Ecologies of Coexistence: on the Human and Nonhuman in Walt Whitman, T. S. Eliot, and William Carlos Williams

by

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ABSTRACT

Where does the distinction between human and ecological forms lie? How is political and social change reflected in representations of the natural landscape throughout Anglo-American literary tradition? How does the environment inform what it means to be American? In pursuit of these questions, this thesis examines the relationship between the human and nonhuman Nature in the poetry of Walt Whitman, T. S. Eliot, and William Carlos Williams. In the first chapter, I argue that Whitman's 1855 book *Leaves of Grass* fuses the human and nonhuman into a monism that reflects his belief in a united American democracy. The second chapter examines the fragmentary and polyvocal structure of T. S. Eliot's 1922 poem *The Waste Land* as reflective of post-World War I disillusionment and modern humanity's alienation from Nature. In the third chapter, I present William Carlos Williams's epic poem *Paterson*, published between 1946 and 1958, as a modernist multiplicity of human and nonhuman forms, grounded in the American locality of Paterson, New Jersey. This paper concludes by examining postmodern conceptualizations of Nature as a social construct, and ultimately proposes the need for a reimagined contemporary understanding of the fundamental difference of the nonhuman.

INTRODUCTION

Considering Nature

In their 2016 book *Are We Human?: Notes on an Archaeology of Design*, Beatriz Colomina and Mark Wigley describe the human as "part of the living Earth that it designs in just as the living Earth is part of it. The material world, whether the flows in a river valley or in the veins of our own bodies, is never just outside, waiting for human thought and action."[1] This notion of human entanglement with the natural world is the fulcrum of critical debate in anthropocentric literature. Author Jonathan Bate calls for a necessary examination of Nature in its "otherized" state in order to understand the concept of the human. In his book *The Song of the Earth*, Bate writes, "We only know ourselves when we confront our Other."[2] But how far from humanity is this Other? In what ways do human forms divorce from and entangle with Nature? I raise these questions to reveal the complexity in the distinction between self and Nature. This complexity destabilizes traditional understandings of human identity rooted in anthropocentric domination over the natural world, and demands a reconsideration of the definition of "human" in the first place.

In the concluding lines of his 1966 book *The Order of Things*, Michel Foucault leaves his reader with the vision of a human body disintegrating into the properties of the natural world. Foucault proposes the possibility that "...man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea."[3] The conjured image of a visage dissolving into the transient sandscape evokes anxieties of impermanence and an inherent tension between human and natural forces—

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[1] Beatriz Colomina and Mark Wigley, *Are We Human? Notes on an Archeology of Design* (Baden: Lars Müller Publishers, 2022), 25.
[2] Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (London: Picador, 2000), 87.
[3] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (London: Routledge Classics, 2002), 422.

problems that likewise permeated nineteenth and twentieth-century Anglo-American culture. Foucault's vision of man's erasure as "a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea" depicts a natural landscape claiming power over humankind. In raising the possibility of Nature conquering and transforming the human form, Foucault challenges solipsistic beliefs in humanity's power over the natural world.

I propose a consideration of the human and Nature not as distinct categories, but as concepts that participate in an entangled world of exchange and transformation. In order to understand the human and earth as concepts, it is necessary to examine their historically categorical interpretations in mid-eighteenth and nineteenth-century English Romantic poetry. English Romantic poets William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge look to Nature in their verse as means to return to an ideal and unspoiled landscape in face of the Industrial Revolution in Britain. Wordsworth's 1810 sonnet "The World Is Too Much With Us" details the impact of human-made machines on the inherent purity of Nature. The fourth line of the poem begins, "We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon! / This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon; / The winds that will be howling at all hours, / And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers…"[4] In this passage, the poem's narrator muses on Nature's negative response to the effects of industrialization. Humans have lost touch with Nature as a source of celebration and appreciation. Due to this neglect, the decimated landscape, like the winds, "will be howling at all hours," while the "sleeping flowers" represent the fragmented, silenced relationship between humanity and the natural world.

Exemplified by Wordsworth's sonnet, the English Romantic tradition responded to the industrialization of Britain and articulated the desire to return to a lost Edenic world rooted in

[4] William Wordsworth, *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. E. de Sélincourt (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1947), 18-19.

imagination, pastoralism, and a love for Nature. In his 1953 book *The Mirror and the Lamp*, American literary critic M. H. Abrams argues that this widespread mourning of the natural world and desire for a pre-industrial reunion with the environment establishes man as a clearly separate observer of Nature. Abrams writes that the most distinctive attribute "in the poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge is not the attribution of a life and soul to nature, but the repeated formulation of this outer life as a contribution of, or else as in constant reciprocation with, the life and soul of man the observer."[5] Abrams notes a distance between human and Nature that positions the natural world as a force with the ability to influence man's "life and soul." The distinction between humanity and Nature is evident as well in Coleridge's 1825 poem "Work without Hope." The second stanza begins, "Yet well I ken the banks where amaranths blow, / Have traced the fount whence streams of nectar flow. / Bloom, O ye amaranths! bloom for whom ye may, / For me ye bloom no! Glide, rich streams, away!"[6] In evoking imagery of amaranths and flowing streams of nectar, Coleridge submerges his reader in the beauty of the natural environment to enforce the necessity of hope in performing human labor. The core message of Coleridge's poem is reflected in the imagery of a motion-imbued natural landscape that moves onwards through its ecological systems of life, a metaphor for the progression of human society. While Coleridge's speaker ventures into the landscape to understand the importance of hope, his presence in the natural realm is only temporary—it is his duty to carry the lessons he learns in Nature back to his human world.

The notion of impermanence in the human relationship to the natural world serves as a running theme not only in the works of the English Romantic poets Wordsworth and Coleridge,

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[5] M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 64.
[6] S. T. Coleridge, *The Complete Poetical Works of S. T. Coleridge*, ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912), 447.

but in the literature of American Renaissance writers including Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, and Henry David Thoreau. In his 1964 book *The Machine in the Garden*, critic Leo Marx writes that because Nature "is untainted by civilization, man's true home is history, it offers the chance of a temporary return to first things. Here, as in a dream, the superfluities and defenses of everyday life are stripped away, and man regains contact with the essential."[7] The temporariness of human reunion with Nature, I argue, permeates the texts of the American Renaissance, evident in Ishmael's ultimate rescue by the ship the *Rachel* from the wreckage of the *Pequod* in Melville's *Moby Dick*,[8] and Thoreau's abandonment of his Walden Pond experiment and return to Concord civilization after two years, two months, and two days spent living in his homemade cabin.[9] English Romanticism wrote of this reunion through an imaginative, emotional, and celebratory lens of Nature, while American Renaissance writers examined the sublimity and hardships in the epic journeys their protagonists undertook in Nature. Both traditions, however, can be characterized by the distinction they create between human and Nature.

The distinction between man and Nature as articulated by these eighteenth and nineteenth-century writers inspired the Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson. In his 1836 essay *Nature*, Emerson describes the importance of Nature's influence on man. Emerson's interpretation of Nature as a spiritual force stretches beyond a mere separation between society and Nature, as represented in English Romantic poetry. Instead, Emerson defines Nature as "a discipline of the understanding in intellectual truths."[10] For Emerson, the ideal human mind is one permeated by the influence of the natural world. Nature takes on a degree of agency in

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[7] Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 69.
[8] Herman Melville, *Moby Dick* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), 532.
[9] Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (Boston: James R. Osgood and Co., 1875), 5.
[10] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature* (London: Penguin Books, 2008), 25.

Emerson's philosophy, no longer a resource for tranquility and moral lessons, but an expression and manifestation of the divine. Although Emerson likewise establishes a fundamental separation between the self and the natural world, his understanding of the relationship between human and Nature is more fluid than his English Romantic predecessors and American Renaissance contemporaries. In the beginning of *Nature*, Emerson writes, "Philosophically considered, the universe is composed of Nature and the Soul. Strictly speaking, therefore, all that is separate from us, all which Philosophy distinguishes as the NOT ME, that is, both nature and art, all other men and my own body, must be ranked under this name, NATURE."[11] Emerson's distinction between the human and Nature challenges preceding literary understandings of the relationship between human and natural forms by positioning the soul as the core of what constitutes the self, and widening the definition of "Nature" to include everything in existence that is not the soul—including the human body.

Walt Whitman establishes a poetics in his 1855 book *Leaves of Grass* that transcends Emerson's understanding of Nature. In the first chapter of this thesis, I argue that through conflation of the body and the soul, Whitman's poetics establish the emergence of "nonhuman" Nature—a concept alien to Emerson. Nonhuman Nature, according to Whitman, encompasses all natural material and immaterial entities that exist separately from his monistic understanding of the "human," constituted by the human body and human soul. This chapter examines how Whitman's representation of the relationship between the human and nonhuman in *Leaves of Grass* is influenced by Transcendentalist conceptions of Nature as both an ideal source of divinity and a material landscape. Analyzing Whitman's poems "Song of Myself," "This Compost," and "A Song of the Rolling Earth," I argue that *Leaves of Grass* establishes a notion

[11] Emerson, *Nature*, 2.

of Nature that exists in a fluid and permeable relationship with the corporeal human body. By examining how Whitman's poetics work to dissolve the boundaries between the human and nonhuman, I propose that *Leaves of Grass* constitutes an ecocentric state of being that reaches for ultimate union between human and earth, a metaphor for Whitman's vision of democracy.[12] In positioning himself as a distinctly American voice, Whitman establishes a new democratic poetic tradition in *Leaves of Grass* that captures and celebrates the diversity of the American people.

While Whitman's poetics in *Leaves of Grass* express a monism of the human and the nonhuman in celebration of American unity, T. S. Eliot's 1922 poem *The Waste Land* establishes a clear rupture between the human and nonhuman. Symbolizing the disillusioned state of post-World War I cosmopolitan society, Nature in *The Waste Land* is represented as a desolate, barren environment, bound by temporal fragmentation and the potential for human destruction of the earth. I argue in this chapter that modern human society in *The Waste Land* pushes itself to extinction through confinement in hermeneutic circles, a concept proposed by Martin Heidegger in his 1927 book *Being and Time*. The entrapment of modern humanity in hermeneutic circles reflects the division between self and earth caused by political, industrial, and anthropogenic anxiety. I examine this cyclical state of reality in *The Waste Land* through the theory of contemporary philosopher Timothy Morton. In his 2016 book *Dark Ecology*, Morton reinterprets Heideggerian hermeneutics in the context of anthropocentrism and ecological awareness. Morton

[12] I use the term "ecocentric" in this thesis to refer to an understanding that recognizes the equal value of all Nature and rejects anthropocentric interpretations of the human as superior to the natural world. The concept of ecocentrism was first introduced in the writings of the American writer and naturalist Aldo Leopold. In his 1949 essay "The Land Ethic," Leopold writes that "a land ethic," an ethic dealing with the human relation to Nature, "changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow-members, and also respect for the community as such." In contrast to the descriptor "ecological," an "ecocentric" state of being reconsiders the relationship between human and Nature. Aldo Leopold, "The Land Ethic," *A Sand County Almanac* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949), 204.

argues that "ecological awareness is weird: it has a twisted, looping form. Since there is no limit to the scope of ecological beings (biosphere, solar system), we can infer that all things have a loop form. Ecological awareness is a loop because human interference has a loop form, because ecological and biological systems are loops."[13] This chapter ultimately argues that the rebirth of nonhuman Nature from modern humanity's state of post-war disorder reveals the potential for Nature's survival despite anthropogenic apocalypse, perpetuated by feedback loops that anticipate Morton's philosophy.

While Eliot's severed relationship between the human and the nonhuman in *The Waste Land* rejects Whitman's monistic, celebratory poetics, I argue in the third chapter that William Carlos Williams's *Paterson* serves as a modernist reinterpretation of Whitman's democratic ideals and search for unity in *Leaves of Grass*. Williams's aesthetics of the local move towards a Cubist-like poetic freedom that stands in opposition to Eliot's fragmentary, allusive poetics in *The Waste Land*. While projecting principles of democracy and unity into the world of modernist literature and art, Williams's reconception of Whitmanian philosophy transcends Whitman's monistic understanding of the union between humanity and Nature, instead establishing the human and nonhuman worlds as engaged in an interconnected system of multiplicities. This system of multiplicities, I argue, can be further understood through the rhizomatic modes of thinking proposed in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's 1980 text *A Thousand Plateaus*. Williams's verse invokes rhizomatic multiplicities to grapple with the coexistence of man-made urban landscapes and natural environments. In *Paterson*, Williams establishes a Cubist poetics that places the reader in an immersive perspective, maps the locality of Paterson, New Jersey

[13] Timothy Morton, *Dark Ecology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 6.

through an unfixed language, and creates a fluid subject that simultaneously represents the narrator, urban setting, and natural landscape.

Williams's poetics in *Paterson* serve as an integral point of departure for the emergence of postmodern understandings of Nature. In grappling with past literary representations of Nature, *Paterson* opens future avenues for postmodern thought in the same manner that Romanticism establishes a path for Whitman in *Leaves of Grass*, and Eliot's disillusionment in *The Waste Land* leads Williams towards liberated poetic experimentation in *Paterson*. I conclude by proposing the inception of a contemporary "Second Nature," a reimagining of Nature that responds to the solipsism of postmodern thought. I ultimately suggest a necessary reconsideration of Nature that realizes the distance between human and nonhuman forms and challenges humankind to understand that which is fundamentally different from itself.

CHAPTER I

Democracy, Materiality, and Monism in Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*

Published in 1855, Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* establishes a poetics that celebrates the vastness of the American landscape, encapsulates the diversity of the American people, and presents a monistic interpretation of the relationship between the human and nonhuman Nature. In the epigraph to *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman writes, "Come, said my Soul, / Such verses for my body let us write, (for we are one,) / That should I after death invisibly return, / Or long, long hence, in other spheres, / There to some group of mates the chants resuming, / (Tallying Earth's soil, trees, winds, tumultuous waves…)"[14] Whitman opens *Leaves of Grass* by asserting his belief in the monism between the material body and the immaterial soul. He establishes an interconnectedness between this unified human being, body and soul, and the material properties of Earth—the "soil, trees, winds, tumultuous waves…." In death, Whitman states, the human invisibly rejoins the natural world through ultimate disintegration into the soil. Whitman's understanding of the relationship between the human and nonhuman is grounded in the divine spirituality of Nature, an idea central to Ralph Waldo Emerson's Transcendentalist philosophy.

While *Leaves of Grass* is influenced by the contemporaneous works of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, Whitman exceeds these Transcendentalist influences to frame the corporeal body as one with the natural, material objects that stand in relation to divine Nature. Whitman dissolves the boundaries between the human and the nonhuman, revealing an ideal, interdependent, and ecocentric state of being that strives for ultimate union between flesh and earth. This union of the human and nonhuman, I argue, is evident in *Leaves of Grass* through

[14] Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (New York: The New American Library, 1954), 29.

the transmutative relationship between Whitman's language and material American Nature, the union of corporeal bodies with the landscape, and the conflation of the body and the soul.

Emerson's 1836 essay *Nature* articulates the foundations of the Transcendentalist belief in Nature as a divine force which humanity must harness to understand reality.[15] According to Emerson, the moral truths of Nature are grounded in idealism, a philosophical doctrine that proposes physical matter as an embodiment of the spiritual world and reality as a reflection of the mind. In the sixth chapter of *Nature*, entitled "Idealism," Emerson writes, "Nature is made to conspire with spirit to emancipate us. Certain mechanical changes, a small alteration in our local position, apprizes us of a dualism…. In these cases, by mechanical means, is suggested the difference between the observer and the spectacle—between man and nature."[16] Emerson establishes a distinction between the human as "observer" and spiritual Nature as a "spectacle," designed by God to liberate humanity. Humanity, Emerson notes, often fails to see Nature on more than a superficial level. To truly understand Nature is to be a person whose "inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood. His intercourse with heaven and earth becomes part of his daily food. In the presence of nature, a wild delight runs through the man, in spite of real sorrows."[17] To truly *see* spiritual Nature, Emerson argues, humanity must let go of its preconceived notions and embrace a life of solitude in the natural world, free from the distractions and opinions of others.

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[15] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature* (London: Penguin Books, 2008), 30-31. Emerson argues for the infallibility of the moral truths of Nature, writing, "A rule of one art, or a law of one organization, holds true throughout nature. So intimate is this Unity, that, it is easily seen, it lies under the undermost garment of nature, and betrays its source in Universal Spirit. For it pervades thought also. Every universal truth which we express in words, implies or supposes every other truth."

[16] Ibid., 35-36.

[17] Ibid., 4.

Like Emerson, Whitman reconsiders widely accepted understandings of Nature, questioning the existences of natural objects throughout *Leaves of Grass*. Consciously working against the hierarchies of the Anthropocene, Whitman examines the ontologies of natural material beings not as things objectified through human-centric attitudes, but as entities with existences that stretch beyond their relationship to the human. In "Song of Myself," Whitman writes, "A child said *What is the grass?* fetching it to me with full hands, / How could I answer the child? I do not know what it is anymore than he. / I guess it must be the flag of my disposition, out of hopeful green stuff woven."[18] While Emerson's philosophy is grounded in his conceptualization of Nature as a universal and immaterial spiritual force, Whitman tends to the material existences of environmental entities not as a reflection of the spiritual realm, but as inherently inseparable from it. Whitman transcends the influence of Emerson's idealist belief in the tactile natural world as a symbol and reflection of spiritual Nature, instead constructing a monism that binds the divinity and materiality of Nature.

Emerson both inspired Whitman intellectually and vaunted his reputation as a poet. In his 1844 essay "The Poet," Emerson declares America's need for a poet to articulate the country's shortcomings and accomplishments in a distinctly American voice. As a poet focused on the spirituality of Nature rather than the inclusion and celebration of the American people, Emerson proved incapable of filling this role himself. Arguing that the diversity of the American people and vastness of the land can only truly be represented through poetry, Emerson writes, "And this hidden truth, that the fountains whence all this river of Time and its creatures floweth are intrinsically ideal and beautiful, draw us to the consideration of the nature and functions of the Poet, or the man of Beauty; to the means and materials he uses, and to the general aspect of the

[18] Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 53.

art in the present time."[19] Emerson establishes his idealist philosophy at the center of this national role, describing the poet as a prophetic figure with the ability to dictate the relationship between the human race and the truths of Nature. Emerson contends that the poet "stands among partial men for the complete man, and apprises us not of his wealth, but of the commonwealth… Nature enhances her beauty, to the eyes of loving men, from their belief that the poet is beholding her shows at the same time"[20] In describing the poet as a "man of Beauty" with the ability to dictate the universal spirituality of Nature, Emerson establishes the role of the "true poet" in mid-nineteenth century American culture as a unifying voice for the nation. After reading "The Poet," Whitman set out to directly answer Emerson's call by creating a poetic voice in *Leaves of Grass* that simultaneously channels the beauty of Nature and represents the American people. Whitman sent Emerson a copy of *Leaves of Grass* when it was first published in July 1855. Upon reading the book, Emerson wrote in a letter to Whitman, "I find it the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed…. I greet you at the beginning of a great career…"[21] Overtime, the admiration and interest that Emerson and Whitman found in one another cooled as the philosophical differences of their works became more apparent. Nonetheless, it is critically accepted that without Emerson's belief in Whitman's poetics, *Leaves of Grass* would have gone unnoticed.

It is important to note that although Whitman fulfilled Emerson's vision of an American poetic voice in writing *Leaves of Grass*, the book is likewise imbued with the stylistic and philosophical influence of Emerson's Transcendentalist contemporary, Henry David Thoreau. While Emerson and Thoreau shared the same Transcendentalist principles, Thoreau put

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[19] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Poet," *Essays: Second Series* (Boston: Phillips, Sampson & Co., 1850), 10-11.
[20] Ibid., 11.
[21] Walt Whitman et al., *Walt Whitman, The Correspondence, Volume I: 1842-1867* (New York: New York University Press, 1961), 41.

Emerson's idealist philosophy of Nature to a material test. On July 4th, 1845, exactly ten years before the publication of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, Thoreau took to the woods near Walden Pond in Concord, Massachusetts—land owned by Emerson—and immersed himself in solitude with Nature. Thoreau's actions, documented in his 1854 book *Walden*, reveal his belief that reality is not a reflection of the human mind, but understood through man's empirical experience in Nature—a challenge to Emerson's idealism. In "Solitude," the fifth chapter of *Walden*, Thoreau writes, "How vast and profound is the influence of the subtile [*sic*] powers of Heaven and of Earth! We seek to perceive them, and we do not see them; we seek to hear them, and we do not hear them; identified with the substance of things, they cannot be separated from them."[22] In these lines, Thoreau articulates the inseparability between the spiritual elements and the physical qualities of Nature in understanding reality. Deviating from Emerson's belief in reality as a pure reflection of the mind, Thoreau, like Whitman, advocates for a reality that relies both on the spiritual powers of Nature and a person's physical experience in the world.

In *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman establishes a poetic language that embodies the movements of Nature itself—a stylistic lesson he learned from Thoreau. Thoreau's prose is imbued with the material reality he finds in Nature. He describes the ecology that constitutes Walden Pond in simple, measured language that encapsulates the deliberation of time passing in the Concord woods and the cadence of the Pond's rippling surface. In the chapter "The Ponds," Thoreau details Walden Pond, writing, "Some think it is bottomless. It is nowhere muddy, and a casual observer would say that there were no weeds at all in it; and of noticeable plants, except in the little meadows recently overflowed, which do not properly belong to it, a closer scrutiny does not detect a flag nor a bulrush, nor even a lily, yellow or white, but only a few small heartleaves and

[22] Thoreau, *Walden*, 194.

potamogetons, and perhaps a water-target or two…"[23] Thoreau establishes a forward-moving rhythm in these lines, orchestrating a moment of pause between each clause through the use of semicolons and commas. In describing the minute details of the pond's biodiversity through a language that embodies the fluid, rippling movement of water, Thoreau conflates the ecological materiality of his narrative content with syntactic form. Thoreau's philosophy of the material can be understood as an experience of reality defined by physical Nature—reflected as well in the materiality of his language.

Whitman enmeshes his poetry with nonhuman environments through the interior narrative structure and poetic style of *Leaves of Grass*. The twelve poems in the book's first edition represent the twelve months of the calendar year—a human-made mode of tracking Nature's seasonal cycles. The most modern edition of *Leaves of Grass* is likewise divided into 52 subsections, representing the total number of weeks in a year. I believe that by structuring his book according to the environmental progression of the calendar year, Whitman works to collapse the divide between human-made poetic creation and nonhuman Nature. This notion of conflation continues; Whitman, in taking on the Emersonian idealist position of the American poet as prophet, imbues his verse with a language whose textures and rhythms connect the multiplicity and diversity of American voices with the diversity of life in nonhuman Nature. Whitman's use of vernacular free verse throughout *Leaves of Grass* enforces his pursuit of a distinct American voice through poetry. Rejecting literary traditions of metered poetry, free verse is unrestrained by rhyme and thus inherently imbued with the notion of freedom. Expanding historically narrow understandings of poetic form, Whitman's free verse style syntactically embodies ideas of inclusivity and liberation.

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[23] Thoreau, *Walden*, 169.

Writing with American democratic ideals at the forefront of his mind, Whitman establishes a liberated poetic language in *Leaves of Grass* that connects his panoramic view of the natural landscape with a unified vision of America, one constituted by the diversity of the American people. His lines marry imperative declarations with sprawling catalogues of ideas, people, and material objects to encompass his vision for America. In a passage from "Song of Myself," Whitman writes:

> Through my many long dumb voices,
> Voices of the interminable generations of prisoners and slaves,
> Voices of the diseas'd and despairing and of thieves and dwarfs,
> Voices of cycles of preparation and accretion,
> And of the threads that connect the stars, and of wombs and of the father-stuff,
> And of the rights of them, the others are down upon,
> Of the deform'd, trivial, flat, foolish, or despised,
> Fog in the air, beetles rolling balls of dung.[24]

Whitman establishes a conversational cadence in his lines through the repetition of phrases bound by "of" and "the." The reader is carried forward with the rhythm of each line, a momentum that mimics Nature's cyclical temporality and establishes Whitman's language as a living, moving force. Scholar William White argues that Whitman's verse is "melodic and rhapsodic oral poetry which almost leaps from the printed page to enclasp the reader. The poems in *Leaves of Grass* are leaves of life which have been absorbed, fused, translated, and proclaimed. They mirror the poet in all his complexity. Accordingly, they flow outward toward mankind and speak intimately to mankind in all his complexity."[25] White presents a rightfully nuanced reading of the language in *Leaves of Grass* as dynamic rather than static. Pushing White's analysis even further, I argue that Whitman's verse is designed to be engaged with by the reader as an *active ecological system*. In the opening of his poem "A Song of the Rolling

[24] Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 67.
[25] William M. White, "The Dynamics of Whitman's Poetry," *The Sewanee Review* 80, no. 2 (1972): 353-354.

Earth," Whitman writes, "A song of the rolling earth, and of words according, / Were you thinking that those were the words, those upright lines? those curves, angles, dots? / No, those are not the words, the substantial words are in the ground and sea, / They are in the air, they are in you."[26] Through the line, "They are in the air, they are in you," Whitman suggests the language of *Leaves of Grass* to be a forward-moving source of life that exists in both human beings and natural landscapes, rather than a fixed listing of words on a page.

Thoreauvian influence in *Leaves of Grass* extends beyond Whitman's linguistic fusion with Nature to his role in the production of the book. Throughout *Walden*, Thoreau celebrates the process of physical labor as an integral means of forming a Transcendentalist connection with Nature. Thoreau frames his conception of human labor as an imitation of Nature's ideal systems of unceasing labor, evident in its self-generating ecological processes. Thoreau calls for labor as a means of self-reliance, writing in the conclusion to *Walden*, "Give me a hammer and let me feel for the furrowing. Do not depend on the putty. Drive a nail home and clinch it so faithfully that you can wake up in the night and think of your work with satisfaction, —a work at which you would not be ashamed to invoke the Muse."[27] The very act of Whitman's 1855 self-publication of *Leaves of Grass* reflects his belief in poetic creation as a form of physical work that, as described by Thoreau, is essential in connecting with Nature. Trained as a printer, Whitman closely oversaw the bookmaking process of *Leaves of Grass*, exercising control over the format, fabrics, and paper that constituted the book's physical form. Scholar Nicole Gray examines the closeness between Whitman as a poet and material creator, writing, "All of the editions of Whitman's books were produced on machine-made paper and profited from the nineteenth-century introduction of binder's cloth and die-stamped decoration on book

[26] Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 190.
[27] Thoreau, *Walden*, 353.

covers….over the course of his life [Whitman] made hundreds of decisions about type, spacing, layout, organization, binders' cloth, and stamping."[28] The first edition of *Leaves of Grass* contains twelve loosely connected poems, enveloped in a green cloth embossed with a vegetative design.[29] By forging an analogy between the book's ecological poetic content and its physical form, Whitman positions the material object of his book as a manifestation of the interconnectedness between human labor and the natural world.

Assigning the name "Leaves of Grass" to his book, Whitman reframes traditional conceptualizations of Nature to further challenge the human-nonhuman dichotomy. On one level, the title "Leaves of Grass" acts as a simple publishing pun; "grass" is a term to refer to less valuable texts in the publishing world, while "leaves" is a synonym for the sheets of paper used for printing. On another level, however, the use of "leaves" as a descriptor of grass, rather than "blades" or "spears," reflects Whitman's desire to reconsider the ontological importance of natural entities on a granular level. Scholar Diane Kepner speaks to this point, arguing that "Whitman comes to change the name of the grass to emphasize it. Referring to a 'spear' of grass calls attention primarily to its shape. By changing the metaphor implicit in the name from 'spears' to 'leaves,' Whitman shifts the focus from the shape alone to shape plus purpose."[30] Through this linguistic alteration, Whitman not only calls attention to the purpose of the grass, as Kepner argues, but establishes his "leaves of grass," or his poems, as *active* entities enlivened by the vitality of his language.

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[28] Nicole Gray, "Bookmaking," *Walt Whitman in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 156-157.
[29] Ibid., 159.
[30] Diane Kepner, "From Spears to Leaves: Walt Whitman's Theory of Nature in 'Song of Myself," *American Literature* 51, no. 2 (1979): 199-200.

Whitman's language in *Leaves of Grass* stretches beyond individualized descriptions of human and nonhuman subjects to position them in a fluid relationship. Whitman's "absorbed, fused, translated, and proclaimed" language, as White describes it, establishes a non-hierarchical, transmutative relationship between the democratic unity of the American people and the vastness of American landscapes. Through the living language of Whitman's poetics, human voices become natural objects as fluidly as Nature merges with the human form. In the passage from "Song of Myself" referenced earlier, Whitman describes the "Voices of the interminable generations of prisoners and slaves, / Voices of the diseas'd and despairing and of thieves and dwarfs, / Voices of cycles of preparation and accretion…." By calling attention to the "voices of the interminable generations of prisoners and slaves," Whitman forces his reader to confront the nineteenth-century oppression of enslaved people and prisoners as a class of persons, rather than a dehumanized "other." While the first two lines in this excerpt refer to human subjects—"prisoners and slaves" as well as "the diseas'd and despairing" and "thieves and dwarfs"—the latter clause blends the human and the nonhuman through cycles of "preparation and accretion." Cycles of preparation and accretion are equally integral to human behavior, biological processes, and nonhuman growth. By entangling human voices with natural systems in his poetics, Whitman mixes traditionally opposing concepts through language and dismantles the subject/object binary present in anthropocentric literature.

Evident in his deconstruction of the subject/object binary and transcendence of Emersonian and Thoreauvian influence, Whitman's poetics in *Leaves of Grass* challenge conceptions of natural imagery and ideas largely taken for granted, forcing the reader to reconsider them in their complexity. This reconsideration, I argue, extends into Whitman's reclamation of physical decay and disease and his subversion of nineteenth-century

understandings of the Black body as "other." Whitman's poetic understanding of "othered" corporeality—that of diseased, dying, and non-white bodies—as part of Nature stems from his exposure to broken-down and injured bodies during his time volunteering as a Union nurse during the Civil War. In her book *Inescapable Ecologies,* historian Linda Nash describes the permeability of the nineteenth-century body with the landscape, writing, "Nineteenth-century bodies, white and nonwhite, were malleable and porous entities that were in constant interaction with the surrounding environment, an environment that retained a complex agency of its own. Disease…. even when acknowledged to be contagious, was not reducible to specific pathogenic agents or person-to-person contact. Contemporaries understood the causes of disease as spread widely across both bodies and landscapes."[31] Whitman, who engaged directly with Nash's pathogenic body-landscape theory during his time as a volunteer nurse, positions the diseased and dying human body in *Leaves of Grass* as necessary fertilizer for new natural life and for the rebirth of a free America in the aftermath of the Civil War.

Through his reclamation of "othered" bodies, Whitman establishes a unity between human corporeality and Nature. In the poem "This Compost," Whitman presents the image of a human narrator who at first wrestles with their disgust and fear at the thought of bodies breaking down into the Earth. The poem begins with the narrator's reluctance to entangle their physical body with the landscape: "Something startles me where I thought I was safest, / I withdraw from the still woods I loved, / I will not go now on the pastures to walk, / I will not strip the clothes from my body to meet my lover the sea, / I will not touch my flesh to the earth as to other flesh to renew me."[32] Whitman continues to describe the narrator's revulsion at both decaying bodies

[31] Linda Nash, "Body and Environment in an Era of Colonization," *Inescapable Ecologies: A History of Environment, Disease, and Knowledge* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 18.
[32] Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 293.

and the natural landscape, writing, "I will run a furrow with my plough, I will press my spade through the sod and turn it up underneath, / I am sure I shall expose some of the foul meat."[33] The compost, as the narrator describes, consists of both human and nonhuman material—the "foul meat" of human bodies laid to rest in their graves, as well as the land itself, the sickened container of corpses "work'd over and over with sour dead."[34] "This Compost" endures a tonal shift in its latter half as the narrator declares the divinity of natural processes of decay and rebirth. Whitman writes, "The grass of spring covers the prairies, / The bean bursts noiselessly through the mould in the garden, / The delicate spear of the onion pierces upward, / The apple-buds cluster together on the apple-branches, / The resurrection of the wheat appears with pale visage out of its graves…"[35] Whitman frames the natural regeneration of the landscape as a miracle that envelops the earth and returns it to life. The sanctity of earthly rebirth is evident in the lightness and spiritual collectivity imbued in Whitman's language—he describes the "delicate" onion spear, the "cluster" of apple-buds, and the "pale visage" of the wheat. Scholar M. Jimmie Killingsworth writes that through earthly rebirth, "the poet slides into another of his rhapsodic meditations on oneness with the earth, the body again emplaced, the earth embodied."[36] Expanding on Killingsworth's articulation of the exchange between body and earth in *Leaves of Grass*, I argue that Whitman rejects the existence of death as ultimate termination. Blurring the distinction between earthly rebirth and divine resurrection, Whitman instead proposes physical death as a continuation of human life through alternative nonhuman forms.

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[33] Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 293.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid., 294.
[36] M. Jimmie Killingsworth, *Walt Whitman and the Earth: A Study of Ecopoetics* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2004), 321.

The transformation of human life into Nature curtails nineteenth-century anxieties of death by establishing it not as an ultimate termination of life, but as an organic change of form. Whitman's ontological questioning of grass in "Song of Myself" reveals it to be a source of natural regrowth nourished by human corpses decomposing into the earth:

> The smallest sprout shows there is really no death,
> And if ever there was it led forward life, and does not wait at the end to arrest it,
> And ceas'd the moment life appear'd.
> All goes onward and onward, nothing collapses,
> And to die is different from what any one supposed, and luckier.[37]

Whitman identifies the grass growing from the corpses as a subsequent progression from death, rather than an end in and of itself. This transformation of life from corporeal body to grass demands the question: can the human self continue to truly exist in an altered nonhuman state of being? Through the construction of natural life as persisting on in other forms despite bodily death, scholar Jack Turner argues that Whitman accounts for these questions through the material immortality of physical matter, writing, "Though the self receives identity from the decomposed body matter of previous generations, its distinctive life experiences leaves a mark on every atom, transforming the matter than passed on to future generations. The self is immortal not as a single entity, but as dispersed atoms taken up by other bodies. Though the self material disintegrates, it leaves an organic signature on the world."[38] The interconnected atomic exchange and dispersal of physical matter, as detailed by Turner, is integral to Whitman's monistic understanding of the corporeal body and Nature. The human and nonhuman prove to be inseparable from each other in Whitman's poetics because to endure a bodily death is to instigate the movement of the same atomic matter from one entity to another.

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[37] Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 54.
[38] Jack Turner, "Whitman, Death, and Democracy," in *Political Companion to Walt Whitman* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 274.

By entangling the corporeal body with Nature through the immortality of physical matter, Whitman deconstructs the Transcendentalist separation of the material body and the immaterial soul—and in doing so, strives for a monistic divine unity. In "Song of Myself," Whitman writes, "I am the poet of the Body and I am the poet of the Soul, / The pleasures of heaven are with me and the pains of hell are with me, / The first I graft and increase upon myself, the latter I translate into a new tongue."[39] Whitman's assertion that he is "the poet of the Body" and "the poet of the Soul" unites the materialism of the body with the idealism of the soul and spiritual world. The soul, according to Whitman, is present in every human and nonhuman entity. Although the verse in "Song of Myself" is imbued with idealist notions of the poet as a spiritual being—the "poet of the Soul"—Whitman simultaneously implements a vocabulary of materialism that establishes transient, tactile natural entities and the material body as inseparable from the divinity of Nature. Diane Kepner argues that it is impossible to accurately categorize Whitman in either the world of Emersonian idealism or Thoreauvian materialism. Kepner writes that there are "problems with classifying Whitman as a materialist. The vocabulary of philosophical idealism is as prominent in 'Song of Myself' as the vocabulary of materialism…. Finally, of course, the emphasis Whitman places on a kind of mystical oneness seems to be completely incompatible with a materialistic, scientific point of view."[40] While Kepner's argument conveys the philosophical plurality of Whitman's poetics, her argument falls short of connecting the fusion of materialism and idealism in *Leaves of Grass* with Whitman's monism. This monism, I argue, exists not only as a means for conceptualizing the relationship between the human and nonhuman, but represents Whitman's democratic vision for the future of the American nation.

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[39] Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 65.
[40] Kepner, "From Spears to Leaves," 181.

In proposing a monistic poetics in which the body and the soul exist as one, Whitman transcends the hierarchical distinctions between the human and the nonhuman established in the writings of Emerson and Thoreau. The monism of the body and soul in *Leaves of Grass* associates material entities with the spiritual realm, thus creating a new form of poetics that dissolves preceding distinctions between the human, Nature, and the divine. White contends that "much of [Whitman's] poetry is based on a sensuous fusion which he felt and accepted on faith…. Whitman wrote not of life's limitations but of its infinite potential, and he wrote a new song in a new tongue for ears scarcely attuned to hear it."[41] By coupling the monistic philosophy and immortality of the human through nonhuman lifeforms with the free verse form of his poetry, Whitman creates a poetics that embodies his vision for a liberated post-Civil War America. Articulating the prospect of a free American nation, *Leaves of Grass*—both a collection of poems (its "leaves") and a material object—evidently exists as a self-possessed, monistic entity in and of itself.

Like an ideal American democracy, or an ecological system, the self-possessed existence of *Leaves of Grass* depends on the diversity constituting it—a truth reflected by the final passage of Whitman's "Song of Myself, " which concludes with the lines, "I am large, I contain multitudes."[42] The multitudes of human and nonhuman, democratic collective and individual, and body and soul that make up *Leaves of Grass* do not exist independently of one another, but merge to become a single, original whole. It is this whole that represents Whitman's vision of an American democracy and embodies his creation of a monistic poetic tradition that not only fulfills, but transcends Emerson's articulation of a distinctly American poetic voice.

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[41] White, "The Dynamics of Whitman's Poetry," 352.
[42] Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 96.

CHAPTER II

Human and Nonhuman Feedback Loops in T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*

T. S. Eliot's 1922 poem *The Waste Land* registers the social and psychological dislocation of modernity through the devastation of ecological landscapes. In this chapter, I examine the polluted landscape of Eliot's *The Waste Land* as a symbol for the disillusionment and decay pervading post-World War I cosmopolitan society, and the destabilized reality of the city as symptomatic of the modern human's alienation from Nature. Rejecting the Transcendentalist belief in the interdependent relationship between self and Nature, humankind in *The Waste Land*, I argue, pushes itself towards its own extinction through its entrapment in hermeneutic circles—a concept developed in Martin Heidegger's 1927 book *Being and Time*. Heidegger describes the hermeneutic circle as a feedback loop constituted by the interpretation of individual parts as a means to understand the whole, and a subsequent understanding of the whole that reinforces that same interpretation of its parts.[43] Feedback loops determine and reinforce human interpretations of reality—reality which, in *The Waste Land*, is overwhelmed by the disillusionment of modernity. Timothy Morton's theory of the human and nonhuman in his 2016 book *Dark Ecology* reinterprets Heidegger's hermeneutic circles in terms of anthropocentrism and ecological awareness. Morton argues that while humans and nonhumans exist within the context of one another, anthropocentric human society attempts to establish its own being independent from the nonhuman world. Cosmopolitan societies, like that of *The Waste Land*, run on systems of hierarchical capitalist control and production, reinforced by the need to sustain the economy of the city amid post-war instability. Focused on the endurance of urban life, human society in *The Waste Land* neglects its relationship with the natural world.

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[43] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1962), 398.

Morton examines this dangerous desire for anthropocentric independence in the context of capitalist politics, writing, "Capitalist economics is also an anthropocentric practice that has no easy way to factor in the very things that ecological thought and politics require: non-human beings and unfamiliar timescales…. Psychology and economics, 'sciences' closest to humans, are, not surprisingly, deeply anthropocentric and unwilling to consider that they may be caught in hermeneutical loops."[44] *The Waste Land*, this chapter argues, anticipates Morton's theory of feedback loops through recursive cycles that perpetuate the disillusioned reality of cosmopolitan civilization, damage the pre-industrial symbiosis between human and Nature, and ultimately lead to Nature's rebirth from the human world's self-induced state of apocalypse.

The fragmentary poetic structure and subsequent sense of chaos permeating the reality of *The Waste Land* exists in a feedback loop form. I believe that the widespread social and psychological disillusionment of the modern human—caused by warfare and modern industrialization—is reinforced by the poem's fragmented and polyvocal structure. In examining the individual fragments that constitute *The Waste Land*, the reader faces the poem's totality as rooted in the absence of a singular poetic voice, a comprehensible timescale, or an explicit meaning. The absence of an evident order when examining Eliot's poem as a whole leads the reader, I argue, to interpret the poem's fragmented parts as indicative of its dysfunctional totality—which in turn points towards the composite understanding of *The Waste Land* as a symbol of loss and desolation. Scholar Jo Ellen Green Kaiser argues that linguistic fragmentation in the poem represents modern humanity's attempt to find meaning in the chaos of modernity, despite its alienation from a collective sense of culture. Kaiser writes that when "faced with the impossible task of formulating a totalizing order, the poem's speakers, like the modern

[44] Morton, *Dark Ecology*, 35.

inhabitants of the everyday world they represent, fragment their world into increasingly smaller segments in an attempt to achieve a local order."[45] Not only do the inhabitants of the wasteland "fragment their world" in search of order, as Kaiser describes, but the linguistic structure of Eliot's poem itself becomes further divided and disordered:

> Here is now water but only rock
> Rock and no water and the sandy road
> The road winding above among the mountains
> Which are mountains of rock without water
> If there were only water amongst the rock
> Amongst the rock one cannot stop or think
> Sweat is dry and feet are in the sand[46]

Reflected by the prophet's desert surroundings in these lines, the pursuit of meaning through fragmentation in *The Waste Land* represents the futility of the modern human's desire to break free from the sterile disillusionment enveloping twentieth-century society.

The disorder of modern reality is likewise evident in Eliot's invocation of references across literary history, which creates a panoramic poetic structure reflective of the unstable modern world. In superimposing fragmented literary allusions throughout the poem, Eliot grapples with voices across time to reference past literature, Biblical verses, mythology, and ancient fertility rituals. In his 1919 essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Eliot describes the necessity of the coexistence between the past and the present in modern poetics:

> Tradition is a matter of much wider significance…. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the

[45] Jo Ellen Green Kaiser, "Discipling *The Waste Land*, or How to Lead Critics into Temptation," *Twentieth Century Literature* 44, no. 1 (1998): 84.
[46] T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land and Other Poems,* ed. Frank Kermode (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 66.

> whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order.[47]

Eliot proposes the necessity of a "simultaneous order" of culture and tradition in modern texts, situating literature of the present in the context of its historical past. Despite Eliot's articulation of its necessity, this order proves fragile in *The Waste Land* as the entanglement of past and present reveals an unstable world riddled with chaos.

References in *The Waste Land* function as objective correlatives, Eliot's term for individual images and sensory experiences that elicit emotion in the reader, rather than presenting a fully formed image or idea. Influenced by the experimental structure and use of allusions to history and mythology in Tennyson's poetics, as well as Eliot's own close relationship to Ezra Pound and the Imagist movement, Eliot defines the objective correlative in his 1919 essay "Hamlet and His Problems." In this essay, Eliot takes issue with Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, stating that Hamlet's desire for revenge is not enough reason for him to be driven to madness. Further criticizing Shakespeare's work, Eliot argues that Shakespeare fails to properly express Hamlet's emotions, asserting, "The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that when external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked." *The Waste Land* is ingrained with a recursive sense of modern disorder, established by the superimposition of objective correlatives that, paradoxically, scramble the "simultaneous order" of literary history with the chaos of the modern era.

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[47] T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (New York: Farrer, Straus and Giroux, 1975), 38.

Eliot, however, does not just deal with the past as a means to represent the present, but establishes *The Waste Land* as a future-looking poetics through the use of prophetic narrative voices, oracles, clairvoyants, and tarot card readings. Gabrielle McIntire argues that Eliot's "understanding of the 'historical sense' describes a hermeneutics through which the specificity of present time compares with its eternal aspects…. he describes the modern poet as situated in a 'contemporaneity' that is taken to task for being 'conscious' of none of other than its location, or, its 'place in time.'"[48] McIntire correctly articulates the fluid sense of time in *The Waste Land*, but falls short of relating this sense of temporal exchange to Eliot's displaced narrative voice. In describing the disillusionment of the modern present through objective correlatives that represent the past and look toward the future, *The Waste Land*, I argue, dislocates narrative voice from a singular vantage point. Each of the poem's five sections opens with a line that, when read as an individual part, appears detached from any poetic speaker and fundamentally unrelated to the poem's other sections. In reference to Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, the first section of *The Waste Land* reads, "April is the cruellest month, breeding."[49] Eliot takes the beginning of the second section from Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*: "The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne."[50] The third section begins, "The river's tent is broken; the last fingers of leaf."[51] In the fourth section, the shortest of the poem, Eliot opens, "Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead."[52] The fifth and final section reads, "After the torchlight red on sweaty faces."[53] Despite their seeming incoherence, these opening lines, scholar Michael Levenson writes, when read in the context of the poem as a whole reveal the poem's acceptance of "a documentary

[48] Gabrielle McIntire, *Modernism, Memory, and Desire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 108.
[49] Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 55.
[50] Ibid., 57.
[51] Ibid., 61.
[52] Ibid., 66.
[53] Ibid.

vocation, where speech becomes the assertion of fact through simple syntax and vocabulary, and scenes are surveyed from an apparently detached and all-seeing vantage point."[54] While I agree with Levenson's understanding of the dislocation of narrative voice in characterizing Eliot's polyvocality, I push his argument further to account for the manner in which syntactic fragmentation establishes *The Waste Land* as a self-regulating poetic machine. This machine not only depicts modern reality, but encapsulates and perpetuates that dysfunctional reality through its fragmented structure. McIntire examines the poem's self-regulated reality, arguing that in writing *The Waste Land*, "Eliot was turning away from mimesis as art's recording mode, offering not only a reflection of his time, but claiming that poetry makes, creates and tempers its cultural and historical conditions of possibilities. These conditions, in turn, are absorbed and refracted back to it, so that poetry functions as source as well as comment."[55] The perpetuated disillusionment and decay of modern civilization positions *The Waste Land* as a symbol for the cyclical entrapment of modernity, from which there seems to be no conceivable escape.

The self-enforcing structure of *The Waste Land* extends into Eliot's subversion of natural cycles of decomposition and regrowth. The poem's opening lines read:

> April is the cruellest month, breeding
> Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
> Dull roots with spring rain.
> Winter kept us warm, covering
> Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
> A little life with dried tubers.[56]

Winter, reflective of the static temporality and stalled progression of Nature, gives the inhabitants of the wasteland a false, but miserable, sense of security. The decrepit ecology of a

[54] Michael Levenson, "Form, Voice, and the Avant-Garde," *The Cambridge Companion to The Waste Land*, 89.
[55] McIntire, *Modernism, Memory, and Desire*, 104-105.
[56] Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 55.

winter landscape, like modern reality, exists within the limits of its hermeneutic circle. When faced with vernal resurrection, the inhabitants treat Nature with hesitation and distaste. McIntire writes that "April is cruel because by prompting memory it reminds one of the inevitability and necessity of change. Its function is both anamnestic (helping rather than hindering memory) and recuperative—through its annual repetition it recalls to consciousness what might have been forgotten…. After the seeming immutability that winter grants by freezing time….spring forces us not only to remember, but to participate in change."[57] Eliot emphasizes the devastation of human and ecological life by World War I as an innate impediment to regrowth. At one point in the poem, Eliot's speaker shares a conversation with the veteran Stetson: "'You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!' / That corpse you planted last year in your garden, / 'Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?' / 'Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?'"[58] Nature in *The Waste Land* is characterized by the rejection of springtime as a season of prosperity and fruitfulness, and the impossible hope that new, bountiful life will grow from the desolated war-ridden landscape. Unlike Whitman's natural life, which regrows from war-ridden corpses, the human inhabitants of Eliot's wasteland are trapped in a recursive disillusioned reality and see Nature's processes of renewal as a false promise.

The fragmentation, destruction, and catastrophe that riddles *The Waste Land* is, of course, a symbol for the social and psychological dislocation of European culture in the aftermath of the first World War. It also, I argue, takes on a literal meaning throughout Eliot's poem, representing the ecological consequences caused by modern humankind's alienation from and destruction of Nature. In her article "*The Waste Land* as Ecocritique," Gabrielle McIntire states that "with Eliot's keen eye for surroundings and landscapes, he is both writing about a barren, postwar *land*

[57] McIntire, *Modernism Memory, and Desire*, 42.
[58] Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 57.

that is marked by pollutants, vulnerable to smog, littered with trash, and, in a sense, dying, while he is inviting us to understand this bleak setting and ecology as offering symbolic and metaphorical commentary on our own wasted (and wasteful) existences."[59] The ecological landscape of Eliot's poem serves as a symbol for the destabilized reality of the modern era—both an analogy of internal human disillusionment and a direct manifestation of the external effects of human alienation from the natural world. In contrast to the pastoral past,[60] the restorative processes of Nature are now unavailable to help humanity achieve freedom from its static state. Instead, humanity stumbles through the detritus-strewn, industrialized landscape of London, wandering "under the brown fog of a winter noon."[61] By examining the damaged symbiotic relationship between modern humanity and Nature, Eliot emphasizes modernity's neglect of the interdependence of human and nonhuman forms. The polarity between the human and nonhuman reveals, according to McIntire, that Eliot "seems already aware of the terrifying breaches that a 'post-natural' world signifies between 'nature' and 'the human,' where 'nature' is profoundly unbalanced by the effects of the human on a global scale even as we spectacularly fail to bear witness to the massiveness and irreversibility of these changes…. Nature in his poetry, just as the human, is ill."[62] Eliot's depiction of the natural world in *The Waste Land* is plagued by the lingering effects of World War I and imagery of pollution:

> The river swears
> Oil and tar
> The barges drift
> With the turning tide
> Red sails
> Wide

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[59] McIntire, "The Waste Land as Ecocritique," *The Cambridge Companion to The Waste Land*, 178.
[60] Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 61. The speaker in Eliot's poem mourns the modern loss of pastoral Nature in the line, "The nymphs are departed."
[61] Ibid., 62.
[62] McIntire, "The Waste Land as Ecocritique," 182.

To leeward, swing on the heavy spar.
The barges wash
Drifting logs
Down Greenwich reach
Past the Isle of Dogs.[63]

Scenes of natural landscapes dominated by urban architecture depict the river Thames clogged by "oil and tar," reinforcing modernity's state of disillusionment through pollution. Humanity is thus cut off from the prospect of freedom from its present condition.

Cityscapes in *The Waste Land* are defined by their abundance of concrete architecture, which likewise reinforces the dismal state of modernity. I propose that the poem's fragmented psychological reality is confined within the concrete echo chamber of the modern city, and therefore sequestered from the inherently ephemeral natural landscape. The modern city runs on capitalist manufacturing, but commercial production of material goods results in the same disillusioned state that incites the human desire for production in the first place. Eliot symbolizes this recursive state of urban existence through the unromantic affair between a man and a woman in London: "Flushed and decided, he assaults at once; / Exploring hands encounter no defence; / His vanity requires no response, / And makes a welcome of indifference."[64] Witnessed by the ancient mythical prophet Tiresias of Thebes, this scene reveals two humans so overwhelmed by their psychological states that, in the modern city, a center of capitalist production, even sex proves unfulfilling and nonreproductive.

It is fair to argue that both the human and nonhuman exist in cyclical states of being, or as Morton describes them, feedback loops. In *Dark Ecology*, Morton writes that ecological awareness—or, ecological *un*awareness in *The Waste Land*—takes the shape of a loop because

[63] Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 64.
[64] Ibid., 63.

"human interference has a loop form, because ecological and biological systems are loops. And ultimately this is because to exist at all is to assume the form of a loop. The loop form of being means we live in a universe of finitude and fragility, a world in which objects are suffused with and surrounded by mysterious hermeneutical clouds of unknowing."[65] The cyclicality of human civilization in *The Waste Land* reinforces the post-war disorder of modernity through widespread social isolation, ecological degradation, and urban architecture. Nature's feedback loops fail to run as they are traditionally thought to. Instead, natural processes of decomposition and rebirth are subverted into symbols of despair, while the ecological landscape itself is littered by industrial pollution and dead corpses from the war—a hindrance to its natural cyclicality.

Cycles of human despair in *The Waste Land* are heightened by the spatial superimposition of cities past and present, which creates a disjunction that ultimately leads to the crumbling of urban spaces in the poem's conclusion. In his mythopoetic style, Eliot does not only examine London as a city, but overlays it with the histories of "Jerusalem Athens Alexandria" and "Vienna."[66] The sounds of human voices across literary history, including those of Eliot's mythopoetic narrators, echo within the confines of the city: "Tolling reminiscent bells, that kept the hours / And voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells."[67] This recursive mode signals the entrapment of the human mind in a shattered, isolated consciousness. In describing the modern human experience in urban spaces, Eliot combines his representation of the city with the writings of Dante and Baudelaire. The speaker of the poem describes the image of a crowd moving across the London Bridge at dawn, trapped in the capitalist routine of modern life: "Unreal City / Under the brown fog of a winter dawn, / A crowd flowed over London

[65] Morton, *Dark Ecology*, 6.
[66] Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 68.
[67] Ibid.

Bridge, so many, / I had not thought death had undone so many."[68] Eliot draws a parallel between the urbanity of modern London and the hellish landscape of the infernal city, or the City of Dis, in Dante's 1321 *Inferno*. Eliot's line, "I had not thought death had undone so many," draws from the Dantean line, "I should never have believed death had undone so many."[69] Dante's infernal city is antithetical to the heavenly city, described in Augustine of Hippo's *The City of God*. By incorporating reference to Dante, Eliot draws a parallel between the City of Dis, which contains the lower levels of the underworld, guarded by demons and filled with fiery tombs,[70] and the post-war and post-industrial chaos of modern civilization.

Baudelaire, writing during Haussmann's urbanization of Paris in the mid to late-nineteenth century, is known for his flâneur, an urban archetype characterized by his excitement in observing city life. In describing the "Unreal City," Eliot fuses industrialized London with scenes from Baudelaire's Paris in the 1857 poetry volume *Les Fleurs du mal*. The opening lines of Baudelaire's "Les Sept Vieillards" ("The Seven Old Men") read: "Fourmillante cité, cité pleine de rêves, / Où le spectre en plein jour raccroche le passant" ("swarming city, where in broad daylight the ghost accosts the passer-by.")[71] The rapid change brought on by the Haussmannization of Paris incited both intense creative excitement and unease. In fusing Dante's infernal city with the excitement of Baudelaire's Paris, Eliot's depiction of London, Robert Crawford argues, "becomes both Baudelaire's city of the daylight ghost, but also in its Dantesque gloom…."[72] Eliot's superimposition of modern London with the cityscapes of Dante

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[68] Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 57.
[69] Robert Crawford, *The Savage and the City in the Work of T. S. Eliot* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 46.
[70] Dante Alighieri, *Dante's Inferno* (London: Cassell Publishing Company, [1860?]), 47.
[71] Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 99. See more in the explanatory notes for *The Waste Land*, where Eliot's use of Baudelaire is examined as an admiration "founded in part on [Baudelaire's] originality as the poet of the modern city." This translation of Baudelaire's poetry is taken from the poem's explanatory notes.
[72] Crawford, *The Savage and the City in the Work of T. S. Eliot*, 46.

and Baudelaire enforces the distorted reality, or unreality, of *The Waste Land*—an unreality that leads to the ultimate crumbling of the modern city: "What is the city over the mountains / Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air / Falling towers."[73] Blending modern London with the literary landscapes of Baudelaire's Paris and Dante's infernal city, Eliot creates an urban atmosphere that combines awe and horror in the new modern city. In contrast to older orders of European urbanity whose architecture reflects centuries of international influence, the cityspace in *The Waste Land* grapples with the startling newness of modern architecture and its subsequent psychological effects.

The human feedback loop reinforcing modern disillusionment is ultimately deconstructed by Nature's rebirth, which arises from the human world's self-induced state of apocalypse. As *The Waste Land* crescendos towards its conclusion, a rooster announces the coming of rain. The resurrection and continuation of nonhuman life despite the breakdown of human culture is represented by the cry of a rooster and the sudden lightning, wind, and rainstorm. After urban landscapes have collapsed into unreality, the voice of Nature itself speaks into the quiet: "Only a cock stood on the rooftree / Co co rico co co rico / In a flash of lightning. Then a damp gust / Bringing rain."[74] The survival of the nonhuman after Nature has exerted its influence on human society dismantles the anthropocentric idea that the world ends without the presence of humanity. In contrast to the hopeful description of Nature's reentrance, S. J. Higson-Blythe writes that "[Eliot's] titular wasteland stands as a stark image for the world post-apocalypse, but also for a dead world looking to birth capital once more, looking to be reborn just to fall to the same fate. The world has already ended for countless extinct creatures, but it kept on spinning

[73] Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 67-68.
[74] Ibid., 68.

and life went on."[75] As the rain arrives—a recurring religious motif in the Bible that represents holy purification and God's blessing—the thunder, serving as the poem's final prophetic voice, announces a three-word refrain: "Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata."[76] With these three words, Nature speaks its own resurrection into existence, fueled by the coming storm. "Datta," "dayadhvam," "damyata" are Sanskrit words that respectively translate to "give," "sympathize," and "control." These fragments serve as advice spoken by Nature itself, warning humanity of the behaviors it must exhibit in order to achieve salvation from the wasteland of modernity. It remains ambiguous if this salvation remains possible for humankind or if the modern world has lost all chance of redemption. The final statement, however, presents a hopeful vision of the future through a refrain from a non-western ancient religion, "Shantih shantih shantih," meaning "peace."[77] Looking to other cultures and societies amid the catastrophic modernity of the West, Eliot stretches through time and tradition to deliver the human world's final breath. "Shantih shantih shantih" is a spiritual utterance that historically ends Upanishads, or Sanskrit scriptures, and establishes a sense of peace between the self and the surrounding environment. By invoking the Sanskirt saying "shantih," Eliot connects his poem with the Hindu belief in the interdependence between Nature and the divine.

With this ending, Eliot retroactively positions his poem as a form of ritual or prayer. In doing so, he concludes the hermeneutic circle of his oeuvre and creates a total order that enables the reader to understand the poem's fragments as parts of a prayer reflecting on the chaos and apocalypse of humankind's demise, rather than meaningless, disordered parts. Eliot ultimately

[75] S. J. Higson-Blythe, "What the Thunder really said: T. S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land' as a proto-Necrocene," *Fields: Journal of Huddersfield Student Research* 9, no. 1 (2023): 10.
[76] Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 69.
[77] Ibid.

presents his reader with the vision of Nature's rebirth as a continuing future and newfound freedom from the cycles of disillusionment plaguing modern human society.

CHAPTER III

Rhizomatic Multiplicities in William Carlos Williams's *Paterson*

In the epigraph to his epic poem *Paterson*, published in five volumes between 1946 and 1958, William Carlos Williams writes, "*a local pride; spring summer, fall and the sea; a confession….hard to put it; an identification and a plan for action to supplant a plan for action; a taking up of slack; a dispersal and a metamorphosis*."[78] Williams's opening lines are both instructional and obscure, at once establishing a clear importance of locality in his poetics—a "local pride"—and a complete lack of formal closure—"hard to put it…. a dispersal and a metamorphosis." This introduction to *Paterson*, an epic poem inspired by the sweeping scale of James Joyce's *Ulysses*,[79] reflects Williams's determination to create a documentary mode of poetic expression that reflects the natural surroundings of Paterson, New Jersey—an aim Joyce achieves with his rendering of Dublin.[80] *Paterson* maps the Passaic River from its sublime falls in the city of Paterson to the sea by anthropomorphizing local Nature as a giant-like, mythical figure called Mr. Paterson. Throughout the poem, Williams presents Mr. Paterson as a poet attempting to conceive of the coexistence of human and nonhuman entities as an interconnected multiplicity, despite the recurring sense of fragmentation in the modern world. The giant Mr. Paterson grapples with the expansiveness of his dreams—represented by the Falls—and the metamorphosis inherent to both human and natural life. Williams's representation of the ineluctable interlacing of human and nonhuman forms in *Paterson* reflects modern reconsiderations of the relationship between human and Nature. The role of Nature in *Paterson*

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[78] William Carlos Williams, *Paterson* (New York: New Directions Books, 1995), 2. I italicize Williams's epigraph in keeping with the original publication.
[79] Marion W. Cumpiano, "The Impact of James Joyce on William Carlos Williams: An Uneasy Ambivalence," *William Carlos Williams Review* 15, no. 1 (1989): 57.
[80] See more in Christopher Beach, "William Carlos Williams and the Modernist Scene," *The Cambridge Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 110.

challenges the binary division between the human and nonhuman as established in Eliot's *The Waste Land*. *Paterson*, I argue, marks a distinctly modernist approach to the concept of the nonhuman that eliminates its distinction as a group of "things" separate from the human form. Rather, Williams positions humanness and ecological thingness as indistinguishable ways of being, turning to the empirical American landscape as the ultimate source of artistic creation.

Just as Williams's representations of Mr. Paterson and Paterson the place are unfixed and interwoven, *Paterson* the poem proves to be ephemeral and ultimately incomplete. In Book III, Williams conflates ecological and linguistic processes of change: "When the water has receded most things have lost their / form. They lean in the direction the current went. Mud / covers them."[81] *Paterson*'s incompleteness is evident both in a linguistic manner, with lines that fall off and deconstruct, and when understood as a complete textual entity, taking the poem's unfinished sixth book into consideration. In constructing a modern epic poem as Joyce does with *Ulysses*, Williams creates a poetics that establishes the present as a dynamic force. But why does Williams turn to this open-ended poetic style in his composition of the poem? Why did any of the modernist poets, many of whom Williams knew personally, reject concrete, realistic representations of the world in favor of abstracted, experimental verse? And how did this poetic investigation of modernist form engage with that of its contemporary cohort of early twentieth-century painters?

Williams's poetics reject literary tradition not just in form, but in artistic function. In both the visual arts and literature, Cubism upholds the same aims; Jan-Louis Kruge defines this Cubist style as "transcending boundaries of genre and mode and imitating a general attitude of originality, of making new through techniques of defamiliarization."[82] In the early twentieth

[81] Williams, *Paterson*, 140.
[82] Jan-Louis Kruger, "William Carlos Williams' cubism: The sensory dimension," *Literator* 16, no. 2 (1995): 197.

century, Cubist painters including Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, and Juan Gris depicted subjects unbound by a single perspective or form. Subjects appear twisted, broken up, superimposed over each other, and seen from every possible angle at the same time. Dada infuses the perspectival originality of Cubism with confrontational pragmatism and anti-art sentiments. While the Cubists reimagine artistic technique on the canvas, Dada artists—most famously, Marcel Duchamp—challenge what art *is*. Beginning in 1913, Duchamp created a series of readymades—ordinary objects produced through manufacturing that he altered and transformed into art, usually by rotating or repositioning the object. Duchamp's readymades, according to Molly Nesbit, mark his abandonment of easel painting and reveal that he instead "lapsed into the language of industry, slipped back onto a ready-made base, one with a technical, nonart edge, pretentions to language, a nonretinal dimension, projections, and cast shadows."[83] The Cubist and Dada movements are important to my examination of *Paterson* not only because of Williams's personal interactions with these artists and thinkers, but because *Paterson* reflects the same disruptive function. While T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* invokes a fragmentary poetic style as a reflection of the post-World War I human psyche, Williams pursues a literary liberation through his fragments, a search for artistic redefinition following the same questions as Cubist and Dada artists. *Paterson* does not just challenge poetic and linguistic form, but leads the reader to demand, what is a poem at all? In asking this question, Williams strives for the transcendence of poetic meaning, as Duchamp does with visual art. Appealing to the anti-art and anti-establishment rhetoric constituting the Dada movement, Williams challenges what poetic beauty can be through both his form and content.

[83] Molly Nesbit, "Ready-Made Originals: The Duchamp Model," *October* 37 (1986): 61.

A man, a place, and a poem, *Paterson* encompasses both human and ecological processes of becoming, marked by Williams's language of multiplicity. Williams's multiplicities in *Paterson*, I argue, reveal the parallels between his thinking and that of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their 1980 philosophical text *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Deleuze and Guattari describe the rhizome—a means of conceptualizing the relationships between entities, circumstances, or power structures—as relative, centerless, and without binaries:

> Multiplicities are rhizomatic, and expose arborescent pseudomulti-plicities for what they are. There is no unity to aboard in the object or 'return' in the subject. A multiplicity has neither subject nor object, only determinations, magnitudes, and dimensions that cannot increase in number without the multiplicity changing in nature (the laws of combination therefore increase in number as the multiplicity grows).[84]

Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome theory counters hierarchical, "tree-like" modes of thinking. The rhizome has "no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*…. The tree imposes the verb 'to be,' but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, 'and…and…and…'"[85] I argue that *Paterson* weaves human and nonhuman beings into a rhizomatic map of multiplicities that exists within the centerless space of "and," thus challenging distinctions between author and subject, self and environment, and poem and place.

The modernist movement in and of itself is imbued with rhizomatic thinking and creating. Characterized by qualities of abstraction, experimentation, and a rejection of realism, literary modernism can be represented, according to scholar James Longenbach, by a line in William Butler Yeats's 1920 poem "The Second Coming": "Things fall apart; the centre cannot

[84] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 8.
[85] Ibid., 25.

hold."[86] Longenbach writes that "modernism is divided against itself, impossible to oppose neatly to romanticism or postmodernism, difficult to associate cleanly with any particular aesthetic practice or ideological position…. What line could feel more central to our received notions of modernism?"[87] With Yeats's quotation in mind, I argue that the experimental, centerless literature of Joyce and Williams evoke rhizomatic modes of thinking in their writing. While the works of modernist artists and writers manifest this entanglement of human and nonhuman beings, rhizomatic modes of thinking are not a production of late capitalism. Open-ended, nonhierarchical means of connection—despite being coined explicitly as the rhizome in the writings of Deleuze and Guattari—prove to be an ahistorical concept that holds a ubiquitous existence in the world. As a work of modernism, Williams's *Paterson* manifests the rhizome in its totality and strives for human transcendence through the deconstruction of singular perspective and the interpretation of both language and Nature as tactile, non-abstracted localities.[88]

By engaging with Paterson, New Jersey as a specific environment—in contrast to the superimposed vignettes unbound by space or time that constitute the setting of Eliot's *The Waste Land*—Williams insists that writers must derive creative ideas from the tangible elements of landscapes and immerse themselves in the culture and history of a singular locality. Williams's belief in the physical and the local—and subsequent rejection of abstract forms—is reflected in his well-known maxim "no ideas but in things," which originates in Book I of *Paterson*:

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[86] W. B. Yeats, *The Poems*, ed. Richard J. Finneran (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1983), 187.
[87] James Longenbach, "Modern Poetry," *W. B. Yeats in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 327.
[88] Deleuze and Guattari note the representation of the rhizome in American and English literature of the twentieth century, writing that "American literature, and already English literature, manifest this rhizomatic direction to an even greater extent; they know how to move between things, establish a logic of the AND, overthrow ontology, do away with foundations, nullify endings and beginnings. They know how to practice pragmatics." Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 25.

> —Say it, no ideas but in things—
> nothing but the blank faces of the houses
> and cylindrical trees
> bent, forked by preconception and accident—
> split, furrowed, creased, mottled, stained—
> Secret—into the body of the light![89]

Williams establishes the significance of Paterson by describing the empirical qualities of its local landscape. It is these non-abstract characteristics that constitute the poetic ecosystem and reality of Williams's work. The philosophy of "no ideas but in things" serves as a guideline of the early twentieth-century Imagist movement, which sought to recreate the physical existence and reality of objects through pure, concise language. The Imagist philosophy reflected in "no ideas but in things" is evident throughout *Paterson*, most notably in Williams's opening description of his locality:

> Paterson lies in the valley under the Passaic Falls
> its spent waters forming the outline of his back. He
> lies on his right side, head near the thunder
> of the waters filling his dreams! Eternally asleep,
> his dreams walk about the city where he persists
> incognito. Butterflies settle on his stone ear.[90]

Williams anthropomorphizes the city of Paterson as an "eternally asleep" giant-like mythical figure, whose visual details, in Imagist style, are rendered almost tactile to the reader.

Although his poetic technique partakes of the Imagist tradition, Williams's focus on the empirical in *Paterson* marks a return to Walt Whitman's material detailing and ontological reconsideration of American Nature in *Leaves of Grass*, published nearly a century prior. Both Whitman and Williams are distinctly American poets who challenge literary convention, transforming American poetic tradition through the unbridled expression of emotion and their

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[89] Williams, *Paterson*, 6-7.
[90] Ibid., 6.

belief in the renewal of a battered nation.[91] An example of early modernism, Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* engages with elements of modernist experimentation that challenge literary tradition—yet at the same time, reveals the influence of Emerson's Transcendentalist idealism. Williams, however, brings the early modernism evident in Whitman's work to fruition in *Paterson*. Stephen Tapscott argues that Williams, characterized in these lines as "the modernist," simultaneously "diverges from Whitman, separating the modernist from the American Romantic work, when the form of the modernist poem seems to demand a choice between the Whitmanian projection of an ideal condition and a more objective representation of the thing-as-itself, registered in a self-reflexive language."[92] Despite their similarities, as Tapscott correctly notes, there is a clear distinction between the poetics of Whitman and Williams, evident in their treatment of the idealism and objectivity of Nature.

Writing directly in the aftermath of World War II, Williams challenges the abundance of expatriate writers dominating American literary culture from abroad by establishing a localized and unidealized value in his representation of Nature, framing it in the context of the industrial city. While Eliot turns away from Nature, a symptom of the alienation between human and nonhuman forms, Williams asserts that American Nature is an integral part of national identity. Unlike Eliot, William's poetics declare: Nature is still here and necessary in understanding what it means to be American. Alba Newmann writes that Williams conceived of *Paterson* at "a time when many American writers were abandoning their native country for Europe. Throughout its composition, [Williams] urged a return to American roots, and a recognition of vernacular value. His poem argues that *here* is a place in which men of merit (Washington, Hamilton, Chief

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[91] See more in James E. Breslin, "Whitman and the Early Development of William Carlos Williams," *PMLA* 82, no. 7 (1967): 619.

[92] Stephen Tapscott, *American Beauty: William Carlos Williams and the Modernist Whitman* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 17.

Pogatticut) found value…."[93] Considering the tension between the multiplicity of the human/nonhuman and the industrial space, Williams firmly rejects Eliot's examination of the city as a background that furthers the chaos of his post-World War I world. Paterson serves a different purpose in Williams's poetics. The city in *Paterson* does not represent the troubles of modernity, but rather, a physical, literally "down-to-earth" place that coexists with its surrounding Nature and human inhabitants. The pragmatic work of Williams, evident in his depiction of the city, opposes the idealism evident in Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* and the influence of European literary tradition and fragmentation present in Eliot's *The Waste Land*.

Paterson, New Jersey represents a rich history of American industrial growth. When Alexander Hamilton established the Society for Establishing Useful Manufactures in 1791, an organization that sourced hydropower from the local Passaic Fall to fuel its abundance of mills and factories, Paterson quickly became the center of eighteen and nineteenth-century American industry.[94] Williams incorporates the industrial past of Paterson in his poetic mapping of the present day place, writing in an interval of prose, "Witnessing the Falls Hamilton was impressed by this show of what in those times was overwhelming power…planned a stone aqueduct following a proposed boulevard, as the crow flies, to Newark with outlets every mile or two along the river for groups of factories: The Society for Useful Manufactures: SUM, they called it."[95] Writing as a sort of reporter, Williams couples his Imagist verse with factual information about the history of Paterson. In mapping the city through empirical details and public histories, Williams asserts the necessity of human experience in representing a place.

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[93] Alba Newmann, "Paterson: Poem as Rhizome," *William Carlos Williams Review* 26, no. 1 (2006): 58.
[94] Jerry E. Patterson, "The Eberstadt Paterson-Passaic Collection," *The Yale University Library Gazette* 31, no. 2 (1956): 77.
[95] Williams, *Paterson*, 73.

The concept of "place" is dependent on the meaning ascribed to it by human experience and emotion, an idea examined in Gaston Bachelard's 1958 book *The Poetics of Space*. Bachelard establishes a distinction between the concepts of space and place, noting that while space is abstracted and theoretical, place proves to be material, local, and fundamentally connected with the human experience. Bachelard describes the importance of place to the human through the example of a house, writing, "Past, present and future give the house different dynamisms, which often interfere, at times opposing, at others, stimulating one another. In the life of a man, the house thrusts aside contingencies, its councils of continuity are unceasing. Without it, man would be a dispersed being."[96] Like Bachelard's house, Paterson the city and its surrounding natural environment serves as an anchor for the figure Mr. Paterson, the poem's primary character. Williams writes in his author's note that "*Paterson* is a long poem in four parts—that a man in himself is a city, beginning, seeking, achieving, and concluding his life in many ways, which the various aspects of a city may embody—if imaginatively conceived—any city, all the details of which may be made to voice his most intimate convictions."[97] A figure symbolizing the life of the poet, Mr. Paterson simultaneously exists in the city and serves as a human projection of it.

Williams concludes Book I of *Paterson* with a return to the mythical, giant-like figure of Paterson:

> And the myth
> that holds up the rock,
> that holds up the water thrives there—
> in that cavern, that profound cleft,
> a flickering green
> inspiring terror, watching . .

[96] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 6-7.
[97] Williams, *Paterson*, XIV.

> And standing, shrouded there, in that din,
> Earth, the chatterer, father of all
> Speech . . . . . .[98]

The awakened landscape of Paterson connects Paterson the place with the human form through metaphor. The word metaphor itself stems from the French word *métaphore*, taken from the Latin *metaphora* and the Greek *metaphorá*—meaning "a transfer," "to carry," or "to bear children."[99] Williams plays with the etymology of the word "metaphor" in its connection to human biological processes by establishing a metaphor between ecological and human life. When first introduced in the beginning of Book I, the mythical, anthropomorphized Paterson is characterized as having a "head near the thunder / of the waters filling his dreams."[100] In the concluding lines, this mythical figure stands, "shrouded there, in that din, / Earth…." Such descriptions visually emphasize the human elements of Paterson, presenting the image of a human body standing above the Passaic Falls, both made by and representative of the earth. The presence of this figure raises the questions: who is Paterson the man in relation to the landscape? Is he a human being independent from the landscape? Is he a projection of the earth itself, caught in its enlivened form? Williams's entanglement of human and nonhuman forms in his local reality can be understood through Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome philosophy—a theory of multiplicity evident characteristic of literary modernism.

Deleuze and Guattari characterize the rhizome as having "no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*" and being grounded in the conjunction "and…and…and…." The conjunction "and," according to Deleuze, is more than a mere linkage of words; it is "neither one thing nor the other, it's always in between, between two

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[98] Williams, *Paterson*, 39.
[99] Paul Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor* (London: Routledge Classics, 2003), 17-18.
[100] Williams, *Paterson*, 6.

things; it's the borderline, there's always a border, a line of flight or flow, only we don't see it, because it's the least perceptible of things."[101] "And," according to Deleuze, is not a connector, but a problem—it is this problem, I propose, that sits at the center of the relationship between self and environment in Williams's *Paterson*. In constructing a poetic multiplicity of forms, Williams makes reference to the influence of Whitman, who writes in *Leaves of Grass*, "I am large, I contain multitudes."[102] Despite this reference, Williams's multiplicity breaks from Whitman's philosophy of monism. While "and" serves as a connector to merge the existences of all things in Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, evident in the long catalogues of beings throughout the poem, the conjunction takes on a different role in Williams's epic.

When conceiving of the relationship between human and nonhuman forms in *Paterson*—specifically that between Paterson the place and Mr. Paterson—as a rhizomatic "and," it becomes clear that the conjunction "and" does not just link the two beings, but establishes their existence in an in-between space. Paterson the place and Mr. Paterson are connected through an unfixed and infinite mode of being, delineated by its imperceptibility of borders. The rhizomatic relationship between self and environment is evident in the following excerpt from *Paterson*, in which Williams explicitly frames the life and materiality of Mr. Paterson—the "I" speaking—in a state of fluid exchange with Paterson the place:

> rolling up out of chaos,
> a nine months' wonder, the city
> the man, an identity—it can't be
> otherwise—an
> an interpenetration, both ways.[103]

[101] Gilles Deleuze, "Three questions about Six fois deux," *Cinema Comparat/ive Cinema* 3, no. 7 (2015): 15.
[102] Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 96.
[103] Williams, *Paterson*, 4.

Williams examines the processes of creation respective to urban and human identities, framing both in relation to the nine-month human gestation period through the lines "a nine months' wonder" and "an interpenetration, both ways," in reference to sex. The phrases "the city" and "the man" are separated by a line break rather than a comma, positioning each as a possible subject relating to the following descriptive phase, "an identity." It is important to note that Williams does not link "the city" with "the man" through a conjunction such as "and" or "or," instead setting up "the city / the man" as sharing a simultaneous existence with interwoven identities. Paterson, at once a localized city and a man, represents the insufficiency of dichotomies in understanding the problems of the modern world.

Paterson deconstructs binaries into a rhizomatic map of multiplicities not only through the interconnection between man and place, but through linguistic form. Williams presents *Paterson* as a triangulation: Paterson the place, Paterson the man, and *Paterson* the poem. Each mode of being marks a point on the work's total rhizomatic map, but stands without clear distinction or fixity. Williams's language in *Paterson* stops and starts, tumbles over itself, submerges the reader in the middle of its imagery, and simultaneously positions the reader at a distance. There is no singular narrative perspective, nor concrete subjectivity or objectivity. Williams instead blends viewpoints by conflating prose and poetry. I argue that this fusion of forms creates a non-static language that engages in an evolutionary process of becoming, mimicking the transformation inherent to human and ecological forms. While Mr. Paterson serves as the primary human figure in *Paterson*, the poem relentlessly challenges the reader's understanding of who is speaking:

> The rock
> married to the river
> makes
> no sound

And the river
passes—but I remain
clamant
calling out ceaselessly
to the birds
and clouds

(listening)

Who am I?

—the voice![104]

The speaker appears at once indistinguishable with the natural landscape, aligned with the silence of the "the rock / married to the river," and distinct, establishing their own voice by "calling out ceaselessly / to the birds / and clouds." Williams's use of the word "married" to connect the rock with the river reveals his rhizomatic thinking. "Married" serves the same function as Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy of "and," establishing the space of the "in-between" as an open-ended multiplicity. It can perhaps be accepted by the reader that the narrative voice in these lines is that of a human existing within a natural environment. The proceeding phrases, however, immediately thwart this clear-cut interpretation, "(listening) / Who am I? / —the voice!" By concluding this passage with the question "Who am I?" and the vague answer provided by the poem itself, "—the voice," Williams obscures the voice of Mr. Paterson. "The voice" refers not to a singular human, ecological, or poetic voice, but to the concurrence, or multiplicity, of voices.

The reader is placed in an immersive position in *Paterson*, as Williams's language washes over and carries the reader forward through its fluid, constantly changing perspective.

[104] Williams, *Paterson*, 108.

Newmann examines the multiplicity of voices in *Paterson*, writing that "the blurring of distinctions between the voice of the author and subjects describes both the fusing of Paterson as man, poem, and city, and Williams's incorporation and manipulation of passages by other writers throughout the poem."[105] Toying with the meaning and modes of realistic language, Williams layers his verse with portions of prose throughout *Paterson*. Williams experiments with the limitations of poetic form through this mélange of poetry and prose—which takes the form of historical facts, letters, and articles—and positions *Paterson* as a guidebook for the reader. Mapping the geography of the Passaic River through the character of Mr. Paterson, the river is positioned as both a source of life and a dangerous force that has killed inhabitants of Paterson with its natural vigor. Sections of prose throughout *Paterson* document the historical relationship between the inhabitants of the city and the natural landscape, examining the violence of the Revolutionary War and the destruction caused by the river's floods. *Paterson*, I argue, encompasses the locality's historical movement in its constantly evolving form. The most notable inclusion of prose in Williams's poem is a series of letters known as the Cress letters, a series of correspondence between Williams and Marcia Nardi, a poet who admired Williams and asked for his feedback on her work.[106] Incorporation of Williams and Nardi's real-life correspondence establishes *Paterson* as a work of documentary poetics, a reflection on the time and place of Paterson through the experience and exchange of humanity with its environment.

Williams's poetic language represents both human voices and the nonhuman elements of his locality. Language in *Paterson* is aligned throughout the poem with the fluid force of its surrounding Passaic Falls:

Language (misunderstood) pouring (misinterpreted) without

[105] Newmann, "Paterson: Poem as Rhizome," 64.
[106] Erin E. Templeton, "Paterson: An Epic in Four or Five or Six Parts," *The Cambridge Companion to William Carlos Williams* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 104.

> dignity, without minister, crashing upon a stone ear. At least
> it settled it for her. Patch too, as a matter of fact. He
> became a national hero in ’28, ’29 and toured the country
> diving from cliffs and masts, rocks and bridges—to prove his
> thesis: Somethings can be done as well as others[107]

In describing the misunderstanding of poetic language, Williams frames the noise of the Falls as a language that demands a new interpretation. Language in *Paterson* stems from a multiplicity of both human voices—Williams as poet and Mr. Paterson as a manifestation of the poet/place—and the voices of the nonhuman, local environment of Paterson. The uninterpretable roar of the Falls serves as a representation of the tumult of the poet’s mind and Williams’s experimental language throughout *Paterson* the poem. In the third book, Mr. Paterson visits the library in pursuit of understanding the natural language of the Falls: “Books will give rest sometimes against / the uproar of water falling / and righting itself to refall filling / the mind with its reverberation / shaking stone.”[108] Williams’s answer to this question of linguistic and ecological interpretation is to reconsider the role of language in the first place. Language becomes not just a means of representation, but an autonomous being in its own right.

Autonomy is ascribed to Williams’s language not only through its interconnection with human and nonhuman Nature, but through the Cubism of its visual and syntactic form. Scholar Joel Osborne Connaroe connects Williams to his modernist contemporaries, arguing that whether “Williams’s poetry is richly textured or loose, evocative or factual, he was always interested in its visual effect—in the way the words and lines are placed on the page. He resembles E. E. Cummings, Marianne Moore, and Pound in his close attention to spacing, margins, section divisions, type size, placement of punctuation, and ideograms, and to the possibilities of verbal

[107] Williams, *Paterson*, 15.
[108] Ibid., 97.

collage."[109] In addition to its participation in emerging modernist styles like those of Cummings, Moore, and Pound, linguistic form in *Paterson* parallels ongoing Cubist and Dada movements in the art world. In establishing an experimental modernist poetics, Williams creates a language that becomes, like a work of art, an optically discernible entity. Literary language acts as a vessel intended to transmit meaning from the mind of the writer to the reader—a duty that takes precedence over the artistic and aesthetic value of the shapes of words on the page. Williams, however, establishes the visual characteristics of language as superior to its semantics. In a passage from the third book of *Paterson*, Williams writes:

> I can't be half gentle enough,
> half tender enough
> toward you, toward you,
> inarticulate, not half loving enough
>
> BRIGHTen
> the cor
> ner
> where you are!
>
> —a flame,
> black plush, a dark flame.[110]

Williams's words are marked by a multiplicity of creative impulses, simultaneously repetitive—"half gentle enough, / half tender enough / toward you, toward you"—and repudiative to its own style, as it breaks and visually tumbles into a new linguistic mode— "BRIGHTen / the cor / ner / where … you … are!" Shaping Cubist language into a distinctly visual force, Williams challenges the distinction between poetry as a sonic and visual medium. Scholar A. Kingsely Weatherhead writes, "One does not want to be 'had' by poems which are only poems by virtue

[109] Joel Osborne Connaroe, *Paterson: Language and Landscape* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970), 37-38.
[110] Williams, *Paterson*, 128.

of their shape on the page, of which there has been a good crop in recent years; and it must be said that Williams himself had an eye for the appearance of the printed poem. On the other hand, it is only by the shape on the page that the way in which a poem is supposed to sound can be communicated; and when this is mutilated, communication is corrupted."[111] Kingsley Weatherhead frames Williams's "corruption" of communication as an intentional effort to disrupt the reader's interpretive ability. This may, to some extent, be true, but Kingsley Weatherhead fails to articulate that Williams is not engaging with experimental poetics for the sole sake of confounding the reader and traditional means of communication. Williams instead works to stretch the limitations of poetic form and tap into a language that more fully captures the history and locality of Paterson, tracing its evolution from the heart of American industry to a source of modern urbanity.

Williams not only transcends the ontology of poetic form, but human and nonhuman identities as well. Framing human forms and his poem itself as made up of the decaying natural matter in Paterson's environment, Williams writes:

> Degraded. The leaf torn from
> the calendar. All forgot. Give
> it over to the woman, let her
> begin again—with insects
> and decay, decay and then insects:
> the leaves—that were varnished
> with sediment, fallen, the clutter
> made piecemeal by decay, a
> digestion takes place .
>
> —of this, make it of *this*, this
> this, this, this, this .[112]

[111] A. Kingsley Weatherhead, "William Carlos Williams: Prose, Form, and Measure," *ELH* 33, no. 1 (1966): 119.
[112] Williams, *Paterson*, 141.

Williams combines the poem as a material object with natural entities, creating a double entendre in the opening lines of this passage, "Degraded. The leaf torn from / the calendar." The use of "leaf" refers to both the botanical form and a page of a book or calendar. Williams overturns the ontologies of his poem, environment, and characters to reconsider each as a fluid, inconclusive entity—reflected in the double meaning of "leaf" and the repetition of "this," which signals the word's plurality of meaning. Paradoxically, he does so by examining the tactile, pragmatic qualities of the human and nonhuman.

In his 1934 book *Art as Experience*, John Dewey articulates a similarly pragmatic understanding of art as dependent on direct experience with daily life. Dewey praises the empirical, writing, "Experience in the degree in which it *is* experience is heighted vitality. Instead of signifying being shut up within one's own private feelings and sensations, it signifies active and alert commerce with the world; at its height it signifies complete interpenetration of self and the world of objects and events."[113] Although Dewey never specifically addresses poetry in his texts, Williams was familiar with his work and took interest in Dewey's belief in the localized, empirical world. In his 1951 autobiography, Williams describes the job of the poet, writing, "That is the poet's business. Not to talk in vague categories but to write particularly, as a physician works, upon a patient, upon the thing before him, in the particular to discover the universal. John Dewey had said (I discovered it quite by chance), 'The local is the only universal, upon that all art builds.'"[114] A textual and visual manifestation of his focus on empirical art, *Paterson* represents Williams's belief in the duty of the poet to examine tactile, non-abstract environments as a source of universal human transcendence.

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[113] John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1934), 19.
[114] William Carlos Williams, *The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams* (New York: New Directions Books, 1967), 391.

By documenting the place of Paterson through a system of multiplicities, Williams universalizes his locality and establishes a forward-looking vision of America. This future is centered around the possibility of an interconnected, ever-changing modern world, rather than one left static and in fragments, as in Eliot's *The Waste Land*. I don't mean to suggest that Williams's vision of the future is purely optimistic. On the contrary, I believe that the future he articulates in *Paterson* is a pragmatic one, conscious of the fallout of the interdependence between humankind and Nature in the modern world. Williams grapples with the remains of the desecrated American Nature examined in Eliot's *The Waste Land*, and seeks to implement the experimental Cubist movement blooming in Europe on American soil. In doing so, Williams declares that America, in all its good and ugly, is both deserving and capable of great change. Weaving human, nonhuman, and poetic forms into a map of multiplicities to represent the city of Paterson, Williams forges a documentary, self-transcending mode of poetic expression. An open-ended and subversive work, *Paterson* represents Williams's achievement of a new American poetic voice imbued with the dynamism and expansiveness needed to encompass the modern world in language.

CODA

"The woods are out walking": the Search for a Second Nature

Romantic and American Renaissance attitudes toward Nature failed the modern world, proving to be ultimately insufficient in face of the great political, industrial, and social change that wracked Western civilization. Breaking with past categorical conceptualizations of Nature, Walt Whitman, T. S. Eliot, and William Carlos Williams represent the nonhuman in their poetry through radical and in many ways, contradictory, approaches. While English Romantic poets return to Nature as an ideal, unspoiled landscape and American Renaissance writers send their heroes on epic journeys through Nature as a means for personal enlightenment, both create a clear distinction between the human and the natural world. Although influenced by their literary predecessors, Whitman, Eliot, and Williams upend this binary-based tradition. Marked by political violence, urban development, and widespread artistic experimentation, the works of these three poets reimagine the relationship between the human and nonhuman in order to account for their changing modern culture.

The 1855 publication of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* altered the course of literary representations of the environment. Transcending the influence of Emersonian and Thoreauvian understandings of Nature, Whitman's poetics establish the emergence of a "nonhuman" Nature. Nonhuman Nature, as evident in *Leaves of Grass*, includes all material and immaterial natural objects separate from the human, both body and soul. I argue in the first chapter that *Leaves of Grass*, in celebration of Whitman's vision for a united America, presents a monistic understanding of the human and nonhuman. Throughout literary tradition, Nature has served as a symbol for peace, renewal, and danger. In *Leaves of Grass*, however, Nature is not only a symbol representing freedom and the diversity of the American people, but is materially

entangled with the human form. Whitman establishes the human and nonhuman as distinct concepts in order to bind them together into a monistic poetics. By dissolving preceding distinctions between human, Nature, and the divine, *Leaves of Grass* establishes an idealized and ecocentric vision for the American nation.

Grappling with psychological fragmentation and the modern disconnection between humanity and Nature, Eliot's *The Waste Land* rejects the idealism and monism of *Leaves of Grass*. Eliot explicitly cites Whitman's work in *The Waste Land*, echoing the elegy Whitman writes to President Abraham Lincoln in his 1865 poem "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd." Whereas Whitman mourns the nation's loss of Lincoln, Eliot, by referencing Whitman's poem in the opening lines of *The Waste Land*, "April is the cruellest month, breeding / Lilacs out of the dead land,"[115] laments the loss of Whitman's world. Nature in *The Waste Land* is no longer part of a unified human-nonhuman whole, but serves as both a reflection of the disillusioned condition of modern humanity and the direct consequence of anthropocentric neglect of the natural world. In the second chapter, I argue that hermeneutic circles in *The Waste Land* reinforce the disordered state of modern reality. By positioning the alienation of the human from the nonhuman as a symptom of modernity, Eliot articulates the dangers of humanity existing without a relationship with Nature. Furthermore, the ending of *The Waste Land* presents the inevitable rebirth of Nature in face of humankind's apocalypse. Eliot's representation of the nonhuman thus presents it as an autonomous force distinct from the human form. The disordered landscape of *The Waste Land*, I argue, proves that this traditional dichotomous relationship between human and Nature is insufficient for conceptualizing the complexity of modernity—a futility reflected in Eliot's expansion of European literary tradition to non-western religious

[115] Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 55.

references in the poem's concluding lines. Unlike Whitman, Eliot's imagined way forward, though ultimately ambiguous, presents a vision of the future where humankind perishes and nonhuman Nature survives.

The third chapter argues that Williams's 1946-1958 epic poem *Paterson* responds to Eliot's desolated landscape by establishing the human and nonhuman as engaged in an interconnected, nonhierarchical multiplicity. In constructing *Paterson* as a dynamic map of Paterson, New Jersey, Williams connects the poem's human, natural, and linguistic forms in a fluid state of exchange. *Paterson*'s obfuscation of binaries and boundaries reflects key tenets of modernism, which challenged traditional literary practices in favor of highly experimental styles. While *Paterson* and *The Waste Land* reflect similar elements of modernist experimentation, Williams and Eliot take contrary approaches to grappling with the relationship between humanity and Nature amid post-war instability and industrialization. Williams's *Paterson* marks a return to and subsequent subversion of Whitman's monistic understanding of the human and nonhuman. The multiplicity of human, natural, and linguistic forms in *Paterson* encompasses ontologies that are simultaneously individual yet interlaced.

By examining the literary history of the human and nonhuman in Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, Eliot's *The Waste Land*, and Williams's *Paterson*, I argue that the conceptual evolution of the relationship between self and environment in Anglo-American poetic tradition opened avenues for postmodern and contemporary ecocentric understandings of the natural world. In the decades following the publication of *Paterson*, postmodern writers furthered the dichotomous human/nonhuman, Nature/culture problems that troubled Whitman, Eliot, and Williams, and reconsidered the definitions of "human" and "Nature" entirely.[116] The postmodern

[116] See more in Donna Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 9-11.

conceptualization of Nature does not entail the destruction of the natural world, but rather deconstructs widespread interpretations of Nature as a distinct "thing" that exists first and foremost in relation to humanity. Postmodern thought, characterized by its use of parody and rejection of absolute meaning, argues that Nature is no more than a theoretical invention created by modern and industrial culture to reflect the human world.[117] Although philosopher Timothy Morton rejects the label of "postmodern," his stance on Nature as an empty construct inarguably aligns with postmodernist ideology. In his 2007 book *Ecology without Nature*, Morton examines the role of Nature throughout literary history, arguing that "'nature' is an arbitrary rhetorical construct, empty of independent, genuine existence behind or beyond the texts we create about it."[118] According to postmodern thought, representations of Nature do not position it as an individual, self-possessed being, but a way of conceptualizing human's coexistence with the nonhuman world. This is evident in the writings of environmental philosopher Paul Wapner, who notes that "Nature is not something laid out before us that we can apprehend in an unmediated manner; it is instead a projection of cultural understandings specific to certain times and places. In other words, nature is a social construction that assumes various meanings in different contexts."[119] Wapner articulates the emergence of Nature as understood primarily by its cultural and political contexts, instead of its distinctly nonhuman features.

This solipsistic postmodern thinking is an insufficient means of conceptualizing humanity's relationship with the environment. Nature, of course, holds a separate existence from humankind. It is a tangible, evolution-based force that humanity is able to engage with, not an

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[117] Alan Marshall, "What is this thing called Postmodern Science?" *The Unity of Nature: Wholeness and Disintegration in Ecology and Science* (London: Imperial College Press, 2002), 148.
[118] Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 21-22.
[119] Paul Kevin Wapner, *Living Through the End of Nature: The Future of American Environmentalism* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010), 7.

abstraction or a mere reflection of the cultural development of human society. I believe a new viewpoint is necessary—one that accounts for Nature's fundamental differences from humankind without alienating the nonhuman altogether. Influenced by postmodernism's solipsism, contemporary writers—including the Beatnik poet Gary Snyder, contemporary Nature poets Mary Oliver and Ada Limón, and novelist Richard Powers—search in their writings for a new understanding of Nature, or what can be called a "Second Nature." This Second Nature, I argue, views the nonhuman environment as a distanced "other." Instead of furthering reductionist anthropocentric ideologies, this othered Second Nature maintains its individual identity apparent in its description as "nonhuman." This reconsideration of the nonhuman challenges humanity to relate to and respect something fundamentally different from itself.[120]

When Richard Powers won the 2019 Pulitzer Prize in Fiction for his novel *The Overstory*, he raised a series of questions in an interview with the Pulitzers:

> What's the best thing we can do for the world of the future? Is meaning really a private, synthetic, and subjective thing, or might it be found out there, in living processes that predate human beings by billions of years? What does it mean, to learn that trees turn out to be social beings, networked together underground, cooperating and coordinating their behaviors with one another? How would it feel to think like a mountain or like a forest? Can we free ourselves from the grip of groupthink, the parochial narrowness of human time, and the colonizing consensus of "the real world?"[121]

Powers outlines the complex difficulty in relating to the Other, but alludes as well to the freedom that results from a reimagined relationship between the human and the nonhuman. By widening the narrowed understanding of Nature as inherently tied to human forms, it becomes possible to engage with and understand the environment in its individualized, autonomous identity. Towards

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[120] See more in Morton, *Ecology without Nature*, 204-205. Morton warns against human-centered understandings of the nonhuman, writing, "We must deal with the idea of distance itself. If we try to get rid of distance too fast, in our rush to join the nonhuman, we will end up caught in our prejudice, our concept of distance, our concept of 'them.' Hanging out in the distance may be the surest way of relating to the nonhuman."

[121] Megan Mulligan, "Q&A: 2019 Fiction Winner Richard Powers," *The Pulitzer Prizes* (Columbia University, 2019).

the end of Powers's 2019 interview, he notes, "The woods are out walking, even when I can't get to my walk in the woods." Independent from humankind, Nature lives, transforms, and grows. While the actions of humanity have direct effects on the natural world, Nature exists simultaneously out of human control. In achieving true coexistence between humanity and Nature, it is critical to realize the natural world in its separateness from humankind—and perhaps by working to understand and respect the fundamental difference of the nonhuman world, contemporary human society will come to grapple with its internal social and political divisions.

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