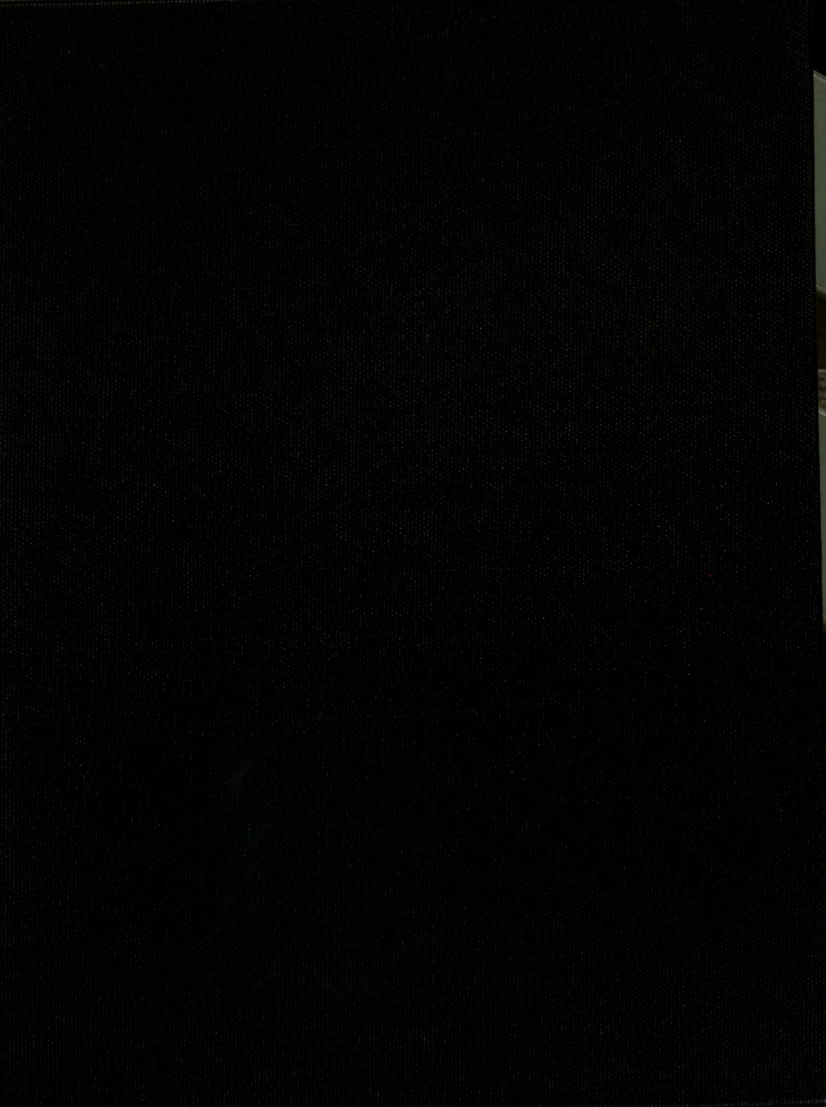






This is to certify that the
dissertation entitled
"A Crowd of Solitudes":
The Social Poetry of James Wright

presented by
Raphael J. Schulte

has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for
Ph.D. degree in English


Major professor

Date 15 June 1992

LIBRARY
Michigan State
University

PLACE IN RETURN BOX to remove this checkout from your record.
TO AVOID FINES return on or before date due.

DATE DUE	DATE DUE	DATE DUE
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

2

in pa

**"A CROWD OF SOLITUDES":
THE SOCIAL POETRY OF JAMES WRIGHT**

By

Raphael J. Schulte

A DISSERTATION

**Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of**

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of English

1992

This disser
Right's poetic p
during the three
with two theoret
critical writing
common during th
paradigms of cul
Horno and Walte
poetry and its c
and effects of t
cultural institu
programs, on the
collected poems.

This disser
chapters, and a
value of a cultu
those texts he p
and anthologies
volumes of poet
individuals asso
establishes cor
framework and W.

ABSTRACT

"A CROWD OF SOLITUDES": THE SOCIAL POETRY OF JAMES WRIGHT

By

Raphael J. Schulte

This dissertation explores the relations between James Wright's poetic practices and forces of contemporary culture during the three decades between 1949 and 1980. It begins with two theoretical assumptions: Wright's poetry and critical writings strained against the New Critical model common during the fifties, and the Frankfurt School's paradigms of cultural studies, particularly those of Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin, provide a useful approach to his poetry and its contexts. This study examines the presence and effects of the dominant American culture, and such cultural institutions as universities and creative writing programs, on the content and form of his uncollected and collected poems.

This dissertation consists of an introduction, five chapters, and a conclusion. The introduction asserts the value of a cultural criticism of Wright's poetry, including those texts he published in magazines, journals, newspapers, and anthologies but did not include in his individual volumes of poetry. Chapter one presents key concepts of individuals associated with the Frankfurt School and establishes correspondences between their theoretical framework and Wright's lyric praxis, while chapter two

examines in detail
and a free verse
informed by content
in Wright's poetic
the anti-rational
of cultural critic
poetics of authentic
personal, "transpa
discourses, can co
diction and resist
work as a literatu
suggested by his s
chapter four. Cha
creative writing
literary marketpl
implicit social c
briefly suggests
and uncollected w
and complicity.

examines in detail two representative texts, a formal poem and a free verse poem, whose content and techniques are informed by contemporary culture. The limitations inherent in Wright's poetics are discussed in chapter three: while the anti-rational impulse of Deep Image poetry is a source of cultural criticism, it risks withdrawing into self; the poetics of authenticity, though problematically privileging personal, "transparent" communication over public discourses, can convey social engagement. Wright's reproduction and resistance to the dominant culture through his work as a literature professor and the social models suggested by his student-teacher relations are addressed in chapter four. Chapter five examines ways his involvement in creative writing programs and active participation in the literary marketplace undercut the effectiveness of the implicit social criticism in his poems. The conclusion briefly suggests a context for evaluating Wright's collected and uncollected works in light of his cultural resistance and complicity.

Copyright by
RAPHAEL JOHN S.
1992

Copyright by
RAPHAEL JOHN SCHULTE
1992

To the r

To the memory of Phyllis and Cletus Schulte

When I think
have to consider
worked with during
research and writing
who influenced me
were nursery rhymes
Dory, and my sister

As important
and encouragements
to address those in
involved in the day
thinking especially
emotional support,
edited the penulti
John Piller for hi
and his honest cri
friendship and sch
discussion and can
and Sherry Liang, C
Nigian Lynn, and A

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When I think back on the beginnings of this study, I have to consider not only the many people I have directly worked with during the last three years, as the actual research and writing were undertaken, but also those people who influenced me when the only poems I was familiar with were nursery rhymes: my parents, my older brothers Mike and Tony, and my sisters Ann, Peg, and Jane.

As important and influential as those early comments and encouragements were, it would be unscrupulous of me not to address those individuals most directly and immediately involved in the day-to-day details of this project. I am thinking especially of Jim Zimmer who, besides providing emotional support, read innumerable drafts of chapters and edited the penultimate copy. I would also like to thank John Piller for his continuing interest in Wright's poems and his honest critique of many half-baked ideas; his friendship and scholarship offer a paradigm for academic discussion and candor. My appreciation also extends to Paul and Sherry Liang, Cindy Fredrick, Larry Jensen, Jack Sun, Liqian Lynn, and Allison Alison for their friendship and

encouragement as
endeavor.

Completion of
without the help
English; the ways
circumstances sur
more notice than
Melle and Sarah
Library, together
Our Library System
primary and second
incomplete citatio
acknowledge the va
McSeoin in the Doc
State University
assistance from Pe
Lundell, in his in
manuscripts and pe
Washington Archive
in Berkeley helped

Finally, and
members of my dis
demands and many
Weiners, my direc
various crises in
introduced a weak

encouragement as I muddled through the many details of this endeavor.

Completion of this study would have been impossible without the help of Lorraine Hart in the Department of English; the ways she contributed to its final shape and the circumstances surrounding its production properly deserve more notice than I can express here. Similarly, Andrea Zoelle and Sarah Vodicka at the Des Plaines Valley Public Library, together with Barb Wilson who worked with the Burr Oak Library System, came to my rescue many times, locating primary and secondary materials, sometimes with only incomplete citations and even less time. I also want to acknowledge the valued friendship and help provided by Mike McSeoin in the Document Delivery Service of the Michigan State University Libraries, as well as the generous assistance from Peter Berg in Special Collections. Gary Lundell, in his indubitably friendly manner, located various manuscripts and papers housed in the University of Washington Archives, and Brian Abbott at Serendipity Books in Berkeley helped in my quest for primary sources.

Finally, and most immediately, I need to thank the four members of my dissertation committee: they have borne with my demands and many infringements upon their time. Dr. R. K. Meiners, my director, patiently assisted me during the various crises in the evolution of this project. He introduced a wealth of views concerning twentieth century

poetry and criticism
intellectual rigour
from and aspire to
History of the Ly
and his comments
and other contemporary
enjoyable. Dr. N
by her own commitment
drafts of this story
to new poetries and
Douglas Lawder, who
always stimulating
with Wright and P
articulate my point
perceived that vi
would have been q
encouragement of

poetry and critical theory, and he demonstrated a logic, intellectual rigor, and passion that I continue to learn from and aspire to. Dr. Douglas Peterson's knowledge of the history of the lyric has shaped my understanding of poetry, and his comments about his personal relationship with Wright and other contemporary poets were both insightful and enjoyable. Dr. Marcia Aldrich, besides bolstering my work by her own commitment to postmodern poetry, graciously read drafts of this study, suggested revisions, and introduced me to new poetries and critical views. Finally, Professor Douglas Lawder, whose conversations about James Wright were always stimulating, shared information about his relations with Wright and provided a sounding board as I attempted to articulate my point of view, even when I only dimly perceived that view. Needless to say, this dissertation would have been quite different without the direction and encouragement of these four scholars and teachers.

INTRODUCTION
Cultural C
The Collec

CHAPTER ONE
Wright and
"Implicit

CHAPTER TWO
Lyric Prax

CHAPTER THREE
The Opposi
the Poetic

CHAPTER FOUR
A Rear-gua
the Instit

CHAPTER FIVE
Wright's E
Official V

CONCLUSION
Toward an I
Cultural C

BIBLIOGRAPHY...

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	
Cultural Criticism and Wright's Poetry: The Collected and Uncollected Poems.....	1
CHAPTER ONE	
Wright and the Frankfurt School: "Implicit Subversiveness" in Poetry and Theory.....	11
CHAPTER TWO	
Lyric Praxis as Resistance.....	52
CHAPTER THREE	
The Oppositional Limits of Deep Imagery and the Poetics of Authenticity.....	84
CHAPTER FOUR	
A Rear-guard Defense of the Institutionalization of Poetry.....	123
CHAPTER FIVE	
Wright's Economic Connections with Official Verse Culture.....	171
CONCLUSION	
Toward an Evaluation of Wright's Cultural Complicity and Resistance.....	227
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	243

INTRODUCTION

CULTURAL CRITICISM THE COLLECTED AMERICAN

good po
mean to
critic
writing
better
language
writing
sound

Having
irrever
positio
interpre
can. A

In the biogr
Anne Wright brief
to the Protestant
and Walter Savage
ringing a bell at
large ambling wom
chipped teeth, di
rest book. The w
emotion, allowed J

INTRODUCTION

CULTURAL CRITICISM AND WRIGHT'S POETRY: THE COLLECTED AND UNCOLLECTED POEMS

I said at one point that there can't be a good poetry without a good criticism. I did not mean that there has to be a great body of formal criticism in print. I meant that a person who is writing and reading is going to be able to write better and more truly if he tries to think about language, if he tries to imagine what his own writing is going to look like and smell like and sound like to an intelligent person of good will.

James Wright¹

Having argued at length in favor of critical irreverence, I find myself in the somewhat comical position of inviting my reader to look upon my interpretation of the text as irreverently as he can. Anyway, I hereby so invite him.

James Wright²

In the biographical sketch "Fragments from a Journey," Anne Wright briefly narrates a trip she and her husband made to the Protestant cemetery where Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Walter Savage Landor are buried. After arriving and ringing a bell at the entrance gate, the couple followed a large ambling woman--notable for her disheveled hair, chipped teeth, dirty glasses, and stained dress--to the guest book. The woman, speaking with barely subdued emotion, allowed James and Anne Wright to sign the registry,

and--after more

had come to see,

whispered to me

gatekeeper, must

afraid of the de

not afraid of th

She wave(d) her

blocks of flats

frightened her n

This odd ta

appropriate that

to two po

frightened by so

often foreground

individuals, inc

advanced industr

situated between

another example

dominant culture

phrase taken fro

(1964), is a text

with her frights

insightful criti

Since his o

poetry have been

"selling," and

and--after more discussion--she showed them the graves they had come to see; Anne Wright notes, "James...already whispered to me that she seem[ed] half crazy" (36). The gatekeeper, musing that visitors frequently ask if she is afraid of the dead, "gesture[d] to the graves. She [wa]s not afraid of them. She [wa]s afraid of those out there. She wave[d] her hand to the traffic in the street, the ugly blocks of flats which surround[ed] us" (36). The living frightened her much more than the dead.

This odd tale should not be surprising: it seems appropriate that James Wright would encounter, while paying homage to two poets he respected, a half-crazed woman frightened by society and contemporary culture. His poetry often foregrounds the contradictions and struggles which individuals, including the poet himself, experience in an advanced industrial society. This cemetery attendant, situated between the living and the dead, presents yet another example of a person isolated by and fearful of the dominant culture. Her life amid the "crowd of solitudes," a phrase taken from Wright's uncollected poem "Heritage" (unc 1964), is a text he might have written; and she could be, with her frightful knowledge of this culture, his most insightful critic.³

Since his own death on 25 March 1980, Wright and his poetry have been the focus of much critical "looking," "smelling," and "sounding"; the recently published James

Right: The Heart

Frank Graziano, of

bibliography of

essays, and chap

death, as well as

of essays, and tw

earlier collectio

Wood devoted

his death). With

Complete Poems in

monographic studi

another book devo

Edkins's The Poet

Amidst this

has been paid to

in various journa

but was unable or

and thematically

span the length o

eight years befor

Green Wall, while

after his death--

Move the River:

translations, whi

together approxima

have yet to be re

Wright: The Heart of the Light, edited by Peter Stitt and Frank Graziano, contains an eleven-page selected bibliography of critical materials, including reviews, essays, and chapters from books completed after Wright's death, as well as two full-length studies, two collections of essays, and two volumes of reminiscences and memoirs (an earlier collection of essays, gathered in a special issue of Ironwood devoted exclusively to Wright, was completed before his death). With the publication of Above the River: The Complete Poems in 1990, additional essays, reviews, and monographic studies continue to be generated, including another book devoted exclusively to Wright's work, Andrew Elkins's The Poetry of James Wright.

Amidst this growing body of criticism scant attention has been paid to the poems and translations Wright published in various journals, anthologies, magazines, and newspapers but was unable or unwilling to include in his stylistically and thematically organized books. These uncollected poems span the length of his career--the earliest were printed eight years before the publication of his first book, The Green Wall, while the last were published several months after his death--and are a significant part of his oeuvre. Above the River: The Complete Poems contains 380 poems and translations, while I have--to date--located and gathered together approximately 200 previously published works which have yet to be republished. Now, twelve years after

Wright's death, a
in conjunction with
begin to critically

My decision

examples of Wright
collected poems by
away from Wright
these poems--read
with certainty--a
ourselves and all
poetic evaluation
shaped by concern
quality of ideology
observed,

Literary
institutions
resist
our her
series
forgotten
literary
been di
How mig
altered
lost? (

Wright's death, a reader examining Wright's books of poetry in conjunction with his uncollected individual poems can begin to critically assess his entire output.⁴

My decision to discuss in the following chapters examples of Wright's uncollected texts together with his collected poems has been informed by the necessity of moving away from Wright's own judgements and intentions concerning these poems--realizing we can never know those intentions with certainty--as well as the obligation of freeing ourselves and all of Wright's texts from his criteria for poetic evaluation.⁵ My motivations, moreover, are also shaped by concern for our cultural memory and the repressive quality of ideological apparatuses. Cary Nelson has observed,

Literary history should continually question the institutional memory of the discipline. It should resist acquiescing in the loss of any portion of our heritage. And it needs continually to ask a series of questions: What have we entirely forgotten and why? How has the selectivity of our literary memory facilitated and inhibited (and been directed by) our development as a culture? How might both the present and the future be altered if we rediscover the literature we have lost? (Repression 51)

Nelson's question

Wright's texts.

examine the ways

and uncollected

the effects of t

poetic texts. I

as well as parti

of that culture.

forgetting is no

erased from our

fashion. There

cultural memory"

demonstrate, con

ideologies, they

our cultural mem

is, after all, a

is my belief, th

uncollected text

Above the River

cultural and pol

individuals and,

culture. Because

"literary" and "

will specificall

Wright's collect

their cultural a

Nelson's questions provide valuable sources of entry into Wright's texts. In the following chapters I will attempt to examine the ways in which Wright's poems, both the collected and uncollected texts, address important issues concerning the effects of the dominant culture on individual lives and poetic texts. I will also explore how Wright's texts resist as well as participate in the dehumanization and inequities of that culture. Nelson indicates that the very act of forgetting is not without motive, "...no texts are merely erased from our memory in a neutral and nonideological fashion. There are no innocent, undetermined lapses of cultural memory" (52). Because Wright's texts, as I shall demonstrate, confront and offer resistance against dominant ideologies, they can easily be "forgotten" and omitted from our cultural memory; the suppression of oppositional views is, after all, a chief function of ideological filters. It is my belief, then, that recovering and discussing these uncollected texts in conjunction with the texts gathered in Above the River is not only a literary endeavor but also cultural and political work that can have an impact upon individuals and, in a more general view, on literary culture. Because of the impossibility of separating these "literary" and "cultural" functions, the following chapters will specifically address the literary characteristics of Wright's collected and uncollected texts as the site of their cultural and political work. Before such an

examination of

recovered poems

Wright's work

now, almost for

judged by differ

that he establish

applied. With

Wright's collec

'selling,' and

well as consider

practices and t

wrote, and publi

not in itself b

'Allegorically,

must not escape

contain richly

also attend to

poems manifest

We need to addre

those gaps and

Pagleton observe

The ta

the ve

theori

of tho

princi

examination of the texts is possible, however, these recovered poems must be re-situated within the body of Wright's work and his historical context. These texts can now, almost forty years since Wright began publishing, be judged by different and possibly even more severe standards than he established and that critics during the 60s and 70s applied. With this in mind, I would like to examine Wright's collected and uncollected poems by "looking," "smelling," and "sounding" them out in their own right, as well as considering them in relation to his publication practices and the historical context in which he lived, wrote, and published. This critical endeavor, though, may not in itself be enough. As Pierre Macherey notes, "Allegorically, criticism uses ears and eyes: the inaudible must not escape the gaze" (96). Because literary texts contain richly suggestive silences and absences, we must also attend to those voices, ideas and values which Wright's poems manifest but do not (and cannot) directly communicate. We need to address the ideological structures which inform those gaps and restrict what Wright expresses, or--as Terry Eagleton observes,

The task of criticism...is to install itself in the very incompleteness of the work in order to theorize it--to explain the ideological necessity of those 'not-saids' which constitute the very principle of its identity. Its object is the

UNCO

not,

emph.

By examining W

context and fo

structures, we

history and id

Rather th

recovered poem

discuss the st

present what i

postmodern lyr

advanced indus

during the thr

countering the

outcasts evide

the following

dominant cultu

universities a

poetry, and i

economic comp

After br

concepts of i

and exploring

especially ap

two several o

unconsciousness of the work--that of which it is not, and cannot be, aware. (89; Eagleton's emphasis)

By examining Wright's poems within their socio-historical context and foregrounding their inherent ideological structures, we can confront the contradictions between history and ideology which these texts evidence.

Rather than offer a generalized overview of Wright's recovered poems and the texts in Above the River,⁶ I will discuss the structure and content of those poems which present what I see as Wright's major contribution to the postmodern lyric: his ambivalent relationship to the advanced industrial society and dominant American culture during the three decades between 1949 and 1980.⁷

Countering the sentimentalization of bums, hoboes, and outcasts evident in much Wright criticism, I will examine in the following chapters the presence and effects of the dominant culture--including such cultural institutions as universities and creative writing programs--on Wright's poetry, and I will pursue his textual resistance and economic complicity with those cultural forces.

After briefly stating in chapter one several key concepts of individuals associated with the Frankfurt School and exploring ways in which their theoretical framework is especially applicable to Wright's work, I discuss in chapter two several of his poems which generate resistance to

elements of late
culture. Chapter
is Wright's poem
the oppositional
four discusses
dominant culture
and suggests the
teaching position
involvement with
of publication,
participation in
effectiveness of
poems. In the
evaluating Wright
of his cultural
that half-crazed
from industrial
within contemporary
institutionalizing
interpretation

elements of late capitalism and contemporary American culture. Chapter three, while exploring the limits inherent in Wright's poetics, examines how these limitations restrict the oppositional potential of his lyric praxis. Chapter four discusses Wright's reproduction and perpetuation of the dominant culture through his work as a literature professor and suggests the opportunities for resistance which that teaching position offered. Chapter five explores his involvement with creative writing programs and the economics of publication, examining ways in which his active participation in the literary marketplace undercuts the effectiveness of the implicit cultural criticism in his poems. In the conclusion I briefly suggest a context for evaluating Wright's collected and uncollected works in light of his cultural resistance and complicity. His poems, like that half-crazed woman tending the cemetery, try to withdraw from industrial society but remain entombed, nonetheless, within contemporary culture and that social totality which institutionalizes the production, dissemination, and interpretation of poetic texts, including his own.

1. This epigraph Wright on 30 Sep references to the text as DS.

2. This quotation is from a dissertation, "The Poet as Critic" (1949), submitted in 1949. In a 25 Oct 1949 letter to the director, Wayne S. Hooper, the dissertation is referred to as "The Poet as Critic", and, curiously, the dissertation is referred to as "The Poet as Critic".

3. For the past process of recovery of poems and translations frequently referred to as "The Complete Poems of Wright" has been included in the "Complete Poems of Wright" which has been collected text each title: for the year of the indicated. I was told that Wright's poem "The River" was included in the documentation of recovered poems.

4. It is important to note that Wright's translation of Hermann Hesse, "The River", is not included in the texts that I have collected in the "Complete Poems of Wright".

5. In the second volume of this critical edition, I often showed a severity about the poem "Uncle Willy" and reread the "Uncle Willy" poem.

Notes

1. This epigraph is taken from Dave Smith's interview with Wright on 30 September 1979 (210). Hereafter, all references to this interview will be identified within the text as DS.

2. This quotation is taken from Wright's unpublished dissertation, "The Comic Imagination of the Young Dickens" (49), submitted to the University of Washington in March 1959. In a 25 June 1958 letter to his dissertation director, Wayne Burns, Wright introduces his term "critical irreverence" by stating that the first chapter of his dissertation is "a long and careful (though at the same time, curiously, it is wild) argument in favor of what I am calling Critical Irreverence, and an explanation of my idea that...a critic ought to be irreverent toward his text and toward other critics..." (58).

3. For the past several years I have been engaged in the process of recovering and annotating Wright's uncollected poems and translations. Throughout this dissertation I will frequently refer to those uncollected texts which Wright published but did not include in his individual volumes of poetry or translations, texts which have subsequently not been included in his Collected Poems and Above the River: The Complete Poems. Citations for these previously uncollected texts will be provided within parentheses after each title: following the abbreviation "unc" I will provide the year of the text's publication, unless otherwise indicated. I will parenthetically provide citations for other Wright poems by providing their page numbers in Above the River. This deviation from standard methods of documentation will more readily differentiate between these recovered poems and Wright's other published texts.

4. It is important to note, however, that not all of Wright's translations are included in Above the River: for example, many selections from his two volumes of works by Hermann Hesse, Poems and Wandering, are excluded, as is his translation of Theodor Storm's The Rider on the White Horse. I have not included these translations among the uncollected texts that I am gathering since they have already been collected in their respective publications.

5. In the second epigraph above, Wright himself encourages this critical freedom. It is important to note that he often showed a remarkable critical detachment, humility, and severity about his own writing. In his comments about the poem "Uncle Willy," he observes, for example, that he "reread the Uncle Willie [sic] poem. It doesn't seem like

each to me now.
over each other
terminal cataton
least five hundr
or something ver
good poem. What
exercise in mod
cant word may be

6. Good book-len
available: see B
Stein's James Wr
Ekins's The Poe
the evolution and
each of his volum
essays, including
"James Wright: Th

7. I am aware of
"dominant cultur
of homogeneity a
Ron Silliman's p
cumbersomeness d
problem. I do,
chronological un
of late capitali
development. It
imperialist, mon
to Morris Janowi
industrial socie
participation, s
participation re
an industrial to
is appropriate t
their results ac
transformation"

much to me now. Reader, if you and I felt like puking all over each other with boredom before we both sank into terminal catatonia, I could easily name you a list of at least five hundred other persons who could have written it or something very like it. It's not a bad poem, It's not a good poem. What is it, actually? It's a conventional exercise in modish free verse or what the hell this week's cant word may be..." ("Knott" 321-2).

6. Good book-length overviews of Wright's career are already available: see David C. Dougherty's James Wright, Kevin Stein's James Wright The Poetry of a Grown Man, and Andrew Elkins's The Poetry of James Wright. These books discuss the evolution and continuity of Wright's work by examining each of his volumes individually. A number of valuable essays, including Stitt's "The Poetry of James Wright" and "James Wright: The Quest for Home," do the same.

7. I am aware of the problems inherent in terms like "dominant culture" and "hegemony" which imply the presence of homogeneity and clearly defined monoliths; I could use Ron Silliman's phrase "ensembles of value" (172), but its cumbersomeness does little to alleviate the original problem. I do, however, follow Ernest Mandel's chronological understanding of "late capitalism": "The era of late capitalism is not a new epoch of capitalistic development. It is merely a further development of the imperialist, monopoly-capitalist epoch" (9). I also adhere to Morris Janowitz's characterization of "advanced industrial society": "The changes in political participation, social stratification, and military participation represent long-term trends in the shift from an industrial to an advanced industrial society. While it is appropriate to stress the continuity in these trends, their results accumulate into a threshold of societal transformation" (546-7).

CHAPTER ONE

NIGHT AND THE IN POETRY AND T

Far b
angel
sign
You c
is we

if gr
it ne
be di
deliv
midni
easily
discov
sleep
of se
misera
it is
the be

In the late
published, he ha
occupational tro
assistance from
undergraduate ed
seemed victorious
in many ways its
do so): the reali

CHAPTER ONE

WRIGHT AND THE FRANKFURT SCHOOL: "IMPLICIT SUBVERSIVENESS" IN POETRY AND THEORY

Far back in the angelic choir a slightly smaller
angel has folded his wings. He has turned
slightly away from the light and lifted his hands.
You cannot even see his face. I don't know why he
is weeping. But I love him best.

"The Lambs on the Boulder" (270)

If great poetry means anything, anything at all,
it means disturbance, secret disturbance, that can
be disposed of in public, as the pharmacists's
delivery of prescription disposes of lonely
midnight daydreams. But that cannot be so
easily disposed of privately, as the insomniac
discovers that the soporific provides him with
sleep only to follow the hand of sleep into a land
of secret wakening, nightmare, or enough to be
miserable; but to be happy, how far beyond shock
it is.... [T]he poetry I want should deal with
the hell of our lives or else it leaves me cold.¹

In the late 40s, when the first of Wright's poems were
published, he had returned from an army tour with the
occupational troops in Japan and was beginning--with federal
assistance from the new GI Bill (Defense 30)--his
undergraduate education at Kenyon College. Though the war
seemed victoriously behind him and the rest of the country,
in many ways its presence lingered (and still continues to
do so): the realities of the Holocaust and Hiroshima did not

simply dissipate
as a member of
(65), "the first"
and the atomic
civilized man, who
had had a chance
with a violent c
evident in poems
Carpenter, 1966
games" during the
quick on their f

In this poem
again on his own
athletic contest
afternoon / The
fall") which has
text--the uncol
1961)--that the
postal service,
cloaked in fals
arrive in the m
effort--"singin
The poem begins
be slaughtered
concludes:

simply dissipate for him. Alan Williamson refers to Wright as a member of the "middle generation of contemporary poets" (65), "the first generation to confront concentration camps and the atomic bomb, the fully revealed destructiveness of civilized man, while still growing up, before private values had had a chance to solidify" (67). It is this engagement with a violent culture--and a different war--that becomes evident in poems like "A Mad Fight Song for William S. Carpenter, 1966" (183) which probe the atrocity of "war games" during this century of war: "...terrified young men / Quick on their feet / Lob one another's skulls."

In this poem William Carpenter's decision to drop napalm on his own troops is posited within the context of an athletic contest ("At the edges of southeast Asia this afternoon / The quarterbacks and the lines are beginning to fall") which has gone "mad." Wright suggests in another text--the uncollected poem "A Reply to the Post Office" (unc 1961)--that these war games, as advertised through the postal service, are a government sponsored slaughter, cloaked in false gleefulness. The enlistment fliers that arrive in the mail entice citizens to join in the war effort--"singing" even--and share in the suicide and murder. The poem begins with the epigraph "Take me to Rice Bros. to be slaughtered (spoken by a cow on a billboard)" and concludes:

I can

The tr

And i

From t

And th

And th

Canine

The barbarism--b

military policie

its are themselv

that barbarity a

billboards, the

and neighbors" a

response to the

word stanza: "No

fatal games, ev

closer to him.

His poetic

career, were co

and crisis, and

pervaded daily

the End of Wint

(1:9) conflates

war-torn ancien

But i

And t

I cannot climb
 The trellises of their prayers,
 And I turn away
 From the enlistment poster's hands,
 And the startling red mouth of our President,
 And the pure white
 Canines of love.

The barbarism--bordering on cannibalism--of war and the military policies of the American government in the early 60s are themselves under attack in Wright's text. He sees that barbarity as it is domesticated and promoted in billboards, the mail, and even relations with "my friends and neighbors" and the "kind mothers." Wright's emphatic response to the poster's invitation is expressed in the one-word stanza: "No." He wants to distance himself from those fatal games, even as their domestication creeps closer and closer to him.

His poetics, though constantly changing during his career, were consistently informed by this century of war and crisis, and he frequently reveals how that violence has pervaded daily life. His poem "As I Step over a Puddle at the End of Winter, I think of an Ancient Chinese Governor" (119) conflates contemporary life in the Twin Cities with war-torn ancient China:

But it is 1960, it is almost spring again,
 And the tall rocks of Minneapolis

Build

Of bar

Where

Where

Of t

The "vars" and

internal struggle

whose values

governor, Wri

the rapids /

an active end

"political j

social criti

individuals

This li

can also be

World War I

while he wa

of The Poem

on Rene Cha

prompted t

vars lies

as his poe

demonstrat

artistic

Build me my own black twilight

Of bamboo ropes and waters.

Where is Yuan Chen, the friend you loved?

Where is the sea that once solved the whole
loneliness

Of the Midwest? Where is Minneapolis?

The "wars" and exile Wright confronts in Minneapolis are the internal struggles and isolation he experiences in a society whose values he cannot accept. Like Po Chu-i, that ancient governor, Wright feels the need to escape and be "towed up the rapids / Toward some political job or other." For him, an active engagement with a social poetics is itself a "political job" and a public function; it is an act of social criticism which identifies the effects upon individuals of the ongoing cultural violence.

This lingering presence of war that informs his poetics can also be found in his critical writings. Comments about World War I are included in his uncollected review (written while he was an undergraduate, fresh from war-ravaged Japan) of The Poems of Wilfred Owen. Similarly, while reflecting on Rene Char's war diary, Leaves of Hypnos, Wright was prompted to observe, "Behind the delighted suicide of our wars lies our terror at reality" ("Meditations" 68). Just as his poetics entail social criticism, his essays demonstrate an awareness of writers who combined public and artistic lives. His foreword to Storm's The Rider on the

White

Storm

cinete

effort

Storm

and po

politi

V

'As I

(183)

'Eise

based

milit

lives

World

as th

the w

attem

milit

activ

serie

Confl

Kalai

litary

period

White Horse, for example, expresses admiration for "Theodor Storm, one of the finest German lyric poets of the nineteenth century, [who] returned to his home and effortlessly assumed powers of great civic importance" (x). Storm, like Po Chu-i, embodies an ideal: he was a politician and person of letters simultaneously addressing the political and literary needs of his community.

Wright's response to contemporary culture in poems like "As I Step Over a Puddle..." (119), "A Mad Fight Song..." (183), "The Undermining of the Defense Economy" (131), "Eisenhower's Visit to Franco, 1959" (129), and others was based, in part, on this society's ongoing engagement in military, economic, and social destruction of individual lives both abroad and at home. The United States survived World War II politically and economically intact, emerging as the preeminent international power; but that status in the world marketplace was almost immediately challenged, and attempts to maintain it led to a continuous cycle of massive military build-ups.² The three decades during which Wright actively wrote are notable for their seemingly endless series of crises: the Cold War, the Red Scare, the Korean Conflict, the Cuban Crisis, and the Vietnam War.³ Walter Kalaidjian offers an appropriately excruciating and lengthy litany of the international tensions during those years, a period characterized by

forei

spend

natio

1948,

Berli

stag

Korea

invad

Unite

the P

Eisen

CIA-b

overt

Arben

Ameri

Sovie

Briti

Egypt

Castr

to wh

Bay o

advis

This list of cr
comprehensive;
Soviet Union's
first nuclear de

foreign adventurism, unprecedented defense spending and weapons production, and a pervasive national atmosphere of fear and paranoia. In 1948, the year the Soviet Union blockaded West Berlin, it also annexed Czechoslovakia through staging a government coup. Two years later North Korean troops crossed the thirty-eighth parallel, invading South Korea and eventually leading to the United States' mobilization for possible war with the People's Republic of China. Meanwhile, the Eisenhower administration orchestrated its own CIA-backed military coup in Guatemala, overthrowing the land reform policies of Jacobo Arbenz Guzman in 1954 and installing the pro-American Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas. In 1956, Soviet tanks rolled into Hungary, at a time when British, French, and Israeli forces were invading Egypt during the Suez crisis. In 1959 Fidel Castro overthrew the Batista dictatorship in Cuba, to which the United States responded with its 1961 Bay of Pigs misadventure. That same year American advisers were deployed in South Vietnam. (7-8)

This list of crises--though overwhelming--is not comprehensive; Kalaidjian adds other alarming incidents: the Soviet Union's test of a nuclear device in 1949, China's own first nuclear detonation in 1964, the decision by President

Truman in 1950 to build the hydrogen bomb, the massive retaliation doctrine of Secretary of State Dulles in 1954, and the nuclear alerts during the 1960 U-2 incident and again in 1962 during the Cuban missile crisis (8).

The postwar era also included Senator Joseph McCarthy's warnings in 1950 to President Truman about communist infiltration of the State Department; the anti-apartheid strikes in Johannesburg in 1950; the 1953 death sentences imposed on Julius and Ethel Rosenberg for selling military secrets; the 1954 Supreme Court ruling which outlawed segregation by color in public schools; the Montgomery city bus boycotts in 1955; the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961; the 1963 arrest of Martin Luther King in Birmingham and the assassination of President Kennedy in Dallas; the 1968 riots by students and workers in Paris; the anti-war protests in various American cities and on university campuses in 1969; and the worsening violence in Northern Ireland in 1971. Lists, like this one, of twentieth century upheavals cannot, of course, be exhaustive and accurately recreate a writer's historical context; even more importantly, they cannot even begin to assess the impact and sustained repercussions of these events on the daily actions and thoughts of countless individual lives.

As we will see in poems like "Mercy" (unc 1957), "Autumn Begins in Martins Ferry, Ohio" (121) and "Heritage" (unc 1964), this tumultuous political and social climate in

which Wright wrote--though alarming to consider--is seldom directly and personally encountered in his texts. Even poems like "As I Step over a Puddle..." (119) which make strong political and social statements, do not overtly address the crises of this century. A notable exception to this restraint exists in the student workbook Wright submitted to his teacher, Theodore Roethke, at the end of a poetry workshop during Spring Quarter 1954. One short, unpublished, Swiftian poem from that workbook, though not (by any stretch of the imagination) a subtle, rich, or complex text, is significant nonetheless because it presents an example of Wright attempting social satire and politically committed poetry. The poem exemplifies a bold engagement, that Wright did not often match, with contemporary history and society; and it is possibly even enhanced by its clumsy Augustan devices and iconoclastic humor. The indecorous text, entitled "A Scatological Wish Occasioned by the Current Senate Hearings: Being an Excellent New Song," probes (from Wright's "safe" position within the Department of English at the University of Washington) the Red Scare.⁴

Written while Senator Joseph McCarthy's witch-hunt was being covered by national television--only to end with the Senate censure of McCarthy--the poem presents a farcical response to the rumors of communist infiltration of military, governmental, and university personnel across the

con-

pub-

dis-

con-

Rela

Asso

Asso

con-

con-

eng-

to

turn

ear-

con-

in

dis-

195

stud

att-

any

the

for

abo

rel

dis-

country. It audaciously provides an indirect and semi-public response to the denial of employment and the dismissal from university positions of those academics considered to be communists, a policy which was--as Kalaidjian observes--"vigorously endorsed in 1953 by the Association of American Universities, the National Education Association, and the American Federation of Teachers" (38).

Rather than withdrawing from historical and social considerations, Wright produced a committed poem which (unsuccessfully) confronts political issues headlong. His engagement with the social functioning of poetry--as opposed to narcissistic and solipsistic lyrics which deliberately turn away from the social arena--is apparent even in this early text. At the same time, though, its failed confrontation anticipates his later realization that poetry, in order to create "disturbances," does not have to be directly political or overtly address headline news. In his 1956 essay on Rene Char, published when he was a graduate student, Wright notes, for example, that Char's "political attack, as far as his poetry is concerned, is, like that of any good writer, an attack on triteness, on the clotting of the mind by outworn language" (67). Similarly in his 1964 foreword to The Rider on the White Horse, Wright observes about Theodor Storm, "His public life and art are obviously related, and yet the second cannot be understood simply as a direct expression of the first. His art had its own formal

tradition

public

relation

the po

language

realiz

texts

politi

a poss

see in

though

econom

I

tive t

prevai

gradua

studie

studie

contex

of a g

psycho

cultur

witin

Critic

the Pr

approa

tradition..." (xii). Wright recognizes, even before the publication of his first book, the complex and nebulous relations between poetry and politics; and he asserts that the political impact of a text can be expressed in its very language and technical elements. Based upon these realizations, he discarded his early bombastic attempt in texts like "A Scatological Wish...." to conflate poetic, political, and social considerations. He pursued, instead, a possibly more forceful and social poetic that, as we shall see in greater detail in the following chapter, frequently--though usually indirectly--critiques American political, economic, and social conditions.

I am going to argue in this study that as an alternative to more customary models of literary history which have prevailed until recently and which certainly dominated graduate literary education when Wright undertook his studies, the Frankfort School's paradigms of cultural studies offer a useful approach to Wright's writing and its contexts. It may seem jarring to be reading Wright in light of a group of German philosophers, literary critics, social psychologists, political theorists, sociologists, and cultural critics; but because his poetic and critical writings strained against the literary historical/New Critical model common in 50s graduate schools, the work of the Frankfort School provides an alternative model for approaching Wright's texts. It may also be interesting to

not

not

the

The

the

not

the

the

the

not

per

note that immediately prior to Wright's entrance to Kenyon College and studies with the New Critic John Crowe Ransom, the Kenyon Review (as edited by Ransom) published essays by Theodor Adorno in both the Autumn 1945 and the Spring 1947 issues. Though Wright's critical and aesthetic ideas may not have been directly informed by Western Marxism, I suspect he was not a stranger to those views. As Wayne Burns--the director of Wright's dissertation at the University of Washington--notes, the Department of English contained a number of individuals familiar with Marxist perspectives:

... [O]f the six or seven Communists or former Communists (numbers and exact affiliations weren't too clear) the Canwell Committee had presumably identified, something like four or five had been or still were in the English department at the University of Washington. A surprising number, considering the size of the English department in relation to the rest of the University, and one which further convinced me that Washington might be the place for me--not because of my own Marxist background, or at least not primarily because of that, but rather because a department which could include that many Marxists, along with Porter Perrin, must be a wide-open department indeed.

(65-6)

Those texts by Wright which confront postwar American culture can profit by being read and considered in light of Frankfurt School paradigms, including Walter Benjamin's perverse "angel of history" with its outstretched wings entangled in the approaching storm of "progress" ("Theses" 257-8).⁵ Wright's texts explore the contradictions and tensions manifest in the advanced industrial society of the United States during the second half of the twentieth century, and those texts themselves--like Benjamin's angel--become caught in the storm of cultural "progress" and history. As Wright observes in the first epigraph to this chapter, his angel of progress is sad and withdrawn from the community, and in "A Prayer to the Lord Ramakrishna" (167) that angel is physically pained and displaced: "On the window sill, I lean / My bare elbows. / One blue wing, torn whole out of heaven, / Soaks in the black rain." Like the gatekeeper at Browning and Landor's cemetery, he is torn between two worlds; try though he may, he cannot escape the "black rain" of this society.

Just as Benjamin's angel of history wants to return to paradise, Wright desires to be raised up--as he observes in "The Minneapolis Poem" (167)--"By some great white bird unknown to the police, / And soar for a thousand miles and be carefully hidden / Modest and golden as one last corn grain." He is entangled, though. Realizing he cannot flee the wreckage, his poems scream out in witness to its effects

upon him and society; he is--to borrow words from Benjamin again--"a messenger who rushes toward us crying aloud, his hair on end, brandishing a sheet of paper in his hands, a sheet full of war and pestilence, of cries of murder and pain, of danger from fire and flood, spreading everywhere the 'latest news'" ("Karl Kraus" 238). Wright's latest "news which stays news"--to mangle Ezra Pound's definition of poetry--concerns ways in which we, like that angel and the woman tending the cemetery, try to flee this industrial "progress" but remain entombed within contemporary culture:

There they are now,
 The wings,
 And I heard them beginning to starve
 Between two cold white shadows,
 But I dreamed they would rise
 Together,
 My black Ohioan swan.

.....

Here, carry his splintered bones
 Slowly, slowly
 Back into the
 Tar and chemical strangled tomb,
 The strange water, the
 Ohio River, that is no tomb to

W. J.

to

and

tex

Dis

be

can

fa

's

pa

the

re

but

the

the

the

the

the

es

re

re

tra

Rise from the dead
from.

"Three Sentences for a Dead Swan" (163)

Wright's texts frequently foreground this escapist impulse to rise like a bird or an angel above the social wreckage, and they express a frustrated desire for transcendence. In texts like "A Poem Written Under an Archway in a Discontinued Railroad Station, Fargo, North Dakota" (159), he yearns to situate himself "Outside the great clanging cathedrals of rust and smoke." His efforts, of course, fail. Even as he says, "I am leaving," that combination of "rust and smoke" follows him "across the street," into "the parking lot," and ultimately even into his old age.

In the justly famous "A Blessing" (143) this escapist impulse is evident in a different form: Wright eagerly removes himself not only from human relationships but also human constructs, including literally a highway ("Just off the highway"). The poet attempts to retreat into nature and transcend human bounds: he "step[s] over the barbed wire into the pasture" to experience the love and loneliness of two ponies. In the often quoted final lines, he seeks escape from his own humanity and physicality: "Suddenly I realize / That if I stepped out of my body I would break / Into blossom." At the same time that he is desirous of transcendence, the penultimate line ending asserts that this

meta

very

rela

as c

twen

Benj

in th

the i

call

who w

in th

ident

Schoo

gener

their

Wright

for So

metamorphosis "would break" him by severing him from those very social and human elements which define and produce him.

These issues which Wright addresses regarding the relationship between individuals, society and nature as well as culture, domination and repression also concerned twentieth century thinkers like Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and Herbert Marcuse; the poetic work Wright began in the late 40s can be illuminated and explored in light of the insights and methodologies of the members of this so-called "Frankfurt School," especially Adorno and Benjamin, who wrote during approximately the same period as Wright.⁶ In the forward to a collection of his essays, Marcuse identifies issues which were central to the Frankfurt School, the same issues that Wright and poets from his generation confronted--and sometimes scurried away from--in their own writings:

What precisely has gone wrong in Western civilization, that at the very height of technical progress we see the negation of human progress: dehumanization, brutalization, revival of torture as a "normal" means of interrogation, the destructive development of nuclear energy, the poisoning of the biosphere and so on? How has this happened? (i)

Wright, like the individuals associated with the Institute for Social Research, critically examines the social,

es

ca

as

co

co

la

re

re

es

de

de

ve

se

de

de

de

de

de

es

de

de

de

de

as

de

de

economic and political conditions evident in postwar capitalism which cause this "dehumanization": he, like them, addresses labor relations, the commodification of cultural objects, the social effects of industrialization, and--among other issues--the contradictions inherent in capitalist ideologies.⁷

In the following chapters my discussion of Wright's relations with the dominant culture, including its educational institutions, has been informed by Adorno's discussions about the relationship between art and society in "On Lyric Poetry and Society"⁸ and Aesthetic Theory, as well as Walter Benjamin's Charles Baudelaire: Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism.⁹ In his essay on poetry (originally a radio lecture) Adorno postulates that even lyric poetry, often considered the most subjective of literary genres, is socially mediated and expresses social tendencies: autonomous art is a cultural product itself and expresses knowledge and critical insights. Social and historical conditions are inscribed within poems, empowering those poetic texts to reveal within their very structure the contradictions inherent in contemporary western cultures and the prevailing social totality. Far from reading the texts as sociological or philosophical data, Adorno bases his critical views on close reading and attention to the literary forms, structures, rhythm, and rhymes of particular

po

Se

Le

of

Le

Co

W

Le

2

S

Co

S

Le

Co

S

Le

Co

S

Le

Co

S

Le

Co

poems by Stefan George, Eduard Morike, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and Rainer Maria Rilke.

"On Lyric Poetry and Society" provides an accessible introduction to the more developed and labyrinthine complex of views paratactically expressed in Aesthetic Theory.¹⁰ Among the many ideas explored in that volume, I am primarily concerned with the tenets Adorno advances about those areas where politics, society, and art come together. An emphasis upon socio-historical contexts informs his understanding of artistic production and reception. True art, because of its social nature, is oppositional. He observes, for example, that art "is not social only because it is brought about in such a way that it embodies the dialectic of forces and relations of production. Nor is art social only because it derives its material content from society. Rather, it is social primarily because it stands opposed to society" (AT 321).¹¹

For Adorno, society is manifest in art works by the very artistic techniques which are employed: technical problems in a poem or opera are expressive of social tendencies.¹² We can see this interaction of poetic technique and social elements in the structure of Wright's "May Morning" (333), a prose poem written shortly before his death and included in This Journey:

Deep into spring, winter is hanging on.

Bitter and skillful in his hopelessness, he stays

alive in every shady place, starving along the
 Mediterranean: angry to see the glittering sea-
 pale boulder alive with lizards green as Judas
 leaves. Winter is hanging on. He still believes.
 He tries to catch a lizard by the shoulder. One
 olive tree below Grottaglie welcomes the winter
 into noontime shade, and talks as softly as
 Pythagoras. Be still, be patient, I can hear
 him say, cradling in his arms the wounded
 head, letting the sunlight touch the savage face.

In this poem the absence of formal verse structures
 foregrounds the text's prosodic clarity, treats sentences
 (rather than lines) as the unit of construction, and
 highlights the textual "freedom" from generic orthodoxy.
 This hybrid prose--though containing elements such as
 personification, allusions, and devices for the manipulation
 of sound--pursues immediate comprehensibility rather than
 strictly "poetic" features.

Prose poems like "May Morning" are frequently
 characterized as expressions of liberation from traditional
 generic restraints. Stein, for examples, observes the
 freedoms available for reader and writer alike in prose
 poems:

[T]he form offers a means for the poet to address
 self-consciously himself, the aesthetic process of
 writing, and his audience (who themselves are

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

11.

12.

13.

14.

15.

16.

17.

18.

freed from their preconceptions of poetic form and rhetoric). The freedom of this rhetorical stance, a freedom not present in the modes that had dominated earlier decades, enables the poet to move readily between perceived outer experience (or narrative) and interior experience (intellectual or imaginative reality)" (Wright 140).

This rhetorical use of prose, free from the restrictions that closed forms entail, resembles and suggests liberation from social constraint: "...[F]rom a political perspective the abdication by poetry of generic underpinnings parallels attempts to destroy social boundaries, which genres, of course, reinforce" (Fredman 4-5).

Wright's choice of prose for this text, then, suggests broader ideological concerns, but the underlying social and political alliances of "May Morning" become less clear when we realize, as Michael Heffernan points out (51), that this prose poem is actually a sonnet which can be divided into lines with feminine and slant rhyme endings (abbacddc efbeffb). It consists of a clearly defined octave and sestet and contains relatively regular iambic pentameter lines, with occasional variations provided by trochees. The first "quatrain" could be presented:

Deep into spring, winter is hanging on.
Bitter and skillful in his hopelessness,

the 'free'
actually
offers a
the poem
poem de-
received
struggle
view, th
that bot
formed,

We
expressi
opposing
contains
margin i
radical
Anthony
pentame-
Poetry a
with bal
elitist,
popular,
in this
traditio.

he stays alive in every shady place,
starving along the Mediterranean.

The "freedom" evident in the prose format of the text actually disguises a hybrid Petrarchan sonnet. Heffernan offers an explanation for Wright's choice of form: because the poem appears in This Journey immediately before a prose poem dedicated to Robert Bly (who has frequently criticized received forms), this text expresses aspects of the literary struggles and friendship between the two men (52). This view, though attesting to Wright's humor, does not consider that both open and closed poetic forms are historically formed, as well as ideological, political, and social.

We could argue, instead, that Wright's text is an expression and fusion of two poetic traditions and two opposing ideologies. The very act of reading a "poem" which contains irregular line lengths justified only on the left margin is informed by traditions and histories that differ radically from that of reading prose and prose poems. Anthony Easthope, for example, sees in the history of iambic pentameter an alliance with the upper social classes. In Poetry as Discourse he contrasts Renaissance court poetry with ballads, noting that the former is "individualist, elitist, privatized," while ballads are "collective, popular, intersubjective" (77). Wright's prose poem/sonnet, in this light, ambiguously conjoins the socio-historical tradition of iambic pentameter and the sonnet with the

ideological structures that inform prose writings and recent prose poems. It can be seen on one level as a fusion, an attempt to bring together two different sets of readerly expectations and two different classes of readers, striving for both elitism and popularity, individualism and community.

On the other hand, the embedding of a traditional verse form within a prose paragraph resembles the way ideologies themselves are hidden but still pervasive in individual lives. The sonnet structure, though buried in the prose, determines the underlying form of the poem and invokes specific responses: the rhyming iambic pentameter lines, whether they are recognized or not, are evocatively present and subvert the prose facade. Wright's poem, by masking its own structure, imitates the undetected ways in which ideologies shape people.¹³ Similar ideological struggles are evident in "Dawn Prayer in Cold Darkness to my Secret Ghost" (unc 1975), another of Wright's "Jenny Poems." In this text, though, these conflicts are not hidden, but are foregrounded in the radical shifts from heroic couplets to prose statements. The text can be understood, on the level of its poetic techniques, as a dialectical movement between two social forces.

By conflating the aesthetic and socio-political qualities of art, Adorno approaches art works less as mimetic presentations of metaphysical truth than as attempts

to reve

current

foreign

view in

(to bor

negativ

being i

little

Ac

social

sphere

include

ready

by Ado

primar

access

illusi

than e

cultur

indivi

encour

situat

order,

T

and fu

sponta

to reveal truth by depicting the radical falseness of current culture. Art presents the world with a strange and foreign quality, as individuals in a utopian society might view it. To express truth, then, art must be "disturbing" (to borrow Wright's term from the second epigraph) and negative: "Rather than gathering up the diffuse threads of being into a meaningful whole, art wants to destroy what little meaning there is" (AT 201).

Adorno's aesthetic theory posits works of art in the social arena and approaches them as texts embedded in the sphere of social domination; he extends that analysis to include cultural objects which have been mass produced for ready consumption. That "culture industry," a term coined by Adorno and Horkheimer in the Dialectic of Enlightenment, primarily attempts to create diversionary, readily accessible, and entertaining objects which provide escapist illusions from the realities of working conditions. Rather than existing in opposition to the dominating powers, the culture industry contributes to the socialization of individuals by creating and marketing products which encourage those individuals to willingly accept their situation as "natural" and reproduce the existing social order; it masks the pervasive dominant ideologies.

True works of art, on the other hand, are subversive and function in critical capacities: they contribute to the spontaneity and self-emancipation of individuals. Like

object

social

artist

cognit

autoco

breaks

commod

produc

their

pervas

publis

buyers

relati

essays

market

into a

progre

in fu

specia

because

domina

social

Ac

concert

profite

complex

objects created by the culture industry, art expresses social tendencies, but because it does so through radical artistic techniques and unconventional means, it assumes cognitive oppositional value. This polarity separating autonomous art from the products of the culture industry breaks down in late capitalism when art itself becomes a commodity. As capitalism advances, literary means of production change, as do the relations between artists and their audience, writer and reader. Commodity forms become pervasive, and the literary marketplace--including a host of publishers, printers, editors, designers, advertisers, book buyers, reviewers, and other individuals--mediates the relationship between poets and the reading community: poems, essays, and books become commodities in a competitive marketplace where the use-value of the texts is transformed into an exchange-value. Similarly, as capitalism progresses, laborers (including writers) cease to be engaged in fully human interchanges and instead become highly specialized workers, separated from their final "product." Because of this specialization and fragmentation, forms of domination are more easily and impersonally facilitated: social relations become reified.

Adorno and Benjamin, though addressing similar concerns, often prove dissimilar, and their works can profitably be read as a dialogical engagement. The complexity and subtlety of Benjamin's book on Baudelaire can

hardly

note t

positi

eviden

Saunders

ninete

his go

ninete

emerge

which,

from i

Benjan

partic

work,

I

on Bau

establ

modern

Ninete

notabl

crowds

and ur

techno

qualit

experi

twenti

ldly be acknowledged in an overview like this, but we can
 e that Benjamin discusses the historical, economical, and
 itical context for the emergence of modernism as it is
 dent in Baudelaire's verse.¹⁴ Benjamin's discussion of
 delaire is informed by and situated in Paris during the
 eteenth century: in a famous comment, he observes that
 goal is to "show Baudelaire as he lay embedded in the
 eteenth century. The impression he left there must
 rge in a manner so clear and pristine as that of a stone
 ch, having lain for decades in its place, one day rolls
 m its spot" (Jennings 21). Jonathan Arac notes
 jamin's inclusion of the "whole life of the time, and in
 ticular with changes in the structure of economic life,
 k, and the conditions of labor" (198).

In the history of pre-modernism contained in his work
 Baudelaire and the "Arcades Project," Benjamin
 ablishes a basis for approaching twentieth century
 ernism, which also applies to Wright's own views.
 eteenth century Paris, as characterized by Benjamin, is
 able for its omnipresent masses (I am tempted to say,
 wds of isolated solitudes), emerging mass communication,
 urbanization. Together with the contemporary
 hnological developments in mechanical reproduction, these
 lities of Baudelaire's Paris suggest insights concerning
 erience, individuals, and society in the nineteenth and
 ntieth centuries. Benjamin also asserts that modern

capit

role

much

incor

indus

vell

parad

this po

in liq

insti

betwee

unders

on the

like Ma

questio

living

those in

be defin

like lit

capitalism caused the decline of the lyric and the social role of poetry, and--as Arac notes--Benjamin focusses as much on what is excluded from Baudelaire's poems as what is included, an approach equally valid for Wright studies.

The Frankfurt theorists' discussions of the "culture industry" and the relationship between cultural products (as well as their production) and society provide a valuable paradigm for examining Wright's poetry. Instead of reading his poems as autotelic texts, I will consider Wright's works in light of their cultural, social, economic, and institutional contexts, in order to probe the interaction between cultural products and society. Wright, too, understood his poems to be more than literary performances: on the dust jacket for Saint Judas, he observes:

To me, poetry in this age is the art of stating and examining truth. I have tried to shape these poems, singly and as a group, in order to ask some more questions: Exactly what is a good and humane action? And, even if one knows what such an

action is, then exactly why should he perform it?

Like Marcuse's theoretical discourse, Wright's poetic texts question the moral and historical situation of individuals living in the twentieth century. In an attempt to explore those issues concerning truth, Wright's literary actions can be defined in terms of a deployment: he launches his poems, like literary flares, as disturbing, illuminating presences

in a soc

very exi

Wit

Benjamin

through

their on

approach

to exami

understa

that of

disserta

Wright f

presents

While fo

discours

(borrowi

tyranny"

interpre

device r

the auth

oppositi

reads Di

polariti

threaten

institut

irreduci

in a society that would prefer to ignore and forget their very existence.

Within the theoretical framework provided by Adorno and Benjamin, Wright's subjective lyric utterances can provide, through their specifically literary aspects, insights into their own cultural and institutional contexts. Before approaching these poems, though, it might also be profitable to examine the similarities between Wright's theoretical understanding of the role of art in industrial societies and that of members of the Frankfurt School. In his critical dissertation on the six early novels of Charles Dickens, Wright foregrounds his own variant of cultural criticism and presents Dickens's novels as attempts at social reform.¹⁵ While focussing on the ways Dickens's imagination shapes discourse, Wright examines in detail what he refers to (borrowing a phrase from John Stuart Mill) as "social tyranny" in nineteenth century England.¹⁶ Wright interprets Dickens's use of farce as a modernist literary device revealing institutional attempts to control and strip the authority of the self. By establishing a binary opposition between institutions and individuals, Wright reads Dickens's novels as dialectical engagements with polarities: "the individual human values which are threatened, in Dickens' view, by modern anti-human institutions" (87) and "the self whose very nature is irreducibly human and the institution whose very nature is

reductio

in its

the st.

the so

insti

change

in Dic

In thi

regard

diffic

contai

might

false-

Frankf

Althous

where i

pervasi

reductively anti-human" (94). It is precisely this struggle in its various forms that is manifest in Wright's own poems: the strained postmodern relations between individuality and the social, political, economic, and educational institutions. Though motivated by an optimistic desire for change, Wright's assessment of modern society, as perceived in Dickens, is bleak:

...[I]n spite of Dickens' artistically successful evocation of the oppressive workhouses and of the London underworld, he lacks at this [early] stage of his career either the skill or the stamina to drive his vision to its conclusion--namely, that modern society as he finally came to see it...is so hopelessly self-deluded that its villains and its so-called "good" people are alike tricked and swallowed and devoured by it. (190)

In this vision of an all-consuming society, individuals--regardless of their moral standing--can only with great difficulty, if at all, escape illusions intrinsically contained within the society and culture as a whole; Wright's concern, in other words, is with ideology as a false-consciousness which distorts reality. Like the Frankfurt theorists (as well as the philosophy of Louis Althusser), Wright focusses on the sites in Dickens's texts where ideology seems least oppressive but is, in fact, most pervasive: those routine daily situations which individuals

exper

sign

Dickens

underne

second

for aes

Dickens

focus th

'sleeping

shall se

problem

experience and are tempted to accept without pondering their significance:

Perhaps the most powerful feature of Dickens' imagination in this early novel is its ability to show how commonplace notions of reality (that is, the superficial, the everyday, the ordinary) contain within themselves the seeds of a reality deeper and stranger than themselves, so that, when the details of everyday reality are seen from a certain point of view, or placed in a certain juxtaposition of violence and upheaval, they themselves vanish and reveal--to the horrified reader--the essential reality of nightmare underneath. There are seeping wounded cracks in the minds of the most ordinary men, wounds that suppurate under the pressure of mob violence or internal psychological pressure. (210)

Dickens's revelation of the "essential reality of nightmare underneath" the ordinary can be construed, in light of the second epigraph to this chapter, as an important function for aesthetically effective poetry. The early novels of Dickens provide Wright with the opportunity to more clearly focus the aim of his poetic flares by directing them at the "seeping wounded cracks" of ordinary readers (but as we shall see in chapter four, this very concept proves to be problematic for Wright: "ordinary readers" of poetry are not

necessarily an audience comprised of the "most ordinary men" and women). A poem, then, like Dickens's novels, is launched into the world specifically to irritate and suppurate within the minds of readers, as well as to reveal the illusory nature of those ideologies which inform "everyday reality."

While noting the presence of social tyranny in "everyday reality," Wright (like Adorno and Benjamin) sees the possibility for cultural products to offer resistance to the dominant culture by revealing ideological distortions; printed texts can expose that tyranny, at least in part. Wright notes that Dickens "subjects [his imaginative] creations to the forces of modern institutionalization, and discovers much perpetual defeat of the human, curiosities of wild laughter, and strategies of resistance that move either towards farcical mockery or towards outright crime" (173-4). Limited by the dominating forces, individuals have four possible responses to the encroaching institutionalization: they can see themselves as victims doomed to fail, be marginalized, or--as a third option--create interference by overstepping the law. Their fourth possibility is to write the kind of oppositional "farcical mockery" that Dickens himself creates in his novels.

By 1959, four years after he had submitted his "A Scatological Wish Occasioned by the Current Senate Hearings," Wright realized that texts intent on provoking

social change and freeing individuals from the tyranny of institutions not only do not have to directly attack those institutions, but also might better succeed by not directly challenging them. Texts, like Dickens's, which are "farcical mockeries" are more effective oppositionally than direct assaults on social, economic, and political institutions. Reminiscent of Adorno's observations about autonomous art being only indirectly political, Wright defends the political effectiveness of Dickens's novels which contain "implicit subversiveness." Texts that are implicitly subversive succeed while

The ordinary strategy of defense against propagandistic social protests does not work, because the conditions necessary for its effectiveness are absent. If nothing in particular is attacked, then nothing in particular can be defended. If the very idea of a social institution, on the other hand, is attacked, then we are all stripped naked and defenseless against this appalling vision. (103, Wright's emphasis)

Wright's concept of implicit subversion, then, entails direct, emotional, and aesthetically effective assaults against the ideas and ideology which inform the power structures rather than assaults against the institutions themselves. A writer, imitating Dickens's model, can rebel against modern tyranny, resist institutionalization, and

defend her individuality by "implicit subversiveness" which indirectly undermines the authority of dominating institutions, without allowing for recourse. Though perceived as failures by the dominant culture, texts of "farcical mockery" can offer resistance; in fact, their failure may itself be a sign of success. Wright sees the trial scene in Dickens's Pickwick as an example of that success amid apparent failure:

So the outcome of the trial can only be one of resistance. In other words, on the level of the trial itself, Sam is defeated, along with every other human being in the Old Bailey. But in the larger and more important sense, he is the victor, for he succeeds, through the employment of the farcical methods which I have described, in illuminating some genuinely subversive facts-- among them the intrinsic and irreducible existence of human beings as such, and not as instruments of power. (162, Wright's emphases)

Wright's lesson from Dickens--that failure in discourses of power may actually enhance the resistance a text can provide--again, as we shall see, proves to be problematic, not because textual "implicit subversiveness" is ineffective, but because in late capitalism all successful strategies are themselves appropriated and commodified.

Besides his concern for individuals contesting the authority of industrial-era institutions and his recognition that implicitly subversive texts can offer resistance against domination, Wright was aware--like the Frankfurt theorists--of the implications surrounding this commodification of cultural products. As Adorno notes in the essay "On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening": "To be sure, exchange-value exerts its power in a special way in the realm of cultural goods" (279). That unique power can involve the usurpation of the use-value of both human labor and printed texts by the very system which is being resisted, stripping both labor and texts of their identity and intended function. In his dissertation, Wright discusses commodification in ways suggestive of critical theory: "...[A] world based on purely cash-value in human relationships is a world in which men assume the form of animals..." (247). While aware of the ways human labor is being "dehumanized," to return to Marcuse's term, Wright also realizes that the fruits of human labor--including books, poems, essays, and serialized novels--are consumed as items bought and sold for a profit, not their use-value. Wright was attuned to the effects of the literary marketplace upon the production of nineteenth century fiction. He observes:

With his mind filled with fruity and open plans,
Dickens tuned his ear as sensitively as possible

Dick

soci

the

resp

the

would

was a

to hi

his s

cons

to the responses of his public while he was writing his book. Having planned one series of fictions, he discovered that the public did not care for them, and so--between one weekly number and the next--he let the sales accounts of his publishers (Chapman and Hall) influence him into searching for imaginative conceptions that would genuinely please his readers....

This failure of [Martin] Chuzzlewit to sell as quickly and as widely as its predecessors was undoubtedly one of the reasons for Dickens' decision to change his plan for the novel, and to send his young hero Martin with the valet Mark Tapley to America. (256; 285-6, Wright's emphasis)

Dickens, while writing novels of implicitly subversive social reform, was at the same time monitoring the pulse of the marketplace; tailoring his "reforms" to readers' responses (as measured by the public's willingness to buy the serials), Dickens attempted to make certain his novels would be profitable. His "implicit subversiveness," then, was a strategy designed to effectively silence those opposed to his reforms, even as it would allow him to "sugar coat" his social medicine and ensure its palatability for unwary consumers.

I
novels
in which
sheer
for su
pro-
tation
would
advent
the o
defen
their
but p
of th
and e
compr
Marke
in it
novel
Dicke
his m
Wright
resol
chapt
disti

In discussing the effectiveness of Dickens's early novels, Wright fails to take into account the complex ways in which Dickens's "farcical mockery" turns at times into sheer entertainment that is neither aesthetically warranted nor successful but reinforces, instead, the current status quo--times, that is, when it becomes a product of the "culture industry." Without going into great detail, I would suggest that even the eight chapters of American adventures in Martin Chuzzlewit (added--to bolster sales--to the original plans for the serialized novel), which Wright defends, are problematic aesthetically: though entertaining, their relationship to other aspects of the novel seem all but purely tangential. By lessening the aesthetic integrity of the novel, Dickens's attentiveness to economic factors and eagerness to satisfy the desires of his readers compromise the novel's very oppositionality. Allowing the marketplace to determine the structure of the novel reveals in itself an aspect of "social tyranny" and undermines the novel's effectiveness in resisting that tyranny.¹⁷

Dickens's unsolved dilemma between his desire for reform and his need for financial stability becomes an imbroglio which Wright also encounters and, like Dickens, is unable to resolve, an issue that we will probe in greater detail in chapter five.

Wright's critical agenda in his dissertation, though distinct from that of the Frankfurt theorists, also shares

easy c

poetry

disse

lette

ackno

havin

being

entire

lette

those

Dick

will

hist

his

After

exam

coll

tyra

many of their concerns. Equally important, though, the poetry written by the young academic who was completing his dissertation is informed by those critical issues. In letters to his dissertation director, Wayne Burns, Wright acknowledged the direct impact his dissertation research was having upon his poetry: "...I have spent the summer really being affected so deeply by Dickens that he has changed my entire conception of poetry itself" (93-4)." In a later letter, Wright addresses more specifically the nature of those changes:

I had a traumatic experience with poetry this summer--subconsciously. Dickens himself undermined the neo-classicism: and now I am a full-fledged modern, whether good or bad. No more rimes, no more tum-te-tum scansion, all in the American language. I'm really happy and liberated for the first time since I had a poem published (98, Wright's emphasis).¹⁸

Dickens's attentiveness to social reform stirred Wright's willingness to become "modern," to confront his socio-historical situation, to attempt implicit subversiveness in his own work, and to direct his political attention to "the American language." In the following chapter we will examine two texts by Wright, an uncollected poem and a collected poem, to see his attentiveness to the social tyranny of the dominant culture in the 50s, 60s, and 70s;

and V

subve

seri

1950

and we will witness the possibilities for implicit subversiveness contained in those texts written during the series of national and international crises between 1949 and 1980.

2.
im
the
the
en
so
No
su
an
the
so
the

3.
to
Ca
the
the

4.
the

May
was
De
em
fiv

5.
sto
fro
sta
how
row
see
we
the
ma
can
long
the
deb
pro

Notes

1. This quotation is extracted from Wright's review/essay "I Come to Speak for Your Dead Mouths" (291-2).

2. It is worse than presumptuous, of course, to consider the implications and effects of World War II only in terms of the United States. The history of the Frankfurt School and the lives of its individual members were horrifically entangled in the grotesque political, racial, economic, and social upheavals of the pre-, during-, and post-war periods. Not the least of those catastrophes is Walter Benjamin's suicide when denied entrance into Spain at the French border and the movement of the Frankfurt School from Germany to the United States, an emigration which eventually included the somewhat reluctant Theodor Adorno. For a more complete history, see Martin Jay's The Dialectical Imagination.

3. Much of my historical information comes from the following sources: Paul Breslin's The Psycho-Political Muse, Cary Nelson's Our Last First Poets, Walter Kalaidjian's Languages of Liberation, and Bernard Grun's The Timetables of History.

4. Unfortunately, because of the changing legal status of unpublished materials, I cannot quote this humorous text.

I draw attention to Wright's relative security because Wayne Burns, a faculty member at the University of Washington during the Red Scare, attests to the English Department's unwillingness to be cowed into following those employment strategies. See particularly chapters four and five in Burns's Journey Through the Dark Woods.

5. Benjamin writes: "A Klee painting named 'Angelus Novus' shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress" (257-8).

6. 1.
spee
of
or
and
max
Gen
oth
aw
Res
oth
Pol

7. 1.
mon
wan
opp
the
the
ten
the
Lyn

asse
and
to s
form
gap
ide
rela
part

8. 1.
essa
terr
Pric
and
Niche
quot
othe

9.
bell
sum
and
frag
Gesi
syst
curs
my a
deve

6. I am aware of the problematic nature of, first of all, speaking of a "Frankfurt School" as if it were a gathering of theorists joined by a single or unifying set of standards or beliefs. As Martin Jay in The Dialectical Imagination and Susan Buck-Morss in The Origin of Negative Dialectics make clear, that was certainly not the case for Adorno, Benjamin, Max Horkheimer, Leo Lowenthal, Erich Fromm, and others. I am equally aware of both Adorno and Benjamin's awkward, at best, relationship with the Institute for Social Research and their own philosophical differences with each other, as documented in their correspondence (Aesthetics and Politics (110-141)).

7. I do not in any way want to present Wright as a mouthpiece for a group of Frankfurt ventriloquists, nor do I want to minimize the crucial differences between Wright's oppositional poetics and the critical theory generated by the institute. (Wright would, I suspect, bristle at even the mention of a dialectical materialist approach.) But the tensions that result from this attempted fusion generates fireworks that can illuminate Wright's work and postmodern lyric poetry.

When I discuss "ideological contradictions," I am not asserting that ideologies themselves present inconsistent and conflicting views since the very purpose of ideology is to superimpose a myth of naturalness upon arbitrary social formations. Contradictions are present, though, in those gaps and silences where history has the potential to reveal ideological constructions. For more information about the relation between ideology and literary texts, see Eagleton, particularly pages 64-101.

8. I fortunately have two different translations of Adorno's essay to work with: the older translation by Bruce Mayo (entitled "Lyric Poetry and Society") reprinted in Stephen Eric Bronner and Douglas MacKay Kellner's Critical Theory and Society and the new translation by Shierry Weber Nicholsen in volume one of Adorno's Notes to Literature. My quotes in the text are from Nicholsen's translation unless otherwise indicated.

9. While recognizing the need to expose my own theoretical beliefs and alliances, I am trying to resist presenting a summarizing statement--even if I could do it--of Adorno's and Benjamin's views: the stylistic complexities and fragmentary essayistic nature of their writings seem designed to thwart just such generalizations and attempts to systematize. I will instead content myself by simply and cursorily presenting some of their insights most relevant to my area of study here. In the body of this monograph I will develop those insights as they apply to Wright's work.

10. To make my way through Aesthetic Theory (if I can erroneously assert that I, or anyone else, can fully process Adorno's complex work), I have relied heavily upon two recent books attempting to provide critical perspectives on Adorno's ideas: Fredric Jameson's Late Marxism, particularly Part III, and Lambert Zuidervaart's Adorno's Aesthetic Theory.

11. All subsequent citations to Adorno's Aesthetic Theory will be presented in the text with the abbreviation AT.

12. T. Scitovsky asserts a similar idea but from a different theoretical standpoint in "What's Wrong with the Arts Is What's Wrong with Society." He argues, for example, "If anything is wrong with the arts, we should seek the cause in ourselves, not in our economy" (65).

13. The pervasiveness of ideologies can be understood metaphorically by comparing ideological structures with computer operations. As I work with my word processor, messages flash across the monitor screen, enabling me to accomplish my tasks with relative ease. What seems to be "user friendly," however, actually borders on user domination. The real work of the computer is not evident amid the surface phenomena. Rather, the computer hardware (including the inaccessible Read Only Memory [ROM]) and its interactions with the software actively process data--of which I remain unaware--and prompt the instantaneous messages. As I work at the keyboard, it is not so much me "running" the program as it is the computer controlling my responses. When, for example, the message on the screen asks for the name of the file to be retrieved, I must type "chl," in this instance. Any variation or deviation from these three characters will cause the "error" message to flash. The hidden programming determines which of my responses will facilitate certain processes; other responses are unacceptable.

This metaphor and my understanding of the "ideologies of technology," are informed by John Hanhardt's Video Culture, Richard Lanham's "The Electronic Word," Charles Bernstein's "Play it Again, Pac-Man" in A Poetics, and Marjorie Perloff's Radical Artifice.

14. The three essays in Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism were extracted from Benjamin's unfinished study of Paris in the nineteenth century, Passagen-arbeit. The complex history of these essays and Benjamin's Paris Arcades Project are best presented in Michael W. Jennings's Dialectic Images and Susan Buck-Morss's The Dialectics of Seeing.

15. Like his uncollected poems, Wright's dissertation and master's thesis are ignored by most critics. His dissertation is his longest, most sustained, and most reflexive critical endeavor, and it offers a developed view of his own methodologies of reading. The aggressive style of that criticism is a wonderful complement to his poetic texts. In the course of his dissertation, Wright offers a wide variety of "social criticism" derived from artists as diverse as Shakespeare, Cervantes, and W. C. Fields. It is also interesting to compare and contrast Wright's study of Dickens with Adorno's essay--also about an early Dickens's novel--"On Dickens' The Old Curiosity Shop." Moreover, Eagleton's discussion of the relations between Dickens's literary form and ideology (125-30) provides yet another socio-historical reading of Dickens's work.

Much necessary work can be done on the relationship between Wright's theoretical perspective and his poetry. Even the most superficial relationships between the two have gone uncharted so far. In his dissertation, for example, Wright devotes a rather lengthy discussion to Dickens's presentation of violence in Barnaby Rudge (part of which is included, in a revised form, in Wright's posthumous Collected Prose (43-53): "The vision has to do with social suppression, with irrational and sadistic punishments...and with the actual nature of both mob violence and of officially sanctioned corporal and capital punishments. That is, Dickens' imagination in this novel is not only stating but demonstrating (through created actions and images) the hideous fact that mob violence and official violence can be, and often are, distinguished from each other in the simple sense that the agents of official violence are a little better organized and a bit more adequately armed" (206, Wright's emphasis; compare this with the version in Collected Prose 45). I know of no better summation than this of Wright's poem "At the Executed Murderer's Grave" (82).

16. Wright's understanding of social tyranny is informed by Mill's essay "On Liberty." Wright quotes (and underscores) a section from that essay: "Society can and does execute its own mandates: and if it issues wrong mandates instead of right, or any mandates at all in things with which it ought not to meddle, it practices a social tyranny more formidable than many kinds of political oppression, since, though not usually upheld by such extreme penalties, it leaves fewer means of escape, penetrating much more deeply into the details of life, and enslaving the soul itself" (297-8, Wright's emphasis). Like Mill, Wright continues by discussing "tyranny of opinion," particularly in relation to "the most feared tyrants of opinion in a democracy" (307): newspaper editors. Wright's recognition of the power and tyranny that can be connected with editorial work raises

Ques
Owe

17. 1
Vark
Dick
Comm
este

18. 1
Ima
Phy
to be
moder
rely

questions, that we will explore in chapter five, about his own compliance with editorial practices.

17. Michael Gilmore in American Romanticism and the Marketplace offers what I see as a better example than Dickens of a novelist directly confronting the issues of commodification and oppositionality: Herman Melville. See especially Gilmore's discussions in chapters six and seven.

18. Regardless of the nature and intensity of Dickens's impact upon Wright's work, Wright did not completely discard rhyme and meter. He did learn from Dickens, however, that to be a "full-fledged modern" poet he would have to confront modern social and historical realities rather than simply rely on inherited poetic techniques and stances.

CHAP

LYRIC

Th
include
in cap
white b
James B
instanc
block a
gatherin
away:

CHAPTER TWO

LYRIC PRAXIS AS RESISTANCE

The friends of my childhood
One after another have fallen behind
Payments
And stones.

....

All you have to pay for
Is shroud, fuel, and labor.

"On the Foreclosure of a Mortgage
in the Suburbs" (unc 1961)

But this one was not the usual, cheap
Economics, it was not the solitary
Scar on a poor man's face, that respectable
Hole in the ground you used to be able to buy
After you died for seventy-five dollars and
Your wages tached for six months by the Heslop
Brothers.

"The Old WPA Swimming Pool
in Martins Ferry, Ohio" (236)

The dust jacket for the cloth edition of Saint Judas includes a quotation from John 9:34 that is written entirely in capital letters and printed with purple ink on an off-white background.¹ The single verse, taken from the King James Bible, is repeated three times, with the second instance in bold face, and the entire quotation printed in a block as if to form a poem with a refrain or as a retort gathering force by sheer repetition, only to slowly wane away:

THEY ANSWERED AND SAID UNTO HIM,
 THOU WAST ALTOGETHER
 BORN IN SIN, AND DOST THOU TEACH US?
 AND THEY CAST HIM OUT.

THEY ANSWERED AND SAID UNTO HIM,
 THOU WAST ALTOGETHER
 BORN IN SIN, AND DOST THOU TEACH US?
 AND THEY CAST HIM OUT.

THEY ANSWERED AND SAID UNTO HIM,
 THOU WAST ALTOGETHER
 BORN IN SIN, AND DOST THOU TEACH US?
 AND THEY CAST HIM OUT.²

The biblical quotation (printed in standard typeface) is positioned between the two cursively written words of the title--also in purple--though there are numerous places where the two sets of letters overlap. (The large capitalized S in "Saint," for example, covers "HIM" in the first line.) This ensemble of texts forms the sort of dialectical engagement which Adorno and Benjamin would have appreciated, a visual constellation which aptly suggests a series of binarisms explored in the book: humane and inhumane actions; domination and repression; inclusion and exclusion; the privileged position of the rich and royal--dressed in purple--and the commonality and blandness of the working class, presented in soiled white; sin and virtue; individuality and community; and other issues.

Among these various topics suggested by the jacket design, I would like to focus on one. We can approach this constellation as being a representation, an emblem, of Wright's relationship with his readers and the community. It suggests the way his poetic vision is informed, determined, and controlled by restrictive social codes as much as it is an imposition upon that community. This anticipated community may scorn and cast him out, treating him as the Other, but the largeness of his vision (like that of the healed blind man discussed in the ninth chapter of John's Gospel) can encompass their rejection and even expose its comedy. His vision also defines the menacing crowd as being essentially the same as those individuals who have been cast out.

The poet, as an outsider, recognizes that his position is an outgrowth and expression of that community, since even the gaps comprising his identity--those spaces between the letters of his name--are socially defined. The established social order cannot sever him from those communal aspects which he has internalized any more than he can completely sever himself from them. The poet and his reading community cannot be so easily distinguished when even the economy of cultural commodities (the book) brings them together, however indirectly and in highly mediated ways.

The emblematic dialectic also turns back upon itself and demonstrates ways in which the poet is aware of his

outs:

'alto

sanct

reden

very

that

their

to es

anoch

both

ident

blind

renew

of Ju

group

event

'open

the b

exclu

Green

indiv.

death,

reinfo

like "

outsider status: the truth that he was and remains "altogether born in sin," unfit to teach anyone. The sanctity of society, even a fallen community, is a redemption that he needs. Yet, he is "different" by the very fact that he exists at the margins of their discourse; that difference is his willingness to create interference in their tidy rows of block letters, to engage in conflict, and to establish himself as an individual rather than simply another anonymous space completing the crowd.

The dust jacket serves, finally, as an emblem of death, both suicide and murder. By overlaying the story and identity of Judas onto the biblical account of Jesus and the blind man, the jacket design challenges the possibility for renewed vision: it foregrounds the complicitous involvement of Judas and the Pharisees--including their individual and group guilt--in the murder of Jesus, as well as Judas's own eventual suicide. The healing of the blind man did not "open" Judas's eyes and renew his sight; it only increased the blindness of the Pharisees and led to the communal exclusion and death of both Jesus and Judas.

The poems collected in Saint Judas, like those in The Green Wall before it, posit ways in which Wright as an individual and community member is torn between life and death, and those texts suggest that death can both sever and reinforce the relations between community and self. Poems like "My Grandmother's Ghost" (45) and "The Ghost" (72), as

well as the uncollected "The Three Husbands" (unc 1957), "A Whisper to the Ghost Who Woke Me" (unc 1959), and "Dawn Prayer in Cold Darkness to my Secret Ghost (unc 1975), among others are haunted with ghosts unwilling or unable to leave the community of the living, and the texts also present individuals torn between the needs of their own lives and their connections to the past and those who have died. But, as is usual for Wright, he situates himself between twin poles, this time between the polarities of life and death as well as self and community. In the title poem of Saint Judas (84), Judas--the social castoff--wants to kill himself, but when he encounters a man being beaten by hoodlums, Judas intervenes. His care for the victim suggests that life could have meaning for this Other and for himself. His intervention between life and death and his attempt at reestablishing communal ties is contextualized in a dialectical discourse concerning money: those "proper coins" which led to his own social and religious ostracism and the fact that he helped the stranger "for nothing." As "Saint Judas" and the two epigraphs suggest, even a discourse of mourning and redemption is mediated by an economics which fosters both community and isolation. That emphasis on economics in this and other texts both provokes and subsumes action.

The multi-faceted oppositionality exhibited on the dust jacket suggests points of complicity and resistance between

the t
unco
him,
inter
an in
Wright
and n
social
fence
possi
usele
calli
effic
empow
lanbe
seems

This
device
societ

the text and the world, an issue foregrounded by Wright's uncollected poems as well as his various collections; for him, lyric praxis is not necessarily a politically committed intervention nor simply a symbolic action; it is, instead, an indirect but forceful involvement in social criticism. Wright would agree with Adorno, I believe, that art does not and need not have a clearly defined social purpose: "If any social function can be ascribed to art at all, it is the function to have no function" (AT 322). Lyric offers the possibility for truly transformative praxis by being useless, by not having to fulfill rational functions, and by calling into question the very need to be functionally efficient. Paradoxically, this very uselessness is what empowers poetry to be socially and politically useful. Lambert Zuidervaat offers a concise summary of a view that seems equally applicable to Adorno and Wright:

According to Adorno, art's social isolation allows it to challenge the dominant social praxis by recalling the forgotten purpose for which rationality is deployed..... Art's impracticality allows it to remember the forgotten purpose of rationality and uncover the absurdity of the dominant rationality. (135)

This indirect lyric praxis, though centered on its own lyric devices, does not lose sight of its involvement in and with society; Adorno's social aesthetics support and illuminate

the im

Dicken

survive

For W

trans

forma

Wright

socia

and r

indiv

a var

atten

chapt

texts

and a

the importance Wright assigned to the subversive nature of Dickens's early novels. While describing that "implicit subversiveness" in his dissertation, Wright observes:

its quality of social criticism is both accidental and inevitable. It is accidental because the poet's aims, though complex and multiple, do not plainly include the establishment of specific propagandistic programs. Implicit subversiveness may be distinguished, for purposes of literary criticism, from the explicit kind in that the latter has a specifically definable social aim which is primary, all literary and artistic aims being secondary. (104-5, Wright's emphases)

For Wright and Adorno, the indirect but effectively transformative lyric praxis is located in the technical and formal aspects of a particular poem; to understand fully Wright's lyric praxis of implicit subversiveness against social tyranny, we must look closely at the ways he presents and resolves specifically "poetic" concerns within individual texts.

Wright's collected and uncollected poems, demonstrating a variety of technical devices, offer varied and subtle attempts at social criticism and lyric praxis. In this chapter I would like to closely examine two representative texts--an early uncollected poem written in a closed form and an open form text from The Branch Will Not Break--to

exp

of c

pos

ear

ind

explore the relationship between Wright's poetics and forces of contemporary culture. The first of these texts, the postwar poem "Mercy" (unc 1957), focusses, like many of his early works, on destruction and death and their effects upon individuals and community:

They shot a horse. Some women in their shock
 Snivelled the other way as they drove past;
 The sheriff stared, a small boy tossed a rock.
 Under far trees the skeleton lay blown:
 The mad horse in the wind, the mighty thighs
 Broken against a rock, the skull
 Dumb with the bullet and the roar.

I lay lost, in a molten shadow thrown
 Out of the rugged sky. I closed my eyes,
 The sheriff and my father walked so tall.
 Killers of god, they strode by, muscular,
 And left me to my lamentation.
 Self-blinded in the dark of dying time,
 I crept off by myself, and lost my share
 In that last brutal ritual of creation:
 The grace of muscle pitched away in life.

In this poem--one of many texts in which horses provide an image of natural freedom, strength, and grace in a culture lacking those qualities³--a horse with "mighty thighs" and "grace of muscle" is killed. The text begins with a sudden

iambic burst: "They shot a horse." Then the action stops, and because the referent for the pronoun "they" is not provided, the identity of those who killed the horse is blurred, making the speaker's relationship to the killing and this particular horse uncertain. The shooting, presumably a mercy killing, is only ambiguously presented: that the horse was "mad" is the only explanation Wright offers. Whether the animal was rabid or merely unruly seems less important than the presence of reactionary social fears and a desire to dispose of--to cast out--marginalized individuals.

In this text the killing becomes a social event and provokes diverse responses from various community members: "Some women in their shock / Snivelled the other way as they drove past; / The sheriff stared, a small boy tossed a rock." The unemphatic response of the women is frightening because of its resolute coldness: their attempt to distance themselves only implicates them more. The generic "they" responsible for killing the horse is an indictment of a general citizenry which includes those women. After the shooting, they continue to whine about their problems and then simply go on to other (presumably equally destructive) routine business. Like the horse, they, too, begin with an iambic movement forward and pause: they stop long enough--for three unstressed syllables--to see the horse and evince their dismay, during another pause, before moving on. The

ster

inju

boy,

scal

viol

boys

and

resu

cont

wome

the

wind

thro

dist

unrh

way

a sp

inco

thro

to i

--of

the

imnee

sheriff, rather than responding to violence and possible injustice, watches with incredulity and passivity while a boy, in imitation of the adult violence, tosses a rock in a scaled down--and socially acceptable--version of the violence. Death itself has become a social phenomenon.

The women's response--their "shock"--is linked with the boys's weapon, a rock, by rhyme. The women, the sheriff, and the boy are all equally implicated in the violence. The results of this human "madness," though, are not easily contained: just as the boy imitates the initial action, the women carry the violence with them as they drive away, and the horse's skeleton turns to dust and is "blown" by the wind. Wright's use of rhyme and meter are important throughout the poem, both in their regularities and in their disturbances of those patterns. The second line is the only unrhymed line in the poem: the women "Snivelled the other way as they drove past." That absence, like the absence of a specific context and an historical "past," invokes an incompleteness and desire for continuity that is maintained throughout the poem. Ultimately, that very openness serves to invite and implicate readers in the textual violence.

For the speaker, the death--I am tempted to say murder --of the horse, takes on a broader historical perspective: the shot animal is not only figuratively blown away, he immediately decomposes:

The b

a chi

apply

and

trees

at

wind

two

pred

life

shor

lamb

fol

unac

outs

toge

unit

rugg

firs

hors

spea

Under far trees the skeleton lay blown:

The mad horse in the wind, the mighty thighs

Broken against a rock, the skull

Dumb with the bullet and the roar.

The horse that was just shot, as witnessed by the women and a child, is already reduced to a skeleton and skull, implying that this violence and death have happened before and in other, possibly even distant, places ("under far trees"). Its results, though, remain visible and audible, at least to the speaker; he can see "the mad horse in the wind" and refuses to be struck mute by the roar. The final two lines of the stanza are tetrameter, rather than the predominantly pentameter lines in the rest of the poem; the lifeline of the speaker and the poem itself has been cut short. Since both lines start with trochees rather than iambs, they--like the poem itself--begin with violence followed by the silence of two and sometimes three unaccented syllables in a row. Yet, within the text (and outside of it), time and violence both roar on.

Just as the women and the small boy were joined together by rhyme, the speaker and the shot horse are united: "I lay lost, in a molten shadow thrown / Out of the rugged sky. I close my eyes...." The line endings from the first stanza create an echo in the second. Dust of the horse that is "blown" in the air is associated with the speaker who also lays down as if shot by "a molten shadow

thrown / Out of the rugged sky"--this darkness flashes upon him. To separate himself from this history of abuse against nature, the speaker closes his eyes: an empty gesture, like the once powerful thighs of the lifeless horse.

This helplessness and confusion of the speaker become even more apparent as the poem continues: "The sheriff and my father walked so tall. / Killers of god, they strode by, muscular, / And left me to my lamentation." This boy transfers both the power and the death he associates with the horse to those who killed it, the sheriff and his father. The features of the horse find their corresponding attribute--their rhymes--in the two men. The lifeless skull of the horse is linked with the men who seem "so tall," but that too is an emptiness, an illusion of power. Wright interrupts his pentameter line yet again to make the men seem "so tall"; he disturbs the rhythm by introducing once more three unstressed syllables in a row (itself an intimation of mortality: a missed heartbeat). These two "killers of god" seem "muscular," but that quality also will vanish in the roar and advance of time. These new images of power focussed on the two men, as a result of their act of violence, reveal their own vulnerability and powerlessness before death.

Both stanzas contain a single word which disturbs the rhythmic flow and disrupts the pentameter lines. In the first stanza that disturbance happens with the unexpected

appearance of the "skeleton"; in the second stanza the irregularity occurs with the word "lamentation."

I lay lost, in a molten shadow thrown
 Out of the rugged sky. I closed my eyes,
 The sheriff and my father walked so tall.
 Killers of god, they strode by, muscular,
 And left me to my lamentation.

A jarring new presence becomes apparent with the introduction of the biblical lamentation; the speaker ceases to be a "lost" boy and becomes instead a prayerful, prophetic voice for nature and humanity; if the missing rhyme from the first stanza is satisfied at all, it is at this moment. The culture which has attempted to create its own "molten" images and to kill nature and god with a rampant violence that continues to spread has to effect everyone, even a witness who strongly objects to the crime: the boy speaker. He recognizes that this act of violence, this killing, also involves him; he, too, shares in the responsibility. His own complicity in this society blinds him to this dark and "dying time"; he becomes isolated even from those he should be closest to, his family and the social agents for order and justice. This prophet opposed to the cultural violence is a twofold loser: he cannot free himself from the responsibility for the crime, plus he cannot partake of the profits from that crime. He loses his "share / In that last brutal ritual of creation" and cannot

benefit, as the women and the boy did, from the violent attempts at self-creation. The speaker, the cultural instigators of violence, and all of society, including the women, children, and readers of the poem, share in the natural, religious, and social loss, "The grace of muscle pitched away in lime." That loss is apparent in the many disruptions and irregularities introduced into the meter, line lengths, and rhyme; the form, which--to borrow Madeline DeFrees's term--we can call "convulsive" form, is an integral part of the poem's meaning. Nature, our advanced industrial society, the poem itself, and each of us individually are in need of mercy, which we can only receive when the human destruction ceases.

Elkins argues that Wright's formal poems, like "Mercy" --which Elkins, of course, does not directly discuss-- present a problem that cannot be resolved:

Metered verse is especially suspect, for it is one more step removed from experience. As Karl Malkoff, in Escape from the Self, has noted, "The important characteristic of meter...is that it exists as a rationally apprehensible construct in the poet's mind before the poem is written, in fact, before the experience that is the occasion of the poem exists." Consequently, the poet may feel, as Wright now begins to feel, that he has "been imposing a logical system on reality,

distorting it rather than objectively describing it." Precise, decorous forms imply an order that Wright suspects violates the reality of the subjects trapped inside. (43)

Rather than providing a "precise, decorous" form, texts like "Mercy" make it possible to see instances in which the very regularity and discontinuity in the formal structures ebb and flow in imitation and re-creation of experience.⁴ It is this re-creation--in the metrical violence--which further implicates the poet in "that last brutal ritual of creation."

Even more important, though, is a point which Elkins does not make: the speaker of this poem is not only imposing a form upon reality but is himself a receiver of an imposed cultural stance. He recognizes his own complicity and responsibility for the ideologies which he cannot control; he is shaped and "self-blinded" by that society and his relationship to it. The visionary quality of postwar poems like "Mercy" is restricted because both the poet and the text are "self-blinded" and informed by the atrocities of war and contemporary society. Form, then, is not just a construct created by the poet: it suggests the parameters which define the poet's and the culture's ideological horizons. Elkins argues that Wright seeks

a way to speak that will allow him sincere, honest communication that denies cultural assumptions

(the dominance of the ego, the willful manipulation of the world for selfish ends, the anthropomorphic appropriation of all the contingent world to man's realm) of the language he uses to communicate. (47)

We can see in "Mercy," however, a speaker who is conscious of himself as being inseparable from the assumptions and resultant actions of his language and culture. I am not arguing here for a privileged ranking of formal texts over free verse; but I am trying to counter the faulty notions of formal verse which critics bring to Wright's early poems. The form and content of "Mercy" reflect the violence and crises of our culture and implicate both the poet and his audience for their complicity in those crimes. These indictments, though, also turn back upon the text itself: "Mercy" implicates its own existence as well, questioning the relevance of a poetic text in a culture gone "mad." Theodor Adorno, commenting about the role of lyric poetry in contemporary society in "Cultural Criticism and Society," approximates the disturbing and negative view of poetry expressed in "Mercy":

To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today. Absolute reification, which presupposed intellectual progress as one of its elements, is now preparing

to absorb the mind entirely. Critical intelligence cannot be equal to this challenge as long as it confines itself to self-satisfied contemplation. (34)

"Mercy" presents a self-conscious individual resisting that urge for mere introspection and self-exoneration: the speaker positions himself against the barbarism and cruelty of late capitalism, and thus against his own barbaric participation in that society.

I have gone to such lengths discussing this poem to show that "Mercy" and others of Wright's uncollected poems do not lack the qualities, complexities, and depths evident in his various volumes of poetry. Also, "Mercy" provides an advantageous starting point because its content and form provoke a reading which goes against the grain: it situates itself within the advanced industrial society that informs its own technical elements as well as the attitudes, actions, and subsequent responses of various individuals within the text. The poem not only posits itself within the context of twentieth century American culture, but it culturally locates the poet and his contemporary audience as well. The text identifies the poet as a cultural producer who both confronts ideological structures and recognizes his complicity with them.⁵ An understanding of Wright and the works he produced requires knowledge of that culture, as it is present in the poems and as an external force shaping

those texts and our responses to them. To read poems like "Mercy" as autotelic texts is an attempt to sanitize and restrict their boundaries; it denies their implications about both author and reader, rather than enabling the poems to serve as poetic flares launched into the world of economics and reified relations.

The formal structures of "Mercy," while effective within the poem, may have struck Wright as incompatible with the texts included in The Branch Will Not Break, but the central concerns of this early poem--the cultural causes and impact of violence upon individuals and society--are evident in the free verse texts from that collection. In "Autumn Begins in Martins Ferry, Ohio" (121), for example, Wright probes societal violence and another "brutal ritual of creation" in a text that provides another variation of his horse poem sub-genre:⁶

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

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

Therefore,

Their sons grow suicidally beautiful
 At the beginning of October,

And gallop terribly against each other's bodies.

As he does in "Mercy" and other poems--"Ohio Valley Swains" (233), for example--Wright moves outside the poetic self in "Autumn Begins in Martins Ferry, Ohio" and deals, albeit indirectly, with the socio-political world of manual laborers;⁷ he begins by stressing inclusiveness (with a repetition of the coordinating conjunction "and") and by focussing on individuals in the community: "Polacks nursing long beers in Tiltonsville, / And gray faces of Negroes in the blast furnace at Benwood, / And the ruptured night watchman of Wheeling Steel." All of these laborers, who are either working or relaxing after work, are addressed in familiar terms. The ethnic reference to "Polacks," Presumably based on familiarity, implies some bond between them and the poet who describes them as delaying their return home by slowly sipping bottomless mugs of beer; faces of black workers at Benwood are seen "in" the blast furnace, their very livelihood scorching and consuming them; finally,

the night watchman is presented as ruptured--his masculinity deformed and incapable of sustaining life.

These representatives of the working class, all maimed in some way, are reduced and dehumanized by their demeaning work, and the poem recreates that social construct. Each group of workers "possesses" a single line of this stanza for themselves (like a worker's allotment), and like the individuals described, these lines are unique units with varying numbers of stress and syllables. But the workers' isolation is emphasized throughout the stanza, not only by "containing" them within separate lines but also in the end-stopped lines, preventing them from uniting. In The Last Half-Century: Societal Change and Politics in America, Morris Janowitz describes this separation of labor as a reflection of the social totality:

...[T]he long-term trend in the social structure has been toward a more differentiated pattern of social stratification, reflecting the complex division of labor and the persistence and growth of cleavages based on age, sex, region, and primordial attachments. The differentiation of social organization has also been conditioned by the fact that a person's position in the social structure is not only a function of his position in the occupational structure but is also

increasingly related to the claims and expectations generated by the welfare state.

(547)

Presumably, then, the workers even during their off hours are kept in their place and "cast out" from social functions--like high cultural events, including the appreciation of poetry--deemed inappropriate for their class. Their isolation at work, then, becomes a synecdochic representation of their social relations. Though separated, the "Polacks," "Negroes," and the watchman do share one feature: they are "dreaming of heroes." Demeaned by their lives and work, they seek an escape and hope for something better and more noble. Ernest Mandel in Late Capitalism situates this dream in the context of capitalism itself:

To the captive individual, whose entire life is subordinated to the laws of the market--not only (as in the 19th century) in the spheres of production, but also in the sphere of consumption, it appears impossible to break out of the social prison. "Every-day experience" reinforces and internalizes the neo-fatalist ideology of the immutable nature of the late capitalist social order. All that is left is the dream of escape--through sex and drugs, which in their turn are promptly industrialized. (502)

If the workers in this text are dreaming of sexual escape, their expectations will be disappointed. The laborers' isolation, induced by their participation in the processes of industrial production, extends even to their most intimate relations. These workers hesitate returning to their families. Again, the text stresses the distance separating the individuals: their families and home life are "forced" into the following stanza: "All the proud fathers are ashamed to go home. / Their wives cluck like starved pullets, / Dying for love." This disjointed, paratactic stanza denies the workers and their families even the luxury of an expansive articulation of their situation; the fathers are discussed in one line, their wives in another, and love in a third--the very relationship between the three elements is not directly discussed. The industrialized families are silenced by their labor conditions or kept unaware (denied consciousness) of their own selves by those working conditions. Once more the heavily end-stopped lines isolate individuals, separating the men from their wives and keeping the women from love (while the men are twice removed from that love) just as the workers in the first stanza are separated from their dreams. The women even cease to be human: their unfulfilled lives and relationships reduce them to clucking hens. James Breslin, like Mandel, notes "a connection between the workplace and the bedroom: grinding, ill-rewarding, and undignified work breaks the spirit of the

men, thus ruining their relations with their wives" (168). The poem, then, explores the relationship between demeaning forms of work and family life, and it suggests that the effects of labor conditions are difficult to enclose. They cannot simply be left at the work site at the end of the day: they follow the workers home, permeating their relationships and contaminating their beds. In Remembering James Wright, Robert Bly discusses the relationship between sexuality and economics:

Studs Terkel interviewed a lot of working men about the Thirties, and a heartbreaking detail came out from several men. After a husband lost his job during the Depression, his wife would sometimes stop sleeping with him.... [W]hen the man during the Depression stopped bringing home food, and felt humiliated, a double humiliation happened when his wife lost interest in him" (24).

It is that double humiliation which keeps the husbands and wives isolated and silenced in the second stanza, but the effects of industrial working conditions on families is not restricted to the spouses.

The final stanza separates the children from their working fathers and their loveless mothers and then re-connects them. That union takes place in the single (itself isolated) word "therefore": it joins together--if for nothing more than an implied logical, causal relation--the

sons with their fathers and mothers. This precarious rationalistic basis for unity with their parents, however, has little validity in this industrialized society: it also drives the sons further away. They grow--in an image reminiscent of Yeats's "terrible beauty"--"suicidally beautiful" as they "gallop terribly against each other's bodies." The sons, while developing their natural strengths, grace and power, have also been dehumanized--like their mothers. They have been reduced to animals, a type of deformed horse trained to destroy itself and others. Ironically, it is only in this third stanza of the poem that isolation between individuals is broken down, but this attempt of the sons to form a community, though "beautiful," is suicidal. While football provides a substitute for the intimacy and human contact that are missing from their family lives, the violent interaction of the sport only diminishes them. Robert Hass observes: "Insofar as this is a political poem, it is not about the way that industrial capitalism keeps us apart, but the way it brings us together" (43). That way, it seems to me, entails violent self-destruction on the football field or repressed self-destruction in the Tiltonsville bars.

We cannot leave the poem, though, at this point: the speaker, presumably the poet, and his position within the poem need to be considered. Wright presents himself within a football stadium, a common meeting area, where he, too,

can establish relations with other individuals in the community. While Wright the poet has the opportunity and leisure to "think" about others, the workers are still engaged in their dehumanizing work or mustering the courage to return to their fragmented lives; they are not attending a football game. Wright, in this privileged position, insists on seeing these workers only in diminutive dimensions. Though attempting to understand and empathize with them, he reduces the working class people to caricatures by focussing on certain aspects of their lives (the night watchman being ruptured, for instance) and ignoring other possibly more positive and self-actualized features. A social hierarchy is present within the poem. Even though Wright includes himself in the same line with the beer drinkers--"I think of Polacks nursing long beers in Tiltonsville"--he, too, is isolated from them and maintains that separation throughout the poem. (Wright observes in a similar situation in his later poem "At the Grave" (239): "Christ, it is going to be a cold day / In hell when any Johnny Bull knows / What I am saying to you.") Again, let me return to Hass:

The word therefore is what isolates the speaker, but it is also what gathers the people of Martins Ferry to the poet and his readers, makes them known and felt. The poet does not rise into suicidal light; he brings himself and them and all

of us up into the different kind of light that poetry is, so that, even though what he sees is tragic, that he sees is a consolation. (45)

My point is that Wright cannot "see" these individuals as more than cardboard figures. The very ideologies which restrict and isolate the laborers also restrict the poet, preventing him from transcending the false-consciousness of late capitalism. I am not arguing that capitalist labor relations and working conditions have not demeaned these people and disfigured their lives (that is obviously true), but I am asserting that the poet, in this poem, has not and possibly cannot successfully or sufficiently "see" or present these people in a way that reveals them as living and suffering humans, rather than "dehumanized" chickens and horses. His synecdochic attempts to create representative individuals denies the individuality of the workers and their families as much as the industrial labor practices do. Part of this failure is due to the very nature of separation inherent in a capitalist industrial society and Wright's involvement in that society as an agent of cultural production; it also results from Wright's embrace of unsubstantiated synecdoche. Whatever the causes, its presence permeates the "blind" spots and silences in the poem. At the beginning of his essay "The Terrible Threshold," Wright states:

In New World Writing No. 4, Theodore Roethke remarks of [Stanley] Kunitz that "he has an acute and agonizing sense...of what is it to be a man in this century." This statement is true, I believe, and simply to be a man (instead of one more variety of automaton, of which we have some tens of thousands) means to keep one's eyes open.

(249, Wright's emphasis)

In "Autumn Begins in Martins Ferry, Ohio" Wright reveals that even with "one's eyes open" one cannot always escape joining the legion of automatons. As the ninth chapter of John--quoted in part above--reveals, social and institutional powers can forcefully restrict the scope of an individual's vision. Wright's efforts to "see" are marred by his own "self-blinded" complicity with cultural forces:⁸ even those attempts to see seem doomed to fail and are a cause for being cast out.

Herbert Marcuse, in "The Affirmative Character of Culture" raises another question which must be considered in light of "Autumn Begins in Martins Ferry, Ohio." Marcuse asserts that art which depicts problems in the social order by presenting these problems on a purely aesthetic level actually "pacifies" its audience and ultimately affirms the capitalist culture and status quo:

By exhibiting the beautiful as present, art pacifies rebellious desire. Together with the

other cultural areas it has contributed to the great educational achievement of so disciplining the liberated individual, for whom the new freedom has brought a new form of bondage, that he tolerates the unfreedom of social existence.

(121)

Wright's poem, rather than "exhibiting the beautiful as present," exhumes what we assume to be beautiful and begins the process of obfuscating that image, in this case the high school football programs, family life in a capitalist society, and the social organization of labor. Wright's poetic flare aims for those areas of unquestioned daily experience where ideologies are least questioned, and "Autumn Begins in Martins Ferry, Ohio" reveals the nightmare reality beneath the surface. The parataxis and complexity of the poem forces a reader to assume an active role in exploring the subtle elements of resistance, even as those elements include the "I," the poet, and the reader. Hugo Achugar has demonstrated that this process is not necessarily conscious during a particular reading: "These social effects function independently of the will of the real author, and, for that reason, they are necessarily involved in relations with the rest of the signs uttered by a society. This does not depend on the receiver being conscious of the process" (654). A reading of the poem, though, cannot be complete without the "receiver" herself

"completing" the reading process by situating her own life in terms of opposition or accommodation to the industrial labor practices, the isolation, dehumanization, and other factors evident in the text. On more than a casual reading, the simplicity and disturbing silences of the poem will be alarming precisely because of the embedded contradictions which have to be considered, though probably not resolved, by individual readers.

"Mercy" and "Autumn Begins in Martins Ferry, Ohio" are only two examples of Wright's confrontation with American culture during the middle decades of this century. These and others of his poems illustrate a complex and tenuous interchange between the subjective expressions of poetic texts and the dominant forces of contemporary culture. His implicit subversiveness, expressed in the content and technical aspects of these poems, provides the basis for his lyric praxis and discloses the broad reaches of ideological apparatuses. These disclosures, in turn, empower his readers to "see" the textual elements as emblematic representations of cultural contradictions and to resist "self-blinded" acquiescence with those cultural forces.

Notes

1. I have no way of assessing and documenting the level of Wright's involvement with the design of Saint Judas, but in an 11 February 1958 letter to Roethke, which I cannot legally quote, Wright articulates his desires concerning the published book's appearance.

Also, for the 1976 publication of Moments of the Italian Summer, Wright worked closely with the artist Joan Root who did a number of illustrations for the volume. Wright's concern for the production and design of his books was certainly evident by that time.

2. Compare this version with that in the New American Bible: "'What!' they exclaimed, 'You are steeped in sin from your birth, and you are giving us lectures?' With that they threw him bodily out."

Wright's Collected Prose includes notes for a sermon that he delivered in April 1969. Appropriately enough, that sermon focuses on chapter nine of the gospel of John, whom Wright refers to as "the dark lyric poet of the Gospels" (126). Wright includes a parenthetical reminder for himself in his notes: "Here, give the Pharisees reply in the King James version, with its coiling sneer" (130). It is that version which Wright used for the cover of Saint Judas. Wright also offers the following comment about this verse: "They cast him out. What did they cast him out from? It was their flawless self-assurance. There is a flaming scimitar of lightning that swings from one side of Jesus' body, and it is the clear blade of comedy. He hated no man, and sinners, who are you and me, delighted him. I believe with all my heart and with all my soul and with all my mind, such as it is, that the man born blind was delighted by the blindness of the Pharisees. They are not to be scorned. But they are funny. They knew everything except what stared straight into their faces" (130).

3. For other examples of this sub-genre see "The Horse" (9), "The Thieves" (unc 1958), "On the West Side of the Red River" (unc 1977), "Two Horses Playing in the Orchard" (133), "A Blessing" (143), and possibly even "In Memory of the Horse David, Who Ate One of My Poems" (202).

4. Wright's comments, in the essay "The Stiff Smile of Mr. Warren," about the dramatically effective formal aspects of Robert Penn Warren's poems are relevant to Wright's own practice, and worth quoting at length: "The speaker [in the poem "The Child Next Door"] is trapped in his necessity of choice; and yet he cannot choose. Between the necessity and the incapacity the speaker is driven to a point where the outraged snarl of an animal would have been justified by the

dramatic context. But this is where the imaginative course of Mr. Warren's continuous explorations comes in. Instead of following the music of his lines and the intensity of his drama into chaos, he suddenly rides the pendulum back to formality--but this time the formality of the rhythm includes the formality of the drama, and I think the strategy is superbly successful. Instead of snarling, the speaker acknowledges the horror's greeting. He faces the horror, and his acknowledgement is a perfect embodiment of what earlier I called a severe and exaggerated formality..... It is the exaggerated formality with which a man faces and acknowledges the concrete and inescapable existence of an utterly innocent (and therefore utterly ruthless) reality which is quite capable not only of crushing him, but also of letting him linger contemplatively over the sound of his own bones breaking. And the exaggerated formality is, in the sound and syntax of the poem, that violence of language which I have described... (247-8).

5. It is undoubtedly apparent by now that my understanding of Wright and his work are heavily informed by Walter Benjamin's essay "The Artist as Producer."

6. I am wary of beginning a "reading" of this text, possibly Wright's most anthologized poem, because I am aware that my approach to it flies in the face of much recent criticism which insists on seeing the poem as a self-contained unit, complete within itself. I am also conscious of Wright's own comments about the poem. When asked if he was protesting the football games or "pointing toward certain positive qualities which may emerge from such rituals," Wright responded, "I think that there were positive qualities. Those games were occasions for the expression of physical grace" (DS 192). It seems to me that focussing on the "physical grace" of football players is among the least productive ways to enter the poem. I can sympathize with Adorno when, at the beginning of his radio lecture "On Lyric Poetry and Society," he perceptively observed, "You will suspect that examination of the conditions under which works are created and their effect will try to usurp the place of experience of the works as they are and that the process of categorizing and relating will suppress insight into the truth or falsity of the object itself" (37). Hopefully, though, my reading of "Mercy," while attending to specifically "poetic" techniques and experiences also began the process of examining Wright's firm roots in American culture. I will attempt the same with "Autumn Begins in Martins Ferry, Ohio."

7. A number of Wright's poems specifically address the economic situation of the poor and working classes: "The Poor Washed Up By Chicago Winter" (153), "In Terror of Hospital Bills" (151), and "Before a Cashier's Window" (156), to name just a few.

8. My understanding of Wright's "blindness" is informed in part by Paul de Man's Blindness and Insight, particularly the essay "The Rhetoric of Blindness" (102-41). De Man notes, for example, "It is necessary, in each case, to read beyond some of the more categorical assertions and balance them against other much more tentative utterances that seem to come close, at times, to being contradictory to these assertions" (102). He also notes, in a comment appropriate to my concerns about Wright: "The insight seems instead to have been gained from a negative movement that animates the critic's [or the writer's] thought, an unstated principle that leads his language away from its asserted stand, perverting and dissolving his stated commitment to the point where it becomes emptied of substance, as if the very possibility of assertion had been put into question" (103).

CHAPTER THREE

THE OPPOSITIONAL LIMITS OF DEEP IMAGERY AND THE POETICS OF AUTHENTICITY

I look over the white sand
Into the hollow cities of girls,
And backward, into blinds,
The satisfied homes by the river.
"Prayers Under Stone" (unc 1961)

To speak in a flat voice
Is all that I can do.
"Speak" (157)

The one tongue I can write in
Is my Ohioan.
"To the Creature of
the Creation" (260)

Wright's negative poetics, which attempt to disturb an individual's relationship with institutionalized power structures in contemporary culture, focus on the convergence of subjectivity and objectivity: that indistinct boundary where the self and world come into contact, where ideologies permeate the everyday. As we have seen in "Mercy" and "Autumn Begins in Martins Ferry, Ohio," Wright as a poet in late capitalism is unable to transcend the culture which informs and defines him, and as evident in "Autumn Begins in Martin Ferry, Ohio," the poet--as an agent of cultural

production--is separated from other classes in this capitalist industrial society. Wright's inability to attain poetic transcendence is not entirely a personal failing on his part; the restrictions and contradictions confronting Wright were (and continue to be) shared by other poets writing during our late capitalist period. As Wright became engaged in the poetics of Deep Imagery during the late 50s and early 60s, the focus of his poems frequently resisted socio-historical engagement and turned inward. In "Prayers Under Stone" (unc 1961), for example, Wright's vision of Minneapolis moves progressively inward and away from the social arena: back into the homes, behind the blinds, within the names, and eventually into the various faces of the self. This artistic ambivalence is not exclusively a "failure" on Wright's part or an unwillingness to confront his cultural context. Language itself is involved: if we consider that language, an embodiment of a specific culture, is both informed and shaped by that culture as well as informing and shaping the culture, we can better understand the precarious position that a poet in late capitalism confronts. Yet we can find poems in which Wright attempts to "see" tragic aspects of individual lives--often within the "I," where the poet's own life appears divided as it exists in opposition to the dominant American culture; or to approach it differently, language itself embodies the ideological contradictions embedded within the hegemonic

discourse and manifest in individual lives.¹ This attempt to establish a visionary realm outside the dominant culture and uncontaminated by ideological apparatuses, though always doomed to fail, is most apparent at two diverse moments in Wright's work: when he most adamantly distrusts language functions and when he trusts language unflinchingly. Elkins, aware of Wright's ongoing struggles with language comments:²

Wright's ambivalence about language is one of the most striking features of these early volumes. He is unable to decide whether he should ignore language as unnecessary for true knowledge (as he often did in The Green Wall), distrust language as a hindrance to real communication, or praise language as the only means by which we can be fully human. (44)

For our focus here we can (somewhat arbitrarily) divide Wright's career into three parts: his early formalist poems like "Mercy"; his subsequent engagement during the late 50s and early 60s, together with Robert Bly, in Deep Image poetics; and finally his emphasis on a poetics of authenticity during the 70s. Williamson, in a chapter entitled "Language Against Itself," observes that Wright and other poets of his generation--Bly, W. S. Merwin, Galway Kinnell, and Gary Snyder--demonstrated during the 50s "a special and in some ways hostile attitude toward language

itself. Most of these poets share the view that language is one of the most powerful agents of our socialization, leading us to internalize our parents', our world's, definitions..." (66). This distrust, often verging on the desire for absolute silence, becomes apparent in poems like Wright's "At the Slackening of the Tide" (61):

I would do anything to drag myself
Out of this place:
Root up a seaweed from the water,
To stuff it in my mouth, or deafen me,
Free me from all the force of human speech;
Go drown, almost.

Yet that overwhelming "force" of language also attracts him: Wright did not silence himself, he continued to both write and publish. Williamson attributes this ambivalent relationship to language, so pronounced in Wright's generation, to their location in literary history: he sees it as their response to the impersonal, ironic, and highly rational "New Critical" poems of the 40s and 50s and the poets' resultant distrust of strictly literary and rational norms in an evaluation of poetic texts (67).

Other and possibly even more pervasive reasons for this ambivalence can be found in late capitalism itself and the commodification processes which appropriate language as an advertising tool in the marketplace, substituting the exchange-value of language for its originary use-value as

utterance. Capitalist society, particularly in the mandated dishonesty implicit in advertising, has an impact on the "truth-value" and expressive qualities of language.³ Gary Snyder offers a psycho-sociological explanation when he observes, "Class-structured civilized society is a kind of mass ego. To transcend the ego is to go beyond society as well" (Williamson 66). Snyder and other poets during the 60s correctly, I believe, perceive language as one point of mediation between the self and society; they wrongly assert, however, that distrusting the language allows them to "go beyond society as well." My contention is the opposite: Wright's complex relationship and involvement within society is most apparent in those poems where he fiercely distrusts and "abuses" rational linguistic functions and radicalizes the self-consciousness of the nuclear "I" within the poem.

One of the ways Wright and Bly demonstrate their distrust of rational language is in their deployment of Deep Image poetry (sometimes called American Surrealism, Leaping poetry, or Associational poetry).⁴ Dennis Haskell observes, "Deep image poetry deliberately attempts to heighten emotion and render an acuteness of feeling through dislocation of the reader's expectations. Purposively irrational so as to get at one's deepest thoughts, it cannot be understood by rational analysis" (144). Robert Bly, in Leaping Poetry, explains this irrationality by observing that Deep Image poetry has freed itself from a restrictive

trend that began in the thirteenth century and linked poetry to "Socratic intelligence"; now, "some of the psychic ability to fly has been restored" (6). He characterizes this leaping poetry by observing:

Thought of in terms of language, then, leaping is the ability to associate fast. In a great ancient or modern poem, the considerable distance between the associations, the distance the spark has to leap, gives the lines their bottomless feeling, their space, and the speed of the association increases the excitement of the poetry. (4)

By challenging rational linguistic functions, Bly asserts, Deep Image poetry can "fly." We can examine this aspect of Leaping poetry by looking at an early--and uncollected--example of Wright's Deep Imagery, a poem appropriately titled "Flight" (unc 1960). The most conspicuous element of the poem, like the use of "therefore" in "Autumn Begins in Martins Ferry, Ohio," is not its associational qualities, but its rational, almost syllogistic organization in spite of itself:

I have heard it beginning
Again, the limp wing of the sea, flapping,
As I lie sleepless.

Yet that bird is as far from me
As the locomotives rusting
In the coalyards of my childhood.

Trains move outside.
I doze, and ride off toward a slag-pit
On the pushcart
Of a strange old man.

The imagery is startling in its rapid and unusual juxtaposing of diverse objects--"the limp wing of the sea," and "the coalyards of my childhood"--but those imagistic innovations are merely decorous additions to the rational but unsupported generalization, a narrative cliché, underlying the poem: unable to sleep, the speaker thinks of his future only to realize that the future, together with his past, are "far from me"; distorted elements of that past, however, do influence his present consciousness when he falls asleep. "Flight" is a failed attempt at "psychic flying" and does not empower an enhanced visionary capacity because the text is hindered by its own "limp wing": the poem is distrustful yet trusting, at the same time, of the rational function of language. In a 22 March 1979 journal entry (written in Verona, Italy), Wright displays this same uneasiness about "flying" texts and the demands they make on readers:

It occurs to me that a single wild flight right in the middle of the most prosaic account is best.

It doesn't hurt to lift the reader about a thousand feet in the air for a moment, and then ease him down--don't drop him, he's no good to me dead--back to earth again. (10)

Wright's distrust of language in poems like "Flight" informs their startling imagistic juxtapositions, but rather than disturbing a reader's ideological "blindness" (by disrupting language patterns) and trusting that reader to make new cognitive associations, Wright insists--through his reliance on rational language--on gently returning the reader to her unchanged life. He is afraid to distrust language and risk allowing his readers to fly and fall. The innovations, as manifest in this poem, are superficial poetic devices rather than radicalized revisions of language, the self, and culture. The poetics of Deep Imagery, in texts like "Flight," illustrate a turning away from history and a radical social disengagement that privileges surface, imagistic, and egoistic concerns.

In other poems Wright's imagistic displays manifest a deeper distrust of the rational, including the rational functions of language: in lines like these, for example, from "Many of our Waters: Variations on a Poem by a Black Child" (210):

The long body of his dream is the beginning of
 a dark
 Hair under an illiterate
 Girl's ear.

"The Minneapolis Poem" (147):

A cop's palm
 Is a roach dangling down the scorched fangs
 Of a light bulb.
 The soul of a cop's eyes
 Is an eternity of Sunday daybreak in the suburbs
 Of Juarez, Mexico.

"Twilights" (131):

Locusts are climbing down into the dark green
 crevices
 Of my childhood. Latches click softly in the
 trees. Your hair is gray.

and "Spring Images" (137):

Two athletes
 Are dancing in the cathedral
 Of the wind.

The rapid anti-rational associations in poems like these
 require and create a free interplay of seemingly discordant

images and objects. Whereas the "industrialized" language in "Autumn Begins in Martins Ferry, Ohio" is restricted almost to the point of becoming inarticulate, in these deep images, language invokes freedom. Walter Benjamin in his essay about the French Surrealists maintains that they understand this freedom; they are the first "to liquidate the sclerotic liberal-moral, humanistic ideal of freedom, because they are convinced that 'freedom, which on this earth can only be bought with a thousand of the hardest sacrifices, must be enjoyed unrestrictedly in its fullness without any kind of pragmatic calculation, as long as it lasts....'" (189). This literary struggle for freedom and liberation, as Benjamin--quoting Louis Aragon--correctly observes, is based on comedy (the same comedic understanding that informed Wright's comments on the ninth chapter of the gospel of John, discussed in the previous chapter): "The thought of all human activity makes me laugh" (185).⁵ Benjamin also notes the political possibilities inherent in Surrealism, particularly in its discontinuities and ecstasies, as well as its "profane illumination" (190) of daily life. This political and ideological potential is based not so much on the explicit content of the texts as on the demands they make from the reader and their inherent attitude toward information, an attitude which a reader can learn from the text. These revolutionary possibilities can

be se

succe

radio

read

The Y

ways

of a

"drea

cont

enta

occu

logi

situ

modi

conc

drea

elis

and

"lat

proc

text

subt

be u

appa

be seen in more detail by looking at another--and more successful--Deep Image poem by Wright.

First, though, another way we can approach the radicalized use of language in these dream-like poems is to read them in the way that Sigmund Freud "reads" dreams in The Interpretation of Dreams.⁶ Freud analyzes and decodes ways in which the "latent content"--the unconscious drives--of an individual is dramatically transformed in the "dream-work" as it becomes the actual dream, the "manifest content." Part of the dream-work (the "secondary revision") entails rendering the dream into a coherent whole: "Dreams occur which, at a superficial view, may seem faultlessly logical and reasonable; they start from a possible situation, carry it on through a chain of consistent modifications and--though far less frequently--bring it to a conclusion which causes no surprise" (528). However, since dreams may contain gaps, inconsistencies, ambiguities, elisions, or absences, it is precisely at these disruptions and dislocations that Freud begins the search for the "latent content" of the dream.

In Wright's Deep Image poems we can follow a similar procedure: by looking for those symptomatic places in the text which will let us "read" the poem's culturally informed subtexts, places where the false consciousness, assumed to be universally true, remains unquestioned and thus becomes apparent (in ways which Wright could not have intended).

We, however, must reverse certain procedures in the Freudian process: Wright was trying to create, as we have seen, jarring surface images that grab attention and resist rational explanation, intending those places to be stumbled over and briefly pondered for multiple associations; rather than primarily focussing on those locations, let us examine areas in the poems where Wright intends the reading to be "easy"--those places where his distrust of language was less consciously forced and thus more readily assumed.

Wright's uncollected poem "A Lazy Poem on A Saturday Evening" (unc 1961) presents a barrage of consciously crafted images--no metaphors--which are noteworthy for their initial discontinuity and jarring disturbance of thought, but like the earlier poem, this text narrates its own irrationality. The short poem can be quoted in full:

Right now, I am going on a journey

To the kind voice.

In cold pools, below gray sands,

I want to drink.

A lazy girl laughs at me.

The moon lets itself fall into the dark pines.

I think of that strange star

At the center of a pine twig.

Animals are very quiet

As they follow solitary people down paths.

I lie back in the grass, shameless,

And surrender to that voice.

My bare forearms are wet

With dew.

Once more we see clusters of nouns that attract attention: a journey to a voice, pools beneath sand, and stars inside twigs. They narrate the poet's quest for an internal presence offering sanctuary; that voice which he seeks, though hidden, is also not hidden. He hears it, presumably after a period of time has passed (since dew settles on him, as he lays in an open patch of grass). "By accepting a stance of openness and humility and by recognizing the interdependence of every aspect of the natural world," Haskell observes, "the poet can draw on the energy of the Gott-natur so as to 'bring news of the universe'" (150). Wright stresses his receptivity to the kind voice of this "natural world," and the poem itself offers up "news of the universe," or so he wants us to believe. The title points to the passivity and leisure necessary to hear this voice.

The language of the text insists upon narration and resists Wright's attempts to probe subconscious irrational associations and impulses. In fact, the dream-like images work together cognitively, in spite of their jarring juxtapositions and anti-rationalism; focussing on those images suggests that Wright--in contrast to the laughing girl--has (with echoes of Whitman) shamelessly resigned himself to a kind and masterful voice.⁷ The use of

dream-like imagery serves two purposes, as Paul Kameen observes:

The dialectic of the dream has now come full circle. The psychological poet begins with the presumption of the primacy of the inside word which, in its efforts to make a world, expropriates the outside; in creating itself it dissolves the world of things. The psyche, as the site of the dream, is ubiquitous; a new world emerges through the vehicle of the poem. By an opposite inversion the transcendental poet begins with the presumption of the primacy of the outside and in his efforts to formulate a self he distributes outward the spaces of his mind; in creating the outside he dissolves and abandons himself. The world, as the site of the dream, is made whole; a new self emerges through the vehicle of the poem. (47)

This transcendence and re-creation within the poem seem plausible until we pay less attention to the intoxicating Deep Images manifest on the surface of the poem. The text is a prelude to the "kind voice," but just when the voice should speak, the poem becomes silent. Wright's "secondary revision," his use of disconcerting images, does not hide the narrative qualities expressed in the poem. Once again, his distrust of language is only superficial. By focusing

on those areas in the poem which are less consciously crafted, questions about the position of the "I" again arise; what do these passages reveal that Wright was trying to obscure and repress in the noun clusters and diverse objects? What repressed voices do they express?

Among the voices resonant below the surface of the text is the voice of that laughing and lazy girl, enjoying her lazy Saturday by jeering and poking fun.⁸ Her's, though, is not the only latent voice: Wright's own voice echoes "below the gray sands" of the poem. The "I" in the poem is withdrawing into itself, wanting to hear its own kind voice. But the poet is not simply listening to a quiet animal voice within him ("Animals are very quiet / As they follow solitary people down paths"); nor is he just relaxing so as to hear that "kind voice." The poet's role in this poem is much more active and alarmed: he withdraws from people, particularly that lazy laughing girl; it is a rout and he hastily retreats from the girl and society. He wants to find a private and socially free space within himself. The images gathered in the poem are not irrational, unconscious, and leaping images but frenetic attempts to create that inner sanctuary. "Surrealism's booty is images, to be sure," Adorno notes in his essay, "Looking Back on Surrealism," "but not the invariant, ahistorical images of the unconscious subject to which the conventional view would like to neutralize them; rather, they are historical images

in which the subject's innermost core becomes aware that it is something external, an imitation of something social and historical" (89). For Wright, that "innermost core" is insecure and seeks protection. The Freudian "gap" we are looking for is at the beginning of the poem: a hole the poet did not fill: the phrase "Right now." Rather than serenely and shamelessly "surrendering" to that "strange star" and "kind voice," the poet frantically and impatiently wants to escape: he yearns for that voice "Right now" and asserts, "I want to drink." In "A note on Trakl" introducing Twenty Poems of George Trakl (published in the same year as "A Lazy Poem on a Saturday Evening"), Wright states that Trakl did not write "according to any 'rules of construction', traditional or other, but rather waited patiently and silently for the worlds of his poems to reveal their own natural laws" (9). On the surface, Wright's poem struggles to achieve a semblance of that silence and serenity, where consciousness freely floats--flies even--from potent image to potent image, but in the "cold pools" beneath the surface, the poet's desperate efforts to enforce silence on other voices becomes apparent. Wright's poem is not so much a heteroglot text attentive to a gentle "Other" as it is an attempt at poetic self-domination designed to repress other voices. In this poem expressing discovery of a private "strange" and "kind" self beyond society, Wright reveals the horrors of society and his desire to withdraw. As in his

poem "The Jewel" (122), his very urgency in escaping from society informs his journey. The "lazy" poem is an active and escapist attempt to suppress one world and create another, but language itself, which Wright diligently tries to subvert, betrays that attempt. Adorno, again in the essay "On Lyric Poetry and Society," observes,

The 'I' whose voice is heard in the lyric is an 'I' that defines and expresses itself as something opposed to the collective, to objectivity; it is not immediately at one with the nature to which its expression refers.... [The poems'] pure subjectivity, the aspect of them that appears seamless and harmonious, bears witness to its opposite, to suffering in an existence alien to the subject and to love for it as well--indeed, their harmoniousness is actually nothing but the mutual accord of this suffering and this love" (41).⁹

In a poem attempting to defy the rationalist nature of language and suppress certain meanings, Wright's own relation with language and society become most clear. The text, then, operates on two levels: one pointing to certain intoxicating internal resources and energies that he desires to find (and to a limited extent does actualize) within himself, the second--to use Benjamin's expression--is a "profane illumination" of this everyday need for protection

from a hostile outside world. This combination of shameless intoxication--in which radically new combinations of disparate elements can, seemingly instantaneously, appear--and strategic withdrawal is what gives Wright's most effective Deep Image poems possible political impact and allows them to illuminate oppressive aspects of contemporary culture. In Deep Image texts, like "Eisenhower's Visit to Franco, 1959" (129), "The Undermining of the Defence Economy" (131), and "Confession to J. Edgar Hoover" (171), Wright uses Deep Imagery to make overt political statements without realizing the political implications expressed in all successful Deep Image poems.

Leaping poems, like "A Lazy Poem on a Saturday Evening," reveal a poetic strategy in which Wright attempts to "go beyond society" by distrusting rational functions of language; ultimately, though, it is a strategy which shows how embedded the poet and language are in the dominant culture. Wright's Deep Image poems--by their very attempt to withdraw into the mythical depths of subjective privacy¹⁰--lead to a forfeiture of that mythic self and foreground instead the areas of tension between society and self. Deep Image texts, when rooted in an anti-rational freedom, offer a truly oppositional poetics, but when the texts are informed by superficial novelty, solipsism, and escapist desires, they merely affirm the impossible desire to escape contemporary society.

By the mid-sixties, Wright's texts were moving progressively further from the radical anti-rationality of Deep Imagery on a journey, this time, to a different "kind voice": the spoken and idiomatic diction Wright remembers and associates with his childhood in Martins Ferry, Ohio: as he observes in "To the Creature of the Creation" (260), "The one tongue I can write in / Is my Ohioan." From the early 70s until his death Wright attempts to create a different poetics, one rooted in a carefully crafted plain style--"a flat voice" ("Speak" [157])--of studied artlessness and an implicit reliance on the powers of language itself.¹¹ When Wright ceases to thoroughly distrust language and decides to rely on the "pure clear word," when he unself-consciously trusts language and allows language itself to speak, his later poems provide new attempts to achieve visionary glimpses.¹² The "New Poems" section of the Collected Poems includes the text "Many of Our Waters: Variations on a Poem by a Black Child" (210) in which the third section of the poem, entitled "Learning from MacDiarmid," begins with the often quoted lines describing Wright's "new" poetic:¹³

The kind of poetry I want to write is

The poetry of a grown man.

The young poets of New York come to me with

Their mangled figures of speech,

But they have little pity

For the pure clear word.

I know something about the pure clear word,
Though I am not yet a grown man.

And who is he?

Wright, forty-four years old when the poem was published, questions whether he or anyone else is "grown" enough to use the "pure clear word."¹⁴ His fear of inadequacy is based on an awareness of the powers of language or, as he observes in "Inscription for the Tank" (149), "words, caught and frisked naked" can be so gripping that "the plainest thug who read them / Would cluck with the ancient pity." For Wright, that clarity entails stripping away "poetic" diction and formal conventions not appropriately expressive for a given poem. It is, in a sense, Wright the full-fledged modern poet (as discussed in chapter one) returning to a neo-classicism that he rediscovered in the poetics of Horace; it also includes, for Wright, the possibility of turning to prose itself and melding prose poems which privilege a specific level of clarity:¹⁵

I would like to write something that would be immediately and prosaically comprehensible to a reasonably intelligent reader. That is all. That is all I mean by being clear, but it is very difficult for me. This is a Horatian idea. It is the attempt to write, as one critic said once of the extraordinary and beautifully strong writer Katherine Anne Porter, so that "every one of her

effects is calculated but they never give the effect of calculation." (DS 216)

Integral to the issue of clarity is concern for audience: in a desire to be understood Wright was stripping away those poetic techniques and devices which he thought would detract from direct communication with his readers. After years of writing with consciously shaped formal diction and creating arational Deep Images distrustful of language, this acceptance of the "pure clear word" was an embrace of the expressivity of language: "I really do believe that there is, in language, something like a power to heal itself, to right itself. Language is a living thing, a part of ourselves, and, as such, I think that the notion among the evangelists of the word as flesh is a very, very complex and important living idea" (DS 223). Wright offers an example of that power of language by describing an experience during one of Mario Procacino's campaigns for mayor of New York City:¹⁶ Procacino, Wright states, while in Harlem addressed a black audience by saying,

"My heart is as black as yours!" Now he didn't mean that. He didn't intend it to sound the way it sounded to that audience and to you and to me. But he said it. It is almost as if the language cried out, save me. Somebody save me. We do have a wonderful language in America. (DS 224, Wright's emphasis)

Wright's attempts to save that American language by foregrounding in his texts the "pure clear word" are notable for their recognizably simple, colloquial diction and sentence structure and are evident in the prose poem "Cold Summer Sun, Be With me Soon" (page 205) which begins:

I wanted to write something that you could understand, as Dr. Williams said.

So naturally the God damned kitchen light bulb burned out just as it got dark outside.

Here I am, sitting at day break, which is of course gray.

It is raining.

Wright--like William Carlos Williams--emphasizes prosodic clarity and the difficulties of achieving it ("naturally the God damned kitchen light bulb burned out"); in this text, the metrical unit becomes that of the sentence, rather than the line, thus enabling the poet to foreground comprehensibility rather than technical and formal devices. In texts such as this one, his concern with the "pure clear word" extends beyond prosody: like Wordsworth and Coleridge (as well as Williams) before him, Wright attempts to capture the rhythms of daily speech: the "sense of music in the American language, the music of speech and the music of song."¹⁷ That does not mean, however, writing poetry devoid of ideas or complexity. It is, instead, an attempt to affirm the areas where the individual is embedded in nature, community,

and culture; in "Cold Summer Sun, Be With Me Soon" Wright attempts to produce a dialogue that includes all three elements:

It is raining.

You haven't come out yet.

And neither have I.

Where does that leave me?

Where does that leave you?

.....

Oh, come on out, for God's sake.

Though Wright is aware of the absence of an immediate audience and the presence of inhospitable nature ("It is raining"), his dialogue breaks down: "I can't write a damned thing, which was all I wanted to do. / And all I wanted to do was write something you could understand." Though this text documents a failed attempt to establish contact with his audience, it also reveals his renewed trust in language, or as Wright himself expresses it, "In this kind of poetry there is involved a willingness on the part of the poet to trust the language a little more, and perhaps to trust nature, trust other living things" (HM 166). What becomes evident in this poetry of a grown man is the renewed level of confidence in the power of language to convey both ideas and establish a personal involvement between poet and audience; equally evident is a distrust of artificial

literary devices which call attention to themselves as being "poetic."

This distrust is jarring, at times, when Wright foregrounds his own resistance to artificiality and the mere poetic: in "Emerson Buchanan" (253), he notes, for example, that "Franklin Pierce will scan" and "Publius Vergilius Maro scans" while Emerson Buchanan "is one half-hendecasyllabic, / And almost an amphibrach"; in "She's Awake" (259) Wright comments "All I had to do was delete the words lonely and shadow, / Dispose of the dactylic hexameters into amphibrachs....," while in "The Offence" (204) he draws attention to "the difficult, the dazzling / Hendecasyllabic." These meta-poetic devices help to create an illusion of reality, a semblance of transparency, and the impression of sincerity for both the reader and the poet by distancing them from the idea of the poem as an artificial construct (which is what poetry is) and asserting instead the immediate communicative value of the text. Wright's relationship with his audience also pushes at the limits of poetic decorum: besides invoking specific targeted individuals who are not held in high esteem, like the convicted murderer George Doty and the drunks of Belaire, Ohio in "At the Executed Murderer's Grave" (82), in several other poems, he verbally assaults his audience.¹⁸ Like Brecht's use of "alienation effects," Wright attempts to increase his readers' awareness that they are reading a

poem; rather than trying to destroy the illusion of poetic texts as real and transparent communication, Wright's attacks (a rear-guard defense) seem designed to display his sincerity and "win" readers' trust. By breaking down the normal author-reader barriers, these hostile outbursts invoke collaborative reader participation. He demonstrates this antagonism by directly challenging reader involvement:

Nobody else will follow
 This poem but you,
 But I don't care.

"The Idea of the Good" (179)

"Reader, alone, die. Die in the cold"

"Emerson Buchanan" (253)

Hell, I ain't got nothing.
 Ah, you bastards,

How I hate you.

"Ars Poetica: Some Recent Criticism" (222)

If you do not care one way or another about
 The preceding lines,
 Please do not go on listening
 On any account of mine.

Please leave the poem.

Thank you.

I have a little time left, Jack.

I don't know what you want.

But I know what I want.

"Many of Our Waters" (210)

This belligerence supports the illusion of sincere and direct communication, as if the poet is immediately and unmediatedly present behind or within his transparent words. The antagonism, however, can also be understood as a manifestation of the poet's alliance with the poor and working classes. If his audience is assumed to be academically informed or affiliated, as we will discuss in chapters four and five, Wright's confrontational tone challenges their own complicity with capitalist culture at the expense of the poor, the marginalized, and the uneducated.

Once again, though, Wright's stance is not consistent; though he continues this technique of speaking to his readers directly, the tone of that apostrophe radically differs: he addresses, in a variety of poems, readers as friends and peers:

Reader,
 We had a lovely language,
 We would not listen.

"Ars Poetica: Some Recent Criticism" (222)

You, you, if you read this,
 I wouldn't have you think
 I would give up the kiss
 Of strong drink.

"The Last Drunk" (228)

This use of a benign direct address is possibly more effective at inviting audience members to participate in the activity of reading the text than the earlier antagonistic addresses, but it can also lull them into a passive, complicitous participation and remove, at least in part, the indictments previously leveled against them. The kindly acknowledgement of the audience implies a level of sincerity and trust between the audience and the poet, but Wright's vacillations in his relationship with his readers reflect an uneasiness on his part--a discomfort with that audience and a dissatisfaction with his bonds to them. It reveals, like the pursuit of mythic privacy in his Deep Image poems, a desire to return to pre-industrial relations with his audience, relations founded on the poet's direct and immediate communication. This focus on the poetic self as a privileged site is also an inward turning, positing the

social isolation of the poet. Equally significant, it is a movement away from public discourses, judged to be false and illusory; it invokes, instead, an idiomatic and vernacular discourse that is assumed to be transparent and authentic. The effectiveness of this poetic stance is limited by the naivete of its linguistic assumptions about transparency and the privileging of the personal poetic voice above other forms of discourse.¹⁹ If we choose, though, to accept Wright's belief in the "pure clear word," we still need to address what social practices and ideologies those words express (and conceal), or, as Eagleton observes, "... [T]he conformist, 'transparent' text is in part to be judged in the light of that to which it 'conforms'" (79).

In spite of the limitations inherent in this poetics, Wright's trust in language and abandonment to the "pure clear word" are important because they allow him to again confront ideological structures by attempting to "see" and present individual lives shaped by the contradictions inherent in the dominant American culture. That attention to clarity and sincerity reveals the murky social underbelly permeating texts like "Heraclitus" (unc 1975), a poem whose structure and allusions hinge on contradiction.

On the dust jacket for Two Citizens (published two years before "Heraclitus") Wright states,

Two Citizens is an expression of my patriotism, of my love and discovery of my native place. I never

knew or loved my America so well, and I began with a savage attack on it. Then I discovered it. It took the shape of a beautiful woman who loved me and who led me through France and Italy. I discovered my America there. That is why this is most of all a book of love poems. The two citizens are Annie and I.

In "Heraclitus," this poem of contrasts, Wright again discovers America in Europe, but this time it takes the form of two boys, Harry Schultz and Patsy di Franco. This "love" poem, like Two Citizens, begins with an attack: "My beautiful America, vast in its brutality, and brutal in its vastness." The rest of the text examines the natural and social aspects of this conflation of vastness, brutality, and beauty. It becomes an exploratory narrative and an elegy for the tragic lives quietly forgotten in this country:²⁰

One evening beside the river, only its name.
Only one river, the Ohio, that is the loneliest
river in the world.

Patsy di Franco sank down into the time of
the river and stayed. Joe Bumbico jumped naked
into the suck hole and dragged up Harry Schultz.
I started to cry.

A cop gouged his fists into Harry's kidneys.
He must have thought they were lungs.

The Ohio River is, in this text, a malevolent version of Heraclitus's river, where a person can never step into the same water twice: it becomes the "loneliest river in the world," and it seeks to fill that loneliness by absorbing those who are living. For Heraclitus, the river is a metaphor for benevolent change; it, like time, is always in a state of flux: constantly emptying, constantly filling. The Ohio River, though, is less benevolent: while filling itself with Patsy, swallowing him into its own flux and time, it empties itself of Harry Schultz, who was rescued. This perpetual change and incessant activity form a suck hole that swallows Patsy and Harry. It is an elemental force--sometimes natural and sometimes social--but it is the same suck hole that swallows Hobie Johnson in "The River Down Home" (172)

Under the enormous pier-shadow,
Hobie Johnson drowned in a suckhole.
I cannot even remember
His obliterated face.

and Jenny in "To the Muse" (175) ("...the only way I can get you to come up / Out of that suckhole, the south face Of the Powhatan pit, is to tell you / What you know"). This river with its whirling suck holes is like vast and brutal America, swallowing individual lives.

Change, for Heraclitus, always involves an active--sometimes warring--interplay of opposites; in the poem, that

dialectical war takes on social dimensions: Patsy moves downward while Harry was "dragged up"; the cop attempts to save Harry by puncturing his kidneys; the poet's pleasure trip from Paris to Vienna takes "less time" than Patsy will have with "the time of the river"; the adult poet continues to relive his own childhood experience. Even the form of the text brings apparent opposites together: prose and poetry. When the adult speaks, it is in the flowing lines of prose, but the boy sputters poems:

Harry couldn't talk plain.

Harry puked.

I loved Harry, he was one of my best friends.

Harry, Harry.

Are you still alive?

In "Heraclitus" Wright's "poetry of a grown man" is transformed into the prose of adulthood, and it coexists--rather than merging--with the poetry of childhood: the two styles are juxtaposed, their contradictions never resolved. In fact, none of the various conflicting elements within the poem peacefully combine: the boys continue fighting the river, swimming all the way across, trying to bridge the opposite shores with their bodies, though they have to do it "through a tear on a dead face." That "tear" is the punctured body of Harry Schultz, and it is a teardrop on Wright's own "dead face" when he "started to cry." He mourns not because America is really dead, but because it is

still alive, still consuming individuals--those on the riverbed still fighting upward and those on the top (riding the waves) still standing on the heads and backs of those beneath them. The contradictions remain. Adorno observes, again in "Cultural Criticism and Society," that a successful work "is not one which resolves objective contradictions in a spurious harmony, but one which expresses the idea of harmony, in its innermost structure" (32). In "Heraclitus" opposing forces push the poem apart at its seams, even as they form the structure, unity, and content of the text. As an embodiment of late capitalism, the poem contains the same unresolved conflicts apparent in the culture itself. Mandel has observed, "The ideology of 'technological rationality' mystifies the reality of late capitalism by claiming that the system is capable of overcoming all the fundamental socio-economic contradictions of the capitalist mode of production.... [L]ate capitalism has not, and cannot, accomplish this" (505-6).

"Heraclitus" strives for authenticity by foregrounding, in highly mediated and constructed ways, the "transparent" personal voice of the poet. What we see in the poem, when Wright unhesitatingly trusts his language by momentarily forgetting himself and "seeing" Harry and Patsy, are the stark suck holes and inherent polarities in America itself. Even the awe-inspiring and the repulsive interchange in the chiasmas "Vast in its brutality, and brutal in its vastness"

points to those contradictions. When Wright trusts the "pure clear word" and presents "the river, only its name," that name--a word--opens like an umbrella to a frightening view of isolation ("I swam... with my friends alone") amid a culture that exists by reducing people to their primal selves ("jumped naked into the suck hole"), forcing them to save one person and leave another ("Patsy...stayed" / Harry was "dragged up"), motivating them to combine opposing forces ("swim all the way across"), and asking the living to commune with the dead ("Are you still alive? / Who? Me? I ain't not"). As Adorno has observed, language itself contains social voices:

...[T]he highest lyric works are those in which the subject, with no remaining trace of mere matter, sounds forth in language until language itself acquires a voice. The unself-consciousness of the subject submitting itself to language as to something objective, and the immediacy and spontaneity of that subject's expression are one and the same: thus language mediates lyric poetry and society in their innermost core. This way the lyric reveals itself to be most deeply grounded in society when it does not chime in with society, when it communicates nothing, when, instead, the subject whose expression is successful reaches an

accord with language itself, with the inherent tendency of language. ("Lyric" 43)

In "Heraclitus" when the poet forgets himself and lets Harry speak, language talks, almost in spite of Wright's own mediated presence. Among the many contrasts and opposing tendencies apparent in "Heraclitus," that presence of the poet is not the least: by 1975, when the poem was published, Wright had been the recipient of numerous awards--including a Fulbright Scholarship, a Kenyon Review Poetry Fellowship, the Yale Series of Younger Poets Award, the Borestone Poetry Award, the Eunice Tietjens Memorial Award, the Brandeis Poetry Award, the Pulitzer Prize, a Rockefeller Foundation Grant, an Ingram-Merrill Grant, two Guggenheim Fellowships, the Longview Foundation Award, the Ohioana Award in Poetry, the Melville Cane Award from the Poetry Society of America, an honorary doctorate from Kenyon College, an invitation to the White House Festival for poets, an invitation to join the Institute and Academy of Arts and Letters, and a fellowship from the American Academy of Poets. He was living in New York City, but still thinking and writing about Martins Ferry, Ohio. The man situating himself in opposition to the dominant American culture and writing about Harry who "couldn't talk plain" was a full professor in the English department of Hunter College, active in one of the institutions which perpetuates that culture.

Notes

1. It has become a cliché in Wright criticism to talk about his empathy for the socially marginalized, the outsiders; though that concern is important in his texts, here I am talking about a much more specific and complex approach to that work: an analysis of language as a determining agent for the content of the poem, as well as the construction of the poet himself, in their relation to the dominant culture.

2. As is true of many issues being addressed here, this confrontation with language is not unique to Wright. It is a central issue for all poets, and the various ways writers attempt to resolve this ongoing struggle are everywhere evident in their texts. The work of Wright's immediate peers--including Robert Bly, Galway Kinnell, W. S. Merwin, and Donald Hall--share Wright's mixed involvement and response to current linguistic possibilities.

3. Hayden Carruth, in a discussion of technological influences on poetry, observes, "What seems far more important is a development related to electronic technology, but fundamentally not a part of it: the growing distrust of language in general.... Constantly we are told that this or that commercial product or service, or even this or that candidate for office, is 'better,' when we know it cannot be true.... Children are taught today, in lessons compounded every five minutes, that untruth may be uttered with impunity, even with approval. Lying has become a way of life, very nearly the way of life, in our society. The average adult American of average intelligence and average education believes almost nothing communicated to him in language, and the disbelief has become so ingrained that he or she does not even notice it" (739, Carruth's emphasis).

In the uncollected foreword to a book of poems by H. R. Hays, Wright also attests to the impact of advertizing: "I speak to patriots. Poetry has not yet been a way of life in these states. It is true that at present we have two or three great poets among us, in exactly the same sense that we have two or three great movie stars among us, and two or three great politicians.... Each of these is the concoction of advertising. Holy America, who dreamed so well" (unpaginated).

Marjorie Perloff, in Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media, also discusses the effects of advertising and commercial imaging upon poetry. See especially pages 60-79.

4. A great deal of critical attention has addressed this aspect of Wright's and Bly's careers, particularly focussing on "the strong influence of poets outside of the

Anglo-American tradition" (Elkins 69). A number of the uncollected translations which I have been gathering support that view, but since my main point is not the originary basis for Deep Imagery, I will only discuss Wright's original poems and their relation to my thesis. For more information about this topic, see Dougherty, Stein, and Elkins.

5. Wright repeatedly made the same observation about the comedy (and sense of freedom) underlying Surrealism. In his interview with Smith, for example, he states, "The French Surrealists...understood that Dadaism and Surrealism were comic reactions to certain preestablished conventions of rationality in writing. They started to be deliberately irrational. They were able to write good poems when in one way or another they were comic. Americans who have tried to follow the Surrealistic way don't get the joke" (DS 207).

6. In his essay "The Relation of the Poet to Day-Dreaming," found in On Creativity and the Unconscious, Freud introduces the idea that a poet's work can be understood as a type of play, fantasy, and daydream. Following the lead of the Frankfurt School, I am attempting to cross-fertilize my own more philosophical interests in Deep Image poetics with a Freudian, psychoanalytical approach to the texts.

7. That calm silence and attentiveness to an instructive voice can also be found in a text by a writer Wright greatly admired. The first dialogue in Jacob Boehme's Dialogues on the Supersensual Life states:

Disciple How can I hear him speak

Master When thou standest still from the
thinking of Self, and the willing of Self....
...Nothing truly but
thine own willing, hearing, and
seeing...do hinder thee from
coming to this supersensual state.

(quoted in Haskell 149)

8. Diane Wood Middlebrook in her biography of Anne Sexton discusses a poem Wright wrote for Sexton entitled "Lazy on a Saturday Morning" (133). It is a text which Wright later published, with a slightly revised title, but did not include in his various volumes: "Saturday Morning" (unc 1962). It seems plausible (though insupportable) that "Lazy Poem on a Saturday Evening" is a companion piece to the earlier text and that either the "kind voice" or the "lazy girl" in the "evening poem" is Sexton.

9. In the same essay, Adorno notes, "Today, when individual expression, which is the precondition for the conception of lyric poetry that is my point of departure, seems shaken to its very core in the crisis of the individual, the collective undercurrent in the lyric surfaces in the most diverse places..." (46).

10. The best evaluation of this aspect of Deep Image poetry is in Paul Breslin's essay "How to Read the New Contemporary Poem." Breslin states, for example, "The ascendancy of the new [Deep Image] poetry represents a giving up on the outside world, a retreat from psycho-politics into a solipsistic religion of the unconscious. ...[It is an] attempt to recover innocence and faith at any cost, even the abolition of social reality and the conscious self..." (45).

11. Hass makes the witty observation that Wright's lines "The one tongue I can write in / Is my Ohioan" are "based, presumably, on the well-known Ohio habit of speaking in off-rhymed couplets" (51).

12. Wright's emphasis during the 70s on the "pure clear word" led to a new "plain style" poetics that he had begun to develop since the late 50s. This plain style has since become a norm in itself, a poetic of personal voice frequently associated with creative writing workshops. Charles Altieri offers the most poignant criticism of this "scenic mode" by describing it as the predominant poetic style: "A typical contemporary litany is easy to reproduce: Craft must be made unobtrusive so that the work appears spoken in a natural voice; there must be a sense of urgency and immediacy to this 'affected naturalness' so as to make it appear that one is reexperiencing the original event; there must be a 'studied artlessness' that gives a sense of personal sincerity; and there must be a strong movement toward emphatic closures.... The work places a reticent, plain-speaking, and self-reflective speaker within a narratively presented scene evoking a sense of loss" (10). Altieri accurately observes that "we have paid an enormous price for our poets' commitments to the expressive norm of sincerity..." (200). That price, it seems to me, includes an effective oppositionality.

13. Wright alludes to a long poem by Hugh MacDiarmid, entitled "The Kind of Poetry I Want," which discusses at length possible roles of poetry in a scientific, industrial, and technological culture. MacDiarmid says, in part:

A poetry not for those who do not love a gaping pig
 Or those made mad if they behold a cat
 And least, those who, when the bagpipe sings i' the
 nose,
 Cannot contain their urine.

.....

...a poetry that stands for production, use, and
 life,

As opposed to property, profits, and death.
 (1021; 1023)

14. Wright's adherence to a poetic of transparency--"the pure clear word"--stands in direct contrast to the views of current theorists and poets like Charles Bernstein and Ron Silliman; their insistence on the materiality of words is an attempt, as Bernstein observes, to "make language opaque so that writing becomes more and more conscious of itself as world generating, object generating" (41). Similarly, Eagleton observes, "The function of criticism is to refuse the spontaneous presence of the work--to deny that 'naturalness' in order to make its real determinants appear" (101). Also see Steve McCaffery's "Writing as a General Economy" and Alan Golding's "Language-Bashing Again."

Anthony Easthope, from a linguistic perspective, also challenges the "transparency" of language: "If signifiers have an autonomy and determining action of their own, the signifier is not transparent in respect of the signified, not merely a passive means of communication" (10). Also see Easthope's discussion of transparency in Alexander Pope's "The Rape of the Lock" (110-21).

15. The emergence of prose poems during this period, by a variety of stylistically different poets, is an issue far too large for me to explore here, but its significance to postmodern poetry needs to be considered. Stephen Fredman appropriately observes, "I have felt for a number of years that the most talented poets of my own postwar generation and an increasing number from previous generations have turned to prose as a form that, in its pliancy and its linguistic density, seems to promise 'a faithful reproduction of the exquisite and terrible scene that stretches around us'" (1). For more information on this topic--though not specifically addressing Wright--see Fredman's Poet's Prose: The Crisis in American Verse.

16. Wright also published a poem about Procacino, "The Divine Mario" (unc 1975).

17. This quotation is taken from Wright's statement about his poetics--entitled "From a Letter"--published in Naked Poetry. In this "letter" Wright discusses Williams as well

as his own poetic practices: "During the past few months I had occasion to read several of Dr. William's discussions of prosody pretty thoroughly, and I have yet to make any usable sense out of his phrase 'the variable foot.' He had a perfectly tuned ear; he could write in the 'musical phrase' that Pound asked for, though his poems are capable of including many more different kinds of music than Pound.... I have been trying to grope my way toward something which I cannot yet describe, but whose interest, if any, is not limited to the concerns of prosody and form" (287).

18. Much critical attention has focussed recently on the use of apostrophe in the lyric. See, for example, essays in Chaviva Hosek and Patricia Parker's Lyric Poetry Beyond New Criticism. Cynthia Chase's essay in that volume offers the following comment about apostrophe: "For what the address does is to claim the existence of an addressee capable of hearing it: capable of giving ear, of giving voice, to a text; passing from a sign to a sound and a sense; passing between cognition and perception. The trope of address, a prosopopoeia, institutes the intelligibility of language by engendering the figure of a reader" (212, Chase's emphasis). Chase, like Wright, sees apostrophe as a way to invoke the presence of readers.

19. Much critical attention has focussed on creative writing workshops as a source for the privileging of the personal voice, an idea which I will discuss at greater length in chapter five. Donald Morton and Mas'ud Zavarzadeh's "The Cultural Politics of the Fiction Workshop" provides a good summation of the theoretical concerns underlying my views about Wright's poetics of authenticity.

20. In "Childhood Sketch" Wright describes the incident which the poem is based upon: "Many lives were lost to the river, and a few were saved. My friend Harry Schultz, who was in the first-grade class with me at the old Central School, got caught in a suck-hole one afternoon just above the Terminal Bridge (long since condemned), and maybe he would have drowned; but a strong and courageous boy named Joe Bumbico saved him. At the same time and place, little Patsy di Franco was lost. Even Joe Bumbico couldn't find him..." (332). The poem "A Flower Passage" (354) discusses one of the divers responsible for pulling people from the river, and "Young Good Man" (230) also mentions the diver John Shrunk.

CHAPTER FOUR

A REAR-GUARD DEFENSE OF THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF POETRY

I have gone past all those times when the poets
Were beautiful as only
The rich can be.

"In Memory of Leopardi" (168)

I croon my tears at fifty cents per line.

.....
Alive and dead, those giggling muckers who
Saddled my nightmares thirty years ago
Can do without my widely printed sighing
Over their pains with paid sincerity.

"At the Executed Murderer's Grave"
Saint Judas (82)

As for money, I am mad about it. Let me take this opportunity to announce to readers of The American Poetry Review, and also to my numerous acquaintances... that I would be absolutely delighted to receive any money they would care to send me, not only for the sake of my stunning good looks but also for the sake of my irresistible vivacity and charm. Any denominations will do just fine, from a penny right on up to a thousand dollar bill. No cheques, please.¹

The 40s, 50s, and 60s proved to be a time of radical transformation for the production of American poetry. Beginning with Robert Frost and continuing with the generation of Allen Tate and John Crowe Ransom, poets turned to colleges and universities for financial support, primarily as instructors of writing, though also as journal

editors and teachers of literature (usually courses on modern poetry).² By the mid-sixties creative writing programs employing published poets and writers were common at academic institutions, and Wright's position as a "university poet" was not unique among contemporary American poets: David Wagoner, Kenneth Koch, John Hollander, Louis Simpson, William Stafford, Daniel Hoffman, and other "professional" poets made their living--like Wright--as professors of literature. Similarly, poets such as James Dickey, David Ignatow, Stanley Kunitz, Richard Eberhart, W. D. Snodgrass, Richard Wilbur, John Logan, and Robert Lowell--among many others--were tenured professors of creative writing (Kostelanetz, Old Poetries 39). This movement of the production site of poetry to academic institutions, with their power structures and cultural capital, has had an impact upon the types and quality of writing being produced, an impact evident in Wright's work.

Wright's precarious position in twentieth century American industrial society becomes even more complex and ambiguous when we realize, as Janet Wolff observes, that "it has never been true, and it is not true today, that the artist has worked in isolation from social and political constraints of a direct or indirect kind" (27, Wolff's emphasis). With this in mind, we need to explore in greater detail one of the major socio-political organizations with which Wright was aligned: academic institutions, including

primarily the University of Minnesota at Minneapolis, Macalester College, and Hunter College. We must also consider Wright's involvement in the social and labor relations within the academic community, as well as his political and social position as a cultural authority and producer at a time when the academy was rapidly expanding.³

Concern about the influence of institutions on literature is not new. In his essay "The Literary Influence of Academies" Matthew Arnold bemoans the absence in England of an institution equivalent to the French Academy because

an institution owing its existence to a national bent towards the things of the mind, towards culture, towards clearness, correctness and propriety in thinking and speaking, and, in its turn, promoting this bent,--sets standards in a number of directions, and creates, in all these directions, a force of educated opinion, checking and rebuking those who fall below these standards, or who set them at nought. (266)

Arnold purports that the value of an institution like this resides in its ability to create a "sort of centre and rallying-point" (267) for culture and intelligence and a "centre of correct information, correct judgment, correct taste" (269). He clearly spells out the value of this authority for defining and maintaining critical standards,

but he also points to other repercussions of such an academy:

It is not that there do not exist in England, as in France, a number of people perfectly well able to discern what is good, in these things, from what is bad, and preferring what is good; but they are isolated, they form no powerful body of opinion, they are not strong enough to set a standard, up to which even the journeyman-work of literature must be brought, if it is to be vendible. (267, emphasis added)

Part of the power for such an institution in a capitalist economy is its influence and power in the marketplace by setting the boundaries for what defines an officially sanctioned poetry.⁴

Implicit in Arnold's discussion of the "literary influence of academies," of course, is the power which that academy exerts over the formation of literary canons and issues of hermeneutics. In the last three decades that power in North America has been exercised not by a central academy⁵ but by the professional academic institution. "If we wanted to describe its actual social existence," Frank Kermode asserts, "we should get involved in a complex account of its concrete manifestations in universities, colleges, associations of higher learning; and if we wanted to define its authority we should have to consider not only

its statutory right to confer degrees and the like, but also the subtler forms of authority acquired and exercised by its senior and more gifted members" (168-9). Much has been written about the authority of this loosely organized "academy" over literary, ideological, and methodological issues: Kermode, for example, presents a case, though possibly more reserved than it needs to be, for the social hierarchy within the institution, as well as the institution's control over which texts get read and how they are interpreted.⁶

Again, though, the influence of this institution extends beyond internal hierarchies and exegetical questions. Universities, as the "caretakers" of knowledge and cultural works, control the reception, interpretation, and reproduction of texts. In a capitalist economy they function as brokers in cultural exchanges and are holders of a unique form of power--professors exist as authorities juxtaposed to the more influential monetary agents and other cultural producers like musicians, artists, and poets. Pierre Bourdieu, referring to French academic institutions, describes this position of the academic in late capitalism:

As authorities, whose position in social space depends principally on the possession of cultural capital, a subordinate form of capital, university professors are situated rather on the side of the subordinate pole of the field of power and are

clearly opposed in this respect to the managers of industry and business. But, as holders of an institutionalized form of cultural capital, which guarantees them a bureaucratic career and a regular income, they are opposed to writers and artists: occupying a temporally dominant position in the field of cultural production, they are distinguished by this fact, to differing degrees according to the faculties, from the occupants of the less institutionalized and more heretical sectors of the field (and especially from the 'independent' or 'freelance' writers and artists, as opposed to those who belong to the university). (36, author's emphasis)

University professors, then, are cultural producers and intellectual laborers who occupy a social space distinct from and, he suggests, in opposition to that of artists, industrialists, and manual laborers. The power that they have, though, is not only "cultural capital": it includes direct financial and socio-political ties.⁷ In The Power Elite, C. Wright Mills argues that in the 50s "the university, while pretending to be a haven for the exercise of reason in the pursuit of knowledge, was becoming a research and development center for big business and the military. Instead of providing a liberal education...the universities were beginning to train technicians,

concentrating on the skills demanded by the centers of power" (J. Breslin 4). Yet it would be inaccurate, as Bourdieu demonstrates, to consider universities as homogenous: the various departments and faculties operate with different critical standards, pay scales, work loads, and activities; and individuals within a given department have liberties and options.

A discussion of Wright's position as a "university poet," then, must involve confining our perimeters of study even more and focusing on English departments as specific production sites within universities. Evan Watkins in Work Time: English Departments and the Circulation of Cultural Value discusses the complex relations of English departments to culture. He situates English departments within the university structures:

...English typically is one of the larger departments in both secondary- and university-level educational institutions. And at some point, almost everyone is required to take a course in English. In another sense, however, that size is deceptive. For just as typically, English is not intra-institutionally as powerful as its size would suggest, and English faculty on the university level are not paid on the same scale as faculty in a great many other departments. Further, the size of English is rarely if

ever proportionate to the total amount of labor time--student, faculty, clerical, administrative--generated by courses in literature....

[L]iterature and literary study is highly privileged work for permanent faculty in English.... (20)

Within institutional politics, Watkins asserts, English is not as powerful as certain other disciplines: Bourdieu points to law and medicine faculties in France as being more prominent dealers of cultural capital (55-59). Wright's position in the academy as a professor of literature, primarily nineteenth century British fiction, is a privileged position, more "powerful" than the position of professors teaching creative writing.⁸ Though the "cultural capital," to use Bourdieu's term, can assist in the reproduction of the values and ideology supporting the dominant classes, that authority can also be used to promote cultural resistance. Watkins localizes English departments within the institution and addresses the specific nature of the work being done there:

English, however, is situated in a perhaps unique position to function as a place of educative exchanges of knowledge and strategies, to affirm and encourage a multiplicity of directions, of work resistances elsewhere--to educate a support structure, including ourselves, for resistance.

For there is perhaps nothing else located to do that job in quite the same way. That is, the very pervasiveness of English departments in the social circulation of people in the United States, if necessary to the distribution of race, class, and gender positions, can also be made a weapon to support multiple practices of resistance. (28)

Those oppositional sites are possible, Watkins acknowledges, but their existence is contingent upon English departments' success "in the education of a support group" (28). Though Watkins discusses the potential for political and revolutionary work within the English department, he more practically addresses their value in immediate daily routines:

...[T]he [English] class itself can be understood as a social organization of work, a particular complex of relations among students and the instructor engaged in the study of Paradise Lost. Further, these relations are organized in a way that continually "produces value." It's not value in quite the same sense as one might speak of the value of Milton's altering the conventions of English blank verse. But unless you imagine that the whole process of drawing up a syllabus, assigning readings and papers, making comments on the results students generate, "translating" those

comments into a number grade, and filing a grade report at the end of the term is just a meaningless ritual, then the social relations that exist in the classroom represent an organization whose result is "value" in some sense. (17)

An English classroom as a site of cultural exchange, political resistance and support, and social organization is the environment--the production site--in which we have to consider Wright's work. Also, we must address his position within the larger and subtler issues of universities and English departments as sources of economic and cultural power and domination.⁹

During his interviews, Wright was consistently conscious of his position within the academic institution; he tells Andre, for instance, "Well, I'm an academic person after all" (MA 137). Although his relations with university English departments were complex and at times precarious, Wright was aware of English departments as sites of cultural reproduction:

I worry about it endlessly, for our system of public education is a fragile thing, and if we destroy it, or allow it to be destroyed, it won't automatically reappear. Huge numbers of young people have got to be shown--not just the social need, but the personal--for an orderly life and

for what Irving Howe beautifully calls a life of disciplined hope" (BH 189).¹⁰

The educational system is for Wright, at least in part, a cultural means for establishing social order. Within contemporary culture, then, academia is a two-edged sword: a tool in the hands of the hegemonic culture for shaping "an orderly life" (Who defines what is "orderly?" How is that order implemented? What happens to those who position themselves outside the order or those who are cast out?) as well as a tool for resistance groups, empowering them to fight back. Wright's complex relations with universities can be situated in this ambivalence about education as an enriching gift and education as cultural constraint. Wright directly addresses in several texts issues related to this two-fold aspect of teaching. At the end of his prose memoir, "The Infidel," which recounts a childhood incident when an atheistic hobo shares some conversation and roasted potatoes with a group of boys, Wright describes a short poem which an Iraqi poet translated and read to one of Wright's classes. Though the poem perplexed his students, for Wright it was both understandable and personally meaningful:

To me, the poem was instantly perfectly accessible.... It is possible that Ghazi's poem reached out and touched, as with a kindly and understanding hand, my half-buried memory of that strange infidel, the hobo with the unwashed eyes,

who stepped out of the sumac trees near the railroad track just above the Ohio River so long ago and shared with my friends and me a little of his time, a little of our time, some serious conversation we only partly understood, a few of our lies, a couple of mickies, and the social comfort of our August fire.

Here is the poem that Ghazi translated:

As I drifted near shore
 In the first light of morning,
 I saw my country
 Hunched over in a blackened boat,
 A fire between her knees. (328)

Wright's account illuminates his perspective on the English department at Hunter College as his work site. He confronts a situation in which his students do not appreciate a poem which he, the instructor, values. In his capacity as teacher, he faces the dilemma of either imposing his taste upon them or creating a context in which various (possibly even contradictory) criteria for evaluating the poem can be presented and compete in the classroom. Ghazi's poem was significant for Wright because he could relate it to an experience and perceptions that he valued--the poem "reached out and touched, as with a kindly and understanding hand, my half-buried memory of that strange infidel." He is by his

choice of subject matter imposing certain views, or at least subjecting students to those views.

At the same time, though, the text contains images of American culture that challenge current social and labor relations. Within the memoir, Wright presents concrete details about America during the Depression: it is a place where men who wanted to find jobs could not (though he says nothing about women's even more restricted roles), a place where children would steal potatoes to eat, a place where religious non-conformists were ostracized. It is a place described as an industrial waste land, where an "open sewer from Martins Ferry poured into the river about a mile upstream; and a little further up, such factories as Wheeling Steel, Laughlin Steel, and the Blaw-Knox Company were constantly presenting their modern contributions on which the health of our American economy continue to depend." It is a place where a railroad detective "might do anything" to a child caught illegally inside a freight car.¹¹ Finally, it is a place where an unemployed man can be so hungry he will instantly eat a hot potato that had been cooked for so long "its entire crust must have been charred half an inch thick."

The poem, then, that Wright was teaching reproduces his image of America, even as that text questions the social, political, and economic forces which could create such inequity: "I saw my country / Hunched over in a blackened

boat, / A fire between her knees." Wright's class was a chance to reinforce his own authority; but it also provided an opportunity, returning to Watkins's terminology, to educate a support structure of cultural resistance and create value by probing social and labor relations as they existed (and continue to exist) in the workplace and in the classroom. Additionally, Wright as instructor was--by allowing students to say they "could never understand the poem in a million years"--challenging authoritative models of student-teacher relations, as well as allowing and encouraging students to form their own opinions. He was creating a classroom which supported cultural resistance: "What English produces is, precisely, a labor process, which is then available to function in the social circulation of people as one basis for the distribution and certification of human capital through the terms of evaluation" (Watkins 251, author's emphasis).

Immediately following this memoir, as it appears in American Poets in 1976 and later in Collected Prose, is an untitled but dated prose piece (It was written on 25 February 1974, three months before "The Infidel"). It is, I believe, a prose poem:

This afternoon, after I had lectured for an hour or so, a girl came up to me and exclaimed, "I feel so shaken! How can you go on and on so passionately about the poems of Robert Herrick? I

think he's too--too pretty. I don't think I like him."

Ears small and delicate as the inside of a monarch butterfly's wing; her nostrils seemed strong and careful enough to catch something beyond ancient Cornwall. I would have liked to ask her to take her shoes off and walk across the floor of that dismal classroom. I don't know how I know, but I know that her toes would have been as sure and strong as the horns of a snail.

Anthea, Julia, Electra, why do I love Herrick?

I don't know. Lucky, I guess. (328-9)

In this piece, like the other memoir, Wright presents a view of his work site and labor relations within the English department. In this second example, he again provides a model for authority. Rather than silencing the student (who seems, he implies, as slow and hard-headed as the "horns of a snail"), he does two things: he recognizes her as a beginning student not to be authoritatively "corrected" but gently encouraged to extend beyond her limits: "Ears small and delicate as the inside of a monarch butterfly's wing; her nostrils seemed strong and careful enough to catch something beyond ancient Cornwall." Second, he positions her within the very process she challenges. By allowing her to express resistance, Wright encourages resistance; by

listening to and respecting her views--though he has the last word--he presents a model for student-teacher relations that is not based exclusively on domination. In comments addressed to individuals working within English departments, Watkins says:

For one use at least of what socio-cultural values we can force into circulation is not to identify with the work of others, but to change the conditions of all our work. It is, by whatever means are available in whatever specific locations, to destroy the organization of labor as it exists and construct one that values the lives and energies of people to each work for each other in a society. (276)

By creating a comfortable classroom environment where a student can resist authority, Wright allows for the creation of a new type of relation: one that hopefully can extend beyond the classroom to other work places and meaningfully engage with the inequities documented in Wright's hobo narrative.

Other works by Wright also explore labor relations between student and teachers--including the two poems, published seventeen years apart, about the death of his former teacher at Kenyon College: "In Memory of Charles Coffin" (238) included in Two Citizens and "A Dream of Charles Coffin's Voice" (unc 1956). In both instances the

teacher is an image of cultural authority which Wright, the student, places in a privileged position and adamantly tries to understand. In "A Dream..." Wright uses a formal rhyme structure, resembling a sestina, in which the last word of the last line in each of the six stanzas is always "hear." The poem emphasizes the importance of listening to this teacher; only death eases the obligation to listen: "He fades, a dream of music now, so I / Walk to his patient trees, absolved of fear / That he might speak and I should fail to hear." The social relations presented in these poems foreground the love and humble submission of an inferior before the voice of authority--a relationship contrasting with the image of Wright as teacher in "the Infidel."¹² This intense devotion is disturbing, not only for psychological reasons, but also because of the implied power relations, the social and educational hierarchy, and ways in which Wright as a student silenced himself before authority.

In the poem "To my Teacher, After Three Years" (unc 1961), Wright again presents that complex bond between a dead teacher and former student; in this poem, though, that unhealthy relation ends with Wright's realization that there exists a darker side to their association. Wright refuses to continue mourning for the teacher: "I was a fool to mourn you, now you need / Nothing at all that I know how to give." The poem concludes with an allusion to Wright's second book,

Saint Judas and its many poems focussing on death, the dying, and the dead:

I took three years to write
 One book of leaves that darken under rains
 All over hell's half-acre. Now the blight
 Turns back to fight the worm's deliberate waste:
 We rend each other, murderers to the last.

His intense devotion to the dead teacher "turns back" on the poet; he perceives the last three years of his life as being wasted. The teacher has become more than just an intellectual sparring partner for Wright: they destroy and mutilate each other. Their adversarial bonds, consistent with models of labor and management relations within capitalism, ruin them both. Wright demonstrates in this poem and the two for Charles Coffin a power structure, modelled after capitalist relations, that is both dangerous and destructive.¹³ His works which directly touch on issues concerning the social organization and labor relations (student-teacher) within college and university English departments reveal a commitment to those academic institutions, even as he tries to redefine in liberal terms his own position within them. He ambiguously presents glimpses of the university as a source for resistance and as a site for the reproduction of power relations.

As we have already seen in poems like "Mercy," "Autumn Begins in Martins Ferry, Ohio," and "Heraclitus," Wright

conducts a frontal attack on the hegemonic culture, while as a teacher he offers a rear-guard defence of academic institutions which perpetuate that culture ("social order," as he calls it), even as he uses his classroom to support possible resistance. His ambiguous relationship within that university environment becomes more apparent and problematic in light of the larger issues raised by Arnold, Kermode, and Watkins, issues which address universities as sites of power, cultural reproduction, and agents for socialization beyond the immediate institutional setting.

Wright's entrance into academia as a full time assistant professor began in 1957--the year The Green Wall was published--when he accepted a position at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, where Allen Tate and John Berryman also taught. As Robert von Hallberg indicates, Wright entered into the profession at a time when the number and prestige of universities and faculty members were rapidly increasing:

Within only ten years, from 1950 to 1960, the number of college teachers had nearly doubled (to just under 200,000), and the indirect influence of this occupational group increased as the number of college students did. During the entire postwar period the number of colleges (now about 3000), faculty, and students grew tremendously. In 1940 some 1.5 million students were registered in

colleges. By 1968, when Lyndon Johnson withdrew from the presidential campaign, that number had increased fourfold. Now there are about 10 million college students and 600,000 faculty. By 1979 about 30 percent of the adult population had some college training, and half of these people held college degrees. The political influence of this rapidly expanding sector of the population increased throughout the cold war years-- especially after the Soviet success with Sputnik in 1957--and with few complaints from anyone after McCarthy's demise. (120)

Wright's place within the academy and the accompanying increase in cultural capital and authority which that position entailed further complicate his position as a poet writing texts which engage in social criticism. He was aware of the powers that accompanied his professorship, but he was equally aware of the responsibilities that ensued, particularly for language use: "Well, expressions of language in a context of power do have important consequences, always. And it seems to me just a matter of life and death for writers to pay special attention to this phenomenon and at least try to think clearly and to keep the language in close contact with reality" (HM 165). As we saw in the previous chapter, presenting a language "in close contact with reality" ultimately means, for Wright,

privileging the poet's private voice over public discourses. As a poet whose production centered around universities, Wright was situated, though in a marginalized manner, in a position of cultural authority in state supported institutions. Scholars like Ron Silliman have explored the complex financial and social relations between academia and poetry and the ways those relations have impacted the production and study of poetry:

The primary institution of American poetry is the university. In addition to its own practices, it provides important mediation and legitimation functions for virtually every other social apparatus that relates publicly to the poem. The university provides the context in which many, and perhaps most, poetry readers are first introduced to the writing of our times; it may even be, as has sometimes been argued, the context in which the majority of all poems in the U.S. are both written and read.¹⁴

This institutionalization of poetry during the 50s, 60s, and 70s (and, of course, into the present) may itself be a significant symptom of the pervasiveness of the social totality within late capitalism: it also raises questions about economics and cultural capital, issues regarding the power structures which control textual interpretation, and concerns about the production and dissemination of poetic

texts. Fredric Jameson goes so far as to see the movement of the arts into the academy as a defining characteristic of postmodernism.¹⁵ This institutionalization also entails questions about the poetry audience. Hallberg notes, "...the audience for contemporary poetry can be identified to a considerable extent with one particular set of social institutions: colleges and universities" (22)¹⁶. During the same period that Wright was becoming established as a university teacher and poet, the audience for poetry publications was not only forming around academic institutions but also rapidly increasing.¹⁷

Among the many characteristics of that expanding audience(s) for poetry and serious literature--as noted by Nicholas Zill and Marianne Winglee in their study of three demographic surveys of American reading habits from 1982 to 1985--are the following:¹⁸ audience members tend to have at least some college education, have parents who were college educated, are white collar workers, have incomes of at least \$25,000, live in large metropolitan areas, and usually are white. Individuals with less than a high school education, earn annual incomes below \$10,000, work in blue collar occupations, and belong to a racial minority are under-represented among the audience members for literature, especially poetry.¹⁹ If we accept the results of Zill and Winglee's study, Wright's poetry audience includes those people who either belong to or aspire to belong to the

dominant social classes. His poetics positing questions about power structures and repression within late capitalism were primarily being heard, read, and appropriated by individuals who were actively participating in the very social, economic, and political organizations which he was hoping to implicitly subvert. The results of Zill and Winglee's analysis raise disturbing questions about Wright's relationship with the dominant culture and the working classes. "The Polacks nursing long beers in Tiltonsville, / And gray faces of Negroes in the blast furnace at Benwood, / And the ruptured night watchman of Wheeling Steel" were probably not among Wright's audience, though we can speculate that his "plain style" and poetics of authenticity--with their emphasis on clarity and immediate comprehensibility--were stylistic attempts to include the working classes in the audience for his poetry.

One way of assessing Wright's position in relation to working class people is comparative: how do his means of production and printed texts compare with those of other workers' poets? One model we can examine is socialist. In 1926, after actively embracing socialism, the Russian poet Vladimir Mayakovsky attempted to formulate a revolutionary aesthetics in How are Verses Made? Mayakovsky suggests approaching artistic work as production, similar to other forms of material production, with the connection between the two modes being explicit. He concludes his study with

twelve conclusions about the "mysterious techniques of this productive process," including:

1. Poetry is a manufacture. A very difficult, very complex kind, but a manufacture....

6. Don't set in motion a huge poetry factory just to make poetic cigarette lighters. You must renounce the uneconomical production of poetical trifles....

7.A knowledge of theoretical economics, a knowledge of the realities of everyday life, an immersion in the scientific study of history are for the poet, in the very fundamentals of his work, more important than scholarly textbooks by idealist professors who worship the past....

10. You mustn't make the manufacturing, the so-called technical process, an end in itself. But it is this process of manufacture that makes the poetic work fit for use. It's the difference just in these methods of production that marks the difference between poets, and only a knowledge, a mastery, an accumulation of the widest possible range of varied literary devices makes a man a professional writer. (56-7)

Mayakovsky replaces the romantic "mysteries" of poetic creation with a focus on modes of literary production which

transform raw materials by a materialist means of production into cultural products; poetry becomes the work of a craftsman and artisan. Rather than attempting to bury ideological choice, Mayakovsky's model foregrounds its own social and economic alliance with laborers and specific means of production. During the second half of the twentieth century, however, poetry and poets like James Wright are centered around academic institutions; universities, including creative writing programs, are major influences defining the social impact, parameters, and audience for poetic production.²⁰

We can, as another means of helping us assess Wright's relationship with his audience and the working classes, also examine the work of other American poets at this time; Hallberg observes, "From the end of World War II until the early 1960s, American poets had little to say about the differences between the intelligentsia and the working classes" (122). He continues by noting, "Instead of examining the strains and contradictions in the relation between workers and intellectuals, poets tended to write about the very poor and the well-off, which often meant servants and their employers" (126). Hallberg's study, American Poetry and Culture, 1945-1980, though, does not address Wright's poetry nor his relationship with, on one hand, "American intellectuals, among whose growing numbers were nearly all readers of poetry" (122), and, on the other,

his emotional, familial, and intellectual connections to the poor and working classes.

Wright's awareness of his problematic relations with his audience can be illustrated by examining the version of "At the Executed Murderer's Grave" (82) contained in Saint Judas. In that poem Wright clearly identifies himself--"My name is James A. Wright, and I was born / Twenty-five miles from this infected grave, / In Martins Ferry, Ohio, where one slave / To Hazel-Atlas Glass became my father"--and clearly situates himself as one of the "slave" class. This insistence on providing his name, though, separates Wright from that class: in mass production (like large classrooms), the identity of individual laborers is never attached to the finished commodity. Wright's name at the top of the text as well as within it identifies the text as being his own construct, tied to his personal and communal history, and expressive of his views. This very display of "freedom" contrasts with that of the working class.²¹ The poet continues by identifying himself with the convicted murderer George Doty; in the same way that Doty was "a thief" stealing people's lives, Wright made his "loud display" and stole the "language on a dead man's voice." When addressing Doty, however, the poet casts doubt on the sincerity of his own commodified verse, even as he implies authenticity: "Doty, you make me sick. I am not dead. / I croon my tears at fifty cents per line."²² As if turning his poetry into

capital proved he was at least alive, Wright shows himself neither removed from the system which murdered the murderer nor better than Doty: "If Belmont County killed him, what of me?"

In the same poem Wright proclaims, "no love's lost between me and the crying / Drunks of Belaire, Ohio." But he does, indeed, recognize and bemoan the distance which separates him from them, in that those "drunks" and "giggling muckers who / Saddled my nightmares thirty years ago / Can do without my widely printed sighing / Over their pains with paid sincerity." Throughout the text, the poet evinces an awareness of the socio-economic considerations that separate him from them. Wright foregrounds his own ambiguous position and once again situates himself in the midst of contradiction: his poetry is both a commodity and not a commodity. In the sense that his poems are produced and exchanged for money, they are commodified, but to the extent that they are expressions of personal "sighing" and "sincerity" they resist fully participating in commodity capitalism.²³

In a similar way, the poem "In Memory of Leopardi" (168) confronts these same contradictions; this time, though, the poet tries to sever (or at least cover) his ties with monetary influences. He combines his voice with that of the Italian Romantic poet Leopardi, who--like Wright--was an academic.²⁴ The poet's alliance with the poor is

foregrounded, even as he recognizes that historically poets and poetry have relied upon and attached themselves to a different class: "I have gone past all those times when the poets / Were beautiful as only / The rich can be." In these texts, Wright--though conscious of the irony in his stance--addresses himself to the conditions of the poor and working class, even though the audience for poetry remains centered around universities and are members of the middle and upper classes. Wright attempts, though, to join the "collective undercurrent" which Adorno observes:

A collective undercurrent provides the foundation for all individual lyric poetry. When that poetry actually bears the whole in mind and is not simply an expression of the privilege, refinement, and gentility of those who can afford to be gentle, participation in this undercurrent is an essential part of the substantiality of the individual lyric as well: it is this undercurrent that makes language the medium in which the subject becomes more than a mere subject. ("Lyric" 45)

Wright's poems demonstrate his effort to resist active complicity in those expressions of "privilege, refinement, and gentility" manifest by previous poets. At best, though, he expresses an ideological alliance: Wright the poet continued "crooning" his poems for money in a capitalist

system even as he defended the academic institutions which perpetuate that system.

Another way of approaching and defining this contradiction in Wright's poetry is by examining the stark contrasts evident in his changing sociological positions. In his interview with Smith, Wright talks about his educational status within his immediate family:

I think that with the family I came from, a very good people, there was no tradition of education in the family. I had one distant cousin who had gone to college but except for him no one else. My mother had to leave school when she was in the sixth grade, my father had to leave when he was in the eighth grade. He went into the factory when he was fourteen and my mother went to work in a laundry. All of my relatives were working people. Back in the thirties I would have called them working class. My older brother Ted, who is now a photographer in Zanesville, Ohio was, except for that distant cousin, actually the first one of us who ever graduated from high school. (DS 198-9)

When Wright speaks about his brother as the "first one of us" to receive a diploma, Wright manifests the ideological bonds he shares, even as late as 1979 (when the interview was conducted), with his family as well as the "working people." For a celebrated poet--who had a doctoral degree

and affiliations with various universities and colleges, who was a recipient of several federally subsidized grants, who received paid sabbatical leaves to support his frequent travels in Europe, and who wrote and published for an audience that was primarily middle and upper class, as well as academically informed--that bonding if considered as something more than emotional or historical seems problematic, to say the least.

E. L. Doctorow, an undergraduate friend and classmate of Wright's at Kenyon College, offers one way to focus on these contrasts which Wright embodies. Doctorow states, "...the group to which Wright and I sociologically belonged and to whose standards we aspired.... [was] a variety of exotics--Jews and Irish Catholics from New York and Philadelphia, the first two black men ever admitted, foreign students, homosexuals, farmhands, and a fair number of unprepossessing boys given to social afflictions like acne or stuttering" (12). Wright's and Doctorow's shared aspirations--whether for ideological reasons, comfort, friendship, or possibly even status--included joining the "community" of marginalized individuals, that academic "crowd of solitudes." For Wright, though, this inclusion with social and economic outcasts was not a studied affectation: it represented a continuity with his past. Doctorow poignantly describes that past by recounting a trip

he made with Wright to Martins Ferry, in which they stayed at the house of Wright's aunt:

She was a gracious and very humble woman clearly made uncomfortable by the collegiate ambience we brought with us. The house was quite small, a worker's one story cottage in a street of them. Our sleeping arrangements consisted of the parlor floor beside the wood stove, with newspapers for blankets. In the morning we went to a diner for breakfast and then crossed the river into Wheeling, West Virginia, where we attended an afternoon concert of the Wheeling Symphony Orchestra, sitting for a dollar each in the almost empty, wooden balcony of this hall where it seemed as if there were more people playing on stage than listening in the audience. It was not an event I would have chosen for myself--the child of music-loving parents in New York who had made him a familiar of Carnegie Hall and the Metropolitan Opera House. But I was incredibly moved. How hard these people played, and how they struggled to do well, and how well they did, and what a profound isolation it was to long for beauty and grace in the industrial heartland of the United States. (20)

"How hard these people played, and how they struggled to do well, and how well they did" seems an ample description of Wright's life and achievement, but Doctorow's description also reveals Wright's attempts to combine his roots among "poor country people" (11) with his experience and interests in high culture. The image of Wright bringing home his "cultured" New York friend--who notices Wright's "inevitable cigarette between the wrong fingers" (22)--to sleep on the floor with newspaper blankets predates and anticipates the opposing social forces apparent in Wright's poetry.²⁵

Stitt, in the introduction to James Wright: The Heart of the Light, provides yet another context for examining Wright's past and his connections with contemporary culture:

The valleys of the Ohio River present everywhere a landscape of stark contrasts, but perhaps nowhere more than on the border between West Virginia and Ohio.... The surrounding fields and hills are sylvan and beautiful--Eden and the wilderness intermingled. The base of the valley itself, however, is heavily urban.... [Factories] line the river, pollute its waters, and provide a gritty contrast to the surrounding landscape.

(1-2)

Elsewhere, Stitt points out another significant contrast in Martins Ferry, the economic disparity: "Life was tough there in the thirties, the people generally poor, thanks to the

Depression. Perched on the hills at the top of the town, however, were large Victorian houses occupied by shopowners and by the managers of the glass factories and steel mills" (James Wright: A Profile 7). Wright's ambiguous position between undisturbed nature and scarred industrial waste land, between rich and poor, informs the social and political context for his poems and his life. In many ways, it is only appropriate that in his texts the idiomatic Ohioan speech, the people and places in Martins Ferry, and his childhood experiences should exist in discomfort and conflict--seldom blending together--with the life and experiences of the educated, well travelled, and cultured poet-professor.

The poem "Heritage" (unc 1964) draws these opposing forces into the text itself, but is--once again--unable to resolve them: the pastoral and antipastoral, the poet's identification with the poor while being conjoined with the cultural elite, the educated with the uneducated, and high culture with life on the streets. The poem begins by exploring the relationship between Wright's grandfather and grandmother:

Brooming the streets, sick drunk he hated life.
 Winter after winter, his whining wife
 Forgave him about midnight, and then she prayed,
 John, 3-16. Pure slag-heap, smoldering his bed.
 One winter afternoon of snow and smoke,

Fuddled by horses, traffic lights, and drink,
 He tripped on old horse manure, and sprawled
 Along the curb, favoring his broken back,
 Chuckling through rot-gut fumes.

The text appears to rise out of the streets themselves. By dragging his feet as he reluctantly plods home, the old man sweeps the pavement; but he eventually plunges into that street himself (and it may have been more accommodating than his bed). Later a crowd of the dead and living parade not just down his street but all city avenues--and eventually lead us back to this same dung-filled street.

That the old man "hated life" is evident even before his entrance into the poem: the two adjectival phrases ("Brooming the streets, sick drunk") point to the avoidance techniques he uses in order to cope with life in an industrial society. The text explores the old man's familial and social relations by probing socioeconomic factors; his faltering trip home is partially due to his complaining, pietistical wife.²⁶ Like "Autumn Begins in Martins Ferry, Ohio," the lives, sexuality, and homes of these working class people are bound inextricably to their dehumanizing jobs: there is a "Pure slag-heap, smoldering his bed." This slag heap is the same industrial refuse that scars eastern Ohio and informs Wright's psycho-poetic landscape in "Stages on a Journey Westward" (124), "Two

Poems about President Harding" (127), "Chilblain" (334), "Flight" (unc 1960) and "To Build a Sonnet" (unc 1964).

The old man's wife also feels the residual heat from that slag-heap as it sears their lives and the remains of their marriage. Her attempts at Christian forgiveness, though, only exasperate both of their lives: each winter she "forgave him about midnight." Either she has forgiven him in the middle of the night, when he is presumably either dead drunk, passed out, or asleep, so her forgiveness is never communicated; or she forgives him for midnight--because of the darkness he brings, in which case she frees herself of the burden by squarely placing it upon him. Though she prays, what love John 3:16 offers is not enough for her to extinguish their smoldering slag-heap. The isolation between her and the old man becomes ever more apparent: when he dies and is buried, her absence from the poem becomes conspicuous.

Industrial residue permeates the cityscape just as it penetrates their home; even a snowy afternoon is filled with "smoke." Nature itself, like the old man, seems to become intoxicated with whatever it can: the smoke-filled afternoon is "fuddled by horses, traffic lights, and drink." In the same way, the old man is both befuddled and fuddled by the demeaning conditions his life has assumed--the "horses, traffic lights, and drink." By falling over dried horse dung (which in this poem, unlike "Lying in a Hammock...")

(122), has not turned golden), the old man reveals his reason for sweeping the streets. His life, never far above the level of those streets, is "sprawled / Along the curb," where rather than bemoaning his proverbial "broken back," he favors it and chuckles. Death itself, he suggests, is better than this industrialized life of "rot-gut fumes."²⁷

The old man is wrong, however: possibly the only experience worse than living in a late industrial society is dying in that society, where death itself is commodified by morticians who "offered bids," "priced his molars, calculated sums." The poet attacks with acerbity these "Pink graduates from morticians' colleges" who "Giggled together if they cracked his thumbs, / Threaded the cat-gut, and sewed up his gums." Working class people, such as the old man and his wife, are isolated and entrapped in unfulfilling lives, while these college graduates--"like roaches out of septic tanks"--feast upon the dehumanized lives of these laborers. Just as the morticians "haled him [the old man] out of sight," they try to hide and "bury" all of the poor.

The vehemence of this attack on both the old man and the graduates, as well as the emphasis on their differing socioeconomic backgrounds, points to the overwhelming presence of the poet in the poem. This is a class struggle quite different from the relationship between servant and employer which Hallberg comments on: it is a struggle in

which the poet is not so much caught between the two classes he is most closely affiliated with as it is Wright himself warring against both classes. The repulsive college educated morticians are reduced to imperviousness by the nursery-rhyme quality of:

They priced his molars, calculated sums,
Giggled together if they cracked his thumbs,
Threaded the cat-gut, and sewed up his gums.

The triple masculine rhyme not only dehumanizes them--it all but reduces them to "roaches"--but also characterizes them as being only "sums," "thumbs," and "gums." Like the grandmother, these morticians vanish as abruptly as they appeared: the poet severs his relations with them.²⁸

In the same way, though, the poet presents an unflattering and simplistic view of the old man and his wife, even withholding the fact that they are his grandparents until the final stanza. The emotional distance from the old man that is evident in this poem resembles that of the early text "The First Glimpse of Death (unc 1961) which states: "My paternal grandfather is laughing drunk underground, / Beating his head at doors, / Refusing all shelter." This anger contrasts, however, with the acceptance and identification evident in "A Poem of Towers" (248):

I am becoming one
Of the old men.

I wonder about them,
 And how they became
 So happy.

Wright observes in "Heritage" that the old man "tripped on old horse manure, and sprawled / Along the curb"; but in "Well, What are You Going to Do?" (256) the poet offers a more sympathetic account of his own scatological experience:

And there was a pile of horse manure
 I couldn't evade, and so by God
 I did not even try.
 All I could do was fall
 From time to time.

Wright's callous description of his grandfather and the morticians evidences an unwillingness to loosen or strengthen his connections with either class. He denies having any heritage at all.

The final two stanzas narrow the focus of the poem to immediate familial relations: brothers to brothers, parents to children, grandparents to grandchildren. These relationships draw the poet further into the text and demonstrate an awareness of at least one part of his heritage, his familial connections, but these bonds are nebulous, inexplicable, and disturbing.

He loved his brother, Christ alone knows why.
 Christ and his family know he never told.
 One evening, when his time had come to die,

My father said since I was four years old
 I might as well get used to something now:
 I had the old man's brother's name, and so
 The dead drunk, wallowing in death, loved me.

The grandfather's love for his brother provides the strongest emotional and intellectual commitment in the text, but the poet, rather than affirming that bond, is concerned that the old man never articulated his reasons (as if reasons are necessary). Without words, the poet implies, their love is meaningless. This absence of words forms a still point in the middle of the poem, a conspicuous silent vacuum that will recall our attention. The poet, brought as a child to the old man's deathbed, learns that he was named after his grandfather's beloved brother, "so / The dead drunk, wallowing in death, loved me." The silent, incommunicative old man puts his faith (and love) in a word, the name of his brother, but for the poet that single word is not enough. The unarticulated love between him and his grandfather seems neither real nor binding.

The poem concludes by exploring these ambiguous familial and social relations which are the poet's heritage:

I have nothing to live for but my death:
 Alone, last of a crowd of solitudes,
 Half-wondering where I am and how I came
 To carry a beloved dead man's name.
 Lashed to the wall by pain, half stupefied

By dreams of liquor, my grandfather died
 Hoping to hang his fearsome love on me.
 All right, he did so; now I let him be.
 And, though, I know the comfort of a lie,
 I pray to keep my mouth shut when I die.

These familial bonds are contradictory in almost every conceivable way: they are both comforting and fearsome, disrupted and continuous, as well as binding and isolating; they entangle the living with the dead, life with death, and the present with the past. The silence of the old man isolates the poet from his grandfather, "the dead drunk, wallowing in death," but it also is embraced by the poet: "I pray to keep my mouth shut when I die."

The poet's heritage may be nothing more than his own unarticulated and inexplicable connections to all the individuals in the text, this "crowd of solitudes" that includes both his family and the morticians. Like "Lying in a Hammock..." (122), this poem reduces the poet to his nuclear self; here, though, it is that self as it is disconnected yet bound to complex social and familial relations. The desire for human bonds is everywhere evident in the text, including its rhythmic pattern and rhyme scheme. The final rhyming couplet, for example, is like a maliciously distorted childhood prayer, with the adult poet knowing that his vow of silence at death, like that silence of the old man, is itself "a lie."²⁹ This prayer harks

back to the recitation of John 3:16 by his grandmother. The poem is an exploration of the absence of those verbal manifestations of love; the allusion itself offers "the comfort of a lie."

The absences and silence within the text suggest the poet's own inarticulateness, and they disrupt the attempts at artificial closure which the masculine rhymed couplets try to impose. Wright's use of slant rhyme, on the other hand, illustrates relationships which are real and forceful. In the first stanza, for example, the rhyme words "smoke," "drink," and "back" have an indirect, implied connection: the industrial wastes, including the ravages of the old man's home life, do lead him to drink, and his final "dreams of liquor" ultimately cause his broken back and death. What interests me most right now, however, are the conspicuous silences in those lines which have no rhymes: the words, like the poet, beg for some connection (even as they disparage the forced artificial rhymes): "I had the old man's brother's name, and so / The dead drunk, wallowing in death, loved me." This lack of a real bond resonates throughout the poet's depiction of his grandfather, and Wright places part of the blame for that on the industrial society. In the same way, the couplet beginning the last stanza (a stanza notable for the artificiality of the rhymes: "came"/"name"; "me"/"be"; "lie"/"die") is disturbing because of its lack of firm connections ("I have

nothing to live for but my death: / "Alone, last of a crowd of solitudes") as well as its implied connection, that being isolated and alone is itself a type of death. This crowd of isolated individuals, like Baudelaire's crowd, leads us back out into the streets where the conflict between individual and industrial society and the conflict between academic and laborer continue to be unresolved. This "crowd of solitudes," consisting of academics as well as the working class, can only keep growing and wandering aimlessly, tripping over dried horse manure. This crowd consists of both internal forces and external elements: it is the multiple, jostling, and contradictory elements within the poet himself, and it is that very real and wayward "crowd of solitudes" created by late capitalism.

Notes

1. This quotation is taken from a letter Wright wrote to the editors of the American Poetry Review (Vol. 3.3); the letter is a snarling, ironic defence (I particularly enjoy the British variant "cheques") against the faulty perceptions that the poetry audience and critics have about poets, poetry, and readings. I discuss this letter in more detail in the following chapter.

2. I know of only two sources which trace in detail the historical development of creative writing programs on American campuses, and these two texts provide stimulating, but occasionally contradictory, information: Stephen Wilbers's The Iowa Writers' Workshop: Origins, Emergence and Growth and D. G. Myers's dissertation titled "Educating Writers: The Beginnings of 'Creative Writing' in the American University."

3. My indebtedness to Robert von Hallberg will very quickly become evident, though--to be honest--I must acknowledge that my own preference for oppositional poetics differs radically from his political espousal of accommodating poetry, so my interpretation of much of his data often runs counter to his own. In that light, the absence of an extended discussion of Wright in his book bolsters my thesis.

4. Arnold, though, does not stop with issues of national economics. "This zeal," he observes, "for making a nation's great instrument of thought,--its language,--correct and worthy, is undoubtedly a sign full of promise,--a weighty earnest of future power" (260). That future power is, of course, not restricted by national borders: it can be transported and translated into cultural imperialism.

5. Robert von Hallberg argues, though, for the importance of understanding New York City as the cultural center of the United States after World War II, a position which, if true in the past, is certainly not the case today.

6. Kermode, too, points to social relations in which universities, like Arnold's much admired French Academy, have influence and maintain elaborate initiation procedures: "It is, however unemphatically, however modestly, hierarchical in structure, because its continuance depends on the right of the old to instruct the young; the young submit because there is no other way to the succession. The old, or senior, apply at their discretion certain checks on the competence of those who seek to join, and eventually to replace them.... [T]he possession of interpretive power,

power of divination, is tested only by reference to the tacit knowledge of the seniors, who nevertheless claim, tacitly as a rule, that they can select candidates capable of acquiring these skills, and have the right to certify that they have achieved them" (169).

7. My views on the relationship between education and power structures are informed by Michel Foucault's Power/Knowledge, as well as a number of recent Marxist studies, especially Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis's Schooling in Capitalist America, Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron in Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture, Michael W. Apple's Education and Power, and Martin Carnoy's essay "Education, Economy, and the State." Richard Ohmann's English in America specifically addresses the relationship between the work being done in English departments and what he describes as "the Military-Industrial Complex." He problematically, for example, asserts that English teachers "have traditionally attempted to teach: organizing information, drawing conclusions from it, making reports, using Standard English (i.e., the language of the bourgeois elites), solving problems (assignments), keeping one's audience in mind, seeking objectivity and detachment, conducting persuasive arguments, reading either quickly or closely, as circumstances demand, producing work on request and under pressure, valuing the intellect and its achievements. These are all abilities that are clearly useful to the new industrial state, and, to the extent that English departments nourish them--even if only through the agency of graduate assistants--they are giving value for society's money" (301-2). The most poignant critiques of Ohmann's work that I am familiar with are Gerald Graff's "English in America," William E. Cain's "English in America Reconsidered: Theory, Criticism, Marxism, and Social Change," and Frank Lentricchia's response to Cain, "On Behalf of Theory."

8. Ohmann observes, "There is just no sense in pondering the function of literature without relating it to the actual society that uses it, to the centers of power within that society, and to the institutions that mediate between literature and people. In other words, the function of literature and the role of English teachers cannot be understood except within the context of a given society and politics" (303)

To locate Wright within the historical context and power struggles of academic literary studies, see Gerald Graff's Professing Literature: An Institutional History.

9. Among the most helpful materials I have read about the opportunities the English classroom provides for resistance are Robert Con Davis's "A Manifesto for Oppositional

Pedagogy: Freire, Bourdieu, Merod, and Graff," Henry Giroux's Border Crossing: Cultural Workers and the Politics of Education, Wayne Burns's Journey Through the Dark Woods, particularly the chapter "The Teacher as Revolutionary," and Bruce Henricksen's essay "Teaching Against the Grain."

10. I suspect Wright's view here is at least partially informed by Ortega y Gasset's Revolt of the Masses, a book and an author Wright frequently reread (Collected Prose 174); if this is the case, Wright is using education in this instance as a way to protect individuals from violence by the "masses."

11. Wright states, "For the benefit of readers unfamiliar with the idiom of southeastern Ohio and the West Virginia Panhandle, I should point out that the word 'anything,' as commonly used, is neither an abstraction nor a vague generalization. The term has a specific meaning. I am not going to define it here. I don't like to think about it. I know a boy who got caught by two railroad dicks and they did something to him. He didn't die. I am old enough to realize that the process of human dying is sometimes very long and painful. But it is easy to be dead" (325).

12. Wright's complex relation with his other "teacher," Horace, is also worth pursuing. See especially "Prayer to the Good Poet" (227), also in Two Citizens, and "Imitation of Horace" (unc 1958) and "To Horace" (unc 1975).

13. Wright had a number of prestigious teachers: while an undergraduate at Kenyon College, his teachers included John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Philip Timberlake (for whom he wrote the elegy "A Winter Day in Ohio" included in Saint Judas), and--of course--Charles Coffin; Robert Penn Warren and Robert Lowell were visiting instructors; at the University of Washington, Wright studied under Theodore Roethke and Stanley Kunitz (James Wright: A Profile 145). It may also be interesting to note that The Green Wall is dedicated to Roethke, among other people; Saint Judas is dedicated "To Philip Timberlake, my teacher, and to Sonjia Urseth, my student"; and To a Blossoming Pear Tree is dedicated to Helen McNeely Sheriff, Wright's former high school teacher.

Wright's correspondence during the late fifties with Roethke also sheds light on Wright's views of the social organization of universities and the cultural authority of professors, as well as his personal relations with both Roethke and Ransom.

14. This is quoted in Hank Lazer's "Poetry Readings and the Contemporary Canon" (69). It is also interesting to note that in a telephone conversation with me on 24 February

1992, Silliman emphasized that his own experiences as a poet parted ways with academia when he was an undergraduate at the University of California, Berkeley: he left school and did not complete his bachelor's degree.

15. In "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" Jameson observes: "Indeed, one way of marking the break between the periods and of dating the emergence of postmodernism is precisely to be found there: in the moment (the early 1960s, one would think) in which the position of high modernism and its dominant aesthetics become established in the academy and are henceforth felt to be academic by a whole new generation of poets, painters, and musicians" (124).

16. Other authors have probed the complex intertwining of the publishing and book marketing industries with academic institutions. Ron Silliman, for example, states, "...the relative efficiency of trade distribution virtually guarantees its predominance on college course reading lists, which is the largest single market for books of poetry, with 2500 colleges and 200 writing programs in North America" (30, Silliman's emphasis).

17. Hallberg notes, "...[T]he audience for all serious poetry, established as well as avant-garde, grew during the early 1960s. In one year, between 1963 and 1964, the total distribution of Poetry magazine jumped by almost 50 percent to just under 10,000. And no one needs to be reminded just how many small poetry magazines have appeared in the last twenty years.... One of the consequences of this growth of po-biz was that a young poet starting out in the 1960s stood a good chance of selling as many copies of his or her first book as T.S. Eliot had sold, forty years earlier, of The Waste Land" (14).

18. I am here only presenting, in summary form, the analysis of the data that the two authors provide. The statistical and demographic information from which they based their analysis, as well as information about the surveys themselves, are interesting and valuable in their own right.

19. Zill and Winglee do not discuss in detail the complex interconnections between the various factors determining the audience for poetry. An individual, for example, whose income and career possibilities have been restricted by education and race will not have the luxury of developing the reading habits which a person from a dominant class would have.

20. In "Patria Mia," Pound develops an extended analogy of the capitalistic cultural production which differs radically from Mayakovsky's: "As the factory owner wants one man in his employ to do some one mechanical thing that he can do almost without the expenditure of thought, so the magazine producer wants one man to provide one element, let us say one sort of story and another articles on Italian cities and above all, nothing personal" (111). When Mayakovsky presents the analogy of the artist as a producer in direct relation to her readers (and listeners), the poet is fully cognizant of her relation to the means of production and an economic base, and she consciously engages in the manufacturing process; Pound's analogy, however, reveals the delimiting role of publishers in capitalist societies, where they function as middlemen mediating between writers and their audience and imposing stylistic standards. As Lentricchia states, "...the very materiality of capitalist culture, according to Pound--which is the sign of that culture's insidiously intimate economic setting of human behavior--is necessarily also the index of capitalist culture's degradation, of our severely diminished capacity, under capitalist conditions...to be human" ("Lyric" 77).

21. Contrast these opening lines of "At the Executed Murderer's Grave" with Wright's later "Names Scarred at the Entrance to Chartres" (251) which begins: "P. Dolan and A. Dolan / Have scrawled their names here." Wright both aligns himself with the Dolans and distances himself from them:

I have no way to go in
Except only
In the company of two vulgars,
Furies too dumb to remember
Death, our bodies' mother, whose genius it is
To remember our death on the wet
Roads of Chartres, America, and to forget
Our names.

22. During the late fifties, Poetry (Chicago), which published an earlier version of this poem, was paying fifty cents per line of poetry.

23. Silliman's essay "The Political Economy of Poetry" in The New Sentence is a particularly insightful discussion of the commodification of poetry.

24. In the interview with Andre, Wright relates an interesting story about Leopardi in which an aristocratic woman rejected the poet's advances; when asked for her reasons, she simply responded, "My dear, he stank" (MA 146).

25. Doctorow describes Wright as being "the kind of student with whom a professor would associate" (16), yet he attracted and relished an entourage of "the weirder students of the community" (17).

26. Once again--as on the dust jacket for Saint Judas--Wright returns to the Gospel of John. Wright's sermon notes contain several references to the writer of the fourth gospel: "A. John is to my mind the dark lyric poet of the Gospels.... B. Yet he is not an ornamental poet, His [sic] chps. short, his words blunt. Not blunted but sharp. C. His accounts of Jesus' life, episode by episode are more brief than those of the other three who, in their way, were more skillful storytellers.... Yet in John's account there is a ferocity of swiftness, a clear mind almost pouncing in medias res upon the meaning of Jesus' most complex actions. In John, as in Jesus himself, I have always sensed something that could almost be called a contempt for false rhetoric" (126).

27. Reading these and other poems by Wright always bring to mind a different literary tradition with which these texts have much in common. I am thinking of those poems included in Dan Tannacito's "Poetry of the Colorado Miners: 1903-1906," the poems in Jack Salzman's two anthologies Social Poetry of the 1930s and Years of Protest, and the recently reprinted American Stuff: An Anthology of Prose and Verse by Members of the Federal Writer's Project. The poems in these collections, like Wright's, insist on being read as more than autotelic, literary niceties.

28. In "The Refusal" (78) Wright presents an equally gloomy portrait of morticians: "Preacher and undertaker follow the cars; / They claimed the comfort of the earth, and lied."

29. Contrast that couplet with Wright's rhymes and rhythms in this contorted and highly monosyllabic version of the prayer for children:

And when I lay me down to die
Let me call back I might have used
The woman of a girl who loved me
Enough to let me let her lie
Alone in her own loneliness,
And mind her own good business.

"So She Said" (192)

CHAPTER FIVE

WRIGHT'S ECONOMIC CONNECTIONS WITH OFFICIAL VERSE CULTURE¹

This poem frightens me
So secretly, so much
"To the Creature of the Creation" (260)

If these lines get published, I will hear
From some God damned deaf moron who knows
Everything. The dead are nothing.
And he will be right.
"At the Grave" (239)²

Wright's poems foreground conflicts between classes and within social formations in late capitalism, and the poet ideologically aligns himself more with workers than intellectuals or the wealthy; in this context, Williamson refers to Wright as being "characteristically bodily, proletarian" (67) while James Breslin points to Wright's depictions of "sub-middle-class existence" (172). The oppositional nature of Wright's social poetry creates two problems concerning his relations with academia and official verse culture: first, conflicts relating to his peripheral involvement (his status as both an "insider" and an "outsider") in creative writing programs--as they emerged on university campuses during the 60s, occupied a unique

position in the socio-political formation of the academy, and established poetry networks which he had access to-- second, problems arising from his choice of publication outlets within those "po-biz" networks, outlets which have their own complex economic connections with the dominant culture.

Because American poetry is currently centered around academic institutions, especially creative writing programs, colleges and universities are major influences defining the social impact, parameters, distribution, and audience for poetic production: as Bettina J. Huber notes, "four-fifths of the undergraduate English programs in the United States have courses in creative writing and ...close to half have degree programs" (173), and D. G. Myers observes that "At last count there were more than 300 degree-granting programs in creative writing disgorging as many as 1,000 graduates yearly" (5).³ Mayakovsky's manufacturing model for the production of poetic texts can be juxtaposed with the current institutionalization of poetic production, as described (rather caustically) by Philip Levine:⁴

As for those of us here in the United States of America in the second half of the twentieth century, we have developed something called Creative Writing, a discipline that not only flourishes on hundreds of campuses but has even begun to invade the public schools. It has

produced most of the poets--for better or worse--now writing in the country. One can only regard it as one of the most amazing growth industries we have. Thus, at the same time as we've made our society more racist, more scornful of the rights of the poor, more imperialist, more elitist, more tawdry, money-driven, selfish, and less accepting of minority opinions, we have democratized poetry. Today anyone can become a poet: all he or she need do is travel to the nearest college and enroll in Beginning Poetry Writing and then journey through the dozen stages of purgatory properly titled Intermediate Poetry Writing and Semi-Advanced Poetry Writing, all the way to Masterwork Poetry Writing, in which course one completes her epic on the sacking of Yale or his sonnet cycle on the paintings of Edward Hopper, or their elegies in a city dumpster, and thus earns not only an MFA but a crown of plastic laurel leaves. (533-4)

Levine relates this institutionalized model of poetic production, a miniature capitalistic enterprise--a "growth industry"--to failings within the dominant culture itself, and he denigrates the achievements possible from such an "apprenticeship," as well as the final products: the Yale and Hopper epics and the dumpster elegies. Levine's attack on the nature and value of creative writing programs

resonates with the same type of criticism leveled against those programs by literary academics and other poets, including Bly's frequent harangues and Donald Hall's description of workshop poems as "McPoems."⁵

Richard Hugo in his essay "In Defense of Creative-Writing Classes" describes--in a graphic overstatement--the awkward relationship between creative writers and the literature faculty: "...in many of our large state universities, creative writers suffer a status something like Japanese prisoners in World War II" (57). Hugo defines, among the numerous reasons for that status, an underlying economic tension: "Today the department budget in most state universities is based on enrollment statistics. A department may not get more budget line positions if the enrollment goes up, but it might very well lose positions if the enrollment goes down" (59). Because creative writing workshops remain popular and continue to sustain high enrollments, these same economic interests ensure writing programs a future position among the English curriculum;⁶ but that popularity also aggravates the social organization within the department: as Hugo observes, the declining enrollment in literature courses "hardly endears creative writing to the average academic that ...has spent years of hard work getting the Ph.D. degree, involving himself deeply in scholarship and criticism, and now his position depends on the presence of people who don't care about his

expertise" (59). This idea may partially explain the source of internal tensions experienced by an academic poet, like Wright, who primarily teaches literature, but Hugo's argument, valid though it may be, ignores other primary points of disagreement between creative writers in the academy and other English faculty, not the least of which are theoretical issues regarding the predominant poetic style taught in contemporary workshops and its emphasis on personal voice over craftsmanship.

When asked about Roethke's methods as a creative writing teacher during the 50s, Wright responded:

He taught mainly the craft, and he, like Berryman and Lowell, was an entirely conscious craftsman. He understood that the relation between the craft and the mysterious imagination is not what we conventionally think it to be. There are some people who think that a very careful, conscious craftsmanship will repress your feelings. And Roethke understood that it is careful, conscious craft which liberates your feeling and liberates your imagination. (PS 198)⁷

Like Mayakovsky, Wright sees poetic production--ultimately involving complex social relations between writers and readers of poetry--as the application of poetic craftsmanship to raw materials (interestingly, he carefully avoids the economic connection): in a poem addressing Horace

("Prayer to the Good Poet" [227]), Wright observes that "I worked once in the factory that he [Wright's father] worked in. / Now I work in that factory that you live in."⁸

Writing poetry entails participation in a manufacturing process which Wright describes as "liberating"; and involvement in creative writing workshops--like those conducted by Roethke--can serve as an apprenticeship period for learning the poetic craft necessary for that manufacture. In "Willy Lyons" Wright talks about his "uncle, a craftsman of hammer and wood" who "planes limber trees by the waters / Fitting his boat together," while in "To Build a Sonnet" (unc 1964), Wright defines himself as a craftsman and laborer:

I had not gone back there, because to go
 Meant pouring moonlight of a skinny kind
 On slag-heap, that my mother used to know:
 Slow smoldering hell, shrunken, and hard to find.
 Now I have gone back there, it is no dream;
 It is broad walking; I have leave to go.
 But not of anybody's goodness now.
 It is my native rocks I go back to.

And build a sonnet. Laboring as I hide
 Behind the shadow of this great hinge flung wide
 Where Clare, John Ransom, Robinson stepped forth
 I lift my slight wall, yawing to one side,

My spine a splinter between winds, yet worth
 More than the losses of my life on earth.

This poem has an odd reflexivity regarding Wright's relationship with academic institutions: the poem was published in the Macalester College student literary magazine while Wright was a teacher at the college. The hybrid Petrarchan sonnet narrates its own construction and the "building" of sonnets; it reads like an instructional manual--a concept implicit in the title--and was presumably published for Macalester students. The poem's consciousness of its own history within the sonnet tradition is matched by the poet's awareness of his own presence in the poem and his relationship with such earlier sonneteers as Thomas Wyatt, John Clare, E. A. Robinson, and Wright's former teacher, John Crowe Ransom. In this notably educational context, however, Wright foregrounds his connections to the working classes and distances himself from academia. In the same way, though, his self-consciousness both conjoins him with laborers and craftsmen as well as establishes his essential differences from them. If we accept Anthony Easthope's assertion that iambic pentameter and sonnets are aligned more closely with the higher social classes than with common laborers (77), Wright appears to be stranded between the two classes and between industrial and poetic production.

The octet consists of two independent quatrains: the first one establishes Wright's reluctance to go home because

of the industrial labor conditions there: "to go / Meant pouring moonlight of a skinny kind / On slag heap." As we have seen in several previous poems, he often personalizes these impersonal industrial practices by contextualizing them within family life and revealing their destructive effects. This time, however, the searing domestic evidence is difficult for the poet to detect: it is a "slow smoldering hell, shrunken, and hard to find." The line itself is hesitant (the two long /o/s and two caesuras), prolonged (eleven syllables), and metrically irregular. The evidence, though difficult to pinpoint, is subtly embedded in the parataxis and the gaps which unite that "hell" and its "shrunken" residue.

The second quatrain confirms that the poet did indeed make the trip home, only to recognize (or hope, at least) that he differs from the industrial laborers there--he can walk away; he is not a slave indentured to some capitalist's goodness; he is not "one slave to Hazel-Atlas," as he describes his father in "At the Executed Murderer's Grave" (82). Yet he is not completely free: the final two lines, lacking the masculine rhymes present in the rest of the poem, end with slant rhymes: "But not of anybody's goodness now. / It is my native rocks I go back to." He maintains an indirect connection to his family in the first quatrain; but he also anticipates his departure from home and introduces his interest in poetic production by parodying the final

stanza of Thomas Wyatt's poem "They Flee from Me," which states in part:

It was no dreame: I lay brode waking.
 But all is torned, thorough my gentilnes
 Into a straunge fasshion of forsaking;
 And I have leve to goo of her goodness,
 And she also to vse new fangilnes.

While Wyatt laments his present circumstances and remembers when he was actively pursued by both Lady Fortune and women in the court, Wright views his past as something he must escape (he is "broad walking"). He wants to believe that his change in fortune is an improvement "worth / More than the loses of my life on earth," but he is as uncertain of his future as he is of his past. Claiming that his trip home was not a dream, he also implies that he was--again unlike Wyatt--not "brode waking." His interest in building sonnets is a dream, both a nightmare of what life within industrial conditions is like, as well as a dream that remains unbounded by mines and industrial mills. "Dream" is the only unrhymed word in the poem, and it suggests his freedom from the "slow smoldering hell," even as it is itself tainted by industrialization.

That dream which is born on his "native rocks" directs him toward a second type of work: sonnet-writing, the type of labor which Wyatt helped to establish in England. It, too, is not ideal work--or he would not be hiding in a

shado

equi

a pa

Clar

may

rema

ment

metr

octe

tea

stu

con

Yet

alr

dia

whe

whe

dis

ful

him

be

Bri

que

shadow and building a wall which threatens to destroy his equilibrium. This time, he is apprehensive and hiding from a past he cannot claim for his own: it belongs to Wyatt, Clare, Ransom, Robinson, Frost, Hardy, and other poets who may have flung the doors of poetry wide open, but Wright remains too uncomfortable to simply walk in. Just mentioning "Clare, John Ransom, Robinson" disrupts his metrical line--even more than the "smoldering hell" in the octet. Wright, a laborer's son, the builder of sonnets, the teacher modelling his finished poetic product for his students, the descendant of other sonneteers, remains connected to these laborers, teachers, poets, and students. Yet he is equally disconnected. As we have seen many times already, Wright's texts are engagements in his own negative dialectical method; he situates himself in the tense spaces where contradictions crash together, those awkward positions where he is neither free from restraint nor completely disconnected; he is torn between nothingness and an inhumane fullness. He begins as an industrial worker and crafts himself into a literary laborer, never allowing himself to be fully comfortable with either.

The fact that Wright, the poetic craftsman, taught British fiction rather than poetry workshops raises questions about his involvement with creative writing

programs. He responded, when asked about the "real value" of those programs:

I took the master's in creative writing to get it the hell out of the way. Don't you have to learn every essential thing by yourself.... I wanted to be a serious teacher and I wanted to get the M.A. out of the way so I could get down to the serious work of the doctorate, which I did. And I wrote it on Dickens. My subject as a teacher, my main subject, is the history of the English novel.

(PS 198-9)⁹

Like Berryman and Levine, Wright stresses the importance of self-learning in regard to poetry (again confirming his belief that the production of art is a solitary process), and he goes even further by separating his creative thesis from "the serious work," his dissertation on Dickens. Wright's peripheral relationship with creative writing programs--a familiarity and involvement with them, yet eagerness to separate himself from them--while allowing him advantageous access to "both parts" of English departments, also left him without secure connections to either. His peers did not know what to make of a scholar who wrote poetry.

This pattern of inclusion and exclusion that we have seen in so many other contexts continued as he began teaching full-time. The creative writer chose not to teach

creative writing: "I tried it [teaching creative writing] once and failed at it completely because all I could do was sit and talk to the class. And someone would ask me a question, how I worked on something, and all I could do was grunt" (198). When teaching a poetry workshop, Wright failed to do what he most admired about Roethke's class: he did not teach poetic craft but focussed instead on his own idiosyncratic means of production. Ignoring the labor practices which, at least early in his career, he felt were essential, left him in an uncomfortable and strained relationship with his students and creative writing programs in general. Bly observes,

He didn't think of himself as a creative writing teacher, and didn't want to teach it. He loved Sterne, Dickens, the English novel.... [H]e wanted to be a good teacher of the English novel. He was in that sense at home in the university. In one book jacket he said, "I am a bookish man." He was uneasy about the relationship of universities to living writers, and to the practice of poetry.... [H]e respected the academic personality and he was determined to be polite. But felt some black humor in "the poet in the university." (13)

Wright, then, was loosely affiliated with creative writing programs because of his one course with Roethke¹⁰ and one

failed attempt at teaching a writing workshop; after these two experiences, he distanced himself from creative writing workshops and established his career as a professor of literature. The precariousness of this academic position in some instances hurt him: at the University of Minnesota, for example, where Wright was unwilling to teach creative writing, he was denied tenure.¹¹ I belabor this point to show Wright's tenuous position in creative writing programs and within the university itself. Yet as a publishing poet, even this marginalized status situated him within an influential network of poets, administrators, and editors--a network with important connections for publishing his poems.¹² Wright's letters to Roethke in late 1957 and early 1958, which I am unable to quote, suggest his knowledge of this network, his desire to be initiated into it, and his connections with editors and established older poets.

Wright already at this early point in his career was concerned, for a variety of reasons--including money and the development of his career--about editorial "networking," reviewing, poetry readings, and establishing publication outlets for himself: "success" as a poet necessitated that he be attentive to the literary, social, and economic practices relating to poetic publication.¹³ As Watkins notes, the material means of production for contemporary poets like Wright were easily accessible, so poetry became

subjected to two new systems of control from within the publishing industries:

On the one hand, there was a complicated selection process centered in the editorial offices of book and journal publications, and the apparatus of reviewing and the like, which continually monitored how and what poems circulated in print. And on the other, there was an increasingly more complicated and structured process of cultural education that differentiated from the whole susurrus of poetic-like-sorts-of-writing what was "genuine poetry," that is, which elaborated in great detail the refinement of cultural means of writing poetry. (40, Watkins's emphasis)

My present concern includes Wright's involvement with both of these systems and particularly the ways in which his connections within the poetry apparatuses undercut the effectiveness of his poems.¹⁴

Because there are thousands of poetry readings in the United States each year, with an audience in the tens of thousands, the reading circuit is now--in Donald Hall's words--"the chief form of publication for American poets" (56). The NYC Poetry Calendar and Poetry Flash out of the San Francisco Bay area, to give just two examples, suggest the extent of this circuit by listing hundreds of readings each month at various sites.¹⁵ Besides being economically

lucrative for "star" poets, readings (often sponsored by colleges and universities) contribute to the process of defining the parameters of official verse culture, or as Hank Lazar notes, "The poetry reading, as presently constituted, and especially on American university campuses, plays a small but significant role in legitimizing, judging, and promoting certain varieties of poetry" (64). That role is accomplished by "filtering" which poets can read at a particular campus and by the publicity and actual introductions, during the readings, of the poets.¹⁶ Poetry readings, then, have contributed to the institutionalization of poetry and the maintenance of official verse culture. Hall comments on this interrelation between readings and poetic "networks":¹⁷

The poetry reading can become a commodity for trade. I had not been teaching long when I had a letter from a poet on another campus suggesting that he and I exchange readings next year. It seemed a friendly notion.... Suddenly I realized that he proposed an impropriety: that we each use our influence to spend the taxpayer's money (or endowment income) for the other.

And money is not the only item of trade. Sometimes when I visit a campus, I discover that I am invited not because I am so admired, alas, but because I am considered useful--to recommend my

host for a Guggenheim, to write a review, to print poems in a magazine which I edit, or to write a blurb for the jacket of a book. (69)

Readings provide an opportunity--especially for a young poet--to ingratiate herself into publication networks. Wright's interest in poetry readings was not motivated exclusively by money or connections, but in his readings, as well as his publications and correspondence, he carefully entrenched himself in the upper stratum of official verse culture and was not unwilling to use that position to his advantage.

Wright's numerous letters in the late 50s and early 60s to Roethke, Heilman, and Wayne Burns frequently contain comments about his financial and personal reasons for giving readings and writing critical essays and reviews; he states, for example, in a 19 November 1958 letter to Burns: "next week I must leave to give a series of public readings at Tufts, Connecticut, Wellesley, Buffalo, and several others. I'm doing it for money, of course, but I'm a ham actor too, of course" (106). Ultimately his hard work paid off: his readings on the eastern campuses provided a prestigious symbol of achievement and success in the literary marketplace.

Wright frequently returns in his letters--always ambivalently--to the issue of money. In the ironic and sometimes bitter letter to the editors of the American

Poetry Review, quoted in part in the epigraph to chapter four, Wright demonstrates that discomfort; he makes bristling comments about his involvement with poetry readings, his interest in financial matters, and his relationship with some members of his audience. He describes being approached by a callous young man who exclaimed that Wright's latest book was being lambasted by critics. The stranger unabashedly observed that he would like to hear Wright read. When Wright informed the man that he no longer gave poetry readings, the aspiring critic observed that another author had recently said the same thing and was now on the reading circuit again, collecting between one thousand and fifteen hundred dollars a reading. Because that unidentified man walked away before Wright could respond, he offers his comments in the letter:

I have nothing against readings. On the contrary, they have given me some of my happiest moments....

As for money, I love it very much. In my boyhood long ago, I even managed to pull out one of my own teeth prematurely with a pair of loose pliers. In accordance with the custom of those quaint Depression times, I virtuously and bloodily presented both sections of the snagged tooth to my parents, who, of course, bound by tradition, placed the fragments of the tooth under my pillow

that very night. In the morning I naturally found a dime had replaced the tooth. I liked that dime so much that, so help me, I didn't even spend it....

Reading my own work in public is a threat to my health, and, after careful consultation with my family doctor, I have decided to retire from such readings indefinitely. (69)

Though Wright, of course, did not retire from readings, his comments reflect his ambivalent involvement with the economics of poetic success. If poetry readings endanger his health and are like pulling teeth, the idea that he found them to be "some of my happiest moments" is disturbing--but probably true. Wright again is caught within a web of opposing forces. In a dialectical spirit that Wright (as well as Adorno and Benjamin) would have appreciated, Hall offers two observations in "Public Performance/Private Art": "(1) poetry readings are narcissistic exhibitions devastating to poet, audience, and American poetry; (2) poetry readings are the best thing that ever happened to poet, audience, and American poetry" (66). Wright's response to readings seem almost as bi-polar: he uncomfortably acknowledges their complicitous material base, but he also indicates their oppositional potential. Before noting in another letter to Burns his own "chatter[ing] to hangers-on" (110) at readings, Wright comments on his

willingness to use poetry readings as sites of interference:

Bly put me up to a dirty trick which, I hereby swear to God, I am going to carry out: this early winter I'm going to tour eastern schools, reading poetry (Tufts, Wellesley, Harvard, Buffalo, Poetry Center NY, etc.). At the academic places, I'm going to read aloud an extremely and stunningly beautiful poem out of Rexroth's book The Signature of All Things. Then I'm going to let the audience applaud. Then I'm going to tell them who wrote it. I'll let you know what happens. Rotten tomatoes. (98-9)

In poetry readings, as in so many other matters central to being economically and critically successful as a poet in late capitalism, Wright was torn: between his desire to read at the prestigious schools and his distrust and fear of that academic audience; between his love for poetry and his awareness that certain poets and types of poetics were unfashionable and unacceptable in high brow eastern academic institutions; and between his desire to make money through his poetic work and his repulsion by the economic system. Wright felt uncomfortable within the system and promoted the types of poetry it excluded, yet he continued to actively market his poetry and himself. As Bly notes, "...[H]e felt some black humor in 'the poet in the university.' And he'd laugh about a trip: 'Oh Jesus Christ, I just came back from

such and such a university (groan). Don't go to that one!'" (13).

During the late 50s and early 60s, when Wright was-- however ambiguously he may have felt about it--becoming established as a university teacher and poet, the audience for poetry publications was rapidly increasing (Hallberg 14), but Wright's success with this growing audience began long before this expansion; Ransom's acceptance of the poems "Lonely" and "Father" for publication in the Kenyon Review for Autumn 1951 was a stamp of approval--Doctorow calls it "akin to a Nobel Prize" (16)--not just at Kenyon College but in other national and international publishing markets as well.

By 1954, three years before the publication of his first book (as W. H. Auden's selection for the Yale Series of Younger Poets Award), Wright's poems were appearing in some of the most influential poetry magazines: Poetry, Sewanee Review, Kenyon Review, New Yorker, and Botteghe Oscure, among others.¹⁸ Levine observes that by 1954, Botteghe Oscure was "the best-paying and most prestigious literary magazine in the world" (540).¹⁹ Similarly, Wright's poems challenging social values of the dominant culture were regularly being published between advertisements for furriers, champagne, and imported cars in the New Yorker. Texts like "Vain Advice at the Year's End" (unc 1955), "The Private Meeting Place" (unc 1959), "To a Young

Girl on a Premature Spring Day" (unc 1959), and "To a Salesgirl, Weary of Artificial Holiday Trees" (unc 1959) appear on the glossy pages of the New Yorker, having passed through the ideological and aesthetic filters of the magazine.

Oddly enough, this last text, an appropriate poem for the New Yorker, is positioned beside a cartoon which depicts an escaping prisoner climbing down one of the prison's external walls; immediately below him stands a frowning guard, with a rifle ominously aimed at the prisoner's head. The balloon caption above the sheepish prisoner reads, "Shall I just climb right back into my cell?" If this cartoon had been juxtaposed with "At the Executed Murderer's Grave," for example, the possibilities for cultural neutralization which Wright's publication practices have incurred could be clearly seen. Instead, we can find the poem "Saturday Morning" (unc 1962) with its "racket of trucks" and "gulls poised" squeezed between an effervescent women swinging her own racket--this one designed for playing tennis--and a more poised advertisement for Evyan's Baroness; "Micromutations" (unc 1965), which begins with "A million years of death" and concludes "on the frozen floor of hell" is comfortably drifting between an ad for fine whiskey, a holiday cruise to St. Croix, and the delights of the Chateau Madrid--not the daily fare, I suspect, for the

"drunks of Belaire, Ohio," Harry Schultz, Patsy di Franco, or Joe Bumbico.

In an interview reprinted in Talking All Morning, Robert Bly comments on the New Yorker's privileged position within literary culture. He describes it, by appropriately using military terminology, as the epitome of official verse culture:

Someone told me a wonderful story about the Iowa workshop. A mood of anxiety had settled over the place--it was a few years ago. And one man set himself to trace the source of it, which he found to be a poet who was in the habit of saying that publishing a poem in Poetry was like being a colonel--if you publish in a mimeographed magazine you're a private--you see--and publishing in a magazine like Prairie Schooner is being a lieutenant...but publishing a poem in the New Yorker was like being a general.

(178, Bly's emphasis).

Wright's decision to publish in the New Yorker suggests a desire to achieve poetic success by marketing his texts in the upper publishing echelons. Much can be said, of course, about the larger readership of that magazine in comparison to small press publications, as well as the contradictory nature of the fiction, poetry, and political writing it publishes. Despite these characteristics--however favorable

they might seem--the New Yorker is itself an institution firmly connected to the social and cultural forces Wright's poems confront, and his choice to publish in the magazine, while advancing his poetic career, also posits his texts within the very hierarchical structures he criticizes.

Leonard Kniffel provides what he describes as a "calculable and meaningful" (103) analysis of the most influential American periodicals publishing poetry and fiction--those magazines which, he thinks, libraries should order. In hopes of determining "this country's best original fiction and poetry" (103), Kniffel tabulated which periodicals publish the most award winning poems and fiction. His results can be construed as support for Bly's story: out of the 426 magazines included in Kniffel's research sample the "resounding leader in this survey is the New Yorker, with a total of 164 published stories and poems published in the collections examined" (106). The closest competitor was Poetry, which was a distant second, garnering 73 prized works. Though this research method strikes me as a dubious way to determine poetic quality, particularly for texts which are socially critical, it reveals the pivotal location of the New Yorker within literary culture.

The poet who wrote "I croon my tears at fifty cents per line" and comments on his "paid sincerity" and "widely printed sighing" possibly does have reason to be concerned about the connection between his subject matter and

publication practices. This interrelationship between the aesthetic and the economic implies a complicitous involvement in the very capitalist social structures which he resists, as well as a perpetuation of the contradictions he himself remains caught in. In 1963, for a man undergoing a divorce, being paid fifty cents a line for a seventy-seven line poem like "At the Executed Murderer's Grave" (let alone three different versions of the poem published in three different outlets), would help buy needed groceries, but for a poet who vehemently attacks college educated morticians for being roaches feeding on the life of the poor, that complicity suggests a moral deviation. Wright's poems about working conditions for the poor are themselves disenfranchised from the lower classes and become commodities for an academically informed middle and upper class, or--as Herbert Schiller observes in Culture Inc.:

What distinguishes their [the various arts] situation in the industrial-capitalist era, and especially in its most recent development, are the relentless and successful efforts to separate these elemental expressions of human creativity from their group and community origins for the purpose of selling them to those who can pay for them. (31)

Wright's poems become, through his own publishing practices, commodities which are both material objects and cultural

products;²⁰ and he seems uncomfortably aware that his published poems, reviews, essays, and books are commodities with direct economic ties to the very system he challenges.²¹

The use-value of Wright's texts is, to an extent that we will have to examine in more detail, superseded by their exchange-value in the marketplace. Wright's involvement in the commodification of his poetry raises questions not only about his personal position, but (once again) the restricted role of poets in late capitalism.²² Charles Bernstein has written several articles about "official verse culture"; in the essay "The Academy in Peril" he defines and explores that concept at some length:

...[B]y "official verse culture"--I am referring to the poetry publishing and reviewing practices of The New York Times, The Nation, American Poetry Review, The New York Review of Books, The New Yorker, Poetry (Chicago), Antaeus, Parnassus, Atheneum Press, all the major trade publishers, the poetry series of almost all of the major university presses.... Add to this the ideologically motivated selection of the vast majority of poets teaching in university writing and literature programs and of poets taught in such programs as well as the interlocking accreditation of these selections through prizes

and awards judged by these same individuals. Finally, there are the self-appointed keepers of the gate who actively put forward biased, narrowly focussed and frequently shrill and contentious accounts of American poetry, while claiming, like all disinformation propaganda, to be giving historical or nonpartisan views. In this category, the American Academy of Poetry...stands out.... What makes official verse culture official is that it denies the ideological nature of its practice while maintaining hegemony in terms of major media exposure and academic legitimation and funding. (247-9)

Bernstein's list of publishers, awards, and university positions comprising official verse culture are an apt description of Wright's publishing practices and literary achievements, beginning with his early publications as an undergraduate student of Ransom's and continuing until his death. Ironically, Wright's poetry was published in these culturally powerful outlets: for example, "In a Warm Chicken House" (unc 1961) was published in the New York Times; "A Late Afternoon in Western Minnesota" (revised as "Brush Fire" [164]) appeared in the Nation; and "Romeo, Grown Old" (unc 1974) was published in the American Poetry Review. Wright's publication in these authoritative periodicals suggests that connections and political maneuvering within

the apparatuses of official verse culture define which poems are published, reviewed, and critically appraised.²³

Kalaidjian notes,

In fact, much executive tampering enters into the decisions about where and under what circumstances poets will be published, what awards will accrue to them, which organizations and performing circuits will underwrite their public readings, and how critics will cultivate their audiences. Verse writing in the postmodern era, it is plausible to claim, is less a visionary or sacramental art than a highly competitive industry. (15)

To the extent that Wright's texts comply with that competitive market, they risk sacrificing the very spiritual and prophetic vision which he aspired to attain in poems like "Mercy" and "At the Executed Murderer's Grave." Even the fact that his poetics were so readily accepted and absorbed by the most prestigious periodicals raises questions about the actual resistance these texts offered.

Wright did not actively seek the commercial and popular success which poets like Robert Frost, for example, courted.²⁴ In fact, the opposite is more easily supportable: Wright defined himself as a "literature teacher" (itself a privileged position, as Watkins notes), with an avocation for poetry, and when asked if he was

bothered "that the audience for poetry in America seems a small and an academic one," he responded, "No. I like that very much. At least I like a comparatively small audience. If indeed we can say that there is an audience for poetry" (DS 234). Wright's decision to publish in prestigious mass circulation magazines does, however, register support for the official verse culture and in turn the dominant culture itself²⁵. The same can be said about Wright's various books of poetry: his first five collections were published by major university presses (Yale and Wesleyan) and the remaining collections, published after 1971, were printed by large commercial houses. After winning the Pulitzer, Wright seems to have become more attractive to Random House and Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Richard Kostelanetz notes that "Perhaps the most 'prestigious' American poetry publisher is Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, whose junior partner, Robert Giroux, was also T. S. Eliot's American editor. His firm features the chiefs of that generation now between fifty and sixty--Robert Lowell, John Berryman, Elizabeth Bishop, and Randall Jarrell..." (13). Because of his success in the literary marketplace, together with the aesthetic qualities of his work, Wright must have seemed a suitable peer for the "chiefs" already publishing with Farrar. Again, Wright was positioning himself squarely in the ranks of the official verse culture. It is also important to consider that both the commercial and the university presses, which are

partially subsidized by state and federal monies, are equally imbedded in the dominant culture.²⁶

Wright's active involvement in that hegemonic culture, small and insignificant as the role of a poet may seem, is connected to larger commercial and economic concerns. His publication with Random House, for instance, connects him with a three billion dollar publishing enterprise owned by Rupert Murdoch. It is an empire which includes, as Kalaidjian notes, the Times of London, the New York Post, the Boston Herald, New York Magazine, 20th-Century Fox Corporation, New Woman magazine, Star magazine, Salem House, Ltd., Times Books London, William Collins and Sons, John Bartholomew, and Bay Books (19).²⁷ J. Kendrick Noble Jr., in turn, identifies the following imprints owned by Harper and Row: Basic Books, T. Y. Crowell, A. J. Holmon, and J. B. Lippincott (140), while Benjamin M. Compaine notes that Harper and Row Inc. publishes a variety of business and trade magazines (including specialized professional publications like the American Journal of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine) with a total of 376,300 paid and unpaid subscriptions (192).²⁸ Wright's financial association with multi-national publishers like Harper and Row, though increasing the availability of his texts, raises broader issues concerning his complicity in the reproduction of values and power structure supporting the dominant classes

at the social, psychological, and financial expense of the lower classes.

As we have discussed, Wright demonstrates in various texts a conscious awareness of those social groups which constitute his audience, as well as those individuals and groups unlikely to be readers of his texts, and he frequently foregrounds his own uneasy relationship with that upper class audience: the poet establishes monologues with and about the poor and working class individuals, draws attention to his own authenticity and "sincerity," exhibits antagonism toward an audience unwilling to cooperate with his sympathies, and courts illusory personal bonds to create and attract a more benevolent audience. Wright, while aware that his poems and books are themselves commodities (filled with "paid sincerity" and "printed sighing"), implies that his authenticity and poetic strategies justify his complicitous publication and distribution practices. Yet, that insistence was not always convincing, even for himself: in "A Prayer to Escape from the Market Place," he observes,

I renounce the blindness of the magazines.

I want to lie down under a tree.

This is the only duty that is not death.

This is the everlasting happiness

Of small winds.

Suddenly,

A pheasant flutters, and I turn

Only to see him vanishing at the damp edge
Of the road.

What is that "blindness of the magazines"? Why does the poet want to escape it? Is it the inability of magazine publishers to recognize good poems? Is it their unreasonable and incorrigible expectations for poets? Is it the writing conditions--and the need to "sell" their wares--that are forced upon poets? Is it an insular quality, an artificiality, of human commodities in the face of nature? Is it a failure on the part of editors and publishers to "see" their own position in the capitalist market? Is it simply that one of the poet's texts had not been properly appreciated by magazine staff members? Whatever that blindness of the magazines may be, Wright (though with some humor) identifies himself as a seer who is neither "self-blinded"--as in "Mercy"--nor blinded by the marketplace: he recognizes that literary market for what it is, and he has transcended the materiality and commodification of magazine publication. Because of his vision, the poet renounces the marketplace, or at least hopes and prays that he may. If Wright is turning to nature for comfort as he withdraws from magazine publication, his solace is short lived: the sudden "vanishing" of the pheasant (which interrupts his "everlasting happiness") is itself a variant of the cliches "A man and his money are soon parted" and "Riches have

wings." Not only can the transcendent seer not escape, he can neither transcend nor "see."

The literary marketplace, blind as it may be, also blinds those who cannot escape it. Desiring a larger readership is not in itself a negative attribute for a poet, but publication practices entail more issues than just those of audience quantification. "Success" in that market late in the twentieth century necessarily involves marketing one's poetic wares. But active participation in the literary market, and--more specifically--with official verse culture, can adversely affect the nature of poetry by establishing narrow poetic boundaries which restrict what poetic texts attempt and achieve. Official verse and workshop poems, with their emphasis on subjectivity, risk reproducing ideologies and values supporting the dominant culture. By turning inward toward the nuclear self and not engaging in the social arena, these texts accept the ideological status quo and do not "see" nature and social life, except as they are defined by current ideological structures; instead, they opt for a culturally mediated vision, itself an example of the "blindness of the magazines."

Wright's "Autumn Begins in Martins Ferry, Ohio" critiques--in an implicitly subversive way--our advanced industrial society even as it reveals the poet's complex involvement in that society. Another of Wright's frequently

anthologized lyrics, "Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy's Farm in Pine Island, Minnesota," offers a different example of the poet's ambiguous cultural work.²⁹ This text provides another view of the nuclear poet, the essence of self, in relation to a social and external world:

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

Hass describes one of Wright's texts as being "an American poem... [about] an American place, so the people who have will and force are Puritans, the hard-sleepers, enviers of pleasure.... Maybe the worst thing about American Puritanism is the position it forces its opponents into" (30). "Lying in a Hammock..." reveals Wright at yet another impasse in his confrontation with American history and culture: he has aligned himself with Puritanism, even as he

pits himself against it. His attention to the details of natural life have their roots in the Puritans' attentive observations of nature coupled with their introspective symbolizing: their persistent attempts to read natural signs as indications of divine election and the will of God. As Puritan texts frequently reveal, no detail is too small to be attended to, nor too trivial to have significance in a person's life. It is this purposive examination, even while "relaxing" on a hammock, that informs Wright's pursuit of natural symbols, and it is precisely in a symbolist vein that the poem needs to be read. The contradictory readings of this text by Bruce Henricksen, R. J. Spental, and David Jauss agree, in certain respects, on the range of interpretations possible for these symbols, and these critics see this range as being defined by sensory perceptions of natural and physical objects. I choose to address, instead, ways in which these symbols are mediated through language, poetic structures, and literary culture; the symbols in this text say less about astute natural observations than they do about Wright's skills for cultural reception and his willingness to pursue a versified culture at the expense of natural and social engagement.

Wright's observations, meditation, and final response to the objects on Duffy's farm are informed in part by Rilke's "Archaic Torso of Apollo." Robert Bly in his Selected Poems of Rainer Maria Rilke narrates a brief

exchange between Rilke and the sculptor Rodin: "When Rilke confided one day that he hadn't been writing lately, Rodin did not advise him to change diet or find a new relationship; he suggested that Rilke go to the zoo. What shall I do there? Look at an animal until you see it" (133). Rilke, according to Bly, followed Rodin's advice, and this exercise at the zoo involved prolonged observations of an object (or animal) until it could be "seen," stripped of its superficial features. Rilke's attempts to penetrate beneath an object's surface characteristics eventually led to those texts, including the "Archaic Torso of Apollo," which Bly refers to as "seeing" poems. In this meditation on an ancient, fragmented sculpture, Rilke displays a complex process of "seeing" that begins with physical description, but rather than noting those characteristics of the torso that are still intact and visible, the poet describes what is absent. Bly's translation begins, "We have no idea what his fantastic head / was like...." The text then focusses on the aesthetic effects the sculpture has on a viewer, notably that the statue itself has become a flaming light that "gleam[s] like the fur of a wild animal" and "send[s] out light from every edge / as a star does." Rilke's exercise in "seeing" does not conclude, though, with these descriptions: like Wright's text, this poem asserts that the poet and the reader are engaged in a process of self-examination: "there is no place at all / that isn't

looking at you. You must change your life." Rilke's attempts to "see," to strip objects of their ideological trappings, ultimately involve readers in a process of re-visioning and redefining their own lives.

Wright's poem, on the other hand, while demonstrating attempts to "see" a butterfly and horse droppings and to hear the distant cowbells, immediately invokes their absence: rather than penetrating beneath superficial qualities to "see" the objects, Wright understands, interprets, and transforms what he has seen and heard into images which are informed by literary culture. As David Jauss indicates, the first three lines present typically "poetic" images: butterflies and flowers. They are "staples of sentimental poetry about the beauty and peace of nature" (165). Besides illustrating his revelry in natural beauty, Wright's appropriation of these images serves his poetic agenda: the natural objects around him are both informed and obscured by his poetic prototypes, including Rilke's "Archaic Torso of Apollo." The butterfly sleeping on a tree trunk, for example, becomes more than an observation of a real butterfly when Wright's vision is conjoined with the goldsmith's work in Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium":

Once out of nature I shall never take
My bodily form from any natural thing,
But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
Of hammered gold and gold enamelling

To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;
 Or set upon a golden bough to sing
 To lords and ladies of Byzantium
 Of what is past, or passing, or to come.

Wright's presence in "Lying in a Hammock..." resembles that of the "Grecian goldsmiths" in Yeats's text: both transform natural objects into aesthetic images that can be propped on "a golden bough to sing." The butterfly Wright observed becomes metamorphosed into a cultural object, the "bronze butterfly." This transformation of reality into "literary" images permeates Wright's presentation of all the objects he presents in the text. Just as Yeats's artisans make golden birds to sing before the drowsy emperor, Wright (resting on a hammock) transforms last year's horse droppings into "golden stones." Even the "black trunk" becomes more than a description of a natural object when we remember the second line of Pound's "In a Station of the Metro": "Petals on a wet, black bough."³⁰ Wright, like Rilke and the speaker of Yeats's poem, is stepping "out of nature" and removing the "bodily form from any natural thing," but--unlike Rilke--Wright does not engage in this process to free the objects from their culturally mediated interpretations. Instead, he removes them from nature specifically to impose cultural images upon them. In a similar way, the last line of the poem becomes less a naturalistic statement than a culturally informed artistic pose: A. Poulin identifies it as an echo

of the final line in Rilke's "Archaic Torso of Apollo" (692), while Alan Williamson sees it as a quotation from Rimbaud's "Song of the Highest Tower" (70)--in Paul Schmidt's translation, that quotation is rendered, "Lack of heart / has cost my life." Regardless of its originary source, or its conflation of these and other sources, the final line--like the rest of the poem--reveals Wright, true to one facet of his Puritan background, attempting to interpret these natural images, but his interpretations are informed by the value he places on cultural products (including the texts by Rimbaud, Rilke, Yeats, and Pound) rather than an appreciation and observation of the natural objects themselves. He is prioritizing literary culture over the natural order, or his acceptance of official verse culture prevents him from "seeing" objects except as that culture allows them to be perceived and valued. In that sense, Wright's poem is an example of "false realism"--to borrow Fredric Jameson's description of contemporary art. Jameson notes, "False realisms, they are really art about other art, images of other images" ("Consumer Society" 123).

Wright's casual, leisurely tone in the poem also places him in opposition to his Puritan roots. Rather than seeking divine election and heeding his salvation, he decides to "lean back" in his (or, more plausibly, William Duffy's) hammock, even as he realizes he has "wasted his life" by being disengaged from it and passively presenting "images of

other images." After its original publication in the spring 1962 issue of the Sixties, the poem was reprinted--along with poems by Bly and William Duffy, as well as other Wright texts--in the chapbook The Lion's Tale and Eyes: Poems Written Out of Laziness and Silence. The deliberate flaunting of their "laziness," in the face of the Puritan work ethic, implies a revisionary approach to American culture, as Bly observes on the dust jacket, "In all of the poems, there is an effort to resist the Puritan insistence on being busy, the need to think of everything in terms of work." This resistance, as Hass has observed, forces Wright into the position of trying to assess his life and transcend the cultural influences that have informed him even as he relies upon the language and cultural products imbedded in that culture. Wright's poetic texts which offer levels of resistance to the dominant culture ultimately have their revolutionary status undercut by their own reliance on other cultural forms; in this case, products of literary culture are given predominance over "the Puritan insistence on being busy." Wright's terms of opposition are themselves defined by the dominant culture, and the solitary "I" who is "Lying in a Hammock" is a metamorphosed product of that culture. His engagement with Puritan history is posited in recycled British, German, American, and French images.

Fredric Jameson in his essay "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" provides a theoretical framework for

assessing Wright's process of transforming reality into culturally-informed literary images. Jameson describes postmodern works of art as being "pastiches," and he contrasts these pastiches with traditional "parodies." While parody involves a comic satirizing of recognizable forms, pastiche is parody "without the satiric impulse, without laughter, without that still latent feeling that there exists something normal compared to which what is being imitated is rather comic" (114).³¹ Wright's "Lying in a Hammock," as Jameson suggests, is not so much a conscious parody of poetic discourse as part of a larger echoic discourse that is determined and defined by its reliance upon the past. The text not only contains but is the various muffled resonances that inform it:

[I]n a world in which stylistic innovation is no longer possible, all that is left is to imitate dead styles, to speak through the masks and with the voices of the styles in the imaginary museum. But this means that contemporary or postmodernist art is going to be about art itself in a new kind of way; even more, it means that one of its essential messages will involve the necessary failure of art and the aesthetic, the failure of the new, the imprisonment in the past. (116)

Wright's pastiche, rather than confronting Puritan history, is constrained by its use of literary images which make that

history unapproachable and immediate social engagement problematic. Wright's reproduction of the literary past imprisons and prevents him from directly encountering and "seeing" the physical objects around him. "Cultural production," Jameson observes, "has been driven back inside the mind, within the monadic subject: it can no longer look directly out of its eyes at the real world for the referent must, as in Plato's cave, trace its mental images of the world on its confining walls" (118).³² Wright's confrontation with American culture in "Lying in a Hammock..." can be characterized by an inability to probe historical and cultural forces. The text is informed by those elements of the dominant culture which it attempts to redefine, until it finally reproduces those elements even as it resists them. Wright again keeps one foot on both sides of the proverbial fence--or maybe I should say Frost's "Mending Wall."

Wright's ambiguous, self-divided position in late capitalism can also be seen by examining the publication possibilities which he chose not to follow. In his essay "The Few Poets of England and America," he acknowledges the presence of commodified literature (for which he coins the term "consumeritem") as well as the availability of publication and marketing options which enable contemporary poets to resist commodification. While discussing Robert Creeley's poetry, he observes:

I doubt if Mr. Creeley himself is very deeply troubled by the fact that his work as an artist has not been transformed into something like Mr. Kerouac's--that is a consumer item, to be considered less the work of a struggling artist than a mass-produced fantasy designed to mirror the escapist daydreams of middle-class people who despise their own everyday lives with sullen despair. (270)

Creeley, by escaping entrenchment in the literary marketplace and resisting the forces of commodification, has earned Wright's respect, though Wright conjoins that resistance with the Romantic myth of the "struggling artist."

From the late 50s until his death Wright maintained personal and poetic connections with Robert Bly, and that relationship provides other examples of publishing practices which Wright could have adopted. As is evident from even a quick perusal of Bly's Fifties, Sixties, and Seventies, Wright was often involved in its various literary aspects--translations, original poems, and critical essays³³--and was frequently associated with the publication. But the radical nature of that journal and Bly's own publication history reveal how far Wright's publishing practices are from being exclusively oppositional. The acknowledgements for Bly's Sleepers Joining Hands, for example, reveal prior

publication in small press magazines such as Kayak, Lillabulero, Field, The Falcon, The Lamp in the Spine, and other alternative magazines: a list that differs considerably from Wright's own practices and is notable for its lack of participation in the apparatuses of official verse culture. Also, the combative relationship of the Fifties to literary culture, academic institutions, the book-reviewing and marketing industry, and other socio-political institutions reveals the possibilities for resistance and interference which were readily available during the years Wright was actively writing and publishing.

After Bly stated "The Order of the Blue Toad is herewith awarded to Norman Cousins, editor of the Saturday Review,³⁴ for putting out a boring, stupid magazine. His list of reviewers is enough to make anyone die of boredom..." (Fifties 3: 57), he did not consider his strategies for interference exhausted. He subsequently attempted to use the capitalist system to supplant the literary dominancy of both Cousins and the review: he placed an advertisement in the Saturday Review itself announcing the award. As could be expected, the advertisement was refused, so Bly printed the refusal notice in the following issue of his magazine. Bly's attack on what seemed at the time a powerful and established literary institution, the Saturday Review, was an upstart revolt by a young editor (who was a former Harvard fellow) against the official verse

culture that Cousins and the Saturday Review represented, printed, and supported through positive reviews of books by "its" authors. Similarly, the first issue of the Fifties includes a heated interview, conducted by Bly, with the Editor-in-Chief of the New York Times Book Review, discussing issues such as the subtle (and not so subtle) pressure for favorable reviews from book manufacturers; Bly explored the same topic in the Fall 1960 issue.

Bly's political tactics were not, however, restricted to struggles against literary publishers and literary issues: he recognized the need for poets to confront national and world political concerns. The 1959 issue of the Fifties addressed directly the relationship between poets and public policy:

We have received letters asking why, if we are poets, we concern ourselves with the activities of the Atomic Energy Commission. We believe that artists above all are not exempt from fighting in national issues. The greatest poets, Yeats among them, have opposed their government, or any organ of it, which was harmful to the people....

Condonement of the policies of the A[tomic]
E[nergy] C[ommission] would be a poor show of love
for the United States. (51, Bly's emphasis)

Poets, Bly asserts, "are not exempt from fighting in national issues"; instead, because of their cultural status

and because of the various forms of resistance available to them, they "above all" can and should effectively express their views. Once again, Bly did not simply state his position and then remain quiet and passive. Perceiving a connection between poetry, militarism, and universities, he printed in the Summer 1968 issue a full page reproduction of a letter from the journal's manager--his wife--to 31 universities. I print the letter in its entirety because it addresses issues relevant to Wright's own social criticism and involvement in the economics of publication:

We are canceling your subscription to The Sixties magazine, and/or back-ordered Sixties Press Books. We are not accepting trade from institutions we know to have money from the C.I.A. or the armed services for research on chemical and germ warfare.

Of course the university library isn't the agency in question, and of course we know how tiny our flailing against such powers must appear, but I think universities should be made to know the revulsion that private citizens feel against institutions they once trusted.

Even libraries shouldn't really expect to do "business as usual" when such elaborate cruelty as the proliferation of disease and torture through

chemical poisoning is being worked up on the same campus.

Please find attached a statement of your account with us, and where indicated, a refund against monies due you. (76)

Bly's resistance against "such powers" as the universities contain was a confrontation--financially and politically ineffective as it certainly must have seemed--with the militarism endorsed by bureaucrats and intellectuals.³⁵ It was also a rebellion against those poetry institutions which aligned themselves with that militarism. This interference in public policy by the literary practices of "private citizens" provides yet another model of resistance that Wright did not pursue.

I do not want to suggest that Robert Bly's personal, political, and poetic decisions should have been adopted by Wright nor that those stances were completely altruistic. Bly's subsequent marketing of himself as a guru deserving of reverence undermines, I believe, the efficacy of those positions and questions the possibility of sustaining such views. His actions do reveal, though, that American poetry during the 60s and 70s did not have to be dominated by the institutional practices and views of the official verse culture; as Wright indicated, literature is not exclusively a "consumeritem." Though he did not have to be as aggressive and overtly confrontational in his poetic

positions as Bly was, Wright did have a range of publishing possibilities open to him. We can assess the situation of his texts within contemporary culture by considering his actions, words, and decisions in relation to what he could have done, written, or said.³⁶ His turning from the "blindness of the magazines" to "lie down under a tree" seems, at the least, escapist and suggests his own complicitous involvement with the culture industry, or (to borrow his own words) in "a mass-produced fantasy designed to mirror the escapist daydreams of middle-class people who despise their own everyday lives with sullen despair" ("Few Poets" 270).

Notes

1. I borrow the phrase "official verse culture" from Charles Bernstein. Later in this chapter I provide his full definition of the phrase. For the time being, let me simply present another extended definition that he offers: "The official cultural apparatus, as it applies to American poetry--what I've called 'official verse culture'--is most clearly revealed in the publishing and reviewing practices of the New York Times, New York Review of Books, New Yorker, American Poetry Review, and a number of old-line literary quarterlies; by the Pulitzer Prize, the National Books Awards, and the Guggenheim and MacArthur Fellowships; by the poetry lists of the major trade publishers; by such presenting organizations as the Poetry Center of the 92nd Street Y in New York and the American Academy of Poets; and by the poets on the tenured faculties of the major U.S. universities. While the type of work supported by these institutions is diverse, and subject to a variety of pressures that encourage such diversity, the bulk of this verse tends to be blandly apolitical or accommodationist, neoromantic, and (often militantly) middle-of-the-road or, as it is now called, 'suburban'. [sic] Moreover, what is most striking is not the relatively unsystematic quality of the inclusions but the systematic nature of what is--with important strategic exceptions--excluded: almost all of the formally active poetry developing out of New American Poetry contexts, the many divergent small-press tendencies, and the poetry of gays, blacks, and hispanics, as well as the variety of 'ethnic' poetries that reject standard English as their dialect (categories that should be seen as overlapping rather than as distinct)" (Poetics 93-94).

2. I cannot help but wonder if Wright had horrible premonitions about me while he was writing "At the Grave." I hope not. I have some consolation, though, knowing his poems frighten himself, as much as me.

3. Myers comments on the academic institution as a monolithic presence for the majority of publishing poets: "Of the 134 poets reprinted in two recent anthologies, for instance--Jack Myers and Roger Weingarten's New American Poets of the 80's and Dave Smith and David Bottom's Morrow Anthology of Younger American Poets--nearly eighty percent are affiliated with the enterprise of creative writing in one way or another, either as graduates of a writers' workshop or as professors of creative writing. Typically they are both. Their post graduate education and academic employment seem often to be the only life they have lived. Those who fought with the U. S. Army in Vietnam or were trained as lawyers or work as psychotherapists cannot but

stand out from the ranks of poets who have spent the better part of their adult years taking and teaching classes in creative writing" (5).

4. Though beginning his essay with an attack on writing workshops (and his bad experience in Robert Lowell's class), Levine also discusses his one semester of study with John Berryman: "I had one great poetry writing teacher, I had studied with him diligently for fifteen weeks. From now on I had to travel the road to poetry alone or with my peers. This was his [Berryman's] final lesson, and it may have been the most important in my development" (551). Levine's concluding sentiment would be shared, I believe, by Wright.

5. In recent years numerous similar attacks on creative writing programs have been published, including Bly's "Where Have All the Critics Gone?" and his interview with Wayne Dodd "Knots of Wild Energy," both found in American Poetry: Wildness and Domesticity. In the first of those essays, Bly observes, "What I'm suggesting then is that there is a curious link of workshop creativity with white-color work..." (260). Also see Bruce Bawer's "Poetry and the University," Donald Hall's "Poetry and Ambition," Dano Gioia's "Can Poetry Matter?" Hank Lazer's "The Crisis in Poetry," Greg Kuzma's "The Catastrophe of Creative Writing," Donald Morton and Mas'ud Zavarzadeh's "The Cultural Politics of the Fiction Workshop," Ted Solotaroff's essay "The Literary Campus and the Person of Letters" in A Few Good Voices in My Head, and Joseph Epstein's "Who Killed Poetry?"

More positive assessments of writing workshops can be found in Wallace Stegner's essay "New Climate for the Writer" in The Writer in America, Richard Hugo's "In Defense of Creative-Writing Classes," and Stephen Wilbers's The Iowa Writers' Workshop.

6. Hugo also offers an historical justification--which Myers (correctly, I believe) refutes (16-7)--for the presence of creative writing programs on university campuses: "For around 400 years it [creative writing] was a requirement of every student's education. In the English-speaking world, the curriculum for grammar and high school students included the writing of 'verses.' In the nineteenth century, when literary education weakened or was dropped from elementary and secondary education, colleges picked it up, all but the creative writing. Creative writing was missing for 100 years or so, but in the past 40 years it has returned" (54). This historical context places the emphasis on exposing students to the writing of verse, as "civilized" activity, rather than establishing sites for the production of high culture.

7. Roethke describes some of his methods for teaching poetic craft in his essay "The Teaching Poet." Richard Hugo, another student of Roethke's, in his essay "Stray Thoughts on Roethke and Teaching" also describes exercises and assignments Roethke would use to teach craft. See also Wright's interview with Smith (202-3). Wright's workbook for his class with Roethke, during Spring Quarter 1954, supports the image of Roethke as a teacher of craft: it contains exercises in writing imitations, six-syllable lines with caesura on the first and third syllables, triads with nouns, monosyllabic lines, participial phrases, three and five beat lines, epigrams, and diverse stanzaic forms.

8. In a recent essay addressing the need for restructuring creative writing workshops, Alan Shapiro--like Wright--turns to Horace and the value of poetic imitation as a possible solution for the weaknesses of creative writing programs. It may be interesting to note that Wright's poetry workbook, submitted to Roethke during Spring Quarter 1954, contains a number of imitations.

9. Wright's M.A. thesis, "Mr. Mould's Horses: Elegies and Occasional Poems, 1954," is dated August 3, 1954. Several poems from that thesis are included in The Green Wall; others were published but not included in his various collections.

10. Wright's relationship with John Crowe Ransom was not in the context of a creative writing workshop. Doctorow says about that relationship: "I have no way of knowing, but I assume he [Wright] showed a lot of his work to the older poet and received the benefit of Ransom's just and serenely disinterested critical taste" (20).

11. Donald Hall, in "Lament for a Maker," states, "In 1963, the year he published The Branch Will Not Break, James Wright was fired by the University of Minnesota. Among the professors voting to deny him tenure was his friend the poet Allen Tate, which was hurtful. Jim missed classes because he got drunk; Jim got into barroom fistfights and spent time in the drunktank. It may be noted that Professor Berryman taught, not in the Department of English, but in the Department of Humanities" (xxxiv).

12. The extent to which this informal but highly integrated network extends into academic institutions can be seen by examining the appendix to Wilbers's study of the Iowa Writers' Workshop; Wilbers notes, "Many Iowa Workshop graduates presently hold teaching positions in American colleges and universities. Although they are too numerous to mention here, it is possible to give an account (by no means complete) of the programs founded and presently

directed by former Workshop students.... [T]here is at least some connection between Iowa and a significant number of writing programs in this country" (137). Wilbers proceeds to list those programs which were either founded or are currently directed by Workshop alumni or both (137-139).

Kingston and Cole in their discussion of a survey of published authors (which they acknowledge contained few poets) offer the following observations about contacts between poets: "The only other group which matched this level of regular professional contact was the small number who identified themselves as poets.... [B]y comparison to nonacademic writers of prose, poets appeared to be somewhat more inclined to talk about their writing with fellow authors" (116) and "The writers of academically oriented nonfiction and the very few poets stood out as the most likely to have personal connections to fellow writers who have influenced their own work. That almost a third of the poets had a friend who has had an important influence, more than double the overall rate, was especially remarkable. Indeed, the poets represented the only genre in which a majority of the writers claimed at least some personal connection to an influential contemporary, a fact further supporting Wilson's sense of poets as an 'extended family'" (136).

13. The recently published Spreading the Word: Editors on Poetry asks poetry editors to explain the editorial policies of their respective literary magazines and their own editorial practices. The editors frequently offer comments like these by David Wojahn, "Editors will profess to having no 'party line' of the imagination, no biases toward a particular sort of writing. As I sat down to write this essay, however, I began to feel uneasy about the last point I have listed. As much as I would like to state that the choices we make at Crazyhorse are based on quality over any other basis of selection, I have to admit that our concept of what constitutes quality is very particular, very strict, and is, for all practical purposes, a set of biases" (11). Similarly, Richard Foerster observes: "It is all too easy, for me at least, to be biased from the outset, either for or against a poem by such things as the writer's fame or obscurity, a publishing record outlined in a cover letter, or even the condition of the paper the work is typed on" (5). Finally, Dabney Stuart comments, "There's no mystique to selecting poems for Shenandoah, and I wouldn't want to write as if there were. I choose what appeals to me, what I like" (72).

This list of biases and personal appeal can be supplemented by looking at the biographical sketches of each editor. With only a few exceptions, all of them are themselves practicing poets, publishing their works in other magazines and journals run by poetry editors who are also

poets. The incestuous circularity of these editorial policies is, I suspect, a factor in determining what poems are published.

14. Much has been written about the value of networks and artistic alliances in creating supportive communities of resistance. See, for example, Charles Kadushin's "Networks and Circles in the Production of Culture," Michael Davidson's The San Francisco Renaissance: Poetics and Community at Mid-Century, and Alan Golding's "Little Magazines and Alternative Canons: The Example of Origin."

15. Hall, in the essay "Public Performance/Private Art," provides the only attempt that I am aware of to narrate--however briefly--a history of twentieth century poetry readings.

16. Lazer conducted a survey of 28 colleges and universities about the number, type, and sources of funding for their poetry readings, and he requested, as well, a list of the poets who read.

17. Kostelanetz in his essay "Poetry Readings" in The Old Poetries and the New is critical of readings and in several comments approaches our concerns here. He notes, for example, a factor pertinent to Wright's poetics: "Most poets in performance try to be charming and ingratiating; however, most great poems, even of recent years, are more provocative than ameliorating, more challenging than charming, more disturbing than ingratiating. In more respects than one, the values upheld in poetry readings are quite different from those that inform the best contemporary poetry writing" (80).

18. One of the most amazing facts about Wright's uncollected poems is the surprisingly high number of them from early in his career that were published in influential and prestigious journals. I am basing much of my information about Wright's early publication history on Belle M. McMaster's "James Arlington Wright: A Checklist."

In his dissertation, Wright makes astute comments about Dickens's ability to determine what his audience wanted. These comments seem equally applicable to Wright: "What seems to happen is that an author determines--for whatever motive--just what it is that his audience expects of him. Then he provides it. If the author in question happens to be a highly trained hack like Herman Wouk, he determines the intellectual climate of his audience at a certain moment by some process which I do not know--perhaps it is genius--and then, having figured out just what his audience wishes to hear, he plays the tune" (230-231). Playing a tune the

crowd wants to hear is not often, however, an effective oppositional tactic.

19. In his biography of Roethke, Allan Seager briefly discusses the history of Botteghe Oscure and its founder and editor Princess Marguerite Caetani (177-9).

20. Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin make explicit the economic basis for all publications: "From its earliest days printing existed as an industry, governed by the same rules as any other industry; the book was a piece of merchandise which men produced before anything else to earn a living.... Thus it was vitally necessary from the outset to find enough capital to start work and then to print only those titles which would satisfy a clientele, and that at a price which would withstand competition. The marketing of books was similar to that of other products. To the manufacturers who created the books--the printers--and to the business men who sold them--the booksellers and publishers--finance and costing were the key problems" (109).

21. In her essay "How Dignified Can We Be," Laurel Speer offers an opposing (and somewhat self-serving) view of commodification: "To apply the principles of the marketplace to poetry is like trying to fit an irregular and constantly changing shape into a perfectly rectangular mold. Which brings us back to Wright. What poet in this country even working at the peak of his form, doesn't feel a sense of uselessness in the attitude of the other (non-arts) producing members of the population? Since the country, from its beginnings, has always gauged 'success' by the tangible factors of monetary reward no matter the quality of the product, and since poetry has never been rewarded in this way, it stands to reason though we know our own intangible importance to at least part of the world, still as the larger world turns and looking at ourselves through their eyes, we'd have to feel we'd 'wasted' our lives in devoting ourselves to poetry" (172-3).

22. A great deal of important work has been done in the past few years to explore the commodification of American literature. A historical context for this transformation of literature from a use-value to an exchange-value can be pieced together by reading Michael T. Gilmore's American Romanticism and the Marketplace, Christopher P. Wilson's The Labor of Words: Literary Professionalism in the Progressive Era, and James L. W. West's American Authors and the Literary Marketplace Since 1900.

23. Once again, see Spreading the Word: Editors on Poetry.

Also, in "The Role of Critics and the Emperor's New Clothes in American Poetry," Jed Rasula presents a year by

year listing of those poetry books reviewed in the "prominent" presses from 1968-1981. He notes, "What I have attempted to do is to chronicle the attention lavished on certain poets whenever their books appear, and to indicate by immediate juxtaposition within each year books of considerable merit which were overlooked" (159). Wright was among the "lavished" few: Shall We Gather at the River, for example, received twelve reviews in 1968 compared to books by David Antin, Edward Dorn, and Robert Kelly which each were included in only one review. Rasula's study suggests the ways in which the official verse culture promotes the work of its "members," while excluding others.

24. In his article "Lyric in the Culture of Capitalism," Frank Lentricchia contrasts two modern attempts to redefine the relationship between poets and the literary marketplace: that of Frost and that of Pound. "Pound was defining his literary life as an oppositional intention to shape a career that would violate the tired literary inheritance incarnated (for Frost, Eliot, and Stevens as well) in the genteel guise of that contemporary poetry which young American writers who would become the important modern poets experienced while still youths in the first decade of this century. And in so violating established literary culture, Pound would inaugurate another intention, not separable from his literary desire, to make social change: the transformation of the economic structure itself which (Pound was convinced) had produced the literature he would displace, the very literature which Pound would argue was nothing less than his society's symptomatic expression in the realm of culture of its totalitarian direction" (64).

Frost, on the other hand, attempted to reconcile aesthetics and capitalist economics because, to quote Lentricchia, "he thought he could work within its dominant commercial system of literary production" (66). He wanted to reach a wide audience, be financially successful, and be appreciated by the modernists: "Frost's desire to reach a mass audience, by becoming---among other things---acceptable to mass circulation magazines like the Atlantic, shaped his rhetorical literary relations to his imagined ordinary reader; he could become a poet by fashioning an accessible and seductively inviting literary surface that would welcome the casual reader of poetry (as opposed to the intellectually armed scholar of modernism), while simultaneously burying very deep the sorts of subtleties that might please those accustomed to Pound's aesthetic caviar" (83).

25. For a discussion of the ways high culture aids in the perpetuation of dominant classes see Paul DiMaggio and Michael Useem's "The Arts in Class Reproduction." Also see Albrecht Wellmer's "Art and Industrial Production."

26. Silliman points out, "...[B]eginning with the creation of the Literature Panel of the National Endowment for the Arts in 1966, state subsidies for poets and the publication of poetry became an active force..." (27). Those subsidies have included underwriting some publication costs for university press titles.

27. Ted Solotaroff's essay "What Has Happened to the Publishing Business" in A Few Good Voices in My Head provides a personal perspective on how "the corporate mentality infiltrate[s] a publishing house" (269); he discusses the effect of a corporate takeover on New American Library publications. Curiously enough, though, Solotaroff "exclude[s] Harper & Row, my present employer, and Bessie Books, my publisher, from the discussion" (269).

28. In The End of Intelligent Writing: Literary Politics in America, Richard Kostelanetz documents (by naming names) the power structures determining publication practices: he discusses, for example, the dubious financial and editorial relations between Random House-Vintage and The New York Review of Books. Besides noting their financial interrelationship, Kostelanetz notes that the periodical included more positive notices for Random House-Vintage than other presses and frequently assigned review/essays of Random House-Vintage books to other authors who published with the firm. He implies that the New York Review of Books was, in a sense, an in-house publication of Random House-Vintage.

29. My use of the term "cultural work" is informed by Adorno's views of culture in "The Culture Industry Reconsidered": "Culture, in the true sense, did not simply accommodate itself to human beings; but it always simultaneously raised a protest against the petrified relations under which they lived, thereby honoring them" (129).

30. Bly, appropriately, quotes this line by Pound in the introduction to the chapbook where Wright's poem appeared.

31. It may be interesting to consider a parody of "Lying in a Hammock..." which Wright included in a 20 September 1979 letter to Richard Hugo. This parody raises questions about the possibility of parodying pastiches.

32. In the revised version of "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" included as the title essay in Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, Jameson reworked this passage somewhat: "Cultural production is thereby driven back inside a mental space which is no longer that of the old monadic subject but rather that of some degraded

collective "objective spirit": it can no longer gaze directly on some putative real world, at some reconstruction of a past history which was once itself a present; rather, as in Plato's cave, it must trace our mental images of that past upon its confining walls. If there is any realism left here, it is a 'realism' that is meant to derive from the shock of grasping that confinement and of slowly becoming aware of a new and original historical situation in which we are condemned to seek History by way of our own pop images and simulacra of that history, which itself remains forever out of reach" (25).

33. Beginning with the second issue of the Fifties, Wright's translations of Trakl, Goethe, Neruda, Vallejo, Lorca, Storm, Hernandez, and Jimenez appear often, as do Wright's own poems and essays, including "The Work of Gary Snyder," published under the pseudonym Crunk.

34. Wright had, of course, published in the Saturday Review. It is also interesting--and disconcerting--to consider that the Saturday Review discussed Bly's first book very positively, describing a "rare and attractive cleanliness to his style"; eventually extracts from this review were reprinted as blurbs for the paperback edition of Silence in the Snowy Fields. Bly's radical stances were even appropriated by those industries he most criticized.

35. Hallberg observes "intellectuals as a group enthusiastically supported the one American president who most explicitly avowed such [an interventionist] policy-- John Kennedy; furthermore, it was the Democratic liberals who regarded the university as central to American society" (139).

36. Much more can be said, of course, about Bly's use of literary politics to create resistance against the dominant culture, including his famous speech during the acceptance ceremony for the 1968 National Book Awards when he disparaged his publishers' unwillingness to take actions defying the Vietnam War and turned over his award money to an anti-draft group. Bly's speech at the ceremony, "Acceptance of the National Book Award for Poetry," can be found in his Talking All Morning (106-8).

Other examples of oppositionality can also be mentioned, including Gwendolyn Brooks's decision to discontinue her association with Harper and Row and publish exclusively with African-American presses (Kalaidjian 19).

CONCLUSION

TOWARD AN EVALUATION OF WRIGHT'S CULTURAL COMPLICITY AND RESISTANCE

I would lie to you
If I could.
But the only way I can get you to come up
Out of that suckhole, the south face
Of the Powhatan pit, is to tell you
What you know.

"To the Muse" (175)

I want to write about Felix Jacoby because I want the folks up on Elm Street to know that he existed. In the days before the uniformed sanitation engineers, the piles of ashes and rotten tomatoes and sanitary napkins were there one summery afternoon behind the rose trellises.... The next afternoon the trash had disappeared, and through the magical powers of money it seemed as though the junk had been waved away by silvery-winged creatures who came in the night on their tippy-toes.

I asked my father how he could sit down with [Jacoby] in his yard. It stank. "Oh, I know," he would say, "I know all about it, I know it stinks. The man works hard."

A Secret Field (10)

The diverse American poetries being written in the second half of the twentieth century embody, to varying degrees, the pervasive presence of the literary marketplace; the culturally sanctioned forms of violence; the institutionalization of poetic production, dissemination, and

interpretation; and other aspects of contemporary culture. The content and poetic techniques in Wright's social texts that we have examined--with their exploration of his blurred identification with various classes, their presentation of sexuality as a site for ideological conflict, their frequent confrontations with domesticated violence, their insistence on presenting individuals like Felix Jacoby to "the folks up on Elm Street," and their fierce examination of American political, economic, and social formations--not only reveal opposing elements within the poet, but also illuminate the ambiguous position of those texts (and poetry in general) within the dominant culture. During an era when economics create a "suckhole" absorbing oppositional and accommodational elements alike, an era when "the magical powers of money" provide an illusory new aura for cultural products, this ambivalent position and displacement provide one avenue for understanding and evaluating the social poetry of James Wright.¹

Among those "magical powers of money" is the ability of the literary market to elicit, absorb and finally institutionalize those texts which assist in the reproduction of dominant ideologies. Because of the aesthetic and cultural "filtering" inherent in commercial publishing enterprises, as well as Wright's willingness to market his poems in conjunction with those outlets, his texts risk being consumed by the marketplace and transformed into corporate

expression. Herbert I. Schiller states, "As the cultural industries increasingly occupy pivotal positions in the social, political, and even economic power in the latest period of capitalist development, their symbolic outputs, however entertaining, diverting, aesthetic, or informative, are essentially elements of corporate expression" (44). Though Schiller raises a valid point, the complexity of this issue as it applies to aesthetic products is not as easily resolved as he implies: saying Wright's poems are commodified and thus only "elements of corporate expression" is too reductive.

Literary texts cannot without qualification be labelled as either oppositional or accommodational;² texts like Wright's exist in the boundaries between these categories, dialogically torn between their impulse for freedom, transcendence, and cultural escape and their desire for communal inclusion. Even though the use-value of his texts offers resistance to the hegemonic culture--confronting industrial work conditions, inequitable social formations, and other elements--his active cooperation with the apparatuses of official verse culture, mass circulating publications, and academic institutions implies a complicitous responsibility for the degradations resulting from the actions (and inactivity) of those structures in their relation to the dominant culture. In spite of that commodification, however, the use-value of his texts is not

totally neutralized. Their literary and political status, even when institutionally absorbed and commodified, is reduced but not completely diminished. They still effectively demonstrate, in Lentricchia's words, "our severely diminished capacity" ("Lyric" 77).

Wright's uncollected and collected poems which addresses the political, socioeconomic, and psychological conditions impacting the lives of individuals in late capitalist societies also address their own symbolic position within those societies. We have briefly discussed, for example, the commodification present in "Saint Judas" (84) when the apostle-betrayer recounts "bargain[ing] the proper coins" and assisting a stranger "for nothing." In a related poem, "Son of Judas" (225), Wright confronts those critics who would define his texts as being only corporate expressions or "consumeritems."

Alluding to the story of Judas, the poet again indicts both America and himself in--to borrow Williamson's description of the poem--"a Blakean critique of the possibilities of good and evil in a society that presents no real counterforce, political or religious, to acquisitive greed" (85). "Song of Judas" again localizes cultural effects within individuals' sexuality. In this text, though, there are not slag heaps smoldering in bedrooms or workers socially and sexually isolated from their spouses.

Instead, industrialists like the strip miner Mark Hanna illustrate a different metaphoric sexual outlet:

... Mark Hanna and every other plant
Gatherer of the grain and gouging son
Of a God whonks his doodle in the
United States government of his hand.

Their masturbatory response (which is both unspeakable and childish as evident in the diction: "whonks his doodle") suggests their social isolation and insatiable hedonism at the expense of nature and direct social contact. The poet, while asserting the destructiveness of their response, also distances himself from industrialists like Hanna and accepts his inability to change them or society: "I don't damn Mark Hanna or anyone else / in hell." "All I wanted to do/ Was get out." Attempting to escape from "our severely diminished society," Wright pursues an alternative to this inward turning masturbation, but his alternative is as dismal, self-serving, and sterile as that of the industrialists: he withdraws into a "nature" that he has created for himself.

In poems like Frost's "Birches" and other texts by Wright, physical contact with trees becomes symbolic of both sinking deep into the earth and freely rising into the sky, above the human. "Son of Judas" focusses specifically on a sycamore tree, a choice rich with biblical allusions.³ Not only is Wright, like Zacchaeus, attempting to transcend his

situation so as to see more clearly and escape, he is--like Judas--carrying his own rope and risking suicide. While retreating from self-serving industrialism, the poet rises "out of my body so high into / That sycamore tree that it became / The only tree that ever loved me."⁴ His withdrawal into nature is, metaphorically, another misconstrued sexual relationship: the sycamore becomes "That tree I made my secret love to." The poet, though, recognizes that this second option is as lifeless as the first; the tree, after all, is "the dead sycamore," and as "the one wing, / The only wing," it is unable to lift him out of this industrial wreckage and provide the escape and transcendence he desires.

Confronting the two escapist options that contemporary culture offers--a sterile withdrawal into the self or an impossible (and fruitless) retreat into nature--the poet, like Judas, wants to wipe the blame from his hands and return his tainted pieces of silver. He renounces his complicity in economic affairs:

I have bought your world.

I don't want it.

And I don't want all your money

I got sucked into making

Either.

.....

Here's your money.

I didn't even count it.

This refusal to conspire with economic structures, though noble, is itself an acknowledgement of his guilt and, at the same time, another manifestation of his desire to return to pre-industrial relations; but he cannot (and we cannot) withdraw from the exploitative, financial basis of capitalism, as if it could be taken away "by silvery-winged creatures who came in the night on their tippy-toes." It will only be transformed through the actions of individuals --even a "crowd of solitudes"--willing to confront the system and its inherent problems. Wright's text does that, in part, even as it seeks escape: it foregrounds its own material and economic base while it resists being absorbed into those structures. The poem concludes with Wright suspended in a defiant but helpless indecision: "hovering between the dead sycamore" and the abandoned strip mines. He struggles to be free ("I'm getting out, this time"), but even consciousness of his own economic complicity cannot separate him from that industrial society and a ravaged nature. He cannot simply sever his ties and return the money.⁵

Wright's relations with economic and cultural institutions are as ambiguous, problematic, and contradictory as his other relationships: he at times actively pursues financial markets for his literary texts, while on other

occasions, as in "Son of Judas," he regrets and renounces his participation in those economic structures. Early in his career the poet established high moral and aesthetic goals for himself--"To me, poetry in this age is the art of stating and examining and evaluating truth" (Saint Judas, dust jacket)--but his means of poetic production and aesthetic considerations of truth were subsequently impacted by his pursuit of success in literary networks. The very foregrounding of financial tension in his texts suggests an awareness of the aesthetic integrity he sought but was unable to sustain. In "The Culture Industry Reconsidered," Adorno presents a historical context which may help us assess Wright's complicity and resistance to late capitalism:

The entire practice of the culture industry transfers the profit motive naked onto cultural forms. Ever since these cultural forms first began to earn a living for their creators as commodities in the marketplace, they had already possessed something of this quality. But then they sought after profit only indirectly, over and above their autonomous essence.... Cultural entities typical of the culture industry are no longer also commodities, they are commodities through and through. (129, emphasis added)

Texts like "Son of Judas" and "At the Executed Murderer's Grave," among many others, are not "commodities through and through": they resist (even as they invite) their own connections with the economics of publication, and they yearn for that pre-industrial era when cultural products were only inadvertently present, if at all, in the marketplace. But that nostalgic desire, as we have seen, is impossible to actualize in late twentieth century American culture.

Ultimately, Wright's critics must consider that his uncollected and collected poems, while engaging in social criticism, are texts reluctantly imbedded in late capitalist culture and, at the same time, commodities he often actively marketed in publications supporting the dominant power structures; his poems depicting the isolation, inequity, and suffering experienced by working class and poor individuals both implicitly subvert conventions and reveal the poet's own complicity with inherited forms. A comprehensive evaluation of his poetry must consider, I believe, his renunciation of commodification as well as his complicity with it; it must include his means of literary production and his ambivalent involvement with those literary networks and institutions which interpret and disseminate his texts; it must explore his honest appraisals of economic and political inequity as well as his support for those social hierarchies which mandate inequality; and it must examine

the specifically literary qualities and aesthetic integrity of those texts. Because these factors are intricately interrelated, they need to be considered simultaneously and in conjunction with each other; the poems cannot be approached as autotelic texts free of social consideration.

In Dialectic of Enlightenment, Adorno and Max Horkheimer--like Pound, Bernstein, and others--argue that to resist the "culture industry" art must be radical in two ways: it must subvert traditional artistic forms and resist the commodification present within the contemporary production of art (123). Wright's poems are ambivalent about both. In this way, then, his texts undercut their own effectiveness, but that judgement itself needs to be qualified, and most appropriately by using Wright's own words about Robert Penn Warren's poems:

My speaking of "failure" in a poet of so much stature is of course tempered by my statement of a conviction which constantly grows on me: that a failure like the [poem entitled] "School Lesson" is worth more than the ten thousand safe and competent versifyings produced by our current crop of punks in America. I am spared the usual but boring critical courtesy of mentioning names by the fact that we all know who we are.

("Stiff Smile" 242)

Because texts able to withstand appropriation and commodification cannot exist in late capitalism, Wright's limitations are not simply failures on his part; they are symptomatic expressions of the position of poetry within twentieth century American culture. His historical position in late capitalism necessitates that his cultural production be situated and eventually appropriated into that all-consuming society, though he could have resisted that process or, at least, less actively participated in it.

Just as Wright and his use of language cannot be wholly separated nor removed from the dominant American culture, his cultural products must, by necessity, be imbedded in that culture as well, even as they resist it;⁶ or, to use Benjamin's famous expression, "There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism" ("Theses" 256). All oppositional forces can be (and indeed are) converted, to some degree, into a commodity by capitalism, as is evident by the position of Pound's texts within postmodern discourse. Bly's own literary resistance has been appropriated by industry--most recently in his publications with firms like Harper and Row, who capitalize on his outrage regarding their policies. The commodification of the social poetry of Pound, Bly, and Wright reveals that all texts can be appropriated, including those which offer resistance. Even civilized acts which resist barbarism are eventually consumed by that barbarism--

but, hopefully, they create discomfort even while being digested.

Wright's direct contributions to the commodification of his texts imply a level of failure for his poetics and undermine their effectiveness, but that does not preclude those texts from being a social product with real, rather than merely symbolic, significance in confronting the conflicting forces evident in late capitalism. They still maintain their truth-content, and that content--even when absorbed by economic systems--still exists as a potent (though impure) presence in late capitalism. As Mandel argues, oppositional literature cannot be completely "value-free" or "neutral" for individuals; even items mass distributed through the literary marketplace--like Wright's books and poems--influence "the mass formation (or heightening) of anti-capitalist consciousness. Ideological production that becomes a commodity in this way threatens to lose its objective function of consolidating the capitalist mode of production, because of the nature of the use-value sold" (507-8). Wright's poems, then, maintain their resistance to social inequities even as they circulate within the capitalist system.

We can speculate that the use-value of his texts might, in fact, at this point in our advanced industrial society, be most directly and profitably consumed by the intellectuals as well as the middle and upper classes who

comprise his reading audience. Just as Jesus, in Luke 19, addresses Zacchaeus, "Today salvation has come to this house.... The Son of Man has come to search out and save what was lost" a socially critical poetics needs to address those who are "lost" and most in need of understanding (and changing) problematic social formations and labor practices: those aspirants to the economic and social power structures gathered in and around academic institutions. English departments within those institutions can function as sites of resistance and use the institutionalization of poetry as an opportunity to introduce conflicting voices into the hegemonic discourse. Possibly Wright's texts specifically need to address those who will be able, from their future positions of power, to change current social practices. Donald Kuspit in his essay "The Artist and the University," observes:

...[I]n our society, where everything is sooner or later turned into bourgeois capital, art must address itself, as Baudelaire said, however ironically, to the bourgeois. They, after all, are "the majority in number and intelligence," And therefore the social "force" which must be ministered to. Thus, what better place to produce and show art than in the bourgeois university? Who better to present it to than bourgeois intellectuals? (29)

Who better, indeed? Wright's implicitly subversive texts can and do continue to oppose the dominant discourse by marching, as a "crowd of solitudes," into those institutions which have the power to both perpetuate and resist cultural practices: universities and colleges. When Harry Schultz, Patsy di Franco, the "ruptured night watchman of Wheeling Steel," the "gray faces of Negroes in the blast furnace at Benwood," the "Polacks nursing long beers in Tiltonsville," George Doty, Joe Bumbico, Felix Jacoby, the laughing lazy girl, and other individuals from these texts parade down the crowded streets and into university curricula, then the real human oppressed, the poor, and the working class people--the most important "crowd of solitudes"--might be heard and empowered in their struggle to alter their own social and working conditions.

Notes

1. Terry Eagleton makes a similar assertion about Charles Dickens, William Butler Yeats, and other "major" nineteenth and twentieth century British authors, saying they were displaced from the dominant culture. "By some conjuncture of elements (class, sexuality, region, nationality and so on)," he states, "these writers were contradictorily inserted into an hegemonic bourgeois ideology which had passed its progressive prime" (180).

2. In The Political Unconscious, Jameson suggests that texts either legitimate or undermine the dominant culture, depending upon how those texts are employed: "For Marxism, however, the very content of a class ideology is relational, in the sense that its 'values' are always actively in situation with respect to the opposing class, and defined against the latter: normally, a ruling class ideology will explore various strategies of the legitimation of its own power positions, while an oppositional culture or ideology will, often in covert and disguised strategies, seek to contest and to undermine the dominant 'value system'" (84, Jameson's emphasis).

3. Luke 19:1-10 relates an account of Zacchaeus, a wealthy tax collector, who was both curious and sought after truth. As Jesus--surrounded by a crowd--was approaching, Zacchaeus could not see Jesus so the wealthy man "first ran on in front, then climbed a sycamore tree which was along Jesus' route, in order to see him." When Jesus reached the tree, he asked Zacchaeus to come down and ultimately be rewarded for his efforts.

4. Wright's narration is informed not only by biblical and industrial allusions, but also by a personal mythology. He refers, for example, to the tree as "the Jenny sycamore." Because the nature of that mythologizing is beyond the context of our discussion here, I will not pursue the relationship between this text and Wright's other "Jenny poems." For more information about Jenny and these texts, see chapter five, "The Jenny Poems," in Stein's James Wright.

5. I have not been able to find the publication outlet where this poem was originally printed, if it was published at all prior to its inclusion in Two Citizens, but the list of acknowledgements for that book indicates publishers which again have strong economic and ideological connections within this society. That list includes such small presses as Rapport, Choice, and Chelsea, as well as publications like Harper's Magazine, Esquire, the Nation, the New

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Republic, the Minnesota Review, and--of course--the New Yorker. These acknowledgements suggests that Wright possibly was not irreversibly severing his financial connections, or--worse--that he was actively marketing his renunciation of money.

6. Wright's ambivalent poetics is itself, as Adorno notes, bound to society: "...[T]he traditional lyric, as the most aesthetic negation of bourgeois convention, has by that very token been tied to bourgeois society" ("Lyric" 45).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Achugar, Hugo. "The Book of Poems as a Social Act: Notes Toward an Interpretation of Contemporary Hispanic Poetry." Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture. Eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988.
- Adorno, Theodor W. Aesthetic Theory. Ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann. Trans. C. Lenhardt. London: Routledge, 1984.
- . "Commitment." Trans. Francis McDonagh. The Essential Frankfurt School Reader. Ed. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt. New York: Continuum, 1982. 300-318.
- . "Cultural Criticism and Society" Prisms. Trans. Samuel and Shiery Weber. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990. 17-34.
- . "The Culture Industry Reconsidered." Trans. Anson G. Rabinbach. Critical Theory and Society: A Reader. Eds. Stephen Eric Bronner and Douglas MacKay Kellner. New York: Routledge, 1989. 128-135.
- . "Lyric Poetry and Society." Trans. Bruce Mayo. Critical Theory and Society: A Reader. Eds. Stephen Eric Bronner and Douglas MacKay Kellner. London: Routledge, 1989. 155-171.
- . Notes to Literature. 2 vols. Trans. Shierry Weber Nicholson. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991-2.
- . "On Dickens' The Old Curiosity Shop." Notes to Literature. Vol. 2. 171-7.
- . "On Lyric Poetry and Society." Notes to Literature. Vol. 1. 37-54.
- . "On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening." The Essential Frankfurt School Reader. Eds. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt. New York: Continuum, 1982. 270-299.

- . "Looking Back on Surrealism." Notes to Literature. Vol. 1. 86-90.
- Adorno, Theodor W. and Max Horkheimer. Dialectic of Enlightenment. Trans. John Cumming. New York: Continuum, 1990.
- Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." Lenin and Philosophy. Trans. Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971.
- Altieri, Charles. Self and Sensibility in Contemporary American Poetry. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.
- Apple, Michael W. Education and Power. London: Ark Paperbacks, 1985.
- Arac, Jonathan. Critical Genealogies: Historical Situations for Postmodern Literary Studies. New York: Columbia University Press, 1989.
- Arnold, Matthew. "The Literary Influence of Academies." Poetry and Criticism of Matthew Arnold. Ed. A. Dwight Culler. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1961.
- Bawer, Bruce. "Poetry and the University." Poetry After Modernism. Ed. Robert McDowell. Brownsville, Oregon: Story Line Press, 1991.
- Benjamin, Walter. "The Author as Producer." Benjamin, Reflections 220-238.
- . Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism. London: Verso, 1983.
- . "Karl Kraus." Benjamin, Reflections 239-273.
- . Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings. Trans. Edmund Jephcott. Ed. Peter Demetz. New York: Schocken Books, 1978.
- . "Surrealism." Benjamin, Reflections 177-192.
- . "Theses on the Philosophy of History." Illuminations: Essays and Reflections. Trans. Harry Zohn. Ed. Hannah Arendt. New York: Schocken Books, 1968. 253-264.
- Bernstein, Charles. "The Academy in Peril: William Carlos Williams Meets the MLA." Content's Dream: Essays 1975-1984. Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1986.

- . A Poetics. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992.
- Bly, Robert. American Poetry: Wildness and Domesticity. New York: Harper and Row, 1990.
- . Leaping Poetry: An Idea with Poems and Translations. Boston: Beacon Press, 1975.
- . Remembering James Wright. St. Paul, Minnesota: Ally Press, 1991.
- . Silence in the Snowy Fields. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1983.
- . Sleepers Joining Hands. New York: Harper & Row, 1973.
- . Talking All Morning. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1980.
- Bloch, Ernst et al. Aesthetics and Politics. Trans. Ronald Taylor et al. London: Verso, 1980.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. Homo Academicus. Trans. Peter Collier. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1988.
- Bourdieu, Pierre and Jean-Claude Passeron. Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture. Trans. Richard Nice. London: Sage Publications, 1977.
- Bowles, Samuel and Herbert Gintis. Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1976.
- Breslin, James E. B. From Modern to Contemporary: American Poetry, 1945-1965. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.
- Breslin, Paul. "How to Read the New Contemporary Poet." Poetics: Essays on the Art of Poetry. Eds. Paul Mariani and George Murphy. Ocean Bluff, Massachusetts: Tendril, Inc., 1984. 35-50.
- . The Psycho-Political Muse: American Poetry since the Fifties. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- Buck-Morss, Susan. The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1989.

- . The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt Institute. New York: Free Press, 1977.
- Burke, Kenneth. The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973.
- Burns, Wayne. Journey Through the Dark Woods. Seattle: Howe Street Press, 1982.
- Cain, William E. "English in America Reconsidered: Theory, Criticism, Marxism, and Social Change." Criticism in the University. Eds. Gerald Graff and Reginald Gibbons. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1985. 85-104.
- Carnoy, Martin. "Education, Economy, and the State." Cultural and Economic Reproduction in Education: Essays on Class, Ideology, and the State. Ed. Michael W. Apple. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982.
- Carruth, Hayden. "A Few Thoughts Following Professor Clausen's Essay." Georgia Review, Winter 1981: 735-41.
- Chase, Cynthia. "'Viewless Wings': Intertextual Interpretation of Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale.'" Hosek and Parker 208-25.
- Compaine, Benjamin M. "Magazines." Who Owns the Media? Concentration of Ownership in the Mass Communications Industry. Ed. Benjamin M. Compaine. White Plains, New York: Knowledge Industry Publications, Inc., 1982. 143-197.
- Davidson, Michael. The San Francisco Renaissance: Poetics and Community at Mid-century. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Davis, Robert Con. "A Manifesto for Oppositional Pedagogy: Freire, Bourdieu, Merod, and Graff." Reorientations: Critical Theories and Pedagogies. Eds. Bruce Henrickson and Thais E. Morgan. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990.
- DeFrees, Madeline. "James Wright's Early Poems: A Study in 'Convulsive' Form." Modern Poetry Studies 2.6 (1972): 241- 251.
- de Man, Paul. Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism. 2nd Ed. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983.

- DiMaggio, Paul and Michael Useem. "The Arts in Class
Reproduction." Cultural and Economic Reproduction in
Education: Essays on Class, Ideology, and the State.
Ed. Michael W. Apple. London: routledge and Kegan
Paul, 1982.
- Doctorow, E. L. "James Wright at Kenyon." Gettysburg
Review 3.1 (1990): 11-22.
- Dougherty, David C. James Wright. Boston: Twayne
Publishers, 1987.
- Eagleton, Terry. Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist
Literary Theory. London: Verso, 1990.
- Easthope, Anthony. Poetry as Discourse. London: Methuen,
1983.
- Elkins, Andrew. The Poetry of James Wright. Tuscaloosa:
University of Alabama Press, 1991.
- Epstein, Joseph. "Who Killed Poetry?" Commentary 86.2
(August 1988): 13-20.
- Febvre, Lucien and Henri-Jean Martin. The Coming of the
Book: The Impact of Printing 1450-1800. Trans. David
Gerard. London: Verso, 1976.
- Federal Writers' Project. American Stuff: An Anthology of
Prose and Verse by Members of the Federal Writers'
Project with Sixteen Prints by the Federal Art Project.
New York: Viking Press, 1937. New York: Da Capo Press,
1976.
- Foucault, Michel. Power/Knowledge. Ed. Colin Gordon.
Trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, Kate
Soper. New York: Pantheon Books, 1980.
- Fredman, Stephen. Poet's Prose: The Crisis in American
Verse. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,
1990.
- Freud, Sigmund. The Interpretation of Dreams. Trans. and
ed. James Strachey. New York: Avon Books, 1965.
- . "The Relation of the Poet to Day-Dreaming." On
Creativity and the Unconscious: Papers on the
Psychology of Art, Literature, Love, Religion.
Selected by Benjamin Nelson. New York: Harper and
Brothers, 1958. 44-54.

- Gattuccio, Nicholas. "Now my Amenities of Stone are Done: Some Notes on the Style of James Wright." Concerning Poetry 15.1 (1983): 61-76.
- Gilmore, Michael T. American Romanticism and the Marketplace. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985.
- Gioia, Dana. "Can Poetry Matter?" The Atlantic 267.5 (May 1991): 94-106.
- Giroux, Henry. Border Crossings: Cultural Workers and the Politics of Education. London: Routledge, 1992.
- Golding, Alan. "Language-Bashing Again." Mid-American Review 8.2 (1988): 93-100.
- . "Little Magazines and Alternative Canons: The Example of Origin." American Literary History 2.4 (Winter 1990): 691-725.
- Graff, Gerald. "English in America." Literature Against Itself: Literary Ideas in Modern Society. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979. 103-127.
- . Professing Literature: An Institutional History. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- Grun, Bernard. The Timetables of History: A Horizontal Linkage of People and Events. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982.
- Hall, Donald. "Lament for a Maker." Introduction. Above the River: The Complete Poems. By James Wright. New York: A Wesleyan University Press Edition/Farrar, Straus & Giroux and University Press of New England, 1990. xxiii-xxxvii.
- . Poetry and Ambition: Essays 1982-88. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988.
- Hanhardt, John, ed. Video Culture: A Critical Investigation. Layton, Utah: Peregrine Smith Books, 1986.
- Haskell, Dennis. "The Modern American Poetry of Deep Image." Southern Review 12 (1979): 137-66.
- Hass, Robert. Twentieth Century Pleasures: Prose on Poetry. New York: The Ecco Press, 1984.

Heffernan, Michael. "'To Catch a Lizard by the Shoulder': James Wright a crypto-Sonneteer." Poet and Critic 18.1 (Fall 1986): 50-53.

Henrickson, Bruce. "Teaching Against the Grain." Reorientations: Critical Theories and Pedagogies. Eds. Bruce Henrickson and Thais E. Morgan. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990.

---. "Wright's 'Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy's Farm in Pine Island, Minnesota.'" Explicator 21 (1974): item 40.

Hesse, Hermann. Poems. Selected and Trans. James Wright. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970.

---. Wandering: Notes and sketches by Hermann Hesse. Trans. James Wright. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1972.

Heyen, William, ed. American Poets in 1976. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1976.

Hosek, Chaviva and Patricia Parker, eds. Lyric Poetry Beyond New Criticism. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985.

Huber, Bettina J. "Appendix: A Report on the 1986 Survey of English Doctoral Programs in Writing and Literature." The Future of Doctoral Studies in English. Eds. Andrea Lunsford, Helene Moglen, and James F. Slevin. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1989. 121-175.

Hugo, Richard. "In Defense of Creative-Writing Classes." The Triggering Town: Lectures and Essays on Poetry and Writing. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1982. 53-66.

---. "Stray Thoughts on Roethke and Teaching." The Triggering Town: Lectures and Essays on Poetry and Writing. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1982. 27-36.

Jameson, Fredric. Late Marxism: Adorno, or, The Persistence of the Dialectic. London: Verso, 1990.

---. The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1981.

- . "Postmodernism and Consumer Society." The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture. Ed. Hal Foster. Port Townsend, Washington: Bay Press, 1983.
- . Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism. Durham: Duke University Press, 1991.
- Janowitz, Morris. The Last Half-Century: Societal Change and Politics in America. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.
- Jauss, David. "Wright's 'Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy's Farm in Pine Island, Minnesota.'" Explicator 41 (1982): 54-55.
- Jay, Martin. The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfort School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973.
- Jennings, Michael W. Dialectical Images: Walter Benjamin's Theory of Literary Criticism. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987.
- Kadushin, Charles. "Networks and Circles in the Production of Culture." American Behavioral Scientist 19 (July-August 1976): 769-784.
- Kalaidjian, Walter. Languages of Liberation: The Social Text in Contemporary American Poetry. New York: Columbia University Press, 1989.
- Kameen, Paul. "Madness and Magic: Postmodernist Poetics and the Dream." Criticism: A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts 24.1 (Winter 1982): 36-47.
- Kermode, Frank. The Art of Telling: Essays on Fiction. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983.
- Kingston, Paul William and Jonathan R. Cole. The Wages of Writing: Per Word, Per Piece, or Perhaps. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.
- Kniffel, Leonard. "American Literature--Who's Publishing It?" Library Journal 15 Feb. 1987: 103-9.
- Kostelanetz, Richard. The End of Intelligent Writing: Literary Politics in America. New York: Sheed and Ward, Inc., 1974.
- . The Old Poetries and the New. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1981.

- Kuspit, Donald. "The Artist and the University: The Meaning of Their Incompatibility." Centennial Review 35.1 (1991): 21-30.
- Kuzma, Greg. "The Catastrophe of Creative Writing." Poetry 148.6 (September 1986): 342-354.
- Lanham, Richard A. "The Electronic Word: Literary Study and the Digital Revolution." New Literary History 20 (Winter 1989): 265-90.
- Lazer, Hank. "The Crisis in Poetry." Missouri Review 9.2 (1986): 201-32.
- . "Poetry Readings and the Contemporary Canon." American Poetry 7.2: 64-72.
- Lentricchia, Frank. "Lyric in the Culture of Capitalism." American Literary History 1.1 (1989): 63-87.
- . "On Behalf of Theory." Criticism in the University. Eds. Gerald Graff and Reginald Gibbons. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1985. 105-110.
- Levine, Philip. "Mine Own John Berryman." Gettysburg Review 4.4 (1991): 533-552.
- MacDiarmid, Hugh. The Complete Poems of Hugh MacDiarmid. Eds. Michael Grieve and W. R. Aitken. 2 vols. New York: Viking Penguin Inc.: 1985
- Mandel, Ernest. Late Capitalism. Trans. Joris De Bres. London: Verso, 1978.
- Marcuse, Herbert. "The Affirmative Character of Culture." Negations: Essays in Critical Theory. Trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro. London: Free Association Books, 1988.
- Macherey, Pierre. A Theory of Literary Production. Trans. Geoffrey Wall. London: Routledge, 1989.
- Mayakovsky, Vladimir. How are verses Made? Trans. G. M. Hyde. London: Jonathan Cape, 1970.
- McCaffery, Steve. "Writing as a General Economy." North of Intention: Critical Writings 1973-1986. New York: Roof Books, 1986. 201-221.
- McGann, Jerome J. The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1985.

- McMaster, Belle M. "James Arlington Wright: A Checklist." Bulletin of Bibliography 31 (1974): 71-82, 88.
- Middlebrook, Diane Wood. Anne Sexton: A Biography. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1991.
- Morton, Donald and Mas'ud Zavarzadeh. "The Cultural Politics of the Fiction Workshop." Cultural Critique 11 (1988-89): 155-173.
- Myers, D. G. "Educating Writers: The Beginnings of 'Creative Writing' in the American University." Dissertation, Northwestern University, 1989.
- Nelson, Cary. Our Last First Poets: Vision and History in Contemporary American Poetry. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981.
- . Repression and Recovery: Modern American Poetry and the Politics of Cultural Memory, 1910-1945. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989.
- Noble, J. Kendrick, Jr. "Book Publishing." Who Owns the Media? Concentration of Ownership in the Mass Communications Industry. Ed. Benjamin M. Compaine. White Plains, New York: Knowledge Industry Publications, Inc., 1982. 95-141.
- Ohmann, Richard. English in America: A Radical View of the Profession. New York: Oxford University Press, 1976.
- Patterson, Annabel. "Lyric and Society in Jonson's Underwood." Hosek and Parker 148-163.
- Perloff, Marjorie. Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.
- Pound, Ezra. The Cantos. New York: New Directions Books, 1970.
- . Personae: Collected Shorter Poems. New York: New Directions Books, 1971.
- . "Patria Mia." Selected Prose 1909-1965. Ed. William Cookson. New York: New Directions, 1973.
- . "A Retrospect." Literary Essays of Ezra Pound. Ed. T. S. Eliot. New York: New Directions Books, 1968.

2

1

S

S

S

S

S

Se

Sh

Si

Sl

- Poulin, A., Jr. "Contemporary American Poetry: The Radical Tradition." Contemporary American Poetry. 4th ed. Ed. A. Poulin, Jr. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1985. 685-703.
- Rasula, Jed. "The Role of Critics and the Emperor's New Clothes in American Poetry." Sulfur 9: 149-167.
- Rilke, Rainer Maria. Selected Poems of Rainer Maria Rilke. Trans. Robert Bly. New York: Harper and Row, 1981.
- Rimbaud, Arthur. Complete Poems. Trans. Paul Schmidt. New York: Harper and Row, 1976.
- Roethke, Theodore. "The Teaching Poet." On the Poet and His Craft: Selected Prose of Theodore Roethke. Ed. Ralph J. Mills, Jr. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966. 44-51.
- Salzman, Jack, ed. Years of Protest: A Collection of American Writings of the 1930s. New York: Pegasus, 1967.
- Salzman, Jack and Leo Zanderer, eds. Social Poetry of the 1930s. Burt Franklin and Co., Inc., 1978.
- Saunders, William S. James Wright: An Introduction. Columbus: State Library of Ohio, 1979.
- Schiller, Herbert I. Culture Inc.: The Corporate Takeover of Public Expression. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- Scitovsky, T. "What's Wrong with the Arts is What's Wrong with Society." The Economics of the Arts. Ed. Mark Blaug. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, Inc., 1976. 58-69.
- Seager, Allan. The Glass House: The Life of Theodore Roethke. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991.
- Shapiro, Alan. "Horace and the Reformation of Creative Writing." The American Poetry Review 21.2 (March/April 1992): 7-13.
- Silliman, Ron. The New Sentence. New York: Roof Books, 1989.
- Slesinger, Warren, ed. Spreading the Word: Editors on Poetry. Columbia, South Carolina: The Bench Press, 1990.

- Smith, Dave. Introduction. The Pure Clear Word xi-xxviii.
- . "That Halting, Stammering Movement." The Pure Clear Word 175-195.
- , ed. The Pure Clear Word: Essays on the Poetry of James Wright. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982.
- Solotaroff, Ted. A Few Good Voices in My Head: Occasional Pieces on Writing, Editing, and Reading My Contemporaries. New York: Harper and Row, 1987.
- Spear, Laurel. "How Dignified Can We Be?" Black Warrior Review 15.2 (1989): 172-173.
- Spendal, R. J. "Wright's 'Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy's Farm in Pine Island, Minnesota.'" Explicator 34 (1976): item 64.
- Stegner, Wallace. "New Climates for the Writer." The Writer in America. The Hokuseido Press, 1951.
- Stein, Kevin. James Wright The Poetry of a Grown Man: Constancy and Transition in the Work of James Wright. Athens: Ohio University Press, 1989.
- . "A Redefinition of the Poetic Self: James Wright's Amenities of Stone." Ohio Review 33 (1984): 9-28.
- Stiffler, Randall. "The Reconciled Vision of James Wright." Literary Review 28.1 (1984): 77-92.
- Stitt, Peter. "James Wright: The Quest for Home." The World's Hieroglyphic Beauty: Five American Poets. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 161-193.
- . "Interview with James Wright." The World's Hieroglyphic Beauty: Five American Poets. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985. 194-211.
- . "The Poetry of James Wright." Minnesota Review 2 (1972): 13-32.
- Stitt, Peter and Frank Graziano, eds. James Wright: The Heart of the Light. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990.
- , eds. James Wright: A Profile. Durango, Colorado: Logbridge-Rhodes, 1988.

- Storm, Theodor. The Rider on the White Horse and Selected Stories. Trans. James Wright. New York: New American Library, 1964.
- Tannacito, Dan. "Poetry of the Colorado Miners: 1903-1906." Radical Teacher 15: 1-15.
- Trakl, George. Twenty Poems of George Trakl. Trans. James Wright, Robert Bly, and John Knoepfle. Madison, Minnesota: The Sixties Press, 1961.
- von Hallberg, Robert. American Poetry and Culture, 1945-1980. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985.
- Wakoski, Diane. Toward a New Poetry. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1980.
- Watkins, Evan. Work Time: English Departments and the Circulation of Cultural Value. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1989.
- Wellmer, Albrecht. "Art and Industrial Production." Telos 57 (Fall 1983): 53-62.
- West, James L. W. III. American Authors and the Literary Marketplace since 1900. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988.
- Wilbers, Stephen. The Iowa Writers' Workshop: Origins, Emergence, And Growth. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1980.
- Williamson, Alan. Introspection and Contemporary Poetry. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984.
- Wilson, Christopher P. The Labor of Words: Literary Professionalism in the Progressive Era. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985.
- Wolff, Janet. The Social Production of Art. New York: New York University Press, 1981.
- Wolin, Richard. Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetic of Redemption. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.
- Wright, Annie. "Fragments from a Journey." Kenyon Review 36-42.
- . "A Horse Grazes in My Long Shadow: A Short Biography of James Wright." Envoy, Spring-Summer 1981: 1-4.

- . Introduction. Two Citizens. By James Wright. Fredonia, New York: White Pine Press, 1987. 4-5.
- . "A Note on the Text of This Journey." This Journey. By James Wright. New York: Random House, 1982. 91.
- Wright, James Arlington. Above the River: The Complete Poems. New York: A Wesleyan University Press Edition/Farrar, Straus and Giroux and University Press of New England, 1990.
- . "An Interview with Michael Andre." Collected Prose 133-150.
- . "Childhood Sketch." Included in William S. Saunders's James Wright: An Introduction and reprinted in Collected Prose 330-4.
- . Collected Prose. Ed. Anne Wright. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1983.
- . "The Comic Imagination of the Young Dickens." Dissertation, University of Washington, 1959.
- . "A Few Poets of England and America." Collected Prose 268-278.
- . "From a Letter." Naked Poetry: Recent American Poetry in Open Forms. Eds. Stephen Berg and Robert Mezey. New York: Bobbs Merrill Co., 1969. 287.
- . "A Foreword by James Wright." Poems: 1933-67. By H. R. Hays. San Francisco: Kayak, 1968.
- . "I Come to Speak for Your Dead Mouths." Collected Prose 291-294.
- . In Defense Against This Exile: Letters to Wayne Burns. Ed. John R. Doheny. Seattle: Genitron Press, 1985.
- . "The Infidel." Included in Heyen's American Poets in 1976 452-55 and reprinted in Collected Prose 324-9.
- . James Wright Reading at the Library of Congress, May 25, 1958. LWO-2891
- . The Journey. Concord, New Hampshire: William B. Ewert, Publisher, 1981.
- . Leave It to the Sunlight. Durango, Colorado: Logbridge-Rhodes, Inc., 1981.

- . Letter to the Editors. American Poetry Review 3.3 (July/August 1974): 69.
- . Letters to Robert Heilman. Robert Heilman Papers. University of Washington.
- . Letters to Richard Hugo. Richard Hugo Papers. University of Washington.
- . Letters to Theodore Roethke. Theodore Roethke Collection. University of Washington.
- . "Meditations on Rene Char." Collected Prose 63-70.
- . "Mr. Mould's Horses: Elegies and Occasional Poems, 1954." Unpublished Master's thesis from the University of Washington.
- . "A Note on Trakl." Included in Twenty Poems of George Trakl 8-10.
- . "On the Occasion of a Poem: Bill Knott." Collected Prose 310-323.
- . "Poetry Must Think: An Interview with Bruce Henricksen." Collected Prose 172-190.
- . "The Pure Clear Word: An Interview with Dave Smith." Collected Prose 191-235.
- . A Reply to Matthew Arnold. Durango, Colorado: Logbridge-Rhodes, Inc., 1981.
- . Rev. of The Poems of Wilfred Owen. Hika 15.1 (Winter 1950): 15-16.
- . A Secret Field: Selections from the Final Journals of James Wright. Durango, Colorado: Logbridge-Rhodes, 1985.
- . "Something to Be Said for the Light: A Conversation with William Heyen and Jerome Mazzaro." Collected Prose 151-171.
- . "The Stiff Smile of Mr. Warren." Collected Prose 239-248.
- . The Temple in Nimes. Worcester, MA: Metacom Press, 1982.
- . "The Terrible Threshold." Collected Prose 249-255.

---. "Workbook for Spring Quarter, 1954." Unpublished papers in the Theodore Roethke Collection. University of Washington.

Wright, James, William Duffy, and Robert Bly. The Lion's Tail and Eyes: Poems Written Out of Laziness and Silence. Madison, Minnesota: The Sixties Press, 1962.

Wyatt, Thomas. Collected Poems of Sir Thomas Wyatt. Eds. Kenneth Muir and Patricia Thomson. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1969.

Yeats, William Butler. The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats. Ed. Richard J. Finneran. New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1989.

Zill, Nicholas and Marianne Winglee. Who Reads Literature? The Future of the United States as a Nation of Readers. Cabin John, Maryland: Seven Locks Press, 1990.

Zuidervaat, Lambert. Adorno's Aesthetic Theory: The Redemption of Illusion. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1991.

MICHIGAN STATE UNIV. LIBRARIES



31293007949872