and is only used for want of a better. The reader must conceive the word in the limited sense, produced on some special event" (18).

recommendation to have been followed by Objectivists and other Moderns as well as the postmodern. The immediacy which appeals to Goodman and draws readers to coterie poets like O'Hara and Donne winds up sacrificing the polish that fine writing requires; yet Goethe seems to offer especially good advice to a young poet as far as bringing life, if not varied experience, to an occasion: As Goethe says in proto-Goodmanian terms, guiding the young poets to write what's possible, from a place of polymathic authority:

All my poems are occasional poems, suggested by real life, and having therein a firm foundation. I attach no value to poems snatched out of the air. // Let no one say that reality wants poetical interest; for in this the poet proves his vocation, that he has the art to win from a common subject an interesting side. Reality must give the motive, the points to be expressed, the kernel, as I may say; but to work out of it a beautiful, animated whole, belongs to the poet. I have proposed [to the Nature Poet Furnstein] to make songs for the different crafts of working-men, particularly a weaver's song, and I am sure he will do it well, for he has lived among such people from his youth; he understands the subject thoroughly, and is therefore master of his material. That is exactly the advantage of small works; you need only choose those subjects of which you are master. With a great poem, this cannot be: no part can be evaded; all which belongs to the animation of the whole, and is interwoven into the plan, must be represented with

precision. In youth, however, the knowledge of things is only one-sided. A great work requires many-sidedness, and on that rock the young author splits. (18-19)

This positive and authoritative tone of the Goethe Conversations has much in common with Goodman's advice to his youthful contemporaries in 1950 and to the subsequent generations of acolytes he so desired. And yet, the awe in which Goethe is held by those around him may have aroused some envy on the part of Goodman. The conversant regularly exclaims Goethe's greatness—after the elder poet reads from his work, the acolyte exclaims, "I have never heard so beautiful a declamation. What fire! What a glance! And what a voice!" (qtd. in Goethe 3). The mastery the Goethe recommendation is impressive and just about impossible for the twentieth century Goodman, who longed for a (Jeffersonian) Enlightenment to fully take hold—and for his anachronisms to hold together in postmodern, urban present with his architectonic style.

Perhaps Goodman was attracted to the short occasional forms recommended by Goethe because of the widely spread, bicoastal devotions and the restless, endless sexual energy that both Carruth and Rich, among others, mention with regard to him. Although writing sustained long-form masterwork in the spirit of Goethe's *Faust* likely seemed impossible for all the singular devotion they would require, Goodman certainly sought his antecessor's breadth and fecundity in his quasi-European experimental novels such as *Empire City* and in his Noh dramas. Goodman practiced the trend toward internationalism that Goethe espoused.

Olson and others cited new interest in Goethe as a result of Goodman's essay. Whether or not Auden read this directly, he was certainly of a mind to produce scores of occasional poems that mainly grew lighter as he grew older.

The inherent order of occasional poems:

I especially warn you against great inventions of your own; for then you would try to give a view of things, and for that purpose youth is seldom ripe. Further, character and views detach themselves as sides from the poet's mind, and deprive him of the fullness requisite for future productions. And finally, how much time is lost in invention, internal arrangement, and combination, for which nobody thanks us, even supposing our work is happily accomplished. // With a *given* material, on the other hand, all goes easier and better. Facts and characters being provided, the poet has only the task of animating the whole. (19-20)

Thus is created a built-in apprentice work in the spirit of the education-minded, free-school supporter Goodman. Elements that are resistant to change (dates, names, occasions) provide a level of order that the anti-establishment ethos is less likely to attack. Whatever the strictures of calendrical, temporal orders ("Now it is no more the time to blunder about" Goethe 18), these yet are easily shared among those that poignantly lament them.

Such a shadow Goethe cast. Not only did Goodman want to be literary and scientific, but his standards also seem to be drawn directly from the first

international man of letters, the legendary polymath who died in 1832.

Goodman's titanic aspirations certainly accelerated his descent.

The Advance Guard essay culminates in Goodman's traditionalist longing for a more integrated, community-based situation and in his pragmatic appreciation for the advantages of the "Advance-guard." Within what Goodman calls a "a shell-shocked society like ours [...] the artist is estranged, in the sense that he feels helplessly without status [...]. He is really less estranged than the others, and he is used to inventing means of communication, patterns, irritants, bridges; this is his forte" (163).

Perhaps Goodman's most alienating position is his pacifism during World War II. His already uncertain position as a regularly-published public intellectual was, in his mind, sabotaged as a result of his stance on the war. His use of battle-language, while it is pointedly aimed at veterans he encountered while teaching at elite universities, perhaps allows himself inclusion in the fatigue and anger that actual veterans experienced. He (as well as actual advance-guard artists) overcomes his own alienating shell-shock in the form of artistic communication. WWII Veterans like Frank O'Hara, who were also gay artists, had discovered a much wider world that included far more homosexuality than provincial life had permitted. They had also a lot of the war on the battlefield and in their psyches but not in their art and social lives.

Even the enthusiastic and open O'Hara would cease to be interested in Goodman's opinions after enough exposure. Yet LeSueur's memoir insists that O'Hara would be interested in what Goodman had to say after all, with LeSueur

as go-between. It was hard not to want to know what Paul Goodman thought, even if you cannot speak to him directly, as Sontag indicates in her 1972 eulogy. Somehow, after he died, so did that need.

Goodman and the New York School of Poets

Frank O'Hara was among the readers most affected by Paul Goodman's "Advance-Guard Writing in America, 1900-1950," which stands among the more lengthy retrospections on the state of literature at midcentury. The essay resonated deeply with O'Hara, as he indicated in writing from Michigan to his friend, the artist Jane Frielicher. Then living on a writing fellowship, he exudes optimism in his camp dialect-letter to her while away in 1951:

The only thing that's happened to me since you left gal is that I read Paul Goodman's current manifesto in *Kenyon Review* and if you haven't devoured its delicious message, rush to your nearest newsstand! It is really lucid about what's bothering us both besides sex, and it is so heartening to know someone understands these things [...] he is really the only one we have to look to now that Gide is dead, and just knowing that he is in the same city may give me the power to hurt myself into poetry" (qtd. in Gooch 187).

O'Hara, even as a relatively young man, seems to have been comfortable with expressing his sexuality poetically and personally. André Gide, the French Nobel Prize-winning author of works that frankly deal with his own stages of emerging sexuality, was largely an anomaly in his frankness about homosexual

preferences. Paul Goodman was more than open; he was frank and aggressive to the point of losing teaching positions for his cruising of male undergraduates. He characterizes it in his autobiographical work, *Five Years*: “At first, the teacher has a hard-on and makes love out of lust, but the student, who likes and encourages the advances, thinks he is still being the teacher” (*Five Years* 42).

As Marjorie Perloff, Lytle Shaw, Brad Gooch, Brian Epstein, David Herd concur in their studies of Frank O’Hara and his coterie, the New York poet’s enthusiasm for Paul Goodman’s essay was especially revealing within the larger contexts of O’Hara’s attitude toward publication. When O’Hara sat down to write Frielicher, he was living in Ann Arbor on a Hopwood Fellowship. Cold and homesick, he idealized the physical warmth and human connection that Goodman represents. O’Hara’s very letter replicates the intimate, avant-garde community writing that Goodman proposes. While O’Hara clearly dates the letter, it otherwise proceeds on a primarily intimate level in its scope of reference to proper names which may or may not be recognizable to the reader. These same elements appear throughout most of the poems that O’Hara addressed to Jane Frielicher, such as “A Sonnet for Jane Frielicher,” as well as O’Hara’s writing to other intimate friends, such as “A Letter for Bunny Lang.” The letter also credits Goodman’s essay as providing O’Hara with the intellectual framework to support his social and aesthetic instincts. This was particularly the case in Goodman’s acceptance of the paradoxes and necessity of “Occasional Poetry,” and in Goodman’s claims that such poetry is the richest poetry possible at the time.

In *Beautiful Enemies*, Andrew Epstein quotes a letter from O'Hara to Ashbery, written six years after Goodman's *Kenyon Review* essay:

I would also like to write some new poems and I mean NEW, but can't do that either. In order to show you what I've been up against (and in the brain) I'll enclose my two latest efforts ['Poem Read at John Mitchell's' and 'John Button Birthday'] and perhaps you can tell me where I went off into the dirt road. It may be that remark of Goodman-Goethe: 'Occasional poetry is the best kind.' (118)

Epstein goes on to analyze O'Hara's wedding toast, contrasting Ashbery's philosophical approach against the more overtly friendly method of O'Hara.

Most significant in Goodman's impact on O'Hara was the older writer's focus on alienation and the "Advance-guard" method of writing for one another. The same impact of Goodman's work probably extended to Ashbery. Writing about the context in which these poets were working, Herd (55) and Epstein both cite this letter as evidence of how each poet needs the other, especially at such distance, to excite production. Their long-distance collaboration speaks to Goodman's note that geography need not limit communities from existence.

Goodman's essay itself culminates his long-cultivated theories on the state of literature in the United States in the fifties. For Goodman, the community-minded, occasional poetry that is born out of contemporary alienation would be crucial to the production and survival of poetry in the fifties. For that to occur, he makes a radical assertion that would be of the deepest interest to the sixties' counterculture, stressing community:

the essential aim of our present-day advance-guard is the physical reestablishment of community. This is to solve the crisis of alienation in the simplest way: the persons are estranged from themselves, from one another, and from their artist; he takes the initiative precisely by putting his arms around them and drawing them together. In literary terms this means: to write for them about them personally. (160)

On the one hand, LeSueur is correct to stress O'Hara's enthusiasm for Goodman's essay (123). On the other hand, O'Hara critics do well to stress O'Hara's freedom from programmatic poetics. The way forward is somewhere between these two poles, which is that the later pages of Goodman's essay offer a map towards understanding how to contextualize the poetry of the occasion and the *communitas* of prolific, sensible avant-garde poets. It's also clear from Goodman's posthumous reputation that the highly contextual nature of coterie poetics can lead to startlingly short cycles of direct influence, such as when that coterie is structured around a kind of guru figure like Goodman. Like Arnold and unlike O'Hara, Goodman was programmatic. The neo-Aristotelian Goodman designed movements, education systems and cities, however "natural" and personal. He paradoxically wanted man to remain anarchistic, yet Arnoldian, as "human beings in their man-made scene [...] trying to take on Culture without losing Nature" (Stoehr 2).

Writing in his “Poetics of the Five Spot,” Magee finds in Goodman’s Advance Guard essay the statement, “all original composition ... risks ... something unknown” (“Advance-guard Writing” 157). Magee directs us toward O’Hara’s prose, and its description of artist/sax player, Larry Rivers. Magee offers a valuable explanation for how “O’Hara takes both his painting and jazz into account in describing Rivers’s identity” (696). He quotes O’Hara’s support for the jazz-literary production analogy:

It is comfortable to ask yourself to risk, but it is more serious when the request comes from outside yourself....[H]ere an analogy to jazz can be justified: his hundreds of drawings are each like a separate performance, with its own occasion and subject, and what has been ‘learned’ from the performance is not just the technical facility of the classical pianists’ octaves [...] but the ability to deal with the increased skills that deepening of subject matter and the risks of anxiety-dictated variety demand for clear expression.

(O’Hara qtd in Magee 696)

The implied risks involve the development of identity, in Magee’s view, as O’Hara’s dynamic artistic friendships drew from “what he had learned earlier from Paul Goodman about ‘personal writing’-writing for the audience about them personally” (696).

This observation bears direct relation to the qualities of direct address that are manifest in O’Hara’s “Personism” as well as in his letters and in the letters between poets generally. Goodman’s stress on the interpersonal relation as central

to Gestalt therapy would also be central to the development of “Personism,” whose origins O’Hara recounted as having come to him following a lunch with the poet LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka). O’Hara details the specifics:

on August 27, 1959, a day in which I was in love with someone (not Roi, by the way, a blond). I went back to work and wrote a poem for this person. While I was writing it I was realizing that if I wanted to I could use the telephone instead of writing the poem, and so Personism was born.... It puts the poem squarely between the poet and the person.... The poem is at last between two persons instead of two pages. (O’Hara *Collected Poems* 499)

This passage is fundamental to Magee’s observations about Personism as being neither theoretical or metaphysical but a form of pragmatism in the Jamesian sense, standing “in the midst of our theories like a corridor in a hotel” (*Pragmatism* 47). O’Hara, in this view, was “a good pragmatist” who tested the boundaries of communication, staying in the corridor, so to speak. For such a poet, direct address, the in-between-ness of the coterie pushes the edge of every moment, creates those conditions for living in perseverance.

Goodman directly influenced O’Hara, but it is not clear that he was instrumental for O’Hara. Nor is it certain that immersion in Goodman’s systems is necessary to read and understand O’Hara and his associates. The most approachable admirer, O’Hara brightly praises him, yet the latter poet fell away. O’Hara’s change of mind may be a result of his becoming a definitive New

Yorker which was, interesting, the very role Goodman would play for O'Hara before and as he arrived in New York City.

Goodman and Black Mountain

Charles Olson's extensive community-based program and authority incorporated many of Goodman's ideas about groups. This especially appears in Olsen's letters to Robert Creeley, to whom he wrote in a directed intimacy that follows Goodman's designs far more thoroughly than O'Hara did, for Olsen was the very opposite of the unprogrammable, the "naive" O'Hara. Olsen understood a particularly social aspect of Goodman and of coterie as based in those specific social moments in time that coterie poetics describes as "occasions."

[A]ll this damn funny recent verse—all of it, if you will notice,
directed to actual persons, composed actually, by and for
OCCASION: (1), you and i [are to] restore society in the act of
communicating to each other... (Olsen 2)

The emphasis on direct address that marks private correspondence's mimicking of speech becomes, in Olsen's formulation, crucial to the manifestly social activity of criticism:

that what i mark about this correspondence is something i don't for
a moment think is peculiar to thee et me—that the function of
critique is more than the mere one of the clarities (as, say, [French
novelists] Flaubert, & Mme Sand), it is even showing itself in the
very form of our address to each other, and what work goes along
with it. [...] I put it as of us, but we do say to the Great Society [of
Lyndon Baines Johnson's administration], go fuck yrself (which
Ez[ra Pound] was not quite able to do!) and quietly create a society

of our wives and friends—and without trying to make what DHL
wanted Trigaron or some such ‘community’ to be in Florida!

(Olson 79)

As Olsen’s letter indicates, counter-community consists of “a society of
our wives and friends in a coterie mode that characterized the work of Olson and
Creeley, in their correspondence and their activities as educators. When Olsen
served as rector of the Black Mountain College from 1951-1956, Goodman taught
there, controversially, although he is not commonly associated with the school. A
poem from Olsen observes and comments on the occasion:

“Black Mt. College Has a Few Words for a Visitor”

Name names, Paul Goodman

or else your own

will be the Everyman of sugar sweet, the ginger cookie

to scare the Witch with you, poor boy---if we must have such

classes

as "equals," the young, your lads, the fearful lasses

((these rimes

Huss too would make, as of so good a man as you here pose

yourself to be, dear you, dear true, dear clear, your poor

dear doom, your going away not rightly used. He'd send you

what I send you too, a little reedy Cross pulling feed

out a bottle filled with what now rimes with sis (poor Sis

who don't get half a chance by contrast to the boys because
her tender ender's such a portcullis it's good
for nothing more than making those fond ones you'd---what do you
say?

lay bare? o Paul

who has a rougher thought, who knew he could corrupt an army
were it not he had his friends he owed a something to, a rose
perhaps or rose inopportune on a cop, and there! right on the
street

or in the middle of Grand Central Palace, look! he showed
what he did not admit he meant

Look: us equals, that is, also sons of witches, are covered now with
cookies

dipped in same from your fell poem. It fell, all right, four footed
with one foot short where five were called for---five, sd the

Sphinx,

confronted with senescence and with you, still running running
running

from her hot breath who bore you, Hansel Paul, to bore us---all.

(Olsen *Collected Poems* 268-269)

From this poem, Olson seems to find Goodman arch, inadequate, dull, and hypocritical. In Duberman's account, *Black Mountain: An Exploration of Community*, and elsewhere, it appears Goodman was appreciated by some for his use of physicality, "including relaxation exercises" (377) and for his course in Shakespeare, for instance; appreciation in an academic of the demonstrated ability and willingness to teach Shakespeare appears not to have gone out of style. At the same time that the Black Mountaineers valued Goodman's versatility, it seems that he was too openly gay and too openly sexual to continue at the school, despite sympathy for his ideas.

Similarly, Libby Rifkin in *Career Moves: Olson, Creeley, Zukovsky, Berrigan, and the American Avant-Garde* suggests that heterosexuality dominated the Olson/Berrigan brand of coterie, which unlike Goodman/O'Hara's anti-authoritarian mentorism, reiterates patriarchies and heteronormativity while legitimately avant-garde coterie gurus.

Anne Waldman's memoir of the latter waves of New York Poets and their debt to Berrigan:

If Ted's disciples were serious about making poems and interested in artistic 'community,' they invariably arrived on the Lower East Side where Ted held court, monitoring the cultural, aesthetic and social affairs of the day. Many former students and friends picked up the mannerisms of Ted's speech and poetry, and moved in their own ways from there. Ted's opinions, his 'takes,' rippled out into

the community and carried a political influence within this extended family. His teaching was personal and absolute, tough and tender [...]. He told his Naropa students to read a book a day at least. (viii)

Berrigan's dynamic very closely resembles his own path slavishly following Frank O'Hara—and yet, this dynamic had at its head a patriarch with a matriarch (Berrigan's wife, the poet Alice Notley) that reiterated heteronormative roles.

The importance of the Black Mountain School to the development of a coterie appears in the programmatic of Olsen and in the overlap and influence between Olsen and Goodman. Also relevant to coterie are the responses of poets who felt excluded, or less than compelled to join in the fun. English poet Donald Davie disliked the “slangy in-group flavor” produced by this community-based poetics, calling “[s]uch a movement [...] an open conspiracy, which is only another word for a coterie, though an unusually ambitious and serious one” (qtd. in Shaw 83).⁵ The statement resembles the homophobic reactions to “homintern” conspiracies, as Auden somewhat jokingly called homophobic fantasies of gay plots to overtake the arts. The danger implied is that coteries harbor and foster serious ambitions despite the general perception that poetry was in decline, despite a vibrant underground and despite the activities of academic poets such

⁵ Davies (1922-1995), a friend of Auden's and likewise an English Movement poet seems at least to be aware of the open conspiracy, though Shaw quotes Davies further as a detractor of Donald Allen's editing of *The New American Poetry* in 1960. The anthology had given recognition to such poets with open conspiracies, which Davies calls “sadly indiscriminate” (259n).

as Nemerov, Wilbur, Hecht, and Lowell. The tenets of the New Left and other avant-gardist expressions against cultural and civil institutions have been very successfully integrated into contemporary institutions, at least at the academic level, which up until recently had been a place to land for late-career artist-critics. Outsiders like Charles Bernstein and other Language Poets found careers in academia, sustaining programs in poetics. Especially defiant outsiders, like never fully-accepted or employable Amiri Baraka, attracted—and attracts today—controversy and yet he’s an automatic choice for a range of university syllabi. His literary output is taught in literary and African American cultural courses due to his skill, certainly, but also because he enacted, through plays and poetry and screed and public statement, the stages of his career. In the fifties, he immersed in (married into!) a Beat culture and a New York jazz and poetry culture only to reject (and divorce himself from) it entirely and performed the role of the quintessential Black Artist, founding the Black Arts Movement in the late 1960s. Baraka is the ostensible friend in O’Hara’s Personism essay and was a deep collaborator with the New York School poets. He was sensitive to the strictures of coterie poetics where he felt influence dominate him too obviously (cf. Magee and Diggory).

Raw and Cooked: Goodman and the Academic Poets

The immediacy, roughness and free experimentation of the “raw” are features of the amateur poets. Here is the *unprofessional* which Goodman saw as necessary, since he was, as Carruth observed, a great espouser but not a joiner of

communities. He conducted his own poetry experiments, but in very formalistic ways—such is his often self-described “radical conservative” way. In this light he seems to anticipate Lowell’s acceptance speech for the National Book Award for his book, *Life Studies*, in which Lowell famously divided the contemporary poetry scene into the categories of “the raw and the cooked” (Lowell). Paul Goodman likely shared this reading, in which the poet confessed to how he felt torn but was likely more “cooked.”

In contrast with then-canonical Lowell and closely related to the coterie are theories of the avant-garde that consider the raw or crude in the context of immediate and middle-range literary history. Poggioli stresses the idea of poor craft, or unpolishedness in his *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Quoting Apollinaire, Poggioli takes what Lowell would call “raw” as typical of the avant-garde:

from “La Jolie Rouse” (Calligrammes)

This long quarrel I judge: tradition-invention

Order-Adventure

You whose speech is made in the image of God’s speech

Speech equal to order’s own self

Be easy on us when you are comparing

Us and those who were the perfection of order

Us looking all around for adventure//

Us not your enemy

Who want to present you strange mighty lands

Where flowering mystery surrounds itself to the takers

Where new fires are and colors unseen
Phantasms by the thousands weightless
Which need to be given reality
And we want to explore the bounty's enormous land all stillness
Where time is to banish to call back
Pity us battling always at the limits
Of limitlessness and tomorrow
Pity our errors pity our sins (qtd. in Poggioli)

Poggioli actually quotes Paul Goodman, so perhaps the sense of avant-garde is mutually reinforced. For if it is true, as Paul Goodman has said, that Stephen Dedalus' passwords, "silence, exile, and cunning," express the self-imposed code of the avant-garde artist, it is no less true that the first of these commandments is seldom obeyed (3). Goodman was perhaps the least silent among them. Poggioli/Goodman's terms are the attraction and the danger of these self-imposed codes. "Cunning" implies a level of respect but also allows in the worst uncertainties regarding coterie communities—"Other," Jewish, homosexual, furtive, dangerous. The labels stick for a while, but ultimately can be judged as incoherent as they are homophobic and anti-Semitic.

In all, the Paul Goodman of Frank O'Hara's and of Olsen's imaginations - the gay, leftist urban intellectual poet who wrote in favor of avant-garde poetic communities appealed directly to O'Hara's and Olsen's notions of community and personal writing by way of this landmark essay. These two writers found it affirming of what had been a fairly lonely cultivation of poetic modes. The

Goodman whom O'Hara had met in New York had no chance of meeting glorious expectations ("I liked him better when I didn't know him," O'Hara reportedly said of Goodman (qtd in LeSueur 117)). Goodman's relationship to Black Mountain College, as scholar and sexual pursuer of the students, similarly soured, despite the attractions for Olson and acolytes of the marginal community existence that Goodman espoused. As Goodman met with these poets and educators, he could see, not unfairly, that his writing had a tendency to be misread.

Poggioli's theory of the avant-garde provides a wider context for the extreme individualism that the patriarchal ("our wives") Olsen and the urban-provincial Spicer found so difficult to accept in Goodman, whose essay of 1951 anticipates how individualism and the tendency to take offense constitute problems for the relation between artist and audience, and for a sociological theory of art production:

We started by distinguishing advance-guard as a species of genuine art with a social-psychological differentia: that an important part of the advance-guard's problem is the destruction of introjected social norms. This explains the peculiar offense of the advance-guard to the audience. Tracing the history of the introjected norms and the advance-guard response, we [see] three phases: the phase of the rejection of institutions by naturalistic revelation and hostile withdrawal of feeling; the phase of the rejection of normal personality by experiments on the language

(character, analysis), arousing anxiety; and the phase of the rejection of self-alienated adjustment by direct contact with the audience, rousing the embarrassments of offered but unwanted love. We are now in a position to restate more fundamentally the difference between integrated art and advance-guard. What, psychologically, is the meaning of an art that has a sociological differentia in its definition? (“Advance Guard” 161-2)

Goodman’s anxieties mirror O’Hara’s in 1951, but O’Hara has hope—he can become a New Yorker and find Paul Goodman. His exile, self-chosen, leaves behind the rural Catholicism of his youth and still-living mother and siblings. O’Hara finds people to share his enthusiasm for urbane coterie life. O’Hara displays a winning confidence about having found and continuing to find like-minded fellows, in what he says about Goodman’s Advance Guard essay: “It is really lucid about what’s bothering us both besides sex, and it is so heartening to know someone understands these things” (qtd. in Gooch 187) which were not available in mainstream or academic venues.

To think things through a bit “psychologically,” as Goodman puts it, is to know that Goodman is describing his own frustrations of artistic growth and putting them in terms O’Hara and others accepted. Again, these are all romantically inclined notions, as O’Hara grew conflicted, even negative towards Goodman, while Goodman, for his part, felt that O’Hara was wasting his talent on supercilious topics in penning lines about movie stars and pop entertainment. To the end, of course, O’Hara would want to know what Paul Goodman thought,

despite the inevitable rebukes. Like Hayden Carruth and others who would wonder what happened to Paul Goodman, O'Hara hardly knew life without Goodman's sharpness and fault-finding. To O'Hara et al (however estranged), Goodman was family—which in spite of its dysfunction may have satisfied him. However academic he may have anticipated himself, his work goes largely untaught (perhaps with the exception of his co-written *Communitas*).

Goodman and Berkeley

Sexuality would remain of absolutely primary interest within the various coterie that Goodman developed, or with which he interacted. Coterie emerges in the energy and dissent of agonistic relationships such as between the actively bisexual or predominantly homosexual Goodman and the archly patriarchal, heterosexual Olsen, or in the sexually competitive relationship that Jack Spicer maintained with Robert Duncan, both of them gay poets.. Goodman markedly influenced Spicer, both by way of coterie and in his poetic program, as Spicer spoke approvingly of the occasional poem and the concept of the Alien Outsider and who made his poetic breakthrough with the first of his “serial” poems, *After Lorca* (1957). The latter was published in the same year as Frank O'Hara's epithalamium, “Poem Read at Joan Mitchell's.” Coterie's manifest influence on Spicer appears in that the text cleverly addresses poems to everyone he knows, naming and legitimating a homosexual community that included himself, Robert Duncan and Robin Blaser. The effect, as Spicer half-jokes, is to “assure yourself of one reader” (qtd. in Killian 103). Killian notes further how Spicer's attention to

community and the occasion came directly from “Paul Goodman’s thinking on the subject, “ as “Spicer and Goodman had argued over these issues in Berkeley during Goodman’s 1949-50 tenure there, Spicer resisting, but now he came back to the fold” (Killian 390).

When there are writers for whom the group dynamics are not consistently positive, they may yet be productive within the dynamics of personal relations, including being what Epstein calls (and titles his book) “beautiful enemies.”⁶ The term is useful for understanding how the energy that Goodman helped direct reflects his sexuality and the sexuality. That sexuality seems consistently (and inconsistently) implied in the coterie relationships and situations, as Goodman’s libido, his sense of “the hunt,” as Carruth puts it, is primary to his prodigious energy and his desire for community. Later in his life, even after his libido had diminished, Goodman saw the *meaning of life* as “sexual love,” primary to all of his thinking, including educational theories that include open sexuality.

Sex and sexuality are primary to coterie relationships and underlie the emerging poetics among these postwar poetic communities. This would be evident from the limited but significant contact between the energetic Paul Goodman and the often awkward Spicer. Jack Spicer hardly got to know New York or become intimate with Goodman, unlike Charles Olson and Frank O’Hara, who confirmed their poetic suspicions by way of Goodman’s *Advance Guard* essay. Spicer was also unlike Robert Duncan, who was directly inspired to

⁶ Duncan actually preferred to be in art and literary circles with women, since there would be sexual tension and jealousy problems among the gay poets in literary and sexual competition.

produce his first mature poetry, *The Venice Poem* while musing on the intense rejection occasioned in Paul Goodman's "stealing" Duncan's lover, Gerald Ackerman.. Goodman and Spicer each independently shared a sense of painful contradictions within themselves. Each ached for success and recognition, and each sabotaged his chances through personal manipulation and antagonism. All of these operated in the frisson between Spicer and Goodman, when the former visited New York City. It was December of 1951 when a friend from Berkeley brought Spicer to meet "Goodman, the brilliant social theorist," who then held "ad hoc group therapy sessions that seemed designed to browbeat straight boys into acting out on latent homosexual impulses" (Killian 35). "When Spicer argued with a point made by one acolyte, Goodman jumped in and said, 'You're only disputing him because you want to fuck him, own up to it'" (Killian 35). The encounter ended as "Spicer stumbled out into the snowy street, reeling, he said later, as if after an encounter with the Red Queen" (Killian 35).

Clearly neither Goodman nor Spicer would stand for the imposition of his order to be challenged. Neither poet met the others standards of personal conduct, fidelity, and devotion. For Spicer as for Goodman (and Olson) the guru's role in coterie-community settings can lead to overt displays of unearned and intrusive authority. The irony is clear: both Spicer and Goodman espoused brands of anti-institutional anarchism even as they held court hierophantically over younger acolytes.

Those younger acolytes would still be drawn to the basic egalitarian beliefs of Goodman and Spicer. Still, the unpredictable mix of conservatism and

anarchism made for strange fellow travelers, which include the Agrarians. Perhaps what Spicer refers to as the “best part” of the Agrarians was the interest of Ransom and others (the ‘Distributionists,’ who eventually left the Agrarian movement) in such community-oriented projects as the TVA, which Paul Goodman praised for its de-privatized distribution of natural resources.

Spicer’s core Romanticism precedes his regular disappointment and constant antagonism. Gizzi explains:

[T]he grandest narratives for America are democracy itself, the right to free speech, and the mythology of individual voice, a narrative that was rediscovering its power in the 1960s with the civil rights movement, anti-Vietnam War protests, and, in Berkeley, the Free Speech Movement. As Paul Goodman points out in his collection of editorials, *The Society I Live in Is Mine*, [...] individuals were testing their powers of self-expression and social critique in a way that was ultimately disappointing. In Spicer’s terms, freedom of expression is meaningless in a culture in which no one is listening. He reiterates in the first poem of *Language* that ‘No one listens to poetry.’ (*Collected Lectures* 215)

Indeed, Spicer’s relationship with print is pure antagonism. He went out of his way not to be published with the default assumptions of copyright. He went out of his way to be published in the public domain. He describes in his unfinished “letter” to Lorca:

A friend asked me the other day if I didn't think that the printing of a poem helped to complete it, to make it actual when before it was only potential. I answered no, that to me print was irrelevant, that it was merely an inefficient way of recording the sound of the poem and that, if I had my choice, I would publish my poems alone by tape recording. (Notes to *After Lorca* in *My Vocabulary Did This to Me* 448)

Killian identifies parallels among Spicer's and O'Hara's use of dedications (happily affirmed by Goodman). They "bring a world of others into the text, to create a community" (103) in his high work of coterie aesthetic, *After Lorca*. Spicer sought the membership of those alive and dead that would qualify as of his "lineage." He circulated the idea of gay lineage among the younger poets whom he coveted, which complements the loneliness he cultivated and despaired over. "Spicer's friends observe that he used lovers for poems and poems for lovers" (104). As stated elsewhere on Goodman, these exiles seek, cunningly, for what Goodman calls *grand community*.

Paul Goodman's relationship with print is long and difficult—not that he did not try. As Goodman recounts in his lectures and has been repeated in the work of Stoehr and Carruth, *Growing up Absurd* was rejected by more than a dozen publishers before *Commentary* magazine, then edited by Norman Podhoretz, printed it in serial form. The essay took off, suddenly turning Goodman into a celebrity. It was 1960, and Goodman, then forty-nine, had intellectual admirers but not many readers. He could taste avant-garde poverty,

for he'd known real difficulty in finding places to publish his work, in circumstances which the narrative of his Advance Guard essay shapes and informs.

Perhaps as a result of his long poverty, Goodman was pragmatic on many counts, culturally and politically, but not a weak liberal Democrat for it. This, with his traditionalism and libertarianism, connected with traditional conservatives that would give him occasional forums for his views, especially after his adoption by the New Left. For an openly bisexual anarchist, he appealed to broad American (indeed, patriotic) ideals that were up for debate in the sixties. He was in Berkeley in 1949-50, and was at odds with Spicer, and eventually Robert Duncan, but Spicer and Goodman shared their open contradictions of community-mindedness, political engagement, and iconoclastic antagonism. Separately, they understood how much they agreed.

Goodman and Feminist Poetics: the Admiration of Adrienne Rich

Adrienne Rich provides us a counter to how Goodman's name has gone from ubiquity to near anonymity. In the early seventies, just after Goodman's death, Adrienne Rich published an essay that openly mourns Goodman's explicit sexuality. Rich sometimes refers to Goodman, perhaps as a mentor for sexual identity, but she did not favor his support of the advance-guard or his focus on masculinity in his social criticism. Farwell explains how Rich found in Paul Goodman "a person who restored the female principle to the center of his life and

poetry; for it was Goodman's bisexuality which allowed him to be in touch with the 'woman in many men'." As Rich puts it:

Goodman was one of those few contemporary poets for whom there was no apparent split between himself and nature...he seems to have come by this wholeness through bisexuality... [even] his lust in the his poetry is honest. (qtd. in Falwell 194)

Rich's poetry and reminiscences include a number of references to feeling the loss of Goodman. She references Goodman's death in her poem "Caryatid," as Rich claimed that Goodman's politics sustained her as an undergraduate and as she later wishes that contemporary writing included more of the sort of strong and overt sexuality that Goodman expressed. The emotional geology of bisexuality, Rich claims, gave a real imaginative and political energy to Goodman's poetry (Humm 184). Dickie offers a somewhat different view, pointing to how Rich attacks the avant-garde for its encodedness, and that though she is a "daughter" or gay niece of Goodman, she has been obviously anti-coterie (205). Her turns away from the largely metaphorical Audenesque and towards political gender-conscious lyricism are due in no small part to Paul Goodman's audacity and difficult fame as a public persona.

Paul Goodman's fame was hard-won, but he did much to lose his grip on it. Subsequently, in the early nineties, Rich provides the occasional reference to Goodman, such as that in Humm, and that stretch of text may be qualified with sad comment on the unjust neglect of Paul Goodman. Photographs in the Horowitz book on Betty Friedan show she was a reader of *Communitas* and that

she was able immediately to broaden the concept of youthful disaffection so well-stated in Goodman but restricted to males. From the young Jewish intellectuals that were his peers to the New Left youth, Paul Goodman's provided kind of ever-presentness (Gump or Zelig-esque) characteristics of anonymously being in several places with the famous, being in contact with celebrity and yet not being remembered in the same ways.

Goodman's infamously excluded women in *Growing Up Absurd*, reflecting his bias perhaps, and certainly his passionate interest: disaffected young men of the fifties and sixties. And yet, as Humm states, "Goodman has clearly taught Rich where to 'draw the line' in an unjust world" (Humm 173).

Conclusions: Re-Remembering Paul Goodman

I was raised Catholic, despite the Semitic implications of my last name. I have Jewish background and relatives but was immersed in low-intensity Irish and Italian Catholic culture until about the time I would have reached *bar mitzvah* age. My family was far enough from New York City (90 miles to the north) to be visitors and not live as New Yorkers, culturally. My favorite movie, since I was twelve years old in 1986, has been *Annie Hall* (1977). I have uploaded it so completely into the full circuitry of my brain that it can roll at any point, from any frame to another; to watch it, I have not had to press *play* for a long time. I am sure I am not alone in this.

Importantly for me, the manner and the dialect and the pace of Woody Allen's dialogue and scene-setting engaged long-dormant cultural cues that

seemed utterly familiar, or familial. I understood the implications of my name in new and different ways. I was struck at the right time, and in the time since, I have explored what interested me but knew really that I was not religiously or culturally Jewish, though my slivers of background remained an influence on my thinking and my sense of what is funny. As is the case with the Annie Hall-Alvy Singer pairing, Goodman's sensibilities draw on his Jewish heritage and the conflicts of tempered assimilations. Goodman exemplifies the sociable (if cantankerous) poet. As freely-floating gadfly, he was accepted in the circles he promoted, and then quickly re-circulated.

The trailer for the Paul Goodman documentary offers many disjunctions. Initially in the clip, William F. Buckley is praising Paul Goodman as being just about everything, except perhaps "a basketball player." Seventy five seconds in, a clip from *Annie Hall* appears, one of a flashback to dull dinner parties of the narrator/protagonist Alvy Singer's first marriage. He's trying to get to the bedroom where, as he puts it, he can watch the Knicks (the basketball team) and, we find out, attempt surreptitious sex in a room apart from the intellectuals he mocks for their lack of sexuality. In a moment when he's aiming for the bedroom and she's pulling on his arm to look in the opposite direction, she asks, "Is that Paul Goodman?"

This clearly had not entered my twelve year old brain as significant intelligible data when I first saw *Annie Hall*, nor had any later viewings changed this valence in which that name, "Paul Goodman" would emerge to the point of recognition. I'm not sure what strikes me most—that I had seen it so often and

not registered his name; that Paul Goodman was well-enough known to be shorthand for public intellectual; or that the seed of his diminishment from relevancy is in the joke. “Paul Goodman” as shorthand for “intellectual,” was useful to Woody Allen, which contrasts with Goodman’s personality, which preferred the bohemian enclave to the literati party. Allen probably knew this well enough, not caring really, as bohemian enclaves are no less dull but they are sexier, which is all the better for such a joke. To take it a bit further—one might see Allen’s representation of a failed marriage and its marital-based social scene as dead: dead as Paul Goodman. Allen’s former wife gestures off-screen and it’s not confirmed whether she could see him or not.

Crucial to understanding Paul Goodman’s status in the context of the late fifties and sixties and the aptness of his figure and life, for understanding coterie poetics of the time is that he was, in fact, highly sexual—but not sexy. As an aspiring public intellectual, he was ignored and then widely misunderstood and then quickly ignored again once he was not there to argue for his intellectual causes. It is not all that easy to do, without Paul Goodman, to be of a mind of Paul Goodman—or the state of his work, which is now the same thing. Curiously, Alvy’s first wife consistently accuses him of being “hostile.” This reflects the culture of Freudian and post-Freudian New York intellectuals:

ALVY

Don't you see? The rest of the country looks
upon New York like we're-we're left-wing
Communist, Jewish, homosexual, pornographers.

I think of us that way, sometimes, and I-I live here.

Paul Goodman might have been the author-photo for Allen's self-conscious representation as a representative of "strivers" in New York, as the fifties came to a close. During this period Goodman associated with but was deeply antagonistic towards Communist writers and thinkers, which (people tend to forget) were a statistical majority within certain regions of New York. As a secular Jew who, like Freud, regularly applied biblical principles to his thinking. Paul Goodman wrote explicitly about same-sex desire and encounters when relatively few dared to be so explicit (outside of New York, Goodman's litany of sexual encounters probably counted as pornographic). And Paul Goodman lived and breathed New York as a place where someone of his audacious temperament was able to live publicly as openly and actively bisexual or homosexual, and to find a forum, in the early sixties, for his views on sexual and other matters. It is, I think, Goodman's conscious openness to be his own person that reflects on Allen's self-consciousness over his identity and how he is identified.

I am not saying Woody Allen killed Paul Goodman. Rather, Goodman committed a kind of suicide, motivated by the very reasons and forces that propelled him to fame. Although he is not what one would call *funny*, audio of his forum performances reveal a charm and rapport with the right audiences, that is, the ones of the sixties to which he so amply contributed, but which grew away from him, as he did not change with the times, when the New Left that embraced him in the early sixties left him by the late sixties. Of course, he said good

riddance, perhaps because he was confident that he had more personal force than the volumes he had already produced.

Growing Up Absurd appealed to young Americans' feelings of dissatisfaction. He spoke clearly and sensibly to them, with brisk displays of his broad and deep intellectual heritage. *Growing up Absurd* spoke—and he promoted it—to an eager, college-educated series of crowds. It did not take long for his role as godfather of the New Left to diminish, as young people would assume the sloganeering revolutionary patterns that Goodman witnessed and abhorred, for he was, among other unlikely contradictions, a patriot (“He took off his hat when the flag went by” (Carruth 233)). His traditionalism and patriotism and relative mastery won him enough regard with those ideologically opposed to him, which is part of why he seemed to have been destined for long afterlife.

As opposed to Goodman's manifest signs of belonging, of respect for the flag and a certain genius for marketing to the youth of the time, the poets whom Goodman seems to address most directly—Frank O'Hara, Jack Spicer, and Charles Olson—were all coterie poets who did not share his interest in or commitment to public institutions such as the college or the flag. Their anomie meant that they, unlike him, were poised to develop competing sets of postmodern ethos. Goodman's anarchism and open sexuality complemented their coterie circumstances. He did not stand as a predecessor to them; he was neither a father nor grandfather to their postmodernism or to the so-called “schools” of poetics such as the Black Mountain School, the New York School, or the San Francisco Renaissance. Yet his championing of occasional poetry, which Stoehr describes

as Goodman's favorite genre (*Creator Spirit* vii) conjoined with his openly bisexual lifestyle contributed to the movements made possible by the circles of Frank O'Hara, Charles Olson, and Jack Spicer. Goodman influenced them on levels both theoretical and personal, in ways that merit attention, because in doing so we may further understand obscurity and absence in light of the present-ness of Goodman's influence. Paul Goodman factored into the conscience of poets who developed from the fifties into the sixties. His subsequent absence is palpable in the uncertainty of poets contending with a future without the moral presence with which he endowed his *Advance Guard* essay, developing the cultural capital that poets like O'Hara invested in the rest of their years.

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