

Trauma in Lyric:
A National Reading of 20th Century Postwar Lyric

Anna Muenchrath

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Chapter 1: The Lyrical “I”

“A collective undercurrent provides the foundation for all individual lyric poetry.”
Theodor Adorno, 1951 (On Lyric Poetry and Society 45)

I. Introduction

Grounded in postwar German and British poetry, this thesis explores the dynamic tension between the historicity located in poetic language and the trans-temporality of the identification mechanism facilitated by the lyrical “I” in order to theorize lyric as a medium for communicating national trauma. A poem transmits information *from* the “creator,” or poet, *to* the “user,” or reader; furthermore, this transmission occurs through the poet’s as well as the reader’s use of culturally specific language. As Shira Wolosky puts it, at its most basic, “the artist certainly labors in specific historical circumstances with specific and changing audiences and relationships to them” (Wolosky 656). While I agree that the relationship between the author and the audience, specifically the national audience, is unique, it consists of more than just two bodies in the same cultural space. The poet is connected to his audience through his creation of the lyrical “I” – a pronoun that at its *inception* refers to its author, yet at its *reception* relates to the reader. This “I” then is the bridge between author and reader that transcends the historical circumstances of its creation – the “I,” unlike its creator, is immortal. Once the “I” has entered cultural space, it will remain as long as there is an audience to read it. The temporality or historicity of the “I” is contained in the language surrounding it. The lyric’s timelessness and its cultural moment can be reconciled in a reading of the “I” as an identification mechanism in which the historicity of language roots the “I” as a culturally specific signifier that may vary over time. Furthermore, the “I” functions as an identification link not only between author and reader, but also between author and national community.

The imagined community that overlaps both a nation as well as the community of readers for a certain poem founds the basis for a national reading of lyric. This function of the “I” as a link between members of a community is reflected in the role of poetry during national trauma. Lyric, I argue, is uniquely suited to deal with trauma: trauma is perceived erratically and non-narratively, and lyric is able to represent the traumatic experience without the use of narrative structures. I have chosen to deal specifically with the 20th century trauma due to the unique integration of the World Wars with civilian life, which makes the experience of war a truly national one.

The first chapter of this thesis will explore the history of the lyrical “I” and its function in 20th century lyric as an identification mechanism. The second chapter will root lyric poetry in an imagined community of readers, through its necessary reliance on culturally specific language. I will explore language as semiotic storage that creates structural tension with the universality of the lyrical “I.” The third chapter will discuss the ability of the lyric to act as a location of multiple identifications that creates an imaginary community of readers that parallels the imagined community of the nation. The ability of lyric to be read as a moment of national recognition will be discussed here. The fourth chapter discusses the representation of national trauma in post-World War II lyric.

II. A History of the Lyric Persona

A poem is a cultural artifact and as such it is “a man-made object which gives information about the culture of its creator and users. [It] may change over time in what it represents, how it appears and how and why it is used as the culture changes over time” (“Cultural Artifact”). Lyric and lyric studies have long been embroiled in a struggle to

define what lyric is. Scott Brewster begins his introduction and history of the form with a seemingly paradoxical definition:

Most dictionary definitions describe lyric in two ways: as denoting a short poem expressing the poet's own thoughts and feelings, or a composition that is meant to be sung....The first definition stresses the subjective nature of the lyric form, in that it is a concentrated expression of individual emotion, while the second stresses its intersubjective character through its relation to music and public performance. (Brewster 1)

The seeming dichotomy of lyric as a voice looking inward, while also projecting itself outward, is resolvable, because the two realms, the private and the public, are not diametrically opposed. Brewster goes on to say that lyric is situated at the “uncertain boundary between the public and the private” (Brewster 3). I believe, however, that this boundary is more of an overlap – the experiences of the private are necessarily public in that many of them are shared. The death of a loved one, the birth of a child, or, say, the modern feeling of alienation from nature and from others, are experiences that are inherently private; yet, they are universally private. The experiences and emotions of the one are not separate from the experiences and emotions of the many.

Jonathan Culler mentions that the sharing of private experiences is in fact one of the primary roles of literature: “The value of literature has long been linked to the vicarious experience it gives the readers, enabling them to know how it feels to be in particular situations and thus to acquire dispositions to act and feel in certain ways” (Culler, *Literary Theory* 113). This ability of literature to transport the reader through “world-making” has been attributed primarily to fiction. In her book on the subject,

Marie-Laure Ryan states that the difference between lyric and fiction is that lyric is not capable of “fictional communication” due to the fact that lyric is set in the actual world, rather than a created world. I agree with Ryan’s primary assumption that lyric is not set in a fundamentally new world of its own creation. However, Ryan’s description of what lyric *does* do is illuminating: “The utterance act is not meant to be witnessed, but appropriated by the actual reader. Experiencing poetry means: looking at AW [the actual world] under its directives, adopting the poet’s vision, identifying with the lyrical I” (Ryan 87). Yes, lyric is set in the actual world, but Ryan’s formulation of “adopting the poet’s vision” reveals the fact that the reader must see the “actual world” through a different lens. So, while fiction engages in “world-making” by creating an alternate reality in relation to which the narrative must position itself, lyric engages in a different sort of “world-making” by casting a lens over the existing reality through which the reader must grasp meaning.

Käte Hamburger, in her book *The Logic of Literature*, also believes that lyric and fictional narrative are diametrically opposed. In lyric, “the experience can be “fictive,” in the sense of its being invented, but the experiencing subject, and in turn the statement-subject, the lyric I, can be encountered only as a real and never as a fictive subject” (Hamburger 278). Yet Hamburger only considers two possibilities of the identity of the lyric “I”; in her analysis, the lyric “I” either represents the poet, or a character imagined by the poet. She does not mention the third possibility, namely, that the lyric “I” represents the reader. If the reader fills the role of the lyric “I,” then the “subject-object relation,” which Hamburger says is the primary difference between lyric and fiction, changes. Certainly, the reader is a “real” subject in the sense that he or she exists;

however, the reader in the context of the lyric “I” becomes a “fictive subject” in the sense that he or she is performing a role. Through the process of identification the reader takes on the role of the “I,” which transports the reader into the world of the lyric – a world which, although not entirely separate from reality, is different from the reader’s way of viewing the world. Thus, lyric *does* participate in some form of world-making.

Culler describes lyric as the narrator speaking in his own voice. He says, “In lyric...the poet, in singing or chanting, turns his back on his listeners, so to speak, and ‘pretends to be talking to himself or to someone else: a spirit of Nature, a Muse, a personal friend, a lover, a god, a personified abstraction or a natural object’” (Culler, *Literary Theory* 74). This description, which I will refer to throughout upcoming chapters, is valid, but I would like to place the emphasis on the point that the poet is in fact *not* talking to himself or to someone else – he is talking to the reader *as though* he were talking to himself. The formulation equating the reader with the imagined self of the poet highlights the constructed parallel between the lyricist and the reader facilitated by the “I.”

The function and understanding of the lyric voice have varied greatly through its history. Medieval lyric was aware of its ability to stand in both the private and the public spheres. Brewster borrows from Douglas Gray’s work on medieval lyric:

[Medieval poets] are not primarily concerned with the construction of an enduring object for other people to admire, but rather for other people to use. The medieval poet speaks not only for himself, but in the name of the many; if he uses the poetic ‘I’ it will be in a way which may be shared by

his readers. It is a poetic stance which cannot be accurately described either as ‘personal’ or ‘impersonal.’” (Gray 60)

This “sharing” of the poetic “I” with readers, however, is lost during the romantic period. The lyric, although widely read throughout this time, becomes a highly personal piece of writing that provides the reader with an image and the emotions of an abstracted persona – a persona with limited or no historical ties to reality (Brewster 30). Wordsworth’s often quoted claim that poetry is “men speaking to men” seems to speak against this notion. However, as Lionel Trilling notes, “[the romantic poets’] achieved existence as artists precluded their being men speaking to men, from which it follows that the criterion of sincerity, the calculation of the degree of congruence between feeling and avowal, is not pertinent to the judgment of their work” (Trilling 7). In other words, the romantic poets engaged in an aesthetic, not a sincere, creation of a lyrical “I.” The goal of romantic lyricists was not to create an identification through the lyrical persona, but to engender appreciation of its creation.

It is not surprising then that the romantic period also experiences the rise of the dramatic monologue – a form that mimics the lyric in many ways, but is fundamentally different in terms of voice and the reader’s reception of the work. Culler points out the difference between lyric and dramatic monologue in what he terms the “characteristic extravagance of lyric,” which he says is lyric’s frequent participation “in speech acts without a known real-world counterpart” (Culler, *Why Lyric?* 202). The reader’s role in the dramatic monologue is to watch the development of a character and discover the character using the character’s own speech while allowing space for the author’s irony.

While reading lyric, however, the reader *is* the subject of the lyric. Brewster relies on Elisabeth A. Howe's description of dramatic monologue to make this difference clear:

While the lyric does not necessarily represent the thoughts or feelings of the poet, it 'also does not represent anyone else' [Howe]. This makes lyric poems distinct from the dramatic monologue: 'A characteristic feature of the lyric "I" is precisely this vagueness that allows the reader to equate it with the poet, perhaps; to identify with it himself, or herself; or to see it as a universal "I" belonging to no-one and to everyone.' (Brewster 32)

While I agree that this "vagueness" does exist, in 20th century lyric, the fact that the lyrical "I" "does not represent anyone else," *compels* the reader to identify himself with the "I."

Joel Fineman argues that Shakespeare's sonnets are the first to showcase a subjective voice with a clear interior life – a "new first-person poetic posture" (Fineman 2). He outlines this "posture" at the end of his introduction:

It is, of course, a commonplace of Renaissance literary criticism to see in the sonnet vogue itself the evidence of an increasingly personal or personalizing literature, an incipiently psychological literature of subjective interiority whose self-conscious conventions evince the contours and preoccupation of a recognizably modern "self." (Fineman 84)

The "I" used by Shakespeare, and by subsequent poets, is an "I" that not only showcases the personal, psychological interiority of the speaker, but also creates the interpersonal

connection between poet and reader that is prevalent in post-enlightenment lyric. Furthermore, the mechanics of the lyrical “I” facilitate this connection.

However, there is a distinction to be made between a sincere “I” and an “I” created ironically by the poet. In the second case the poet is knowingly creating a distance between himself and the persona in order to criticize the “I” as well as the reader’s potential identification with it. Although Shakespeare’s first use of the “I” as creating interiority is exemplary, he often creates “I”s that are insincere and that serve a purely ironic function. Another example of this would occur in a situation where the “I” represents an inanimate object – one which is clearly not meant to be identified with. The lyrical “I” that I am concerned with is a sincere “I” that refers to a personal self. By sincere I do not mean that the lyrical “I” must be truthful in the broadest sense. I am primarily using Lionel Trilling’s distinction of what he calls a historically English sincerity: “a sincere man...[must] communicate without deceiving or misleading. Beyond this what is required is only a single-minded commitment to whatever dutiful enterprise he may have in hand” (Trilling 58).

The role of the “I” as a mediator of identity in a sincere persona occurs because of the identification manipulated by the poet. The poet creates the “I,” not necessarily with the intent of self-reference, but with the intent of creating a persona with which readers will identify. The use of the first person, as opposed to the second or third, is a conscious choice that equates the poet and the reader under the formulation “I.” Any voice the poet uses in a poem is necessarily a result of the poet’s own experiences and inner life. The poet, although perhaps creating a character different from himself, cannot completely separate himself from the persona, because the persona can never exist outside of the

poet's range of emotions, thoughts, or experiences. The role of imagination is of course key to any work of literature. As Charles Taylor says in his seminal work *Sources of the Self*, "A human being can always be original, can step beyond the limits of thought and vision of contemporaries, can even be quite misunderstood by them. But the drive to original vision will be hampered, will ultimately be lost in inner confusion, unless it can be placed in some way in relation to the language and vision of others" (Taylor 37). The idea of imagination is balanced by the fact that the poetic voice must necessarily have some relation or reference to the poet's own voice. Samuel Maio says this very succinctly in his book *Creating Another Self*, "Of course, no poet can actually efface himself or herself from the poem. Any poem is a direct manifestation of the poet's presence" (Maio 180). The poet must identify in some way with each voice he uses. The poet's use of the second person in a poem creates a distancing relationship between the author and the reader in which the author identifies with the speaker, while the reader is precluded from identifying with the speaker through the word "you" and is relegated solely to the role of recipient of the speaker's language. This constructed poet-reader relationship creates distance between the poet and reader, and prevents a moment of mutual identification. The use of the "I," however, represents simultaneously a specificity and an ambiguity, which defines its role in lyrical poetry. The specificity resides in the "I's" ability to represent the reader; the ambiguity is located in the "I's" ability to reflect *any* reader.

The role of the "I" in 20th century lyric seems almost paradoxical. The 20th century has been marked by two world wars, which called into question the nature of

humanity and community. Combined with recurring eras of globalization¹, the modern self is torn between alienation and constant reintegration. Lyric poetry provides a way for a self to simultaneously escape from connection with others while subconsciously engaging with the great “Other” of the 20th century – society. Throughout the rest of this chapter, the lyrical “I” will refer to a sincere “I” of 20th century lyric.

III. The “I” as a location for Mutual Identification

The specificity of the lyrical “I” lies in its representation of a certain voice, which is defined by certain emotions and experiences. These represent the interiority of the self – a self, which in 20th century lyric is often alienated and unsure of its place in the world. The power of the lyrical “I,” however, lies in its ability to be vague. The “I” could represent the poet or the reader. Because it represents both, it creates a possibility for mutual identification, which creates a role for lyric in the public realm. The possibility of the “I” to act as a place of multiple identifications allows it to straddle the private and public – a turning inward leads to a turning outward. Taylor discusses the artistic formulation of a self in modernity with the conclusion that it often leads to a broken, rather than whole, view of the self:

And so a turn inward, to experience or subjectivity, didn’t mean a turn to a self to be articulated, where this is understood as an alignment of nature and reason, or instinct and creative power. On the contrary, the turn inward may take us beyond the self as usually understood, to a

¹ The global integration of the world community is often hampered by global conflict. The first era of modern globalization occurred due to industrialization in the late 19th century. Its progress was abruptly halted by the first and second world wars. In fact, in the second era of globalization, global integration did not reach its pre-World War I level again until 1970. The third era of globalization (1980’s-present) is the era of technology, which, as has often been noted, simultaneously integrates the individual into society while alienating him from contact with others.

fragmentation of experience, which calls our ordinary notions of identity into question. (Taylor 462)

And it is precisely this questioning of identity, these fragmentary experiences, that are universal to the human experience of modernity. However, it is not necessarily within the *context* of the “I” that we see the mutual identification, but in the pronoun itself.

The powerful semiotic force of the word *I* lies in the innateness of the concept of a self. The concept of a self or an “I” is so human, so basic, that the word *I* itself presents the opportunity to create a moment of identification between people – a *communal moment*. Taylor supports the idea that the powerful notion of the self is a modern phenomenon that holds with it important implications:

It is probable that in every language there are resources for self-reference and descriptions of reflexive thought, action, attitude (these resources would go beyond referring expressions and would include forms like the archaic Indo-European middle voice). But this is not at all the same as making ‘self’ into a noun, preceded by a definite or indefinite article, speaking of “the” self, or “a” self. This reflects something important which is peculiar to our modern sense of agency. (Taylor 113)

The importance of this notion of the “self” in lyric is that even as a self is something inherently private to an individual, it is obvious that every individual has an interior life. The concept of the self as a way of thinking reflexively about one’s own being is universal among individuals. The self like the lyric “I” is a description of identity that creates a bridge between the personal and the societal.

Through the act of reading, the reader is compelled by the semiotic significance of the word *I* to identify with the lyrical “I”; the poet, in the process of thinking and writing the signifier *I*, has experienced a similar *identifying moment*. *I* as a word is unique because, like all pronouns, it is a name without naming any specific thing. It holds a special place in language, because it always refers to the speaker – the act of speaking the *I* is necessarily self-reflexive. When written by the poet, the *I* refers to the speaker he is creating, who is necessarily a part, although not necessarily identical to himself. When read by the reader, the word *I* overlaps with the self. Fineman mentions this phenomenon as part of his discussion of first-person poetry:

These pointing words, such as pronomial “I” and “you,” temporal and spatial markers such as “now” and “then,” “here” and “there,” have always been recognized as peculiar because, speaking loosely, though their meanings are constant their referents vary: “I” on my lips means the same thing as “I” on your lips, and yet these “Is” refer to different things...In a very formal sense, deictics are *always* “self-conscious” because these “shifters,” as Jakobson calls them, these “egocentric particulars,” as Bertrand Russell called them, acquire their reference, i.e., they identify their referent, from the point of view – personal, temporal, spatial – of the speaker who employs them. This is one obvious reason why they are common in first-person lyric. By their grammatical nature, deictics radiate out from a central space of first-person enunciation to which all reference is by formal consequence itself immediately referred.

(Fineman 7-8)

The *I* manifests the reader as a referent in the poem. The reader becomes a part of the lyric itself in the reading of the word *I*, since *I* is the name of the person who reads the *I*. This function of the “I” corresponds to the simultaneously personal and interpersonal nature of lyric poetry: it refers to a single person, yet it can refer to any person. This unique attribute of the lyrical “I” is also noted by Robert C. Elliott in *Literary Persona*:

In the first person grammatical category there are depths and perplexities of an endlessly alluring kind. How extraordinary it is that “I” somehow encompasses in a coherent way the thousand and one selves that constitute a “Self,” and that the person whom one loves and the person one loathes also say “I.” (Elliott 30)

So, the lyric makes itself accessible to its audience through the grammatical feature of the word *I*. As an “empty” word, it allows itself to be fulfilled both in its being written and in its being read. However, the function of the “I” in lyric involves more than just a grammatical trick of self-reflexivity.

The reader of the lyrical “I” does not read lyric and assume that the “I,” with its emotions and experiences, is referring solely and unequivocally to himself. Instead, what occurs is a moment of identification between the reader and the lyrical “I.” Freud often mentions the act of identification in theories about groups and group behavior; however, I think the process can just as relevantly be applied to the relationship between a reader and a literary persona. About the process of identification he says, “identification is known to psycho-analysis as the earliest expression of an emotional tie with another person” (Freud *Group Psychology* 47). Here, Freud is talking about an infant’s bond with one of its parents. It is plausible, however, to state that a reader feels an emotional

tie with the lyrical “I” – an emotional tie that is facilitated by the self-reflexive nature of the word *I*. Freud, in his theory of psychoanalysis, famously develops the three categories of the self: the super ego, the ego, and the id. It is likely that this formulation has affected if not led to the development of the modern sense of the self that Charles Taylor speaks of.

What is less well known in the English-speaking world, is that these translations, although now permanent fixtures in the English consciousness, do not reflect the original intent behind the words. In the introduction to her translation of *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*, Helena Ragg-Kirby points out that the German words are: “das Über-ich”, “das ich”, and “das Es.” The direct translations – the super I, the I, and the it – showcase the relationship between the human ability to reflexively talk about the self and Freud’s theory of the ego. “Ego” sounds like a creation of Freud’s, whereas the “I” is something eternal, something that has always existed and has now simply been identified more clearly by Freud. For this, reason Ragg-Kirby maintains the German words in her translation, which I think is illuminating in passages such as this one:

This process is based on a so-called identification –that is to say, one person’s *Ich* assimilating another person’s *Ich* – the consequence of this being that the first *Ich* behaves in certain respects like the second one; it copies it, and so to speak absorbs it into itself. (Freud, *Psychoanalysis* 58)

This passage refers again to the identification of children with their parents and I do not mean to say that the reader of the lyrical “I” is affected by the identification to the point that he begins to think he and the “I” are one and the same. I only mean that the reader, in the moment he reads the word *I* experiences himself as the “I” of the poem and

“absorbs it into himself.” This identification between the “I” and the poet, and subsequently between the “I” and the reader creates a bridge between the poet and the reader. The poet and the reader each experience a moment of, perhaps subconscious, identification with the lyrical “I.” This dual identification that occurs to the writer as well as the reader is a commonality that transcends the cultural moment that the poem is written and read in.

III. Misidentification of the “I”

The fact that this identification between the poet and the reader occurs, however, does not preclude the reader from undergoing a process of misidentification analogous to the process described in Lacan’s essay on the mirror stage. Lacan describes a stage in an infant’s life, when he is still unable to stand on his own, yet is able to recognize his own image in a mirror. This recognition of the self leads to what Lacan calls an identification with the self’s physical image:

We have only to understand the mirror stage as an *identification*, in the full sense that analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image – whose predestination to this phase-effect is sufficiently indicated by the use, in analytic theory, of the ancient term *imago*. (Lacan 442)

Here, we imagine the reader “seeing” himself in the metaphorical “I” of lyric. He recognizes himself through the mechanism of identification I have already discussed – yet, he misrecognizes himself, because this “image” does not capture him – it simply reflects him. So, the first issue of misidentification is that the lyrical “I,” in order to be a mechanism for identification, must reify the identity of the reader into an image. This

fragments the identity of the reader in the text to the point of “misrecognition” – he recognizes himself, but it is not his true self. The limiting of the self to a lyrical “I” parallels the limiting of the self to the specular image a child sees in the mirror. This limiting and its effects on the self are elucidated by Lacan:

The *mirror stage* is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic – and, lastly, to the assumption of the armor of an alienating identity which will mark with its rigid structure the subject’s entire mental development. (Lacan 444)

The “I” provides the reader with a false totality of the self, providing the illusion of “wholeness” that the reader does not find in his own perception of himself. The “I” presented to the reader as a self-contained totality gives the reader a feeling of completion, which is actually a misrecognition. In fact, the lyrical “I” is anything but a totality – it is a snapshot of a persona in which the reader recognizes himself.

The analysis of the mirror stage by Lacan also uncovers a second, related problem with identification through the “I,” namely exclusion. The reader’s identification with the “I” forces him, during the moment of his identification, to exclude the possibility of other readers of the “I.” If the “I” is someone else then in the reader’s physical notion of himself, he cannot be the “I.” The perception of the self’s physical body creates what Lacan calls, an “illusion of autonomy” (Lacan 445). The illusion of the “I” as a totality of the self is countered by the illusion of the self as the totality of the “I,” leaving no

room for a second reader. This, of course, is misrecognition, or an imaginary construct, on the part of the reader. The lyrical “I” does represent the reader, yet it does not signify his totality, nor does it represent *solely* his own reality. The “I” is an empty signifier, able to mirror any individual who reads it.

IV. Temporality and the Performance of the “I” in the Lyric of Ingeborg

Bachmann, Robert Graves, and Gottfried Benn

The fact that the reader’s identification leads to a misidentification, however, does not change the fact that it occurs. Beyond simply the semantic meaning of the word *I*, lyric’s ability to transcend the time in which it is written as well as its ability to create a space of performance also facilitates the identification process. The temporality of the lyric and its unique first-person posture are two features that are unique as well as interrelated. Reading lyric situates the reader in a unique temporal space in which the actual passing of time within the lyric is suspended. As Brewster notes, “In lyric the reader accepts the suspension of time; in narrative the reader demands progress and action” (Brewster 81). However, when considering the temporality metalyrically, we see that it is situated in the present moment, yet it is timeless. The poet creates a lyric in the present moment, but each reader, through his reading, manifests his own present moment in his reading. Jacques Derrida, in his essay “At this Very Moment in this Work Here I Am,” combines the idea of temporality and the self: “At this *present* moment I write this, I say *I*, presently; and it has been said that the simple utterance of an *I* is already performative and also that the true performative is always uttered in the first person” (Derrida v.1 173). In a sense, the lyric “I” *is* a performative utterance. The “I” expresses a being – a form of identity – that is realized both in the act of writing and reading it. The

author performs the “I” in his writing of it, while the reader performs the “I” in his reading. The “present moment” then becomes crucial in the act of performing the “I.” Yet, as with the dichotomy of the specificity and the generality of the “I,” the lyric is both only in the “present” and in *every* “present.” The reader of lyric contains the “progress and action” that Brewster consigns to narrative in the performance of the “I”. I would modify Brewster’s definition to say that in narrative action happens *to* the subject, while in lyric the action occurs in the reader’s becoming the subject of the lyric, that is to say “performing” the lyric.

Ingeborg Bachmann’s poem “Ich,” written between 1942 and 1943, foregrounds the lyrical “I” and its performative value.

Ich	I
Sklaverei ertrag ich nicht Ich bin immer ich Will mich irgend etwas beugen Lieber breche ich.	I do not bear slavery I am always I If something wants to bend me I would rather break.
Kommt des Schicksals Härte oder Menschenmacht Hier, so bin ich und so bleib ich Und so bleib ich bis zur letzten Kraft.	Come fate’s hardship Or human force Here, so I am and I will stay And so I will stay up to the final strength.
Darum bin ich stets nur eines Ich bin immer ich Steige ich, so steig ich hoch Falle ich, so fall ich ganz.	Therefore I am always only one I am always I If I rise, I rise high If I fall, I fall completely. ²

² My own translation.

The speaker, the “I,” spends the entirety of the poem defining itself against a negative, exterior force. The poem begins with a statement, “I do not bear slavery.” This proclamation is followed by a line, whose nuances are impossible to translate. The line can be read as translated above, or, due to the lack of punctuation, can be read as “I am

always. I / want myself....” The end of that line would not make grammatical sense anymore; however, the ambiguity between lines 2 and 3 gives the reader pause. What is the semiotic difference between “I am always I” and “I am always?” The first proclaims the tautological immutability of the self-reflexive self. The second reflects the permanence of the self. The end of the first stanza confirms the immutability of the self, while the second stanza confirms its permanence. The self is enduring and what it must endure is twofold – fate and humanity. While the first stanza enunciates the self’s attributes, the final stanza serves to limit the self: “Therefore I am always only one.” The final stanza repeats, “I am always I,” which has already appeared in the first stanza. This time, however, instead of emphasizing the “I’s” immutability, it seems to be limiting the self – making it exclusive. As if to say, “I am always I – not you or anybody else.”

The “I” of this poem attempts to both assert and define itself. This becomes problematic, however, when we view the “I’s” relationship to the reader. It would almost seem as though the “I” is defining itself against “human force,” which represents the reader’s reading. The reader’s performance of the “I” could be interpreted as an attempt to “bend” it; however, the lyrical “I” will not allow this: “I am always I.” The reader and the “I” are in conflict. However, we cannot forget that through the act of identification, the reader, in some way, becomes the “I.” So, as much as the lyrical “I” attempts to maintain its autonomy and delimit its “selfness”, it cannot exist without the reader, and therefore must include the reader in its self. And yet, in the poem, the “I” states, “I am always only one.” This is true; in the moment of reading, the “I” takes on the reader, and becomes the reader, because, in fact, the lyrical “I” *does not exist* without the reader. Only the reader, through his performance of the “I,” creates the self that is the “I.” This

is reflected in Brewster's quote of Keats, "the poet has no 'identity', and thus the lyric 'I' manifests itself only as a product of textuality" (Brewster 74). However, I would say that the lyric "I" manifests itself only as a product of its reader. Yet, even this recognition is not enough. The conflict between the lyrical "I" and the reader is resolved, because the lyrical "I" has taken on the reader's identity. The reader of the word *I* in the poem makes himself the subject of it. So now, what were the empty lyrical "I's" concerns, become the concerns of the reader. It is the reader, not the lyrical "I," who is now asserting himself and defining his boundaries. The manifestation of the author, as we heard from Maio earlier, is necessarily present in the voice of the poem. So, we can formulate that both the author and reader of the poem have experienced the identification with the lyrical "I" facilitated by its "emptiness." The reader is invited, even compelled, by the constructed voice of the poem, and the inherent force of *I*, to experience a moment of identification that overlaps with the author's.

We can also see the possibility for misidentification that is presented by the lyrical "I." There is certainly a sort of mirroring in this poem – the reader sees himself reflected in it, but he fails to realize that it is just a reflection. The poem is self-consciously pointing out the misidentification that will occur; the speaker seems to say "I am always I" – parodying the reader "I will never be you" and "you will never be I." This reading points out the two misrecognitions of the identification process: assuming the lyrical "I" represents the totality of the self, and excluding all other selves from the lyrical "I." The speaker seems to be taunting the inevitable misidentification of the reader. The speaker even goes so far as to parody the reader: "If something wants to bend me / I would rather break." The reader's image of the "I" as his own totality is not

sustainable, and, as Lacan predicts in the mirror stage, will eventually result in a fragmentation and alienation of the self. This disintegration and alienation caused by the reader's misidentification parallels Taylor's formulation of the modern self. The first line of the final stanza, "Therefore I am always only one," acts to reinforce the reader's presupposed idea of totality, that he will be unable to achieve through his identification with the "I."

Robert Graves' 1943 poem "The Reader Over My Shoulder" treats the bond between the author and the reader even more explicitly:

The Reader Over My Shoulder

You, reading over my shoulder, peering beneath
 My writing arm – I suddenly feel your breath
 Hot on my hand or on my nape,
 So interrupt my theme, scratching these few
 Words on the margin for you, namely you,
 Too-human shape fixed in that shape: –

All the saying of things against myself
 And for myself I have well done myself.
 What now, old enemy, shall you do
 But quote and underline, thrusting yourself
 Against me, as ambassador of myself,
 In damned confusion of myself and you?

For you in strutting, you in sycophancy,
 have played too long this other self of me,
 Doubling the part of judge and patron
 With that of creaking grind-stone to my wit.
 Know me, have done: I am a proud spirit
 And you for ever clay. Have done!

In the first stanza, the "I" seems to be identical to the poet. He addresses the reader as "you," creating distance between them. However, it is not the actual reader he is referring to; it is the poet's imagined reader who breaths "hot on my hand or on my nape" in the moment of writing. Yet, the imagined reader is not too far removed from the

actual – he maintains his “too-human shape.” The threat of the actual reader manifests itself in a fictive “you” in the poet’s imagination. This “you,” created by the poet both in his thoughts and in the poem, interrupts the poet’s thoughts, and causes him to write new words.

In the second stanza the “I” becomes muddled and confused. The “you” is identified as an old enemy, but of whom, the poet or the lyrical “I?” This demarcates the point in the poem where the poet and the lyrical “I” begin to separate, an occurrence that the poem suggests is caused by the “you’s” infiltration of the writing process. The “you” is accused of “thrusting yourself / against me” through quoting and underlining. The reader’s violent appropriation and phallic attack on the author’s words evoke erotic turmoil, which points to the reader’s desire to identify with the “I.” The reader’s ability to identify with the lyrical “I” is paralleled here by the reader’s physical power over the poem. It seems that this is an offence directed towards the lyrical “I,” especially because the affront occurs to the “ambassador of myself.” The “I” of the poem is revealed in this phrase to be referring simultaneously to two separate selves – the voice of the poet and the lyrical “I.” Although confusing, it provides a coherent reading: “thrusting yourself (the reader) / against me (the lyrical “I”), as ambassador of myself (the poet).” The final line of the second stanza, however, provides another confusion of beings, namely between the “you” and “myself.” Which “myself” is being confused with the “you?” I would say both. The poet is clearly lamenting the impact of the reader on his writing. However, he is also lamenting that the “I,” the ambassador of himself, will be appropriated by the reader. As we saw in the reading of Bachmann’s “Ich,” the reader will identify with the “I,” absorbing its identity into its own.

The final stanza corroborates this reading. “For you... / have played too long this other self of me,” is the poet referring to the reader’s appropriation of the lyrical “I.” The lyrical “I” is the other self of the poet, which, through publication, has left his authority and become an identity separate from himself, which is able to be performed by any reader. The poet is admitting and even lamenting the fact that the reader has control over the lyrical “I.” Each reader brings a new performance to the “I” – one which will likely vary from the poet’s original performance. Although this concerns the poet, he realizes that this is simply the nature of poetry. The poet also admits that the poem’s persona is a part of himself. Our formulation of the lyrical “I” as being identified with by the poet as well as the reader comes to the forefront in this poem.

In a third example of the lyrical “I” as the subject of a poem, “Ein Wort” (“A Word”) published by Gottfried Benn in 1948, presents the duality of the private and the public – alienation and integration through identification with the lyrical “I.”

Ein Wort

Ein Wort, ein Satz –: aus Chiffren steigen
erkanntes Leben, jäher Sinn,
die Sonne steht, die Sphären schweigen
und alles ballt sich zu ihm hin.

Ein Wort – ein Glanz, ein Flug, ein Feuer,
ein Flammenwurf, ein Sternenstrich –
und wieder Dunkel, ungeheuer,
im leeren Raum um Welt und Ich.

A Word

A word, a phrase – from ciphers rise
Life recognized, a sudden sense,
The sun stands still, mute are the skies,
And all compacts it, stark and dense.

A word – a gleam, a flight, a spark,
A thrust of flames, a stellar trace –
And then again – immense – the dark
Round world and I in empty space.³

³ This translation focuses on the form instead of the semiotic accuracy of the poem. A more accurate translation of the final line would read: “in empty space around world and I.”

The content of the poem focuses on the power of creation that words possess. The language of the poem centers on cosmic vocabulary. The “ciphers” of the poem form a

“life recognized,” the life of the lyrical “I”; however, the self has not yet been named. In fact, it is not named until the final line of the poem. The lyrical “I” is clearly experiencing a feeling of isolation from a nature that is massive, cosmic and foreign to it. The lyrical “I” is surrounded by empty space. The author has written his feelings of alienation in 20th century society into the lyrical “I” – to be performed by the reader. So, when the reader performs the “I” and identifies with it, he will experience the alienation of the lyrical “I.” However, the reader also knows that this emotion has come from outside of himself; specifically, the emotion has come from the original performer of the “I” – the poet. The emotion of alienation felt by the reader of the lyrical “I” comes from the identification with the lyrical “I” by the poet. This mutual identification of the poet and the reader leads to a feeling of communal integration. Ironically, through feeling a mutual sense of alienation in the lyrical “I” the reader feels connected to the author. Thus a paradoxical community of alienated readers of Benn’s lyrical “I” comes into existence.

V. Conclusions of the “I”’s Role in Lyric

The dual identification, misidentification, and in Robert Graves’ case conflicting identification between the author and the reader facilitated by lyric creates the basis for the communal identification, which I will discuss in Chapter Three. The original performance of the “I” by the poet grounds the lyric in a specific cultural space. The closer the reader is, both temporally and culturally, to the author’s cultural moment, the more intended meaning is preserved. As Brewster says, “lyric, far from presenting the unmediated thoughts and feelings of an isolated individual, centers on the relationship between the self and others, the self and history, and the self and language” (Brewster 14). The unique experience of the lyric is both personal and public, both present and

ever-present. There is no art form that can so fully describe a self's interiority while simultaneously facilitating communal bonds. Of course, one thinks of film as a medium that can both present a continuous self, while involving the perspective of a communal audience; however, the key element of the lyric that provides the moment of identification is the performance of the textual "I," by the reader.

Jonathan Culler, in his essay on revitalizing lyric studies, compares modern lyric to ancient lyric: "Not for the first time, with the help of traditional oppositions – public/private, speech/writing, integrated/alienated – the classical is held up as a norm to suggest the individualistic, alienated character of the modern" (Culler, *Why Lyric?* 204). These oppositions, however, can be seen not only between different time periods of lyric, but also within 20th century lyric itself. As we have seen in this chapter, lyric straddles the dichotomy of the public and private through the use of the lyrical "I," which embodies the same opposition in its ability to be both specific to a reader, yet accessible to all readers. Although lyric is seldom performed orally, the public performance of the lyric has been replaced by the private performance within it. The dichotomy of integration and alienation within modern lyric is the most prevalent. The "I" as a personal self, as well as the modern, private nature of reading poetry, create a sense of alienation. Yet 20th century poetry, with its fairly wide publication and readership, is necessarily part of an integrated community. A community of readers exists for every published poem, and this community has had the shared experience of identification with the lyrical "I". The lyric is essentially an embodiment of dichotomies that are varyingly resolved and in tension with one another. The ability of the lyric to be both personal and

public, both now and then, makes it able to become a location for discourse and a communal expression of national trauma.

Chapter 2: Language and Communal Identification

I. Introduction: Historicity in Lyric

In the previous chapter I discussed the ability of the lyrical “I” to create a subjective transtemporality. The “I” could be identified with at any time, because the lyric creates a “present” moment in every moment. At the same time, the lyrical “I” is necessarily rooted in the language of the poem. Critics and theorists often resist the placement of poetry in a specific time and place in favor of a universal, transcendent reading that removes poetry from its cultural moment. Shira Wolosky remarks on this divergence in lyric studies: “this tendency of lyric theory to withdraw the text from history has a certain generic force” (Wolosky 651). The dichotomy at hand is one of accepting that a social reality is present in the poem versus denying the presence of a cultural construct and replacing it with universality: “The lyric is a timeless, formal purity, or it is subordinated to history, with each approach appropriating lyric to a particular ideological service” (Wolosky 652). Culler claims that social reality registers in a poem’s formal devices: “social reality includes paradigms of organization, figures of intelligibility; and the interplay between a literary work and its historical ground lies in the way its formal devices exploit, transform, and supplement a culture’s way of producing meaning” (Culler *Semiotics* 13). For Culler the “culture’s way of producing meaning” lies in the semiotic structure it has created for literature, specifically the meaning of genres and the reader’s expectation. However, this way of producing meaning, at its most basic, is simply language.

Language holds within it the “interplay between a literary work and its historical ground” because it is a semiotic system specific to a culture. Wolosky makes the

connection between form, language, and history explicit: “The composition of the lyric, the lyric as composition, the words that make it up, and the shapes these words take, are shot through with historicity” (Wolosky 658). Language, through its arbitrary nature and reliance on a semiotic code is a location of textual memory and semiotic storage. The author’s reliance on the contemporary semiotic code of the text’s creation makes the complete withdrawal of lyric from its historical and national foundation impossible. The reader, however, uses his own semiotic codes to interpret the text. The signifier’s inability to contain stable, univocal meaning leads to a difference in the signified. This difference, however, is actually an opportunity for meaning to be created, because the difference between the cultural moments of the author and the reader is transmitted through the difference in their semiotic codes. This slippage of signifiers between semiotic systems, which is identical to Derrida’s concept of *différance*, creates instead of detracts from meaning within lyric by creating a multiplicity of cultural moments through which the lyric can be read. As a result of the cultural grounding of language, the two halves of the dual identification that occurs between poet and reader are not identical. The closer the reader is to the cultural moment of the author, the greater the probability of similar experiences of identification will be, but there will never be a complete overlap in the semiotic systems of the reader and that of the writer.

II. Language as Semiotic Storage of Culture

Language is the foundation of any written work; however, as Saussure famously posited, language is arbitrary, and therefore meaning is not fixed. Although language must be consistent or conventional in order for it to function as a system of signifiers, the signifiers themselves can and do change. Information is transmitted from a producer to a

receiver through a code. The receiver, in order to gather meaning from the message, must “decode” it. The parties’ mutual understanding of the transmitted information relies on the extent to which the producer and the receiver share the same code. In *Universe of the Mind: a Semiotic Theory of Culture*, Yuri Lotman argues that although no two people share exactly the same code, there are varying degrees of overlap in the codes of two people trying to communicate: “Understanding is achieved when there is a unity between the coding systems of the author and those of the readership, the most elementary situation being when there is a shared natural language and shared cultural tradition” (Lotman 80).

Most notably Lotman argues that it is not only language that determines the receiver’s understanding of the message, but also his cultural surroundings. This underscores the fact that language alone is not a self-sufficient code. Language consists of words that rely on interpretation to extract their meaning, and this interpretation relies heavily on the language user’s cultural surroundings: “Communication with another person is only possible if there is some degree of common memory” (Lotman 63). This “common memory” refers to the shared cultural knowledge needed to decode a message to extract the same meaning. The implication of this is that a text or rather the language of a text contains within it the memory of a cultural moment, or at least traces thereof. The text was written according to a certain a code used by the author, which was informed not only by his language, but also by his cultural surroundings. Lotman indicates that language as a preserver of memory is one of its key functions: “The third function of language is the function of memory. The text is not only the generator of new

meanings, but also a condenser of cultural memory. A text has the capacity to preserve the memory of its previous contexts” (Lotman 18).

Language is able to carry out this function because the semiotic system of language changes between people, cultural groups and time. Since the relationship between a signified and its signifier is arbitrary, the signifier is able to, and in fact does, change. The idea of language as a signifier, not only of a specific signified concept, but also of a specific signified concept in a specific cultural moment, reflects a modern concern with the signifier’s ability to truly reflect the signified. Saussure recognized that the signifier has no relation to the signified other than the consensus of a group to use a certain signifier to represent a certain signified; Derrida’s *différance* then strips the signifier further by stating that the signifier can never truly represent the signified. The signifier itself has no intrinsic meaning, and the arbitrary meaning can only be found through an endless investigation of its relation to other signifiers. This fact leads to differences and, more importantly, changes in the meaning of words between users. Lotman’s expectation of language to preserve cultural memory relies completely on the arbitrary nature of the signifier and Derrida’s claim that the meaning of a signifier is constantly deferred. This *différance* creates a void of meaning filled by the users of a specific cultural space – a group conventionalizes a connotation of the word that is unique to its cultural moment. This can only occur because the connotation of a word between individuals can be aberrant; between generations it can be marked; and between centuries it can become unrecognizable. Language and all semiotic codes are not fixed – they are informed by and change according to history and culture.

Lotman creates a spatial concept for a nexus of a culture's semiotic codes at a particular moment called the semiosphere:

At the same time, throughout the whole space of semiosis, from social jargon and age-group slang to fashion, there is also a constant renewal of codes. So any one language turns out to be immersed in a semiotic space and it can only function by interaction with that space. The unit of semiosis, the smallest functioning mechanism, is not the separate language but the whole semiotic space of the culture in question. This is the space we term the semiosphere. (Lotman 124)

This semiosphere is in a way the code that is needed to extract the meaning of text in the way that the author originally inscribed it. It is impossible to reconstruct the author's code, due to the fact that the reader is unable to escape his own semiosphere; yet, I argue that it is useful to attempt to illustrate the possible differences in the codes between the cultural moment of the author and the reader. In doing so, the reader may approach a simulated version of the author's original intended meaning. Lotman claims that a text has an inherent capacity for the storage of cultural memory within its semiotic structure, which is constantly changing. The reason the semiotic structure is always evolving is because the underlying influence, culture, is also evolving. As Skulj says in her analysis of Lotman's semiosphere, "culture is not a sum of phenomena, but a *living totality*, where the notion of totality should be understood pragmatically (not metaphysically), i.e., as something inconclusive in its character, an *open, non-finite entity*" (Skulj 254). The combination of a changing cultural landscape, as well as the nature of the signifier as

deferring the meaning of its signified allows for a text to become a semiotic storage of cultural memory by providing a glimpse into the cultural moment of the text's creation.

Lotman's notion of a semiosphere is closely related to the idea of intertextuality – that a text is constantly being informed by other texts. Culler describes the concept of intertextuality and implies that it is important to realize its effect on the meaning of a text:

Literary works are to be considered not as autonomous entities, 'organic wholes,' but as intertextual constructs: sequences which have meaning in relation to other texts which they take up, cite, parody, refute, or generally transform. A text can be read only in relation to other texts, and it is made possible by the codes, which animate the discursive space of a culture.

(Culler *Semiotics* 38)

It is important to remember, however, that it is not only other physical texts that determine a text's intertextuality. As Culler says later:

Intertextuality thus becomes less a name for a work's relation to particular prior texts than a designation of its participation in the discursive space of a culture: the relationship between a text and the various languages or signifying practices of a culture and its relation to those texts which articulate for it the possibilities of that culture. The study of intertextuality is thus not the investigation of sources and influences as traditionally conceived; it casts its net wider to include anonymous discursive practices, codes whose origins are lost, that make possible the signifying practices of later texts. (Culler *Semiotics* 103)

So, in the same way that we think of a text as being informed by and responding to other texts, we can think of a text being informed by the semiotic systems and their underlying cultural situation. A text is interpreted through the “various signifying practices of its culture,” and changes or differences in these practices change the meaning of the text.

The lyrical “I” is necessarily situated in historical space by the language that roots it in the poem. The temporality of the lyrical “I” is located in the disparity between the historically specific use of language in the moment of the author and that of the reader – or more specifically, the semiotic difference between the language in the poem and the reader’s signification of the language. Language becomes not only a system of signs attempting to represent the world, but also a system of signs that encodes a way of representing the world and the reader’s self in a particular cultural moment. Language is a slowly, but constantly, evolving semiotic reflection of culture, and a written text, relying inherently on contemporaneous language and limited by the arbitrariness and *différance* inherent in semiotic systems, becomes a snapshot of the cultural atmosphere of the moment.

III. Examples of Historicity in Language: Auden’s “September 1st, 1939”

To read “historicity” out of a text is difficult because it involves the retracing of the meaning of a word at a cultural moment that is separate from the reader. The reader is simultaneously immersed in his own semiosphere and is influenced in all ways by the semiotics of his own cultural moment. So, while this reading can never give a definitive view of the semiotics of the cultural moment of a poem’s inception, through the reconstructed and imagined codes of the past, the cultural moment can be restructured to give an impression of the change in meaning.

Auden's poem, "September 1, 1939" seems to intentionally capture historicity in its language. The first, second, and fourth stanzas are reproduced here.

September 1, 1939

I sit in one of the dives
On Fifty-Second Street
Uncertain and afraid
As the clever hopes expire
Of a low dishonest decade:
Waves of anger and fear
Circulate over the bright
And darkened lands of the earth.
Obsessing our private lives;
The unmentionable odour of death
Offends the September night.

Accurate scholarship can
Unearth the whole offence
From Luther until now
That has driven a culture mad,
Find what occurred at Linz,
What huge imago made

A psychopathic god:
I and the public know
What all schoolchildren learn,
Those to whom evil is done
Do evil in return.

[...]

Into this neutral air
Where blind skyscrapers use
Their full height to proclaim
The strength of Collective Man,
Each language pours its vain
Competitive excuse:
But who can live for long
In an euphoric dream;
Out of the mirror they stare,
Imperialism's face
And the international wrong.

The words themselves intimate a common memory with the poem's readership – an understanding of a code between the poet and the reader. The poem explicitly places us in a historical time and place: a dive in New York on September 1, 1939. Implicitly, however, the words necessarily reflect the cultural moment by being a part of the language specific to the semiotic codes of the poet. The first line invokes a particular example of this. The word *dive* is a slang word. Because it is often used as a mark of a certain generation, slang changes more rapidly in its semiotic meanings than does standard speech. The word *dive* has existed since the 1871, but was then used to describe a brothel. The current connotation is a seedy bar, usually frequented by locals ("dive," Oxford Dictionary of Modern Slang). Although it is probable that Auden's definition is closer to our own, it is impossible to know exactly what Auden meant when he used the

word. In fact, with this specific word it seems reasonable to say that each individual would have their own expectation of what a dive is based on previous experiences.

Some examples of historicity are not as clear. Reading this poem in 1939, the “unmentionable odour of death” would have most certainly called to mind the declaration of war in Europe as well as the end of the World War I just 20 years earlier. To the modern reader, without the semiotic codes that immediately link “death” to “war,” it is easy to read the smell of death simply as a symbol of decay. While the correctness of this interpretation is not at question, this example shows that without the original code, historical meaning can be lost. Conversely it shows that the text does contain historicity in its language through a reconstruction of the social and historical surrounding of the text’s creation.

While this example shows that a word can lose some meaning, it is also possible that a word can gain meaning as it passes through different semiospheres over time. In the example above, the smell of death could represent an ominous foreboding of gas chambers to a post-war reader. In the second stanza, a reference is made to the city of “Linz.” I do not believe that this city would signify very much to the average modern reader. In 1939 the readership would have been familiar with Linz as the hometown of Adolf Hitler. After the end of the war, the word Linz would have invoked even more significance: it was also the hometown of Adolf Eichmann, a notorious holocaust architect, as well as the planned center for Hilter’s Third Reich. Our common memory has not retained this connotation of Linz, so the poem, or at least this line, has gone through different significances as it has traversed semiospheres. Words such as *skyscraper* and *imperialism* can be imagined to have similar changing connotations over

time. The examples in this poem are obviously not typical of every lyric, but that is not to say that the same principle does not apply. Culture is constantly changing, and even if there are not specific example of words that have empirically changed in their meaning, the meaning extracted by a reader, which is based on experience and memory, is constantly changing. Although it may often be more nuanced than these examples, a text is, as Wolosky says, “shot through with historicity” and cannot be completely abstracted from its cultural moment.

Auden’s poem begins to show the connection between language, identification, and community. The first stanza situates the lyrical “I,” which we already understand to be an identification mechanism for the reader, within a “dishonest decade.” The second stanza introduces the idea of a reflection of the self. The “imago” of the sixth line is a Jungian reference to “a subjective image of someone (esp. a parent) which a person has subconsciously formed and which continues to influence his or her attitudes and behaviour” (“imago”, OED). This Jungian misidentification of an exterior identity, recalls the Lacanian idea of self-misidentification in the mirror stage, which I discussed in the previous chapter. Auden continues to invoke psychoanalytic language in the next line, which reveals that the imago, the parental figure that has been misrepresented in the subject’s mind, has created a “psychopathic god.” All of this, however, has occurred because of an elusive element that has “driven a culture mad.” The psychopathic god created by his own misidentification is a reflection of a communal madness, the source of which Auden claims can be unearthed by “accurate scholarship,” yet hints through an invocation of Luther, as well as the subjective image of a father figure (God), that it may stem from religion.

The fourth stanza continues mirroring imagery. The reference to “Collective man” confirms that the poem is invoking a political or national group, which corroborates an historical reading of the diction. However, the fact that the collective’s achievements are a “euphoric dream” reflects the imaginary nature of the political group. The group is imaginary because it misidentifies itself in the Lacanian sense – as it stares out of a mirror it is “wrong.” The face of imperialism is a misidentification because it attempts to identify a group through exclusion – the group is defined by what it is not. As the national group identifies itself as “empire” it defines itself against another group of oppressed nations that are dominated by it. The national group is oppressed, or at least repressed, by its own demons that have “driven a culture mad.” The nation is misidentifying itself by excluding itself from the category of “oppressed” – it cannot define itself in its current terms.

Auden’s poem reflects the dark side of a repressed national imaginary. It at once identifies it as “imperialism’s face” and shows this identification as a *misidentification*. The language of the poem invokes a national community, but the misidentification of the community does not detract from the poem’s meaning. In fact, the difference between the imagined nation and its misidentification is the source of meaning in the poem. The metaphorical *différance* of the national signifier creates the tension of Auden’s poem and reveals that language, identity and community are not mutually exclusive terms; rather, while language shapes personal and communal identity, communal identity shapes the use and misuse of language.

IV. Problems with This Reading: Meaning and Misunderstanding

There are two problematic instances in this reading. The first is that meaning is obscured as soon as the author writes the poem due to the signifier's deferring of meaning. As we have seen, the semiosphere, or nexus of semiotic codes, in a society is constantly evolving. Even the common memory of individuals operating within the same cultural atmosphere may not ensure that they share identical codes. Lotman indicates that it seems as though this may be a weakness of language in general:

If one then takes into account cultural traditions (the semiotic memory of culture) and the inevitable factor of the individual way with which this tradition is revealed to a particular member of a collective, then it will be obvious that the coincidence of codes between transmitter and transmittee is in reality possible only to a very relative extent. It follows then inevitably that the identity of the transmitted and received texts is relative. From this point of view it might indeed seem that natural language fulfills its function badly. And poetic language even worse. (Lotman 13)

Perhaps language would be fulfilling its function badly if its function were purely to communicate univocally, which it sometimes is. Another function of language, however, is discourse, which, contrary to simply relaying information, creates new information and ideas. Lyric, and all texts that are read as literature, fall into this category. Lotman addresses this point, claiming that aberrations from intended meaning actually add meaning rather than subtract it:

We should not, however, forget that not only understanding but also misunderstanding is a necessary and useful condition in communication. A text that is absolutely comprehensible is at the same time a text that is

absolutely useless. An absolutely understandable and understanding partner would be convenient but unnecessary, since he or she would be a mechanical copy of my 'I' and our converse would provide us with no increase in information: just as there is no increase in money if one passes a purse from one pocket to another. (Lotman 80-81)

Although it may seem as though words lose meaning as they pass through other people's semiotic systems this is just an illusion. Some of the original intended meaning may be transformed – but net meaning cannot be lost. This also relates to Derrida's contention that a signifier never really contains any stable meaning; a signifier is only meaningful in relation to other signifiers. As these relationships change, meaning changes, but it does not disappear. The changes in the signified themselves are a location of meaning.

Certainly, as I said before, the lyric itself remains grounded in the cultural moment of its inception – the words continue to resonate with their historic meanings within the context of the poem. But the fact that reader from a different culture or time period does not make the same semiotic connections does not lessen the quality of his interpretation, it simply removes the reader's interpretation further from the author's. Wolosky, relying on Derrida's *différance*, says that the change in semiotic systems actually aids the signification process:

The loss of the signified does not defeat meaning. Meaning is traced instead through the signifying courses of language through the poem. Significance emerges within the generation, impetus, propulsion, and constellation of the signifying components themselves. Historical and temporal contingency, registration, propulsion, and resistance are the

realms and procedures of signification, their promise and their risk, and lyric represents and negotiates this. (Wolosky 665-66)

The closer the reader is to the cultural moment of the poem's inception, the closer he is to the poet's language. The reader's relationship to the poet is a bridge, facilitated by the mutual identification and misidentification with the lyrical "I." The further the reader is from the poet's cultural moment, the longer the bridge becomes. Of course, the bridge remains nonetheless, so the reader *does* experience identification and meaning from the poem; however, the longer the bridge, the more of the *original* meaning the reader loses, and the longer the train of signifiers becomes. The loss of the original meaning is unavoidable. The reader cannot separate himself from the semiotic system of his own historical moment, since it is this semiotic system through which he perceives and understands all things. Culler cites Paul de Man, who claims that all interpretations are in some way historically influenced:

The hidden order of literary history is based on a negative and dialectical principle, which also orders the relationship between reader and text: the reader, like the new poet, is a latecomer bound to misconstrue the text so as to serve the meanings required by his own moment in literary history. The greatest insights are produced in the process of necessary and determinate misreadings is the claim of another theorist of deformation, Paul de Man, for whom interpretation is always in fact covert literary history and inevitable error, since it takes for granted historical categorizations and obscures its own historical status. (Culler, *Semiotics* 13-14)

All interpretation must be filtered through a semiotic system, which as we have seen is the result of common memory and cultural surroundings. The “misreadings” that result from aberrations in common memory are an opportunity for new meaning for the reader.

Celan, when asked about the timelessness of lyric, responded, “The poem is not timeless...[but] seeks to grasp in and through time – that is: in and through it, not over and above it” (cited in Wolosky 667). In this reading, the poem grasps through time by allowing the reader’s cultural moment to transform the meaning of the poem, while maintaining the historicity in its words. The bridge between the reader and the author does not attempt to transcend time – it attempts to reach through it. In doing so, the text maintains an original meaning, which orients the poet in a dialogue with his contemporary readership while allowing for changes in meaning and misunderstandings to accommodate evolving semiotic systems.

The second potentially problematic issue with this reading is that the transmission of influence between the cultural system and text is not one sided. This is true of the relationship between text and culture, the relationship between the text and its reader as well as the relationship between the reader and his culture. The reader’s understanding of a text relies on his semiotic systems; however, the semiotic systems he is relying on to decode the text may have been shaped by a collective, common memory of information in the same text (for example the Bible). The reader, however, is also a part of the culture he is relying on for the semiotic system he needs to formulate his understanding. This relationship is parallel to the function of language in culture. Individuals make use of the conventions of language, but the conventions of language are created by that very use. Although language is created and determined by the individuals who use it, the

individuals themselves rely on it and do not have any real power to change its conventions. Just as man creates language, man creates the culture he is immersed in and this culture simultaneously creates the individuals who are immersed in it (Lotman 203-204). Analogously, man creates texts, which are influenced by the culture of the texts inception; yet that text may also change the culture into which it is received.

This circularity of effects, however, does not pose a problem for this reading. Although it is true that texts, individuals, and cultures all mutually shape each other, the origins of changes in the semiosphere are not at issue. The fact that the semiosphere *does change* from one cultural moment to the next is the deciding factor. This change allows for and even creates meaning which grounds the text in historicity to be contrasted with a reader's new meaning which is grounded in his own semiotic atmosphere. The fact that the reader's own understanding of the text may have in some way been affected by that text's influence on the common memory of his culture is interesting to think about, but irrelevant for the discussion of meaning. For example, a reader reading the Bible in western culture has undoubtedly been at least subconsciously influenced by it in his experiences and memories even if he has never read it. However, this part of common memory is integrated into the webs of signification through which his interpretation is filtered and does not explicitly change the nature of his reading from a person whose culture is not immersed in the Bible.

This approach to reading historicity in text then is self-reflexive. Although it grounds the lyric in a specific cultural moment, it does not deny the reader's own cultural moment. Rather, it supports the reader's cultural moment by positing that meaning is in

fact created through a misunderstanding between the difference in the signified for a single signifier caused by different semiotic systems.

V. Conclusion: Language as a Basis for Communal Reading

Language is a preserver of cultural memory through its semiotic storage. We have considered, up to now, the text as existing in two specific moments: the moment of authorship and the moment of reception. Now we will focus on the moment of reception of multiple readers in the same time period – a time period which is relatively close to the moment of the text’s inception. That is to say the coincidence in the codes of the poet and the multiple readers will be relatively large and aberrations in the codes will be due to gaps in common memory. These individuals living in the same semiosphere have a special relationship to the text, because their understood meaning of the text is the nearest to that of the author in relation to their cultural surroundings. This language community living in the same cultural atmosphere is equivalent to a national community with the shared language being a creator of the community. Anderson points out the importance of language in the formation of communities:

It is always a mistake to treat languages in the way that certain nationalist ideologues treat them – as emblems of nation-ness, like flags, costumes, folk-dances, and the rest. Much the most important thing about language is its capacity for generating imagined communities, building in effect *particular solidarities*. (Anderson 133)

The fact that a group shares a semiotic code, creates a common memory – a shared experience leads to “particular solidarities” that parallel the idea of nationality. Anderson even thinks that certain forms of language, such as the language found in lyric, is a

privileged source of “community making” language: “there is a special kind of contemporaneous community which language alone suggests – above all in the form of poetry and songs” (Anderson 145). So while a particular culture shapes the semiotic codes of language, the language itself defines the culture not as an emblem but as a creator of it and its boundaries.

The issue of boundaries in Lotman’s semiosphere is pertinent to Anderson’s definition of nationality. Lotman discusses the significance of the boundaries of semiotic systems:

One of the primary mechanisms of semiotic individuation is the boundary, and the boundary can be defined as the outer limit of a first-person form. This space is ‘ours’, ‘my own’, it is ‘cultured’, ‘safe’, ‘harmoniously organized’, and so on. By contrast ‘their space’ is ‘other’, ‘hostile’, ‘dangerous’, ‘chaotic’. Every culture begins by dividing the world into ‘its own’ internal space and ‘their’ external space. How this binary division is interpreted depends on the typology of the culture. But the actual division is one of the human cultural universals. The boundary may separate the living from the dead, settled people from nomadic ones, the town from the plains; it may be a state frontier, or a social, national, confessional, or any other kind of frontier. (Lotman 131)

The culture defines itself in contrast to the idea of the “other” – that which is not within its semiotic system, and therefore cannot interpret its semiotic codes. The imagined boundaries of a nation cannot exist without the existence of other nations and language is a key way of distinguishing “otherness” because it is the most apparent semiotic code. A

foreigner attempting to speak a new language will, even if he has a good command of the words, never be able to mimic the cultural connotations of a native speaker without being immersed in the cultural surroundings. Language is inextricably tied to culture. Even when a language uses many of the same signifiers as with English in England and in America, the words do not mean the same thing when seen through the lens of cultural influence. Each word's significance is filled with a nation's historical and cultural context. A word's appearance in two nations may be the same, but its underlying connotation is not. The author of a lyric then is forced to use as his tool a semiotic system that is not only tied to a particular temporal moment, but also a particular cultural space. The "I" of lyric is hereby grounded not only historically, but also in a national imagined community.

The individual who reads a lyric of his own nation is a part of the language community. He participates in its conventions and in doing so reinforces them. Taylor notes that an individual's use of his language is part of his identity:

A language only exists and is maintained within a language community. And this indicates another crucial feature of a self. One is a self only among other selves. A self can never be described without reference to those who surround it.... A self exists only within what I call 'webs of interlocution.' It is this original situation which gives its sense to our concept of 'identity,' offering an answer to the question of who I am through a definition of where I am speaking from and to whom. The full definition of someone's identity thus usually involves not only his stand

on moral and spiritual matters but also some reference to a defining community. (Taylor 36)

Just as a self can never be described outside of the cultural and semiotic world it exists in, it can also never be removed from its relationship with others because it is precisely in these dialogic and linguistic relationships with others where common memory is preserved and exchanged. This common memory provides the basis for a reading of lyric that ties meaning to the lyric's historical inception – a moment filled with semiotic significance which pervades a national community. The lyric as a dialogue between a reader and a poet preserves this cultural significance because, like all dialogue, it is a location of common memory. The next chapter will attempt to integrate the individualistic, transtemporal reading of the "I" with the historical reading of language to formulate the possibility for a communal reading of lyric.

Chapter 3: Communal Identification and the Nation

I. Introduction

Until now we have explored two distinct features of lyric: the “I,” which we have said is that which gives the lyric its transtemporal quality, and language, which is the historicizing force of the lyric. Although it seems that these two qualities are diametrically opposed, it is possible to resolve the tension of the ambiguity of the “I” and the specificity of the cultural moment in a reading of lyric that emphasizes communal, even national identification. The ability of the “I” to facilitate identification will lead to a communal identification between people, as we have already seen between the author and the reader; however, the specific nature of language as semiotic storage will delimit the identification to a specific group, namely the imagined community of the nation. This group will be privileged in its reading of the poem because it will experience a bond of identification between its members that is based on a language that is unique to it and its cultural moment. In the next chapter I will discuss the implications for the national group of readers if its language, which reflects its cultural moment, becomes disrupted through national trauma.

It is helpful to understand Anderson’s seminal definition of a nation as an imagined community, as I will be relying on it throughout the argument. He defines a nation as an imagined community that imagines itself as limited and as sovereign. It is imagined because a member of a nation will never know even a fraction of its fellow members. It is limited because a nation can only exist in contrast to other nations. The most important “imagined” part of the community is a “horizontal comradeship” or a “fraternal community” that creates an imaginary, fictive relationship between the

members of the community (Anderson 6-7). Although the national community exists purely as an imaginary designation, this does not decrease its importance in the mind of its members. Anderson points out that this imagined bond is so strong that it incites its members to die in support of it (Anderson 7). This definition of the nation will be instrumental in constructing the lyric as space for communal identification.

II. The Identification Mechanism of the “I” as a Basis for Communal Identification

As we have discussed in Chapter One, the lyrical voice straddles both the public and the private realm in its ability to be universally personal. In doing so, it creates an identification mechanism, compelling the reader to identify with the “I,” and thus creating a moment of mutual identification between the reader and the author. This identification, however, does not limit itself to this imagined bond – it extends itself to the entire community of the lyric’s readers. In his essay “On Lyric Poetry and Society,” Adorno claims that the individuality of lyric makes it necessarily social: “The substance of a poem is not merely an expression of individual impulses and experiences. Those become a matter of art only when they come to participate in something universal by virtue of the specificity they acquire in being given aesthetic form” (Adorno 38). Adorno claims that the more specific the “I” is, the more it will speak to a “human” element – the personal becomes the public. As I have said in Chapter One, the specific nature of the “I” is universal to all “I’s” and therefore creates the possibility of encompassing multiple selves: “The universality of the lyric’s substance, however, is social in nature. Only one who hears the voice of human kind in the poem’s solitude can understand what the poem is saying” (Adorno 38). Although I agree with Adorno in the sense that the personal and the public are intimately connected, Adorno uses the *content* of the lyrical “I” – a

tendency against society – as the reason the “I” attracts the identification of the reader. He says that lyric embodies an “I” that is threatened by society, and that this feeling is universal to all individuals. In being resistant to society, the “I” represents all members of society:

That means that even resistance to social pressure is not something absolutely individual, the artistic forces in that resistance, which operate in and through the individual and his spontaneity, are objective forces that impel a constricted and constricting social condition to transcend itself and become worthy of human beings; forces, that is, that are part of the constitution of the whole and not at all merely forces of a rigid individuality blindly opposing society. (Adorno 43)

Although Adorno eventually comes to a similar conclusion, namely that the lyrical “I” does not represent an exclusive personality but rather an inclusive representation of society, he does not single out the “I” as a fundamental mechanism for identification; rather, it is the nature of the “I’s” persona that lends itself to the social sphere. Adorno posits that any identification occurs through the lyric’s content: the experiences of the individual, although not identical to the experience of everyone else, embody what it means to be human. Although I admit that this a compelling idea, there is another way that the focus on the individual in lyric poetry extends to the masses, namely that the identification with the lyrical “I” is a human impulse shared by all who read a single poem.

A reader of lyric identifies with the “I” through the mechanism already discussed. It follows that all readers of lyric experience this identification. What was initially a dual

identification quickly multiplies and becomes *communal identification*. Similar to Anderson's idea of a nation, a group with a shared experience now exists – one that is contrasted to those who have not experienced identification with the “I.” This group is of course imagined in the sense that very few members of this group will ever meet.

Anderson argues that this occurs specifically with newspapers: members of a society read a newspaper and they know that others in their society will read the same newspaper, thus an imagined community of newspaper readers is born (Anderson 34-35). This is not so different from those reading a lyric poem; the primary difference is that the shared experience is not so much the “reading” of the newspaper, as it is the performance of the lyrical “I.” Because of this difference, the lyric exhibits a sort of portable nationality. On the one hand, a newspaper generates a *local* nationality, which is applicable only to the geographic boundaries of the nation. On the other hand, the lyric provides a space of *global* nationality, where any identifying member of a nation, regardless of geographic location, can participate in identification with the “I.”

In *Group Psychology* Freud discusses exactly this sort of identification with reference to smaller groups such as families or a group of friends: “A primary group of this kind is a number of individuals who have put one and the same object in the place of their ego ideal and have consequently identified themselves with one another in their ego” (Freud, *Group Psychology* 61). In other words, a situation in which individuals identify with one another constitutes the formation of a group. Certainly, Freud is referring to a group in which the individual members know each other, but when synthesizing Freud's “primary group” with Anderson's “imagined communities” it is not difficult to imagine a situation in which a larger community would also experience this

communal identification. The primary difference is the nature of the mediation: in Freud's case, mediation occurs through physical contact, whereas in Anderson's case, the mediation of the group is through newspapers, literature, or, in this case, lyric.

A similar sort of communal identification is discussed by Maurice Halbwachs, a philosopher and sociologist who coined and developed the idea of "collective memory." His book on the subject was published posthumously in 1950. Halbwachs, unlike Freud, is in fact talking about an imagined community, although his examples specifically include armies, religious groups, and social classes. He claims that an individual cannot exist, even to himself, without the help of societal cues:

But individual memory is nevertheless a part or an aspect of group memory, since each impression and each fact, even if it apparently concerns a particular person exclusively, leaves a lasting memory only to the extent that one has thought it over – to the extent that it is connected with the thoughts that come to us from the social milieu. But to discourse upon something means to connect within a single system of ideas our opinions as well as those of our circle. It means to perceive in what happens to us a particular application of facts concerning which social thought reminds us at every moment of the meaning and impact these facts have for it. In this way, the framework of collective memory confines and binds our most intimate remembrances to each other. It is not necessary that the group be familiar with them. It suffices that we cannot consider them except from the outside – that is, by putting ourselves in the position of others – and that in order to retrieve these remembrances we must tread

the same path that others would have followed had they been in our position. (Halbwachs 53)

Essentially, Halbwachs claims that even an innermost memory cannot be regarded by a self unless the self situates itself outside of the memory and thinks (“discourses”) about it using the semiotic system that society has given it. Society’s viewpoint is essential to the self’s understanding of itself and without society’s affect on the self, it would have no way to analyze its memories and, therefore, itself. Halbwachs goes so far as to say that when an individual is operating within a society there is no difference between his interior and exterior lives: “There is hence no memory without perception. As soon as we locate people in society it is no longer possible to distinguish two types of observations, one exterior, the other interior” (Halbwachs 169). An individual’s perception is so intertwined with society’s influence that his memories will always be mediated through a societal lens. Here, as in Adorno’s definition of the lyric, the personal becomes the public – the individual becomes the societal.

This formulation of collective memory by Halbwachs is instrumental to a communal reading of lyric because it shows the reciprocal nature of the relationship between an individual and society. Not only is an individual a representational part of society, but society almost wholly infiltrates the individual – especially the individual’s perception of itself. Adorno mentions this relationship in his essay: “But that brings us back to the actual relationship between the individual and society. It is not only that the individual is inherently socially mediated, not only that its contents are always social as well. Conversely, society is formed and continues to live only by virtue of the individuals whose quintessence it is” (Adorno 44). In the moment of identification, the

individual reader identifies with the “I.” The individual, however, not only represents society, but is also a very real product of society. The self’s reading of the “I,” then, is inherently imbued with social knowledge and influence. The self reading the lyric only experiences itself in relation to other selves and therefore only performs the “I” with reference to other selves. Here we return to Taylor’s formulation of the intricate relationship between the self and society:

One is a self only among other selves. A self can never be described without reference to those who surround it.... A self exists only within what I call ‘webs of interlocution.’ It is this original situation which gives its sense to our concept of ‘identity,’ offering an answer to the question of who I am through a definition of where I am speaking from and to whom. The full definition of someone’s identity thus usually involves not only his stand on moral and spiritual matters but also some reference to a defining community. (Taylor 35-36)

Taylor’s formulation shows that there is not only an uncanny resemblance between the self and society in that both only exist with reference to others, but also that the self is defined by its discourse with society as well as its position within this discourse.

Society and the individual are so mutually constituted that it is nearly impossible to separate them. The individual only exists as such through its relationship with society and society only exists as an agglomeration of individuals. When reading lyric, the self brings with it memories of the society and reads the lyric through this lens. Naturally, all others in the same society, with similar common memories, read the lyric through the same, or at the very least a similar, lens. All of these readers experience a moment of

identification, which creates an imagined community of readers that overlaps with their national identity. The moment of dual identification between the poet and the reader, which creates a trans-temporal bridge, is transposed onto society as a whole and as such becomes a moment of communal identification.

As I discussed in Chapters One and Two, misidentification of the “I” as well as a misunderstanding of language through changing semiotic codes enrich the reading of lyric by creating meaning; however, these moments are also pivotal to the understanding of lyric as a space of communal identification. As I said in Chapter One, Lacan’s idea of a self’s misidentification through exclusion necessarily applies to the lyrical “I” because the “I” cannot escape the boundaries of the poem itself, which is an inherently limited construct. This misidentification extends also to the imagined national community. As we saw in Chapter Two, in “September 1st, 1939” Auden’s speaker portrays a community that has misidentified itself as an “empire” by excluding all other aspects of its nationhood. The misidentification of the lyrical “I” then does not preempt the connection with the national imaginary, but rather parallels it. The misunderstanding caused by changing semiotic codes and differences in a signifier’s attachment to a signified is similar in that it does not undermine the communal reading of lyric. The community of readers that identifies as part of a nation will experience rather small differences in semiotic codes. The differences that do exist due to gaps in communal memory and variable cultural exposure again reinforce the idea of a nation as *imagined*. No two members of a national community will have the same cultural experiences, yet the members of this community imagine a “horizontal comradeship” that fictively levels their experiences.

The idea of communal identification through the lyrical “I” is problematic for several reasons: first, the lyric is defined by its focus on the individual. As described above by Culler, the lyric poet “pretends to be talking to himself or someone else” (Culler, *Literary Theory* 714). This makes the poem intimate and defines exactly the *opposite* of what it means to be a part of society, namely what it means to be personal. This is, however, exactly the quality, which makes the lyric ideal as a space for communal identification, and therefore a facilitator or a location of “the social.” The specifically individual or personal in the lyric is that which facilitates the initial identification of the individual with the “I.” On a mass scale then we observe many readers experiencing moments of identification; where before we had a bridge connecting the author and the reader, we now have a bridge connecting the author with each reader and implicitly each reader with each other reader. Anderson’s idea of a “horizontal comradeship” is exactly the image of community we imagine when we consider the moment of communal identification with a lyrical “I”: several individuals undergoing an imagined, uniting experience which places them in a situation to relate to others who have shared a similar experience.

However, a more fundamental problem with this reading is the apparent ignorance of unique groups within the term “nation.” In other words, this approach seems to disregard classifications, such as race, class, and gender, that may supersede or at least parallel the identification with a nationality. Certainly, a more thorough reading could be done in which the differences in identification with a lyrical “I” between races, classes, and genders within a given nationality are examined; however, given the scope of such an examination, this paper will simply have to assume that the imagined community of the

nation subsumes the aforementioned categories. In this reading, we assume that the individual identifies primarily as a member of a given nation first and foremost.

III. Language as a Delimiter of Communal Identification

This moment of mass identification creates a community of readers that apparently share two mutual experiences: reading a specific poem and experiencing a similar moment of identification through the same cultural lens with the lyrical “I.” However, a third mutual experience is less obvious: each reader has a shared language as well as a shared common memory. In *Imagined Communities*, Anderson describes the role of language and specifically the distribution of printed texts as facilitating a feeling of society, or more specifically nationalism, among a group of people: “Print capitalism...made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and relate themselves to others in profoundly new ways” (Anderson 36). Although Anderson’s emphasis falls on the distribution of texts, nevertheless his formulation is very instructive to the individual’s relationship with the text. The ability of individuals to “relate themselves to others” indicates at first a reflexive effort, followed by a projection of this effort outwards. Anderson formulates text as a mediator for an individual’s identification first with himself, and then with the society he is a part of.

A group’s language, as Anderson says, is not an emblem of the society; rather, it is a creator of the imagined community – it builds “*particular solidarities*” (Anderson 133). This creation of the imagined community occurs because the language of a nation is tied in some way to the history of the nation. Anderson says that language is fundamental to the creation of a national identity, because language is that which is both

innate and arbitrary. That is, it is a natural acquisition that is accidental, but shared by all in the imagined community of the nation:

Something of the nature of this political love can be deciphered from the ways in which languages describe its object: either in the vocabulary of kinship (motherland, Vaterland, patria) or that of home (heimat or tanah air [earth and water, the phrase for the Indonesians' native archipelago]). Both idioms denote something to which one is naturally tied. As we have seen earlier, in everything 'natural' there is always something unchosen. (Anderson 143)

Anderson shows that language, although being intimately tied to an individual's identity, is not part of the individual from birth. Ultimately, it is the individual's relationship to its native culture that forms its language. The semiotic system of a culture imbues society and the individual with communal memory. Lynn Visson, in her essay on language and cultural difference goes so far as to say that, "the specific nature and structure of a language determine the way its speakers view the world, and serve as an organizing principle of culture" (Visson 57). Language is so tied to the culture of the nation that many words cannot be directly translated because their meanings are so attached to cultural memory:

Words that characterize the life, culture, and historical development of any given country often have no precise equivalents in other languages. It has even been argued that only proper names, geographic, scientific, and technical terms, days of the week, months, and numerals have full lexical correspondence in several languages. (Visson 57)

She gives a memorable example of this by saying that the word *lunch*, although existing in almost all languages, has a very different meaning transculturally, and invoking the word in different nations would yield varying results.

The most important quality of language, for our purposes, is that apart from being so connected to a specific culture, it is inherently a social invention. Halbwachs notes that expression of the self or one's own memories can be described only in language, and this language can exist only when the self exists in relation to other selves: "Words and language presuppose not just one person but a group of associated persons" (Halbwachs 170). Lyric makes use of language, which presupposes its use as communication – as discourse between two or more people. This inclusive aspect of language, however, is immediately contrasted with its exclusive aspect. As noted before, an imagined community exists only in contrast to other imagined communities. Similarly, a language only exists in contrast to other languages. The lyric is written in one language; therefore, it presupposes the existence of *one group* with which it wants to communicate. This group that shares not only the language, but also the accompanying cultural memory, is the nation. A group of contemporary readers of a lyric becomes then, through identification, an imagined community that finds itself located entirely within the imagined community of the nation. It is true that it is likely that the imagined community of the nation as a whole will probably not be identical with the imagined community of readers of the "I," but this will be discussed below.

IV. Example of the Communal in Lyric: Ingeborg Bachmann's "Wie soll ich mich nennen?"

Although the imagined community created by the lyrical "I" is not necessarily the same as the imagined community of a nation, it is my contention that it can be and often

is. First, we will reexamine the delineating features of a nation, which are not, as one would assume, its boundaries. Rather, the idea of a nation exists only in contrast to the idea of other nations. What then are the limitations of the imagined community of the lyrical “I?” In general, it would seem that the community consists only of those who have experienced the moment of identification. However, the poet, through the manipulation of the language in the poem, can create a lyrical “I” that recalls to the reader not only their identity as a reader of the “I,” but also their identity as a person of a certain nation. To see this process at work in lyric, we turn to Ingeborg Bachmann’s lyric “Wie soll ich mich nennen? (What should I call myself?), which was written between 1948 and 1953.

What Should I Call Myself?

Once I was a tree and bound
then I hatched as a bird and was free
in a ditch captive I was found
a dirty egg left me cracking.

How do I survive? I have forgotten,
where I am from and where I am going,
I am possessed by many bodies
a hard thorn and a fleeing deer.

Today I am friend to the acorn branches,
tomorrow I misdeem myself on the trunk...
When did guilt begin its circle dance,
with which I swam from seed to seed?

But within me a beginning sings still
-- or an end – and resists my flight,
I want to escape the arrow of guilt
which seeks me in the sandgrain and the wild duck

Maybe I can recognize myself once,
a dove a rolling stone...
Only one word is wanting! How should I name
myself
without being in a different language?

Wie soll ich mich nennen?

Einmal war ich ein Baum und gebunden,
dann entschlüpft ich als Vogel und war frei,
in einen Graben gefesselt gefunden,
entließ mich berstend ein schmutziges Ei.

Wie halt ich mich? Ich habe vergessen,
woher ich komme und wohin ich geh,
ich bin von vielen Leibern besessen,
ein harter Dorn und ein flüchtendes Reh.

Freund bin ich heute den Ahornzweigen,
morgen vergehe ich mich an dem Stamm...
Wann begann die Schuld ihren Reigen,
mit dem ich von Samen zu Samen schwamm?

Aber in mir singt noch ein Beginnen
-- oder ein Enden – und wehrt meiner Flucht,
ich will dem Pfeil dieser Schuld entrinnen,
der mich in Sandkorn und Wildente sucht.

Vielleicht kann ich mich einmal erkennen,
eine Taube einen rollenden Stein...
Ein Wort nur fehlt! Wie soll ich mich nennen,
ohne in anderer Sprache zu sein.⁴

⁴ My own translation.

A closer reading of the poem will reveal that the poem's language used recalls to us the cultural moment of its inception. The first stanza depicts the "I" as recalling a previous time in which its identity was clear. This is perhaps a state of pre-trauma. In the fourth line of the first stanza the word *cracking*, which represents the introduction of trauma, is ambiguously linked to either the dirty egg or the "I" itself. The second stanza, which begins "How do I survive?," shows a disorientation of the "I"; it has lost its current position, as well as its trajectory, and even its own body is no longer fixed or "bound" as it was in the first stanza. The third stanza introduces the language of guilt, which the "I" wants to escape in the fourth stanza. It seems that no matter which malleable identity the "I" assumes, this "arrow of guilt" will continue to be pointed at it. The final stanza represents a hope for a new identity that will perhaps absolve it of this guilt; however, this solution is complicated by the fact that the language of the speaker will not allow a re-identification, which implies that the speaker is being held captive in a state of guilt by his language. As we have seen from Anderson, language is a foundation of nationhood, so it would not be too much to say that the speaker is lamenting an inescapable feeling of guilt that stems from captivity in his nationality.

The equation of language and nationality, however, is not the only semiotic storage in this text. Rather, when we reflect on the time this was written (between 1948 and 1953), we can unearth many moments in which the signifier represents much more than at first appears. For a reader whose cultural moment is near to the cultural moment of its creation, the language of the poem would necessarily call to mind the German nation. The "I" lamenting its previous state and the birth of a "dirty egg" that is itself a symbol of instability and destruction ("cracking") represents the rise of Hitler and the

genesis of National Socialism from within the German people. The word “guilt” itself must have had a national resonance after the Nurnberg trials. Yet, the “I” cannot escape the guilt because of its language – its nationality – for the reader, its “germanness.” The words of the poem are, as Wolosky puts it “shot through with historicity.” It is the “I” that is at once personal and universal – the facilitator of mass identification, but it is the language that roots the poem in its cultural moment.

However, it is also the language that makes possible the move from the imagined community of the moment of mass identification to the imagined community of the nation. The mid-20th Century contemporary German reader of this poem experiences identification with the “I” through the mechanisms explained above; however, through the language surrounding the “I” he simultaneously identifies the “I” as a “German,” a classification, as it were, that he also identifies with. We now see a type of dual identification by a single person being manifested through the lyrical “I.” The reader is both a part of the imagined community of the “I” as well as the imagined community of the “German,” which the “I” also represents. The language of the poem has combined the community of the readers of the “I” and the community of the nation into one identity; the person who identifies with the “I” and the “German” are the same. Therefore, through the historicity and semiotic storage of language, the poem can be a “National” poem, without everyone in the nation having read it.

The problem with language as an indicator of nationality and as cultural memory is a main theme of “What should I call myself?” If language reflects the culture it is recording, and the culture it is recording is in a state of trauma, as is the case in post-World War II Germany, then the reliability or even the ability of language to be an

adequate reflection or storage of cultural memory is called into question. The speaker of Bachmann's poem is continually lamenting his inability to identify himself; throughout the poem, the speaker is a tree, a bird, a hard thorn, a fleeing deer, a friend, perhaps even a grain of sand or a wild duck. In the last stanza the speaker thinks that he could be or could become a dove or a rolling stone, but he can't be sure. In the last two lines, the reason for his inability to identify himself is revealed: his language (i.e. his culture) does not allow it. He needs a "different language" – a language that can break free from the common memory of trauma that has ruptured the functionality of the semiosphere.

This trauma can be partially located in the combined misidentification and misunderstanding of the "I." Throughout the poem, the speaker considers several signifiers to signify the signified "self." However, in the final stanza, the speaker reveals his misidentification even more clearly by claiming that "Only one word is wanting!" This is precisely Lacan's concept of misidentification through exclusion of elements that make up the self. The fact that the speaker claims he is missing only one signifier, which represents his totality, shows that his attempt to identify himself is truly an example of misidentification. The speaker then goes on to say that he needs to "exist in a different language." The language in which the speaker currently exists, German, is not sufficient to identify him. There is a semiotic system that is "excluded" from the "I's" current semiosphere, which is restricting him from examining himself in his totality. Taking the historical reading into account, it is possible to say that the German's missing or "wanting" semiotic code is the semitic. The exclusion of Germany's "other" – Jewishness – is keeping the German national identity, represented here by the lyrical "I" from being able to identify itself. Here Derrida's concept of *différance* and Lacan's idea

of misidentification combines to show language's limited ability to identify the self.

There is no one signifier that can express the "I's" identity – the "I" must stop trying to limit its own identity into single signifier's and instead start to increase the "languages", the codes and semiotic systems, that it includes in its definition of the self.

V. Conclusion

The phenomenon of an individual's participation in mass identification through his reading of a poem is parallel to the idea of nationalism. Both are instances in which an individual identifies with others, whom he does not and will not ever know. Within the context of nationalism by mass identification, the community is clearly imagined. Each reader's identification or misidentification with the lyrical "I" is individual, and occurs only within his own imagination. Whether or not the individuals are conscious of or reflect on being part of the moment of communal identification is not important, just as a person must not be acutely aware of his part in a society or culture to be affected by it. The significance lies in the fact that the lyrical poem acts as a facilitator of an imagined community. In his book on the lyric voice, Maio notes that the poet must always be aware of the communal importance of the lyrical voice, "The collective mind of the country, then, takes precedence over the individual mind of the poet. 'What happens [to the poet] is a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable'" (Maio 9).

As we have seen in the reading of "Wie soll ich mich nennen?" the language of a specific cultural moment recalls to the member of the imagined community of readers his role as a member of the imagined community of the nation. In this way, the lyric can create a textual connection between the reader's identification with the "I" and the

reader's identification with a nationality. The performance of the lyrical "I," subsequently lends itself to the performance of the reader's national identity. Skulj notes that there are two modes of cultural or national identity. The first is the "Self in its very presence...identity as sameness." The second is the "performative value which implies 'producing...transforming...identity as selfhood'" (Skulj 253). So the reader identifies with his national identity through reading – he experiences the self as identical with the national identity. However, in performing the "I" he is also producing the self as a member of the national identity since the "I" and the language surrounding it are a part of the cultural semiotic system. This performance of the self as a member of a national community will form the basis of reading the lyric nationally. The next chapter will discuss the disruption of semiotic systems through national trauma and its effects on the lyric.

Chapter 4: Trauma and Lyric

I. Introduction

In the preceding chapter, we were primarily concerned with the way in which lyric is pertinent to a national audience and how it is uniquely suited to address national issues. As discussed in Chapter One, lyric, through its first person lyric persona, straddles the realms of the personal and the public. Lyric, although written in one voice, is performed by a multitude of distinct readers much like the nation, which is an imagined entity composed of heterogeneous parts. In Chapter Two we explored language's ability to capture its historical moment. Chapter Three unified these aspects of lyric to show that the identification mechanism of the lyrical "I" and the historical specificity of language create a community of lyric readers that parallels and often intersects with the community of nationhood. This chapter will go on to explore a specific moment in the national community, a moment of trauma. I will focus on how trauma, specifically the experience of World War II, is approached in lyric.

The lyrical "I" is a narrator acting as though he is speaking to himself; the reader then performs the lyrical "I" and identifies with it. As multiple readers perform the lyrical "I", an imagined community of readers emerges. The language of the lyric captures the cultural moment of its inception, and the semiotic codes of the various readings lead to myriad "misunderstandings" of the poem, investing it with new meaning. In traumatic situations, identity, language, and nationhood are questioned. During a war, a "self" must reorient itself in relation to the world. National trauma causes individual identities to change very quickly: a wife becomes a widow, a woman becomes a worker, a boy becomes a soldier. The fluidity of personal identities is ruptured; additionally, the

individual's identity in relation to the nation changes. The central problem of the lyric, the boundary between the personal and the public, is at the forefront of war: where does the individual end and the nation begin? This problem is especially prevalent in the world wars, which, in parts of Europe, failed to maintain a clear distinction between soldier and civilian. The problem of locating the individual within the collective, parallels the problem of situating the individual temporally. Periods of trauma, especially periods of war, do not "begin and end" in a typical way; trauma is not only an occurrence, but also an inescapable state of mind.

Language is another aspect of lyric that is affected by national trauma. Faced with trauma, language, as the semiotic system that allows us to represent the world in a meaningful way loses the ability to adequately represent reality, thus leaving the individual in a reality that contains only obscure meaning. World War II was a time of unspeakable horrors such as the holocaust and nuclear war, which, for the first time, showed the people of the world that they possessed the ability to kill each other on a scale never before seen. How does one adequately represent this in words?

While identity formation, temporality, and language are all key aspects of lyric that need to be explored during trauma, there are also more concrete properties that illuminate lyric's role in addressing national trauma. The subject matter of poetry written after war is often surprising. Certainly, some poets, such as Wilfred Owen or Siegfried Sassoon, opt to write about actual occurrences during the war, but many, such as W.H. Auden or Dylan Thomas, finding that words are not able to properly articulate the horrors of war, choose seemingly unrelated topics such as the sublime or the mundane. Lyric is often associated with the pastoral; however, as noted by Fussell (231), war is the opposite

of the pastoral. War is man's violent occupation of nature as opposed to his harmonious and fruitful coexistence with it. This chapter will attempt to address these issues of trauma and lyric through close readings of poems by W.H. Auden, Paul Celan, and Günter Eich.

II. Trauma as Personal and Public

In Chapter One, we discussed that lyric is at once private and public in that the experiences of the individual are made public through identification with the lyrical "I." This identification requires, however, a shared basis of emotions. For example, although perhaps not every reader has experienced the death of a close relative, the grief that accompanies this experience is universally human. In the same way, trauma, although seemingly private, is *universally* private in that everyone is confronted with it, especially during a time of war. This is formulated clearly by Middleton and Woods: "Trauma is usually thought of as an individual, internal wound, but like other psychoanalytic concepts it is also transindividual and, can therefore, also be located within the reading process" (Middleton and Woods 191). The transindividuality of trauma makes it an apt theme of lyric, which specializes in making the personal public. The readers, who have experienced trauma in their own way during the war, can then identify with the traumatic experiences of the lyrical "I". Paul Crosthwaithe in his book on World War II and trauma quotes the historian Gordon Wright: "at least one psychiatrist, on returning to the Continent in 1945, contended that almost every inhabitant of occupied Europe showed some trait that might be described as neurotic or even psychotic" (Crosthwaithe 23). Just as lyric blurs the boundary between personal and public, war blurs the boundary between private and social.

The individual also takes on a different role within the national community during war. The nation, not the individual, is the object of war; yet, the war is fought by individuals, not by nations. Benedict Anderson cites war as an example of the power of the imagined community of the nation: “Dying for one’s country, which usually one does not choose, assumes a moral grandeur which dying for the Labor Party, the American Medical Association, or perhaps even Amnesty International can not rival, for these are all bodies one can join or leave at easy will” (Anderson 144). The nation is not an imagined community that one can “join or leave at easy will.” The individual is a subject of the nation while simultaneously constituting its power. He is subjected to the “Other” of the nation state, with which he also identifies. The individual’s relationship to the collective changes and is problematized during wartime. On the one hand, the individual becomes *estranged* from the collective because he is made to sacrifice (perhaps even his life) for it; on the other hand, the individual is *united* with other individuals because they are *all* making similar sacrifices for the same cause, engendering a feeling of nationalism. Catherine McLoughlin notes that, “the perceived senselessness of armed conflict...is primarily a result of the vast disparity between the military endeavour and the individual caught up in it” (McLoughlin 167). The tension of the private individual and the public nation state is addressed in the inherent tension of the lyrical “I”, which is simultaneously looking inward at the personal while providing an object of identification for readers, which constitutes the social. Although wartime problematizes the role of the individual, the individual’s personal feeling of alienation is actually universal. In essence, each individual experiences mutual and simultaneous estrangement from society, which can be addressed by the isolation of the lyrical “I”.

Crosthwaithe relies on Lacan's understanding of the individual as a social subject in order to discuss the effects of trauma on self-representation. For Lacan, there are three distinct registers of experience: the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real. To simplify: the Imaginary is a primal emotional experience; the Symbolic is the representation of the experience to the self (as through language); and the Real is that which the Imaginary and the Symbolic attempts to mediate. The Real is objective experience, which cannot be directly processed by the self. The Symbolic order is not unlike Lotman's notion of the semiosphere. It is comprised of "laws, institutions, conventions, codes, customs, and modes of representation and communication, chief amongst them language" (Crosthwaithe 25). An individual's immersion within this social reality imbues him with subjectivity. The individual cannot represent himself without this social reality; social reality, therefore, is the representation of the Real to individual. Trauma, then, is harmful to the symbolic order that allows the individual to represent himself and the trauma he has undergone:

[Trauma] manifests itself as damage to the symbolic order, which constitutes the subject and in which the subject is embedded. The injury done to the symbolic order at the level of the subject will, in many cases, ripple out from the site of trauma to disturb the wider symbolic network (Crosthwaithe 25).

The symbolic order is, or at least includes, language. Trauma disturbs the functionality of language, which, as we noted in Chapter Two, affects the formulation of the identity of an individual user of language.

Trauma constitutes the Real, which is unable to be seamlessly incorporated into “social reality”: “Trauma constitutes a *missed* encounter with the Real. The encounter is (necessarily) missed partly because the Real is fundamentally unassimilable to the symbolic order that structures subjectivity” (Crosthwaithe 34). Crosthwaithe is indicating here that the Real cannot be incorporated by the entire network of symbolic systems that constitute an individual’s representation of the world and of himself. This, then, reveals the fact that the Real is not compatible with the individual’s representation of the world, because language itself is unassimilable to the trauma. The semiotic system of language cannot represent the trauma in a meaningful way.

Lyric plays a critical role in mediating the private experiences of war with the public emotion of trauma while also acting as a place of collective memory. Astrid Erll remarks that collective memory cannot exist without media: “collective remembering is based on communication....Personal memories can assume social relevance only when they are medially externalized” (Erll 31). The narrator of lyric is certainly not always recalling actual personal experiences; however, lyric serves to preserve the collective memory of trauma. The lyrical “I” is a mediator between the private and the public, which parallels the relationship between the individual and the nation.

III. Trauma, Identity, and Temporality: a Reading of Auden’s “Memorial for the City”

The reader’s ability to identify with the lyrical “I” and his perception of temporality are intertwined and mediated through memory. The introduction of trauma into this relationship ruptures linear temporality, which affects the reliability of memory and, consequently, confuses the concept of identity. Trauma affects temporality in two

ways. Trauma is experienced so quickly and suddenly that it is not seamlessly incorporated into the rest of perceived reality. Crosthwaithe cites Cathy Caruth on the way that trauma is experienced: “trauma is ‘experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor’” (Crosthwaithe 36). In this way, trauma creates a rupture in the normal experience (the Real), because it has not been perceived by the consciousness. Secondly, trauma, especially wartime, does not have the traditional temporal trajectory of a “normal” human experience. It does not begin and then end. McLoughlin notes that the fact that the result of a war, as well as its ending point, is unknown leads the individual to exist in a space of “various possible outcomes” (McLoughlin 107). She goes on to say:

Constantly asking *when will it end?*, *how will it end?* and, deadliest of all, *will it end?*, wartime refuses or is unable to imagine post-war. This breaks the hermeneutic circle: specifically, the removal of the future past forecloses the bringing of the past into the present (‘presentification’). Nor may wartime turn to pre-war for self-definition as pre-war, by now, is itself too ineffably other. This unavailability of post-war and pre-war in turn crucially affects wartime, rendering it...an extended present.

(McLoughlin 112)

This “past-less” and “futurelessness” of wartime leaves it isolated in space. With no foreseeable future, and an unbridgeable gap to the past, the time of trauma lacks a point of reference.

Without temporal grounding the Real becomes disjointed in the flow of collective memory. Memory is, as described by Middleton and Woods, “a means of overcoming the limitations of the human condition as it is understood in contemporary culture, by making the past appear once again in the present, despite its temporal, and possibly spatial, distance” (Middleton and Woods 21). However, in order to create a memory, the moment must first be assimilated into the semiotic system. As we have seen, trauma affects the ability of an individual to create a memory because first, the experience of the Real cannot be fully accessed by the consciousness, and, second, the moment is experienced without a temporal frame for reference – it exists without a future and without a past.

The rupture in temporality and the subsequent chasm in memory-making leads finally to the problem of identification. In *Sources of the Self*, Charles Taylor discusses the causes of an identity crisis:

[It is] an acute form of disorientation, which people often express in terms of not knowing who they are, but which can also be seen as a radical uncertainty of where they stand. They lack a frame or horizon within which things can take on a stable significance, within which some life possibilities can be seen as good or meaningful, others as bad or trivial. The meaning of all these possibilities is unfixed, labile, or undetermined. This is a painful and frightening experience. (Taylor 27-28)

Although Taylor uses the metaphor of spatial dislocation, it seems plausible that an identity crisis can also stem from a temporal dislocation. In those terms, then, an individual who cannot formulate the outcomes of the future, and who is too far removed

from the framework of the past, is “uncertain of where [he or she] stands” – the present. Thus, the present, without a discernible or intelligible future, becomes a place of meaninglessness. Olga Binczyk, drawing on Taylor, claims that the world wars created a permanent rupture in history that continues to affect the post-war individual: “Lost in the contemporary world, incapable of identifying its ‘past steps,’ the modern self cannot delineate its present and its potential future locations, cannot develop the narrative of its life any longer” (Binczyk 158). Perhaps, then, art, especially literature, as a medium of memory can be called upon to formulate a collective memory that sustains a fictive temporality: a temporality in which identity is a meaningful construct. Through this created temporality then, literature can, if not expose, then perhaps address the Real as a shared national experience.

The experience of trauma is meaningless; yet lyric, as a mediator of collective memory, attempts to imbue it with meaning. Auden’s “Memorial for the City”, written in 1949, thematizes both time and memory. The first section is reproduced below.

Memorial for the City

The eyes of the crow and the eye of the camera open
 Onto Homer’s world, not ours. First and last
 They magnify earth, the abiding
 Mother of gods and men; if they notice either
 It is only in passing: gods behave, men die,
 both feel in their own small way, but She
 Does nothing and does not care,
 She alone is seriously there.

The crow on the crematorium chimney
 And the camera roving the battle
 Record a space where time has no place.
 On the right a village is burning, in a market-town to the left
 The soldiers fire, the mayor bursts into tears,
 The captives are led away, while far in the distance
 A tanker sinks into a dedolent sea.

That is the way things happen; for ever and ever
 Plum-blossom falls on the dead, the roar of the waterfall covers
 The cries of the whipped and the sighs of the lovers
 And the hard bright light composes
 A meaningless moment into an eternal fact
 Which a whistling messenger disappears with into a defile:
 One enjoys glory, one endures shame;
 He may, she must. There is no one to blame.

The steady eyes of the crow and camera's candid eye
 See as honestly as they know how, but they lie
 The crime of life is not time. Even now, in this night
 Among the ruins of the Post-Virgilian City
 Where our past is a chaos of graves and the barbed-wire stretches ahead
 Into our future till it is lost to sight,
 Our grief is not Greek: As we bury our dead
 We know without knowing there is reason for what we bear
 That our hurt is not a desertion, that we are to pity
 Neither ourselves nor our city;
 Whoever the searchlights catch, whatever the loudspeakers blare,
 We are not to despair.

The poem begins with the opening of the eye of the camera and the crow. The crow is the foreboding omen, while the camera is a recording device that acts as the storage of memory. However, the camera begins pointed on Homer's world, not ours. The camera, representing a mediator of collective memory, has always been fascinated by war. The next line is the first to introduce temporality. The mention of "first and last" is a reference point for the content of the poem, which exists after the "first" and before the "last." The rest of the first stanza problematizes the relationship between the "camera" (as memory), the earth, and man. Man notices both the earth and literature, but only in passing, which is why he requires the camera; yet, the earth does not care, and man inevitably dies. The final line of the first stanza indicates that the earth's existence is far greater than both the gods' and man's. In fact, the earth is the only thing that is "seriously there." This points to man's ephemeral existence and his lack of importance in

the grand scheme of time – between the “first and last” the existence of man is hardly noticeable and the earth “does not care.” Man’s attempt to create a collective memory through the camera, which is also paralleled by the poem’s act of recording, is futile in the grand scheme of the universe.

Although war has already been alluded to in the first stanza through the mention Homer’s subject matter, the second stanza thematizes war and death. The crow as a symbol of death stands on the crematorium chimney, while the camera records the battle; however, how does the camera “record a space where time has no place”? As mentioned earlier, trauma disrupts temporal linearity. The camera can record only an abstraction of temporality – not continuous, linear temporality. The speaker indicates that the camera cannot be capturing the Real, because the Real cannot be captured with traditional means. The camera can only take snapshots within time, yet war disrupts time’s passing; hence, the camera cannot record war as it is – it must be recording a false version of the Real. This is much like an actual experience of trauma, which is often partially falsified by the mind due to its inability to fully perceive the experience.

The next few lines simply record the action: a village burns, soldiers fire, the mayor cries, captives are led away, and a tanker sinks. The speaker demonstrates the inadequacy of the camera as collective memory. We move from the camera as memory to literature as memory when the speaker begins to tell us what he sees and hears. The speaker attempts to create space between the camera as memory and literature as memory by introducing aspects of reality that the camera would not be able to capture such as sound and motion. We now know exactly what is happening; yet, in reality, we have no idea. The words record it all, yet they are unable to record anything. Much like the

individual who sees the traumatic experience, yet cannot process it, the reader can read about the experience, yet the distance between the words and the experience are so great that the reader cannot experience it. Language is failing as a representation of reality, because the reality of war cannot be encoded.

The next lines add elements of the scene, which appear to make it more vivid. The poignancy of the plum-blossom falling on the dead and the waterfall drowning out the “sighs of the lovers” should give the reader more insight; however, they work to distance the reader further from the experience. The reader is in a privileged place – he can hear the cries of the whipped and the sighs of the lovers, although the speaker claims they are covered by the roar of the waterfall. The speaker betrays the fact that the reader is experiencing a poem in which he can hear the unhearable. He hears the sighs and the cries, while the individual in the situation of the poem should not be able to hear them. The speaker’s attempt to distance the medium of poetry from the inadequacy of the camera is beginning to prove problematic.

The eleventh line returns to the camera, which, by flashing, creates a “hard bright light” and thereby “composes / a meaningless moment into an eternal fact.” First, the hard bright light reveals the artificiality of the recording function of the camera. In the process of attempting to record the actual experience, it must render the scene in an artificial light, causing the recording to be compromised in its veracity. The speaker, again, reveals that the camera’s ability to capture the scene is limited, and is necessarily falsified in order to be recorded. Second, the moment is “meaningless.” It is meaningless not because it is trivial or unimportant. It is meaningless because it has no frame of reference. A photograph is necessarily a limited view of the world. A

photograph ends at the borders of the scope of the camera. The boundaries of the photograph, which limit the context of the scene, parallels the idea of war in general, which, as we saw earlier, has no temporal context – no past nor future. This renders war, as well as this scene, meaningless. Yet, the messenger, who, ironically, is whistling as though he knows the memory he carries with him has been made meaningless by false rendering, carries it away.

The third line of the third stanza begins “The crime of life is not time.” The crime is not time itself; rather, it is the *lack of orientation within time* caused by man’s war that is criminal. The past is “a chaos of graves” and the future is “barbed wire...till it is lost to sight.” The present is past-less and future-less –meaningless. Contemporary warfare is “not Greek” because it is not epic; therefore, the trauma cannot be addressed through the ancient conventions of the epic – it must be addressed through the more modern conventions of the lyric, which provides a view of the effects of trauma on the individual as opposed to the nation. The Greek accounts of war in epic glorify the combatants and the nations, while this lyric account of the modern war shows the dystopic nature of warfare. The Greek is the cultural, and this war has destroyed culture. The speaker has shown a dystopian city in which the horror of the war is masked by a feeling of resignation.

The problematic relationship between the individual and the nation state is shown in the invocation of searchlights and loudspeakers. The society is not to pity “ourselves nor our city.” The populace and the physical national construct are distinct and disjointed. The city, like the nation, is at once the victim of trauma and its perpetrator. The individual is connected to the city by being both its defender and its captive.

Through war, the city becomes the “Other” and the individual, who once identified himself as part of the city, is now conflicted about his relationship to it. The speaker’s claim that “we know without knowing there is reason for what we bear” is clearly sardonic.

Although the poem attempts to create space between the camera and the poem as mediators of collective memory, both the camera’s flash and the poet’s pen rely on inadequate constructs to represent a reality that is unrepresentable. The speaker spends the first two stanzas and part of the third assuring the reader that the camera is inadequate to represent war; yet, we are left with the feeling that the poem faces similar limitations. The poem also has artificial boundaries that provide merely a snapshot of the trauma that must be falsified in order to be recorded. In attempting to record the scene of war, Auden’s speaker has shown lyric’s limitations of doing so. Then what does the poem strive to represent to the reader? The final lines of this section depict the “we” – the society – which “knows without knowing.” This is an apt formulation of the Lacanian “Real,” which is experienced, yet not incorporated into the conscious memory. The “we” of the poem knows what is going on, but they are not able to assimilate this experience with their understanding of the world. Auden’s speaker mourns the fact that not only is this trauma not representable in art, but society is also failing to internalize the horrors that are occurring in the physical world. It is one thing that the camera and literature cannot capture reality; it is another when the people living during the war cannot experience their own reality. In Auden’s lyric, the poem works by showing its own limitations as art and revealing those same limitations in society.

IV. Trauma and Language: a Reading of Celan’s “Keine Sandkunst Mehr”

As we discussed in Chapter Two, lyric relies on the culturally significant semiotic system of language for meaning. Language is arbitrary yet conventionalized, which means that it can change to reflect cultural changes. As Derrida notes, a signifier only has meaning due to the differences between itself and other signifiers; however, in a time of trauma, meaning changes drastically because the semiosphere, the semiotic system, which acts as an intersection of all cultural effects, is unstable. The linear progression of cultural movements is jarred, and the reference point for any given signifier becomes unclear. This means that the signifiers take on a new relationship to each other, which, according to Derrida, necessarily changes or obscures their meaning. Language, then, becomes an increasingly uncertain or unreliable way to represent reality.

In *Rites of Spring*, Modris Eksteins shows the changing nature of signifiers to the world in empirical examples from World War I:

Traditional language and vocabulary were grossly inadequate, it seemed, to describe the trench experience. Words like *courage*, let alone *glory* and *heroism*, with their classical and romantic connotation, simply had no place in any accounts of what made soldiers stay and function in the trenches. Even basic descriptive nouns, like *attack*, *counterattack*, *sortie*, *wound*, and *shelling*, had lost all power to capture reality. (Eksteins 218)

Courage, *glory*, and *heroism* are words that only had meaning in a semiotic system that had no concept of trench warfare. During World War I, the semiotic system that gave meaning to these words was so changed, that those words no longer imparted meaning to war. Binczyk calls language that is affected by chaos “devalued currency” (Binczyk 160). This expression resonates well, especially when one considers the economic

reasons for currency devaluation, namely that investors no longer trust the stability of an economy enough to invest their money in it. Similarly, a language loses its ability to function as a semiotic system when its users lose their trust in it to accurately portray meaning. When culture experiences a trauma that disturbs relationships between objects and people, language's ability as a system of signs to be an accurate reflection of reality is compromised, mostly because the perception of reality itself has become compromised or confused.

If language as a representation of reality has become compromised, how can lyric, whose medium is language, operate in a time of trauma? Erll claims that using language to represent reality, even when language is incapable of doing so, indicates a conscious choice by the author: "The decision to use literature as a symbolic system to represent the past...is a decision for a certain mode of remembering" (Erll 33). The traumatized symbolic system of language itself parallels and represents the traumatization of collective memory. The use of language, then, indicates to the reader its own inadequacy. Wolosky claims that a poem may even unambiguously explicate language as a traumatized and therefore an inadequate system: "The text may in fact finally trace a defeat of language, linguistic sequence as loss and engulfment by process, radicalized in a destructive history" (Wolosky 663).

Traumatized language is thematized in Celan's 1967 poem "Keine Sandkunst Mehr" (No More Sandart).

Keine Sandkunst mehr

Keine Sandkunst mehr, kein Sandbuch, keine Meister.
Nichts erwürfelt. Wieviel
Stumme?
Siebenzehn.

Deine Frage – deine Antwort.
Dein Gesang, was weiß er?

Tiefimschnee,
iefimnee,
I – i – e.

No More Sandart

No more sandart, no sandbook, no masters
Nothing is selected at random. How many
mutes?
Seventeen.

Your question – your answer.
Your singing, what does it know?

Deepinsnow,
Eepinnow,
E – i – O.⁵

⁵ My own translation.

The poem begins by stating that things that were there before, no longer exist. The first of these objects is “sandart.” In the present of the poem, there is no art. There are also no books. Or perhaps art and literature exist, but since there are no more masters, neither of these things are useful. The use of “sand” connotes a feeling of both universality and transience. Sand is found nearly everywhere and does not differ much from one continent to the next. As a canvas, it is also transient in that anything drawn or written in it will be fleeting. The art that Celan’s speaker says no longer exists is an art that is both universal and impermanent. The next line claims, “nothing is selected at random.” The German word *erwürfelt* recalls the root *Würfel*, which means dice. The speaker is saying that nothing occurs because of the roll of the dice, which means that everything must happen for a reason. The speaker seems to be grasping for meaning, which the poem will go on to deny. Next, the speaker asks “how many / mutes?” The question is asked ironically. As the poem shows, language is nonsensical, making all who use it effectively mute to expressing any actual meaning. The speaker demonstrates that when language loses its meaning, the proponents of language are rendered voiceless.

Yet, the speaker answers his own question with an answer, “seventeen.” This ludicrous answer makes the point that not only words, but also numbers have lost their

meaning. For example, death tolls were often reported in newspapers during wartime: 235 dead or 1,456 dead. What do these numbers mean? The human mind is incapable of imagining 235 dead people, much less to conceptualize the difference between 235 and 1,456 dead bodies. McLoughlin notes that “Integers obscure individuals” (McLoughlin 57). She argues that “Death ‘one by one’ might be emotionally manageable, but ‘ten thousand in a single day’ is unthinkable. The figure is simply too large to make sense of and therefore dehumanizing” (McLoughlin 58). Celan’s speaker shows that the war has destroyed the meaning of numbers that were previously thought to be unchanging, objective units.

The speaker addresses the reader “Your question – your answer.” But what question did the reader pose? It seems that the speaker’s remark concerns *any* question that the reader may ask. The speaker is distancing himself from the responsibility of providing any answers; he is making the reader culpable for the answering of his own question. The speaker is providing a disclaimer: do not look for answers here nor in any other piece of art or literature – there *is* no art; there *is* no literature. Any meaningful answer cannot be communicated; rather, they must come from within the asker himself. Each individual must now create their own meaning in isolation because the semiotic structure has collapsed and words, and therefore communication, have lost their relevance. Yet the speaker questions even the individual’s ability to make sense of the world: “Your singing, what does it know?” Celan’s speaker is asking the reader if he is even able to make sense of the world to himself. Not only is the trauma of the World Wars not communicable, but the speaker is also suggesting that it is not even representable in the mind of the self. The “singing,” however, also represents lyric.

Celan's speaker is speaking not only to the reader, but also to the hypothetical lyrical "I," whose "singing" is now questionable. The speaker is simultaneously questioning the purpose of the reader and the functionality of the lyrical "I."

The final part of the poem is of particular interest because it dramatizes the deterioration of language that Celan's speaker has been mentioning. The word that Celan uses "Tiefimschnee" is actually not a word at all. It is a word created from three separate words *tief*, *im*, and *Schnee*. These words are translatable to the phrase "deep in snow." Yet the word is written with no spaces. We have seen that both words and numbers have lost their meaning, and now the spaces between the words, the moments of silence that tell us when one word stops and another ends, are also rendered meaningless. As I discussed earlier, the temporality of war is unique because there is no moment that defines a war's beginning, and much less one that defines its end. The word "Tiefimschnee" shows words running into each other, with no discernable beginning or end. Yet, the lack of spaces between words does not create a difficulty in understanding the meaning of the made up word. The reader understands the word in the same way that he would have if the spaces had been left intact – the word is nonsensical with or without the spaces.

The words deteriorate before the reader's eyes. The first manifestation of the word has already obliterated the spaces between the words. The word's second form is unrecognizable. "Iefimnee" or "Eepinow" recall the sound of the original word, yet the word has lost its meaning. The third form is no longer a word at all – it is a collection of sounds. In addition, the last line does not even grant the reader consonant sounds, which imply a presence. Instead, the original word is reduced to vowel sounds, sounds of

absence. At first glance it seems as though the word is deteriorating in form as well as meaning; however, upon closer inspection it is apparent that the poem is making quite a different point. The word is not losing any meaning because it did not have any to begin with. What does “Deepinsnow” mean to the reader of the poem? Is it any more meaningful than “E – i – o?” Both phrases are meaningless. The physical deterioration of the word simply shows that the original word, Deepinsnow, although appearing to be a functioning example of language, has just as little meaning as the fragmented vowel sounds of the final line. The poem betrays language as ruptured and as containing only illusory meaning. The manifestation of an historical trauma in the *use* of language of the poem is formulated clearly by Wolosky: “Celan’s work projects a theory of the lyric that is profoundly historicized and temporal in confrontation, response, and responsibility to historical challenge and not least within the lyric’s own formal realization” (Wolosky 656). It is this “formal realization” of the poem that questions its own use of language.

V. Trauma and the Everyday: A Reading of Günter Eich’s “Inventur”

Trauma also affects the subject matter of lyric. Before the 20th century, especially in classical and romantic literature, poetry about war often turned to the sublime to depict the greatness of war. The power and destruction of war could not be rationalized in everyday terms, so the poet had to resort to grand, fantastical imagery to express what could otherwise not be expressed. Examples of this are the feuds between the Gods that parallel the Trojan War in *The Iliad* or Coleridge’s war poetry. McLoughlin explains why this approach is problematic:

Simply put, the sublime...drives out reason. This is unacceptable in the fact of war: reason must be reintroduced. But the very subject is beyond

reason. Hence those who would convey war are driven back to sublime or indirect representation and the whole circular argument starts again.

(McLoughlin 162)

According to McLoughlin, the poet strives to reinsert meaning in a time of meaninglessness. Yet, since war has no basis for reason, the poet must resort to the sublime in order to address it at all.

Eksteins, however, claims that in the 20th century the poet abandoned the desire to create meaning in the war. Instead, he argues that art and literature had to evolve in order to represent war as an experience, *not* as a rational occurrence:

[Poets] connected the sights and sounds of war with art. Art became, in fact, the only available correlative of this war; naturally, not an art following previous rules, but an art in which the rules of composition were abandoned, in which provocation became the goal, and in which art became an event, an experience. As the war lost external meaning, it became above all an experience. In the process, life and art moved together. (Eksteins 214)

As the war lost “external meaning”, it became “artful” in the sense that it had no purpose other than an experiential reality. Art, then, in order to be able to represent this reality, had to mimic its lack of rationality and disordered chaos in its very form. In this way, the content of the war did not have to be present in the art; rather, the art needed to evoke the experience of the war in its execution.

The evocation of war in art can be accomplished by turning to a different manifestation of the sublime. Instead of focusing on the grandeur of the war, the poet

utilizes the splendor of the small, everyday things that create life's experience. When even the most mundane object of the everyday is threatened by war, it too retains a certain grandeur that elevates it to a poetic status. Taylor argues that everyday objects are attractive subject matter because they are self-contained units that provide an escape from the chaotic reality of dynamic life: "But the devastation can also be faced...by a return to classical sources, or...by appeal beyond disordered age, even beyond the conflicted and twisted human to the perfection of the inanimate" (Taylor 485). Taylor's formulation shows a funneling down of subject matter into a manageable size. War is a terrible thing fought on an inconceivable scale. Taylor says that instead of trying to represent the conditions of reality or even the human aspects of conflict, the poet can turn to the realm of the inanimate, which provides an escape from chaos and conflict. This attraction to objects as an escape from the chaos and messiness of war also has another dimension, namely that objects provide a basis for common experience. Taylor notes the importance of shared experience in the content of poetry. He claims that war creates a need for "public poetry," which, in turn, requires a "turning away from the metaphysical to everyday things and the common experiences of life, politics, and war" (Taylor 492).

Adorno, who often noted the difficulty of representing war, commended Paul Celan on his use of a language that "lies below the helpless prattle of human beings – even below the level of organic life as such...the language of dead matter, of stones and stars" (quoted in McLoughlin 161). The turn to inanimate objects and the "language of dead matter" are parallel. The subject matter and its representation in poetry must be reduced to the most basic, elementary units and forms in order to retain some semblance of order and meaning in a chaotic and destructive world. The use of everyday objects

and language, then provides a way of dealing with the world, while also providing art that is “public” in terms of its accessibility by a wide range of readers.

A compelling example of this technique of writing war poetry is Günter Eich’s “Inventur” (Inventory). Eich wrote the poem during his imprisonment in an American camp around 1945. It illuminates the ability as well as the limitations of the everyday to define life during war.

Inventur

Dies ist meine Mütze,
dies ist mein Mantel,
hier mein Rasierzeug
im Beutel aus Leinen.

Konservenbüchse:
Mein Teller, mein Becher,
ich hab in das Weißblech
den Namen geritzt.

Geritzt hier mit diesem
kostbaren Nagel,
den vor begehrlischen
Augen ich berge.

Im Brotbeutel sind
ein Paar wollene Socken
und einiges, was ich
niemand verrate,

so dient es als Kissen
nachts meinem Kopf.
Die Pappe hier liegt
zwischen mir und der Erde.

Die Bleistiftmine
lieb ich am meisten:
Tags schreibt sie mir Verse,
die nachts ich erdacht.

Dies ist mein Notizbuch,
dies meine Zeltbahn,
dies ist mein Handtuch,
dies ist mein Zwirn.

Inventory

This is my cap,
this is my coat,
here is my shaving kit
in its linen pouch.

Field rations:
my plate, my cup,
here in the tin plate
I've scratched my name.

Scratched it here with this
precious nail
I keep concealed
from coveting eyes.

In the bread bag I have
a pair of wool socks
and a few things that I will tell
no one,

and these form a pillow
for my head at night.
Some cardboard lies
between me and the ground.

The pencil's the thing
I love the most:
By day it writes verses
I make up at night.

This is my notebook,
this is my tarp,
this is my towel,
this is my twine.⁶

⁶ My own translation.

The poem is what its title promises – an inventory of belongings. The speaker enumerates the things that he owns; however, unlike a standard inventory, this list lacks objectivity. He does not have “one cap” or “a cap”; he calls it “my cap.” Through the use of personal pronouns, the speaker writes himself into the list of objects. This points

to the fact that the speaker is trying to identify himself through his material possessions. Not only do these exist objectively, but they also ground the speaker in the physical world. The listing of the objects gives the physical world a sense of stability, order, and simplicity that is not readily available during wartime. However, since the speaker has tied his own identity to these belongings (“my cap,” “my coat,” “my notebook”) his identity also becomes more secure. The speaker is able to create a stable, orderly identity through references to a list of everyday items. This is reinforced by the speaker’s attempt to literally materialize his own name into the tin plate by etching it. He is attempting to not only make the objects representative of his own identity, but also to create a physical representation of himself. In this way the speaker can escape the disorderly, traumatized realm of the metaphysical world and simply become a physical object, thereby escaping the chaos of humanity and war.

This reading of the poem, however, is problematic because the speaker’s self-identification through the material world is not satisfying. The etching of his name is an attempt to “be” in the physical world; however, it only succeeds in asserting possession of the physical. “Having” does not replace the state of “being.” The urge towards possessing the physical world is further exemplified in the speaker’s protection of his nail, which he conceals from “coveting eyes.” His immersion in the world of objects has isolated him from the world of humanity. The speaker is conscious of the desire of others and this desire influences his perception of his own identity. He even tries to define himself through the desire of others.

This continues in the fourth stanza, which shows the rupture of human relations when the speaker claims to be keeping something that he will “tell / no one.” The urge to

posses has become greater than the urge to commune and communicate. Yet, despite his best attempts, the speaker is unable to fully identify himself solely in relation to the material world. He requires a human community through which he can establish a, perhaps less stable, but more meaningful identity. This recalls Taylor's description of the importance of communication in establishing identity: "A self exists only within... 'webs of interlocution.' It is this original situation which gives its sense to our concept of 'identity,' offering an answer to the question of who I am through a definition of where I am speaking from and to whom" (Taylor 36). Eich's speaker is showing that when there is a rupture in or isolation from a defining community, an individual must resort to defining himself in terms of the material, which may be the only objective reference point that remains.

The fifth stanza reveals the speaker's desire for human communication. He lists his most precious possession – the pencil. The pencil is important to him because he is a poet and he needs it to record the thoughts in his mind. However, the poet's function is not only to record events, but also to communicate them. The love of the pencil betrays the poet's desire to communicate and his inability to be satisfied with a solely material representation of the world. The thoughts that he wishes to record represent the metaphysical – the non-material – that connect people on a more sophisticated level. Yet the sixth stanza shows that wartime has made this impossible. The final stanza returns to the mundane inventory of possessions, and thereby to the speaker's efforts to define himself through the material world. Eich's poem demonstrates that everyday objects do offer a way to stabilize identity during wartime; yet, Eich also shows that this identity that recedes from human contact and the messy chaos of trauma is not satisfying.

Although Eich's speaker has avoided directly dealing with the trauma of the war, he is incapable of formulating a complete identity without including it. Eich has not addressed the Real explicitly; however, his non-mentioning of trauma has created a void, which betrays the Real's existence. Through its absence in the poem, Eich has drawn attention to the presence of trauma.

VI. Trauma and the Pastoral

Lyric is, of course, often associated with the pastoral. Lyric frequently either situates itself within or contrasts itself against the idyllic, natural world. By and large, the lyric's preoccupation with the pastoral has been read as a way of situating humanity within nature, either harmoniously or in conflict with each other. During wartime, humanity's relationship with nature is strained on two levels. First, war literally destroys nature through overuse of natural resources. The world wars are especially culpable because of the use of trench warfare and atomic weapons. Second, war is at conflict with nature because the killing of man by man is unnatural in the broadest sense of the word. War is cannibalistic; it is a species' attempt to extinguish itself. This perversity is at odds with the natural order, and, therefore, often becomes the subject matter of lyric that problematizes man's coexistence with nature. Fussell formulates this problematic: "If the opposite of war is peace, the opposite of experiencing moments of war is proposing moments of the pastoral. Since war takes place outdoors and always within nature, its symbolic status is that of the ultimate anti-pastoral" (Fussell 231). McLoughlin goes further by claiming that the pastoral represents more than just a physical space:

Pastoral as thought-space suggests an existence of intellectual intensity, focused reflection in isolation. Indeed, pastoral can be understood not

only as a flower-strewn retreat but as a psycho-physiologico-psychical area of extended mental activity: concentration, contemplation, meditation, view-formation, creativity. (McLoughlin 100)

In light of this view then, when the pastoral becomes conflicted and humanity is living in a state of Fussell's "anti-pastoral," the effects reverberate not only through the physical atmosphere, but also through man's "psycho-physiologico-psychical area." In other words, the disruption of man's harmonious relationship with nature externally also affects man's ability to reflect and meditate internally.

Many of Celan's poems thematize man's troubled relationship with nature. "Notturmo," written in 1941, is one such example.

Notturmo

Schlaf nicht. Sei auf der Hut.
Die Pappeln mit singendem Schritt
ziehn mit dem Kriegsvolk mit.
Die Teiche sind alle dein Blut.

Drin grüne Gerippe tanzen.
Eins resist die Wolke fort, dreist:
verwittert, verstümmelt, vereist,
blutet dein Traum von den Lanzen.

Die Welt is ein kreissendes Tier,
das kahl in die Mondnacht schlich.
Gott ist sein Heulen. Ich
fürchte mich und frier.

Nocturne

Sleep not. Be on your guard.
The poplars sing and stride
with war troops by their side.
The ditch runs with your blood.

Green skeletons are dancing.
One tears the cloud away:
wind-beaten, battered, icy,
your dream bleeds from the lances.

The world's a laboring⁷ beast
creeps stark under night sky.
God is its howling. I
fear for me and freeze.⁸

⁷ Laboring as in giving birth.

⁸ This translation attempts to retain the reflexive construction in the original. A more natural translation would read: "I / am afraid and freeze."

The poem begins with a warning cry. The “you” the speaker addresses throughout the poem is related to his own identity in a way that is not contrasting, but rather emphasizing it. In fact, throughout the poem it seems as though the “you” is nothing more than a foreshadowing of the future identity of the “I”. The “you” and “I” therefore form a group identity that is then contrasted with the identity of the negative force of the poem. The ominous personification of the poplars in the second line, not only continues the sentiment of the first line by warning the “you” what he should be on his guard against, but also introduces the conflict that resounds throughout the poem. Nature is equated with war, or at least a warring force. Nature, symbolized by the poplars, is not neutral in the war; it is not idealized. In fact, nature is on the offensive against the “you” and the “I”. The final line of the first stanza shows that the “you” has fallen victim to the warring poplars; yet, interestingly, his blood now comprises the ponds (another symbol of nature). Through his death, the “you” has become one with the force of nature that has killed him.

The second stanza introduces a figure that further bridges the gap between the “human” and “nature”. The figure of the dancing green skeletons is one that can neither be considered totally human, nor totally inhuman. Certainly they were once human, but now that they are dead, do they continue to be so? Or do they now become elements of the nature that is at war with humanity? The color green leads the reader to associate the skeleton with the forces of nature in the poem. One of the skeletons tears a piece of cloud away. “Your” dream, which in this reading is nearly synonymous with “my” dream, is “wind-beaten, battered, icy” after having been pierced by the lances

(presumably thrown by the troops of poplars). The weather, clearly reinforcing the idea of nature as a powerful negative force, is shown as having also turned against the “you”.

The final stanza confirms what the reader has thought in the first two stanzas and explicates the speaker’s relationship to the world. The world is depicted as an animal. It is naked and creeps around in the night. Just when the reader thinks that there is no hope of salvation from this world but God, the speaker eliminates this possibility: there is no God. He is an ephemeral sound that originates from the very thing that we hope He will save us from, namely the natural world. The speaker, speaking about himself for the first time in the poem, says, “I / fear for myself and freeze.” The enjambment draws attention to identity of the speaker, as well as physically separating the “I” from its only action in the poem, which is being afraid. Here the speaker’s agency is limited to a subconscious emotion that is contrasted with nature’s very real power over the speaker’s temperature (“freezing”) and by extension, his life.

The “Other”, in this case nature or the world, is that which Celan’s lyrical “I” is identifying himself against. Clearly, this is an impossibility that cannot be resolved, which creates the tension in the poem. “Man and the world” are not two exclusive opposites that exist in dichotomy with one another; rather, the relationship is complicated by the fact that the “I” must live within the world that he has been contrasted against, and in this case even fears. Another problem of the formulation of identity in this poem is that man is a part of nature. As we can see in the first stanza, nature has taken sides with a warring-folk that the speaker does not identify with. This presents the reader with the idea that some people can exist within nature, while others can only be defined against it. Certainly, biographical information about Celan can tell us that the “warring-folk” are the

Germans and the “you” and “I” are Jews, but the speaker does not seem to want to limit his identity in this way. Rather, the speaker’s identity is completely defined by what he claims he is not: he is not a part of the world – rather, he fears the world and its violent, animalistic nature. However, the line between the speaker and the world is blurred. The “you’s” blood, for example, becomes the pond. In “Notturmo” we could say that the speaker, instead of acknowledging an internal human and animalistic identity, projects a difference between the nature he perceives, a world which is at war, and himself. This formulation leaves us wondering how the speaker reconciles his fear of his physical reality, which is paralleled with society, with the fact that he is necessarily a part of both. The pastoral element of nature has vanished and Fussell’s “anti-pastoral,” which defines the state of war, is dominant.

VII. Conclusion

Lyric is unique in its ability to address national trauma largely because of the way it straddles the realms of the personal and the private. The identification mechanism of the “I,” which is the heart of lyric poetry, gives rise to an imagined community that, through language, is contained within a specific cultural moment. This imagined community parallels and often overlaps with the imagined community of the nation. Lyric’s treatment of trauma, a subject that is at once highly personal as well as communal, is an apt topic for a medium that so deftly bridges interior with public life.

Erll, speaking about literature in general, argues that literature is the ideal medium for “collective remembering” because the conventions of literature and the way in which cultures create memories are comparable: “Both literature and memory make use of narrative structures, conventionalized genres and semantically charged forms in order to

produce meaningful versions of the past” (Erll 34). Erll claims that remembering occurs in narrative form, so literature, presumably narrative literature, is the best medium of collective memory. Yet, it is important to remember that a national trauma creates a rupture in collective memory. Memories of trauma are seldom linear; rather, they are episodic and erratic. McLoughlin states that the three most common “traumatized temporal distortions” are duration, sequencing, and presifting, a phenomenon in which an individual or a community thinks that certain events preceding other memories should have acted as omens of the trauma that was about to occur (McLoughlin 118). Memories of trauma do not follow a linear narrative because of the discussed failures to incorporate the Real into a temporal or semiotic system. Lyric, then, is able to reflect the Real’s existence by portraying an experience with which the reader can identify (and misidentify) with the lyrical “I.” Readers of postwar lyric become members of a traumatized community. The understanding and misunderstandings that develop from an individual’s reading develop new meaning and communication within the traumatized group.

After a communal trauma, the imagined national community disrupted. Lyric that responds to this disruption offers the ability for the reader to identify with the imagined community of the “I” that has been discussed above. This replacement of one imagined community with another does not necessarily serve to comfort the reader; in fact, as we see in Bachmann’s poem the speaker himself is distraught with the loss of national identity. However, the poem creates a space in which reorientation through language can take place; in essence, the poem foregrounds and attempts to remedy the lack of spatial orientation within the shattered national community. One way in which this is

accomplished in the lyric is through the evocation of nature, which is often contrasted with the traumatized society as an incorruptible force. Once the “I” relates itself to the immutable constant of nature, it can once again find its bearings in its society. However, as we can see in Celan’s poem “Notturmo,” even lyrical nature can be corrupted by societal trauma so that the “I” has no bearings in the world around it, either in society or nature, so that it must recede into the language of the poem itself.

It must be noted that while the cultural affects language, there exists a symbiotic relationship between language and the culture that uses it. Culture can only make use of the language that exists. By that I mean that a poet cannot use signs or a combination of signs that render no meaning to the reader. But then again, this is not entirely true. It is precisely the manipulation of signs in ways that do not exist in the current semiotic system that makes poetry “poetic.” This manipulation can lead to a rupture of meaning, as in Celan’s poem “Keine Sandkunst mehr” (No more Sandart). In this poem, Celan reduces the words used in the poem to sounds, which withdraws their semiotic significance, rendering them meaningless. The alternate possibility, however, is to utilize the rupture of language caused by cultural trauma to reinsert meaning through new, poetic manipulations of language. This then completes the symbiotic relationship between culture and language: while language limits culture’s ability of expression, it is precisely the testing and overstepping of these limits that transforms language and makes it an ever-evolving mimesis of culture.

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