CHAPTER ONE

POSSESSION AND CELEBRATION

We are told that some birds sing with special enthusiasm mornings and evenings to confirm their territories. One would like to believe that their songs do more than assert squatter’s rights, however—that they commemorate a locality, for instance, with its particular sunrises, shelter, delectable seeds, or insect provisions. In any case when such virtuoso performers as nightingales, skylarks, cuckoos, oven birds, and gold-feathered birds of mere being get likened to lyricists, it is not merely for command of territory but also for vocal brilliance. As a way into topical mappings of poetry and their word-thing relations, I want to explore that mixture of possession and celebration that human singers find in the twofold nature of lyric as it appropriates and commemorates.

Let us begin with an example, A. R. Ammons’s “Plunder,” which in its anxiety over the possession it seizes and perhaps the changes it works on its landscape avoids outright rapture over what may be truly there. Its plundering would not get underway at all were it not for meaning and beauty somehow inherent in its scene:

I have appropriated the windy twittering of aspen leaves into language, stealing something from reality like a silveryness: drop-scapes of ice from peak sheers:

much of the rise in brooks over slow-rolled glacial stones: the loop of reeds over the shallow’s edge when birds feed on the rafts of algae: I have taken right out of the
air the clear streaks of bird music and held them in my 
head like shifts of sculpture glint: I have sent language 
through the mud roils of a raccoon’s paws like a net, 

netting the roils: made my own uses of the downwind’s 
urgency on a downward stream: held with a large scape 
of numbness the black distance upstream to the mountains 

flashing and bursting: meanwhile, everything else, frog, 
fish, bear, gnat has turned in its provinces and made off 
with its uses: My mind’s indicted by all I’ve taken.1

Whether or not Ammons had read Jacquetta Hawkes’s A Land or 
Paul Shepard’s Man in the Landscape,2 he suggests the residual fac­
culties of our ancestors that the environment slowly molded. 
Though birds and the ancient inscriptions of the ice have no lan­
guage of their own, the poet finds attractions and repulsions in 
them, finds something like kinship that could be said to derive 
from experience of long standing with the planet. What he offers, 
however, is not the detailed notation of a long-term environmen­
talism or of the naturalist. Nor does he look for much assistance 
from previous observers or from demonic or divine beings who 
might have left their signatures on the landscape. (He does not, for 
instance, turn noticeably to romantics or to Robert Frost’s kind of 
explicit fabling to capitalize on description or convert analysis into 
epigram.) Instead he itemizes apparently actual objects recon­
stituted in his own second world knowing that he cannot help 
changing things or selecting just the “silverness” he wants. Catch­
ing things on the move, he arrests them in icons, tropes, rhetorical 
devices, twists of individual vision. And so catching itself plunder­
ing, the mind is self-indicted—choosing even that word knowingly 
from the root (dicere) that also gives us “diction,” “dictator,” “dic­
tates,” and other staples of naming, ruling over, and accusing.

When parts of the landscape insist upon a greater wildness, the 
poet discovers the limits of his power. Even the words with which 
he packages his thefts are not exclusively the mind’s or tradition’s: 
some of them suggest primal relations imposed on phonetics by the 
sounds of leaves, brooks, and birds—sounds that words recapture 
even as they nudge them toward intelligibility. Without some such 
independence in the scene, the poet would need less force to sub­
due it; he would perhaps come closer to mere recording. But 
nature is both desirable and alien, the poet both observer and 
raider. Moreover, despite his having taken over the locality, his 
version of the Promethean alembic leaves the landscape relatively 
unharmed, and he refrains from touching some of it. In that re-
spect his appropriation differs from the plunderings of industrialization and other extensions of colonizing, as an odic address to a tree obviously differs from druidic worship of it or an ax’s assault upon it. Ammons remarks in “Extremes and Moderations,” that the artificial has taken on the complication of the natural and where to take hold, how to let go, perplexes individual action: ruin and gloom are falling off the shoulders of progress: blue-green globe, we have tripped your balance and gone into exaggerated possession: this seems to me the last poem written to the world before its freshness capsizes and sinks into the slush: the rampaging industrialists, the chemical devisers and manipulators are forging tanks, filling vats of smoky horrors because of dollar lust, so as to live in long white houses on the summits of lengthy slopes, for the pleasures of making others spur and turn: but common air moves over the slopes, and common rain’s losing its heavenly clarity. (CP, p. 340)

He is not the first to lament the varieties of exploitation men have invented—religious, scientific, industrial—nor the first to resort to prosy accusations to wedge opinions into the songlike inclinations of lyric. But lyric’s mode of perception, which takes “right out of the / air the clear streaks of bird music,” also appreciates natural wonders and atones for its intrusion even as it intrudes. The result is the settling in of a local genius who stakes out a territory while commemorating it or rather as his commemoration of it.

The parallel between poets and birds, however, also stresses often an instinctive and spontaneous accord of singer and setting, or the desirability of such. Its appeal to several poets has been a suggestion of superior consciousness in that effortlessness, which underscores by contrast the labors of poetry. Even transcendentalized birds have no need to use force and so can escape the ambivalence of poets who are alienated from what they name even as they are attracted to it. John Crowe Ransom’s prosaic ducks, for instance, model an entirely guiltless, though in this case also songless, accord with place. Because they need very little to take up residence wherever they touch down, they forestall competition between possessor and site. Though local while they nest, before and after that they make the entire domain of water and shore theirs without leaving marks upon it:

Ducks require no ship and sail
Bellied on the foamy skies,
Who scud north. Male and female
Make a slight nest to arise
Where they overtake the spring,
Which clogs with muddy going.

The zone unready. But the pond,
Eye of a bleak Cyclops visage, catches
Such glints of hyacinth and bland
As bloom in aquarelles of ditches
On a cold spring ground, a freak,
A weathering chance even in the wrack.

The half-householders for estate
Beam their floor with ribs of grass,
Disdain your mortises and slate
And Lar who invalided lies,
The marsh quakes dangerous, the port
Where wet and dry precisely start.

Ducks need no property, permanence, separation from the elements, storable food, or navigational help. They go

where the winds and waters blow
On raveling banks of fissured seas
In reeds nestles, or will rise and go
Where Capicornus dips his hooves
In the blue chasm of no wharves.

As Ransom realizes, ducks in themselves are of no great concern of poets or their interpreters and are not likely to be allegorized as visitant seers. But they nonetheless contrast meaningfully to poets, who need a great deal. Ideally, in Ransom's view, poets should also be adaptable and beyond questing for subjugating ideas. They should live at one with seascape or landscape and carry fewer houseplans and Platonist schemes about with them. But it is inhuman to disdain mortises and to leave without packing or remembering. Although ducks are a remonstrance, almost an ideal, no mere human can hope to emulate them.

The birds of the romantics in contrast are beyond rather than below the human. More wandering voice and mystery than definable thing, Wordsworth's cuckoo, for instance, is what the visionary poet would like to be. Its very presence "at once far off and near" transforms the ordinary earth into a golden place recalled from the poet's youth. Wordsworth addresses it as an "invisible thing, / A voice, a mystery," with an enthusiasm quickly aroused, the lyric crossing well underway from the outset:

O blithe New-comer! I have heard,
I hear thee rejoice.
O Cuckoo! shall I call thee Bird,
Or but a wandering Voice?
But the speaker is also held off and realizes that the cuckoo as mere bird babbles and belongs to the same earth as he does. Its twofold nature reveals a like discrepancy between two levels of the scene, one naturalistic and the other transcendent. "Fit home" for such a bird, earth follows it into mystery, as the bird becomes half absence, half presence, the lyric crossing it entices half commemoration, half elegy.

In using the word *crossing*, I am planing down a word from Harold Bloom to fit a more limited purpose. By it I mean primarily bridge-building between the poet and an other that may seem to come to meet him. He can achieve no possession and make no lyric address without closing with it in some way. But even so prepared for lamination into the context I want for it, the term raises problems. It is difference in the object that makes it stand out—stand out from other objects, stand outward from the consciousness that seeks to master it—yet the poet’s vocabulary is the common one, entangled in his other moments and in culture generally. Any good poem has to twist words almost loose from those connections to make any difficult crossing possible. Thus when Cleopatra, one of Shakespeare’s most prolific myth-makers, says of Anthony, “His legs bestrid the ocean, his rear’d arm / Crested the world: his voice was propertied / As all the tuned spheres” (*Antony and Cleopatra* 5.2.82–84), she forces us to pause not only on the outmoded “be-strid” but on what are ordinarily the familiar “reared” (raised up, bred, threatening, mastering), “crested” (heraldic, topped, making the world a shield), and “propertied” (made properly his own, took over the characteristics of, cosmic in size and balanced in proportion). In their combinations these modifications of common language sustain a hyperbole unusual in its visual concreteness and sense of muscularity even for Cleopatra—frequently aware of Antony’s great weight. A colossus is thus placed by her swerves from the common track, and the crossing she makes is doubled: the word-user gets from unvoiced (perhaps unrealized, inert) feeling to the satisfactions of a grand gesture that sweeps Antony into her mythic empire, and as rhetorician she carries with her such listeners as are of a mind to follow, so that they too take leave of their apathy and join her enthusiasm. Any deviation from ordinary language may achieve something similar, but only in collaboration with our sense of supportive common meanings of legs, arms, voices.

If enough valedictory substance survives such verbal leaps, the crossing tends to be lyric, as the Antony of this perception, whether
formally addressed or not, is made a verbal presence over and above the real presence we have seen enacted up to this point. But he is also in a sense merely her verbal presence, and such praise can be generated only after he has taken his stoic Roman exit. Indeed, it is precisely his absence as a real creature, a limited personality after all, that makes Cleopatra's bridge-building possible. Subject and object are not really woven together; both remain in their places. Yet the attraction is strong enough to call Cleopatra after him, not merely with words of course but with quite poisonous asps.

We clearly need a metaphor for such verbal possessions and repossessions that will suggest the traffic back and forth. Yet several sorts of confusion are possible in the choice of "crossings," if we take it to mean contact with exclusively personal objects. Even an artfully prepared context may not effectively trim off all the dangling references that words and images carry with them. Ransom puts some of the leftovers of "estate" to ironic use, for instance, in mocking simultaneously the pretensions of human households and the lowliness of ducks. It isn't clear that Wordsworth gets rid of the trailing associations a cuckoo brings with it. He leaves us wondering if a better visionary emblem couldn't have been found than the one that pops out of clocks and reminds us of simpletons and cuckholds. Dolabella and about half the readership of Antony and Cleopatra have reservations about the reconstructed Antony as well.

For Shelley likenesses between the poet and the skylark generate a slightly different ambivalence. Like the cuckoo the skylark eludes definition, not because of obscurity but because of its transcendence and the simplicity of its joy, which serves as a reproach to men who "look before and after / And pine for what is not." Describing it is simultaneously the poet's calling and a distortion of its nature. Its reality is less at issue than the poet's perceptions and the inadequacy of human song, which becomes doubly painful beside the skylark's "clear keen joyance":

Better than all measures
Of delightful sound,
Better than all treasures
That in books are found,
Thy skill to poet were, thou scorners of the ground.

Teach me half the gladness
That thy brain must know,
Such harmonious madness
From my lips would flow
The world should listen then—as I am listening now.
Translating the relationship of bird to poet into that of instructor to ingenue enables Shelley to imagine a future closing of the gap between them: what the bird knows and can do, it will teach the bard. But the discrepancy between them can never be totally erased as long as metaphor imposes an alien materiality on the bird. The chief declared nay-sayer in this case is Thomas Hardy, who in looking for Shelley's emblem of transcendence finds instead merely common dust:

Somewhere afield here something lies
In Earth's oblivious eyeless trust
That moved a poet to prophecies—
A pinch of unseen, unguarded dust:

The dust of the lark that Shelley heard.  

The lack of location in "somewhere" and earth's unseeing indifference preclude any but fanciful connections with such a once-etherial creature; and so faeries are commissioned to find it and bring it back in a silver-lined casket—it has taken so little to inspire a bard to such "Ecstatic heights in thought and rhyme."

The aim of the better song Shelley requests is not merely celebration: it is also instruction, as transactions between singer and place are again complicated by the world that listens and implicitly by predecessors who condition both singer and audience. Obviously no poet possesses or commemorates in a vacuum, and that conditioning of song by tradition adds dimensions to the "indictment" that Ammons, Wordsworth, and Shelley acknowledge in their different ways. As Emerson writes in completing the second journal entry at the head of this chapter, "Now and then we hear rarely a true tone, a single strain of the right ode; but the Poet does not know his place, he defers to these old conventions" (Journal for 27 June 1846).

In pastoral lyricism, to take an extreme case of that dependence on conventions, the poet adopts a set of artifices and wears a well-used mask. The metropolis to which he and his readers normally belong lies at some distance from the Arcadian rusticity to which he goes to get a vantage point back on the metropolis. Both the taking up of the convention and its perspective on the capital are public acts. Virgil's first eclogue, for instance, is acutely aware of its cultural center and dramatizes the relationship between shepherddom and Rome, or more broadly, between shepherds and several territories. While Tityrus remains at ease in pleasant fields, pastures, and orchards, Meliboeus heads into exile toward what he considers the
ends of earth, as impious soldiers and barbarians take over his fields. The "god" that gives Tityrus his ease is none other than the city itself ("urbem quam dicunt Romam"). The central authority of empire and its patronage of shepherd-poets stand behind him, whereas for Meliboeus just enough rural pleasantry remains to remind him of what he has lost: rest on green boughs, a supper of mellow apples and cheese, and friendship for an evening. In less identifiable locations such as Frost's New England and Spenser's faery land, the poet proceeds to a personal "elsewhere" but is still likely to use it to size up a familiar world. Like all poets however isolated, he must negotiate between his and tradition's landscapes if only, again, because the vocabulary he uses is the common one, refashioned.

Cultural recollection, then, is always part of the crossing, or perhaps "knitting" would be better in such cases, since a wealth of implications and intersections gives any poet working within a recognizable tradition a tissue of references to work with. Despite the relative privacy of lyric and the singularity of its voicing, relations to such traditions and to the listening world wedge between poet and object and make any reading of a poem a retrospective act, embedded in the diachronicity of influences. Songs come by the promptings of species and book placements or "topics," not solely by individual virtuosity. I raise that complicating of the poet's verbal plundering only in a preliminary way, since it is best considered in specific cases, as a matter of period styles and influences. But it should be noted that the self-orientation of lyric is often at odds with its public dimensions, its orphic ambitions with its laureate ones. Whereas celebrations of place and descriptive amplitude underscore lyric's referential interests and whereas the orphic poet—the enchanting son of the muse Calliope—seeks to tame a wild nature, the listening world demands its place. The lyricist need not acknowledge that as explicitly as Shelley does; Ammons and Wordsworth are not exceptional, for instance, in ignoring both the conventions they use and the listener, and even Shelley thinks of the listening world primarily as proof of the poet's authority. The ambitious bard feels himself the true center, legislating for mankind, "all false centres" else superseding. But if the poet adjusts to the authority of the capital, as Tityrus does, he applies it to the setting, superintending in its name, less an orphic figure than agriculturalist in an economy centered elsewhere.

Whether the authority he applies is personal or is sanctioned by convention, fastening the object in words is an authoritative act that
seizes possession by a certain means that informed readers are expected to recognize. But seizes possession of what? The balancing of rhetorical, mimetic, and expressive elements, like questions of substance, are sufficiently sensitive and debatable in lyric to require some further elaboration. Hence before taking up specific renaissance variants, I want to offer a minimal theoretical framework for them. First in passing and later with some explicit attention, I will also suggest reasons for lyric address being crucially periodized.

TO POSSESS IS TO IMPOSE DESIGN AND TO CLAIM REAL SUBSTANCE

In what sense does a lyric address incorporate the topographical features of an actual place? Does a poem in some way recover reality or merely create stage settings for self-expression, claiming exemption from the rules that ordinarily judge an Antony and install entries for “cuckoo” in the dictionary? If the nature of the real, even apart from our attempts to formulate it, is problematic, it is surely more so in a poem that does not claim to mirror nature exactly or collect its particulars one by one like so many potatoes brought to the cellar. Such directives and temporal indicators as “here,” “there,” “now,” and “then,” and features of direct address become special conventions and discourse labels in poetry. They do not carry the precise meanings that the same words would have in direction-giving on a London street corner. Pointers in lyric set a tone, bridge elements, and establish grammatical relations. Thus when “On a Drop of Dew” begins “See how the Orient Dew, / Shed from the Bosom of the Morn,” we are introduced not to an actual but to a composed scene mapped as a set of progressing signals to the reader.

More answerable than simple mimetic theory to that dissolving and recombining of borrowed parts is Sidney’s notion that the poet’s invented or second world is more perfect than the one we normally inhabit and more responsive to the poet’s desire. In Sidney’s implicit analogy, an idea or foreconceit is to a poem what the creator’s plan is to the cosmos: it deals with a real world and prevents images from becoming private castles in air without bearing on the moral decisions we have to make. However, Sidney does not explore differences between the way objects appear in language and the ways we encounter them through the senses. For him the poet’s reformulation of reality is primarily for instructional purposes, as in its presenting of princes and heroes better than
life's. Unfortunately, not all fictions create an improved—merely an altered and more coherent—nature. Also, unlike rearrangement of actual objects such as a gardener makes, the poet's materials are merely verbal. They rearrange our ideas. Poetics must therefore consider specifically verbal topical mappings: whereas in the daily world we approach objects as ontological things, the poet's invented heterocosm gives us pageants and performances; and whereas real sea lions and serpents are not obliged to illustrate anything except natural laws, hermeneutic practice teaches us to expect objects-as-images to be revealing.

For instance, since the grounds of a likeness cannot at the same time be exclusively topographical and meaningful, the poet usually gives objects lying in the same vicinity metaphoric and synecdochial connection. Compression and epitomizing are especially vital to the renaissance enterprise of preparing objects for inclusion in what Sidney considers the golden world. Indeed, synecdoche, the seizing of the whole by a representative part, is made to assimilate a good deal, its value being a kind of logical governance. What counts in it is the power that control of the part gives its user—power to represent in a compressed form without sacrificing scope, for instance, as in Donne's claims to be able to recapture the entire world by his mastery of love's chambers, or as in Marvell's reduction of all that's made to green thought in the garden's containment of the world's best resources. As Blake realized in "Auguries of Innocence," an important and quite special power of symbolic thought and especially of poetry is "To see a World in a Grain of Sand." At the same time, the user of synecdoche cannot automatically claim that nothing counts except the part he cites. On the contrary renaissance poets are likely to maintain that possession of the whole would be better if one had the means. Thus in "On a Drop of Dew," Marvell's central demonstrator is metaphorically like the soul, which in turn is a small part of the whole to which the poem conducts our attention; but neither likeness nor dew-drop compression is as good as reincorporation of the soul into its source: it is better to be dissolved into the Almighty Sun and be possessed by it. No coy figure makes that crossing for us.

That the various rhetorical, figural, and logical devices of language appropriate reality is the main cause of the poet's indictment, then, and from a modern perspective it is grammatical relation and other tools of language that Sidney should have credited with the poet's remaking of nature rather than witty reinvention of a golden world. Indeed, Michael Riffaterre suggests on behalf of a
sizeable body of recent theorists that as soon as poet and reader get involved in poetic signs they leave the so-called real world behind as merely a first level.\(^5\) The second of two levels or stages of reading is a manifestation of *semiosis*, an especially systematic use of signs that often comes equipped with a metalanguage to fend off naïve referentiality. That notion is more valuable to account for Ammons's kind of poem than Sidney's "foreconceit," translated into a second nature; but one is nonetheless hesitant to sacrifice the signified world entirely to the play of signs. Maintaining the necessity and virtual independence of a second level of discourse is tantamount to making the poet's inventions both different in kind from and better than the experienced world. It is true that a good many renaissance readers also expected serious texts to proceed to some such higher level. But even the didactic poetry they called for did not completely sever words from things or lose concretion in systematic ideas. Sidney's view of poetry is reinforced by the assumption that history and philosophy—servants of truth in its concrete and abstract forms—are not so far apart that it cannot combine them in its pleasurable fictions and metaphors. In uniting them not all poems lean toward symbolism or allegory, which sacrifice real lions to the courage or the wrath they signify and depopulate settings to make trophies. Sidney insists on some level of literal imitation, as Dante on the allegory of theologians, to discourage hasty flights from locality.

Another reason not to sever texts from their references is that literary periods and trails of influence get obscured when we do so, as under new criticism's more extreme versions of formalism, which are usually applied more to lyric than to other forms. My assumption is that significant lyrics always respond in some way to historical circumstances and that the term *imitation* is useful to describe that response, provided that we are aware of the special workings of language in them.

One instrument of such awareness if we choose to draw upon it is Heidegger's word *gestell*, or "placement."\(^6\) The English equivalent carries traces of "locus" while pointing up the poet's resituating of objects in imagistic and metrical settings for purposes that we detect primarily in the poem itself. That trace of topography makes "placement" particularly useful for topical mappings and salvages some of the ambiguity of "topoi." Two other Heideggeian concepts make convenient accompaniment for that "framing" and draw us a little further in the direction of mimesis—the poem's capacity to "let things dwell" and its "lighting up" of objects or bidding them
come to light (p. xviii). I include them incidentally here, more or less uprooted from their contexts, because they suggest the celebrational aura of lyric. What Wordsworth, Keats, and Shelley see in their respective bird-singers is some such special illumination, which in a toned-down version is also what Stevens discovers in the bird singing from its palm at the end of the mind. Neither phrase is quite identical with “mimesis,” nor is either very hospitable to the romantic preoccupation with the self and the transcendent Idea in which the self is sometimes immersed in the Hegelian view of lyric.

Rather, they find the emergence of the poem only in negotiations with a setting, while also acknowledging implicitly the threefold interactions of language, reality, and poet-as-such (whatever his identity may be on occasions when he is not writing). What “placement,” “letting dwell,” and “lighting up” collectively point to—with some tension among them—is the fitting of objects into interpretive schemes in such ways that reading can engage them on analytic grounds—as images of the real and expressions of attitudes toward it. To be appreciated in its own light, the object must be allowed to dwell where and as it is; yet paradoxically poetic framing also unfailingly pulls it from whatever primary settings experience may have provided for it. The strength of the pull is a measure not merely of the poet’s personal strength but of a chosen language, selected from the cultural stock and altered more or less as intent and a given regionality dictate. The appropriated object-image must carry some fragment of a first world with it but carry it into an illuminated state that is the poet’s version of empire, now more likely a personal empire like Ammons’s than a collective one like Virgil’s or Ben Jonson’s.

However, we must take any poetic empire, private or public, to mean not placement merely but placement with something of what Morse Peckham thinks of as a perilous or chaotic relation of parts or that Herrick in a more genteel way talks of as a “delight in disorder.” Every act of placement in a good poem is also an act of displacement in which received tropes, and reality itself, are shown to resist. Ammons’s “Plunder,” to return to it, assumes that however commanding the poet, his language sometimes proceeds through mud roils, combing from a thick and murky substance. Since he makes no claim upon them, frog, fish, bear, and gnat turn away and make off. The physical world adds up to too much for any one act of lighting and placing to handle it. A resilient poet may retaliate by means of whatever vocabulary he employs for bears and gnats escaping, but he knows limits. He balances the
language we know, in the rhythms we expect, against surprising departures in both and may balance images brought forward with rebelling things and their qualities.

This disorder is the other side of presence in worthwhile lyrics, as some degree of social disorder is the proof of order. Heidegger’s brief list of natural phenomena at the head of this chapter is a case in point. Forests spread, as is their wont; brooks plunge; mist diffuses: the poet has an exact word for what each does and a way of lining them up in orderly parallels that do not appear to be confusing. But words and phenomena also draw apart and do not quite form a closed system. The poet’s preemptory way with both is as evident as the gardener’s work from a severely pruned tree. Now forests do of course exist and may even logically be said to spread, but saying that also applies a human scale and a panoramic eye to them and rules out all the other things forests do and are. Plunge as a word for what brooks do moves further out of language’s neutral zone into animation; it is as much dramatic as it is descriptive. Rocks do not really persist; they lie quietly without an effort of will. Blessing breaks such parallels even as it submits to the same grammatical construction; it muses and is implicitly hospitable to muses, but the other things in Heidegger’s list may not be blessings, and all of them pull in their own directions against regulation. Their claim to our attention is partly that they exist and act as we perceive them, and this causes the poet to muse—perhaps to muse the obscure even as he excludes complications. Unlike Browning’s lark on the wing and snail on the thorn, these behaving things do not capitulate to Pippa’s optimism: they can be said on second glance to insist on a degree of confusion, which the poet controls by the brevity of his list and scarcity of detail. To appropriate and to be appropriate are two sides of the same thing.

Disorder by its nature is multifaceted and resourceful. It can inhere in the object or the observer, or in language, or in a collision between these and the audience’s tradition-shaped expectations. Emily Dickinson’s cryptic notation of an invisible choir celebrating its summer mass combines something of all of these:

Further in Summer than the Birds
Pathetic from the Grass
A minor Nation celebrates
Its unobtrusive Mass.

No Ordinance be seen
So gradual the Grace
The insect nation is comfortably at home; yet to human listeners it makes a foreign sound. Its voices and its residences are not ours; it remains invisible and intensifies loneliness. It may remind us of the way in which romantic birds disappear or send their songs from the borders of other worlds, but it is less grand. As in Heidegger's compressed poem, the abandoning of copia and an elliptical entrapment of meaning put off full possession. So compressed and unusual are Dickinson's "pathetic," "antiques," and "furrow on the Glow," in fact, that one cannot be sure the text is right, as elsewhere it is a slant of light or a tone that introduces a similar estrangement.

Reality lends itself to different measurements and formulations, each but a provisional rendering, none a complete conquest. As one such formulation, lyric retains more of a speaker's affective response and more of the physical object's particularity than most others, which is part of its acknowledgment of disorder. Its conversion of things into images is often vivid, as it pinpoints something we have heretofore not noticed. As Wallace Stevens writes in Adagia, "The final poem will be the poem of fact in the language of fact. But it will be the poem of fact not realized before." Or again, "Perhaps there is a degree of perception at which what is real and what is imagined are one: a state of clairvoyant observation, accessible or possibly accessible to the poet or, say, the acutest poet." Or still again, "To be at the end of fact is not to be at the beginning of imagination but to be at the end of both."9 Certainly not avoidance of fact but distrust of commonplaces and universals characterizes the modern retreat from an earlier mimesis. Thus John Crowe Ransom's assault on the poetry of ideas is adamant against Platonist verities but quite comfortable with the properties of things. Objects have a built-in resistance not to poetic imagery but to structure and unified designs. As discrete entities they have a good many more sensory properties than any statement can ren-
der, but when they are converted into metaphors or images, they pull a respectable portion of thingness along, "presenting images so whole and clean that they resist the catalysis of thought." Despite the somewhat shadowy existence of a poem's simulacra, the citation of surfaces, in collaboration with meaning, gives things a presence, a sentiment that gets repeated over and over again among twentieth century anglo-American poets and critics. The key matter for Ransom, one of our better spokesmen in this particular matter, is equilibrium: one must resist the temptation to pursue ideas at the expense of concretion but also the pursuit of Dinglichkeit for its own sake. Substance and design are on a teeter-totter: where one prevails, the other falters. Thus neither the random surfaces of things nor the mind's order should be allowed to dominate: "Things as things do not necessarily interest us," and overly ranked and arranged objects certainly do not—where "things are on their good behavior, looking rather well, and arranged by lines into something approaching a military formation" (p. 872).

In terms of texture, the qualities of objects are not to be sacrificed to ideas. For Ransom, they are like those that Heidegger finds in Physis, which he translates not as "nature" but as the "emerging and arising, the spontaneous unfolding that lingers." Qualities must be stable enough to be named, but our attention is directed more to the subject identifying them and to their arising than to their standing. Nothing nameable can be totally unique or subjective; the spontaneous unfolding must linger. But neither is its being or its naming ever quite finished. Anticipation and memory are part of a very tentative present. Thus in Ransom's words, too, "The aesthetic moment appears as a curious moment of suspension; between the Platonism in us, which is militant, always sciening and devouring, and a starved inhibited aspiration towards innocence which would like to respect and know the object as it might of its own accord reveal itself" (p. 877). If the poet squeezes objects tightly or yokes them firmly to a conceptual scheme, they become allegorical or rhetorical. Whether he tries to honor the thing itself without ideas or exploits it for illustrative purposes, however, he can neither cancel its properties entirely nor avoid some degree of exploitation.

SOME RENAISSANCE PREFERENCES IN DESIGN: IDEA, EMBLEM, AND MUSIC

Renaissance poets and apologists normally say that they prefer the educative, bound image to the rebel image. Sidney, for in-
stance, expects poetry to bind whatever historical concretion it uses to philosophy or to moral example. In the terms of Graham Hough's wheel of literary types in *A Preface to The Faerie Queene*, not only Sidney but other contemporaries of Spenser lean toward thesis-dominated forms and prefer emblems and hieroglyphic symbols to an image-dominated realism or an "image complex" incarnation of themes. The rhetorical figures and structural patterns of renaissance manuals on good speaking and writing are other forms of that thesis dominance, and more relevant to lyric's musical alliances, so are the sound systems of meter and rhyme. Indeed, what imagery does with objects in putting them into such formulas as renaissance schoolmasters called *topographia, chronographia*, and *apostrophe*, musical settings and voicing do with phonetic design and stanzaic pattern, which are less talked about in renaissance advice-giving manuals. In songs proper, melodic sequence is usually accompanied by conventional and illustrative statement, which doubles up on the dominance. Compared with narrative and dramatic forms, such statement is attitudinal in lyric. Despite irregularities and the subversions of wit in some hands, they are parcelled out in well-ordered cantabile elements. Their progression offers formal satisfaction after very brief, measured withholdings; synchronized with abstract statement or set within narrative, songs tend to suggest that the poet thinks first of closing the unit even when he has further meanings and perhaps a story to get on with. Sooner or later, however, statement, story, and musical unit wind up together. The range of disciplinary orders that renaissance lyricists impose on mimetic substance is thus considerable. Lyric is made to support social functions (educational or profitable, entertainment or pleasure), formal functions, and private functions having to do with plangent, confessional, and celebrational motives. Its means of presentation range all the way from the analytic (in argument, definition, and meditation) to the dominantly melodic, and include in between narrative, dramatic, and pictorial or iconic modes. The latter in itself includes emblematic, hieroglyphic, allegorical, symbolic, and many another figural use of imagery.

Given all these formal and conventional resources for a poet to choose among, it is difficult to cross them with thematic interests and come up with anything like a clear historical pattern of developments. But as Jerome Mazzaro points out, renaissance lyric does move generally from formula-governed cantabile-lyric mixtures in the sixteenth century to separations of statement from music in the last decade of the century and thereafter. I take that to
be symptomatic of a broader shift in poetic location and voice, from relatively social to relatively private functions, and from a reliance on formal conventions to individual eccentricities. Where stress in the courtly lyric falls on grace of movement and humanist service in both educational and entertaining ways, seventeenth-century emphasis falls on the individual voice in dramatic situations, often reinforced by a striking use of iconic figures and paradoxical wit. This is an over-simplification, and any of the features of lyric can be mixed with any other at any time, as in the complex musical-dramatic settings of Wyatt. But it has more than a grain of truth. If in the modes of the earlier renaissance musical lyrics are basically public performances, later lyrics seek to convince or cajole. They do so sometimes by a jarring of wits in conceits and images, sometimes by an argument set in dialogue exchanges that bear upon its progress, as Donne's intimate settings bear upon definitions of love. Where earlier modes are artful or conceal artfulness behind an easy surface, later ones expend an obvious energy in arguing positions and presuppose social and intellectual differences to be overcome in the audience.

But let us descend to examples, some of which will qualify theme dominance—one kind of possession-seizing—with something akin to "Shakespearcan" incarnation, which allows objects recognition in their own right and sometimes makes them stand off as though ready to escape whatever order the poet would impose upon them. In the Coleridgian terms that Hough draws upon, that incarnation makes an image partake of the reality it renders intelligible; it may also risk the unintelligible or unmanageable. Like its companion pieces in the anthology England's Helicon (1600, 1614), "The un­knowne Sheephearde's complaint" contrives its general statements in madrigal form and dresses them up in elaborate rhetorical patterns. It is clear from it that not merely thematic precept but felicities of diction and image govern the selection of its well-manicured details:

My Flocks feede not, my Ewes breede not
My Rammes speede not, all is amisse:
Love is denying, Faith is defying,
Harts renying, causer of this.
All my merry jiggs are quite forgot,
All my Ladies love is lost God wot.
Where her faith was firmely fixt in love,
There a nay is plac'd without remove.
One silly crosse, wrought all my losse,
O frowning Fortune, cursed fickle Dame:
Such complaints about inconstancy in *England's Helicon* are similar to Wyatt's bitterly voiced ones, and the language is similar to Spenser's. But the identifying features of the poem are more periodized than personal. Usually attributed to Richard Barnfield, the stanza could have been written by any number of talented versifiers among the Edmund Boltons, Nicholas Bretons, Robert Greene's, Antony Mundays, Michael Draytons, Sidneys, or Spensers of the later sixteenth century. Praise of Eliza or Beta turns up among them frequently and masks praise of authority behind shepherd conventions, just as love sonnets of the period suggest parallels between unsuccess at court and unfruitful love. One finds very little in such works that Donne or Herbert could have written, though they too knew the attractions of song. The difference is partly in the sixteenth-century use of conventional topoi and mythology and the posed attitudes of the personas, hence the avoidance of the dramatized course that mediation or felt thought might take. Despite a somewhat stretched-out parallel between what love, faith, and hearts do and how flocks, ewes, and rams react, poetic movement for the unknown shepherd is choreographed not by witty or unexpected connections but by a careful measuring of phrases and syllables. Meaning is secondary to musicality and rhetoric, with their antitheses, incremental addition of one illustration to another, and softened and sweetened paradoxes. The poem is spoken or sung in first person, but the character of the performer is submerged in that rhetorical and metrical patterning, which is repeated until it needs variation and then complicates the stanzaic scheme with an equally exact second formula. Adjectives are obliged to wear stage costume, as in "merry," "frowning," "fickle." Committing his effort to attitudinizing and sound system, the poet requires of theme and image only enough material to embroider the design, just as all he requires of psychology and drama are pretexts for movement.

It may seem to stretch definitions to call both this poem and Ammons's "Plunder" or Dickinson's "Further in Summer" by the same name; and the historical distance is as great as the generic distance. But personal feeling, pretended or real, establishes the kinship between them, and perhaps a sense of wonder also, since all three poems make impassioned crossings of a speaker to something resistant. They juggle desired possession with a sense of the
escaping prize. Here it is musicality that catches up the pictorial pieces; in Ammons it is less the regularities of argument or phrasing and more the will of a speaker that governs choice. One is set in a conventional Arcadia of course, the other in a landscape never conceived in quite that way before. The possession of materials that the song claims is more or less in the public name; Ammons plunders in his own name.

Closer to England’s Helicon historically but also quite distant stylistically, Donne engineers a deflection from courtly lyrics of “The complaint’s” kind early in his career in such poems as “Song: Goe and catche a falling starre.” His songs are as musical as the complaint, but the wit that links various strange sights to constancy in “Goe and catche” is more daring than the wit that associates fickle women with sheep:

If thou beest borne to strange sights,
Things invisible to see,
Ride ten thousand daies and nights,
Till age snow white haires on thee,
Thou, when thou retorn’st, wilt tell mee
All strange wonders that befell thee,
And sweare
No where
Lives a woman true, and faire. 15

Much of Donne could be set to music and several of the Songs and Sonnets were. But the effects of such a song are less accountable to music or rhetoric than are the enumerations of pleasures and pains and general accounts of time and fortune that fill English verse through the 1590s. The disturbed courtier in Wyatt heralds Donne, as Spenser heralds the professional poet’s concern with his career; but Donne complicates both. Not incidentally he commits himself to private settings and small dramas or unfolding arguments within them. However, he is as thematic and as concerned with universally valid propositions as his predecessors. The difference lies partly in the paradoxical nature of those propositions and their dramatic impact.

The musicality of earlier renaissance songs and sonnets distinguishes them not only from the personal verse of the metaphysicals but from verse whose design is governed by allegory, argument, or fable. Definition and moral precept reign in both and also in poems dominated by musical and iconic design. The emblem with its inscribed messages and equating of pictures and precepts is perhaps lyric’s most demonstrative form of moral statement. In its sacramental and mystical variants, it virtually equates poet and
theologian and as part of a doctrinal system depicts nothing merely for its own sake or for decorative purposes. For the reader to enter such written-out pictures is to leave behind the textured world for an expressive field given entirely to message bearing. Though in more sophisticated variants the emblem book may exploit discrepancies between picture and word and become self-conscious about the arbitrary nature of the connection, the attraction of simpler emblems is precisely their point-by-point assignment of significance to conquered objects.

Pictorial and musical design both collaborate well enough with thematic illustration; lyric after all is not foreign to either logic or judgment, and the lyricist can be as concerned with concepts and definitions as the philosopher. For both, the word *substance* and its synonyms can apply either to the material world that Ransom likes to see given its due or to essence. But with respect to the latter, poets are not likely to be as rigorous as philosophers in holding to their *substantia, ousia, or essentia*. The objects they address will sometimes be found fighting the harness even in highly manipulated atmospheres such as those of England's Helicon. Rather than extracting what evidence flocks and fickle dames afford, however (though the interplay of “feed,” “breed,” and “speed” would give us a foothold), we will fare better in demonstrating that with a more complex imagery and less conventional topography, or simply with a stronger poetry. In such a poetry, celebration and possession, like texture and design, often wage an indecisive struggle. Objects require recognition where they stand, at a distance; yet the patterns of lyric, the statements it makes, and the self seeking to cross over to possess them struggle to fasten them down.

RENAISSANCE POSSESSION AND LOVE

Although they are not totally adequate by themselves to explain lyric's blend of celebration and possession, moral consciousness and language provide the chief means of crossing. Design and the act of placement fall under the technology that poets apply to subjects. If much of renaissance lyricism favors illustrative images, musical regularity, and moral or philosophical abstraction—and thus the dominance of design over rebellious substance—love poets, a sizeable portion of the whole, frequently find the beloved to be out of reach; celebration and possession come unbalanced in elegiac frustration. The value of the object is clear; how to approach it is not. Like the unknown shepherd complaining, the poet may convert his longing into thematic universals and allay it with
philosophy, but that strategy only disciplines the subject and leaves
the object "wyld," to use Wyatt’s well-chosen word in "They Flee
From Me" and "Whoso List to Hunt." If love poetry receives less
emphasis here than it deserves, it is because I do not want to stray
too far from topographical keys, which are stronger in other kinds
of lyric. However, concern for place and for language intrudes into
courtship, and so examples that will do some justice in passing to
the sonnet tradition are not very far out of our way. At the same
time, they allow us to mark differences between the court-oriented
lyric and later verse—and thus put us in a position to follow the
progress of love eventually into such places as Milton’s Eden and
Marvell’s green world. The path from the courtly love lyric to
Donne is more direct.

Herbert’s “Vertue” suggests itself as an initial example, first be-
cause it concerns a setting rather than a specific beloved, but also
because it addresses its objects with something very like a lover’s
longing, and then for moral and other reasons veers away from
them:

Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright,
The bridall of the earth and skie;
The dew shall weep thy fall tonight;
    For thou must die.

Sweet rose, whose hue angrie and brave
Bids the rash gazer wipe his eye:
Thy root is ever in its grave,
    And thou must die.

Sweet spring, full of sweet dayes and roses,
A box where sweets compacted lie;
My musick shows ye have your closes,
    And all must die.

Onely a sweet and vertuous soul,
Like season’d timber, never gives;
But though the whole world turn to coal,
    Then chiefly lives.\(^{18}\)

The musical design, particularly the refrain, allows Herbert to ex­
ploit parallels for cumulative elegiac effects. But ultimately the
poem explores a quite different lyric impulse. If the first move­
ment offers a restrained but mounting elegy, the second comes to
the virtuous soul’s imperishable life as the one that counts. Since
only paradise fulfills the self completely, only the virtue that
achieves it can lift the poem to a higher celebrational plane. As a
moral abstraction, virtue thus governs the reception of place and
provides the crossing force that carries lyric into its visionary phase.
Whereas in Milton's Eden, Adam and Eve fashion morning and
evening songs out of such things as the day's opening and the
night's coming on, here transition and slippage from the golden
age undo our sympathies. The last stanza does not address, then,
but declares, widening its vision beyond things close by to things
unapproachable by normal means. All told, "Vertue" strikes an
unusual balance between celebration and dispossession. Its iconic
and melodic combination makes splendid use of remodeled Eliz­
abethan resources. In the context of The Temple, it also suggests the
seriousness of Herbert's relocation of lyric in sacred precincts, but
that is a matter for later.

Although Shakespeare may not seem to offer inevitable choices
to put beside "Vertue," two of the better known sonnets, 116 and
129, carry further the age-old matter of possession and disposses­sion
and suggest modifications of the historical observation I made
earlier concerning the dominance of illustrative imagery and rhet­
orical patterns. Ordinarily, courtly love offers little opportunity for
the fulfillment of lovers, who are suspended between desire and
idealism. Shakespeare momentarily separates these two compo­
nents into lust and pure love, love being his term for the marriage
of true minds, lust for illusory enticements of flesh, one idea domi­
nated, the other thoroughly incarnate, yet paradoxically beyond
possession. Sonnet 116 defines a purified version of personal at­
traction as a union of minds standing free of all occasions and
phases; sonnet 129 makes passion the opposite of that platonic
union in every respect. But each implies the other and keeps lyric
from drawing entirely into their extremes—keeps it somewhere in
view of both. The difficulty is that what is momentarily seizable
physically, in lust, is neither lasting nor praiseworthy; what is
praiseworthy in love is immaterial and not possessable in a worldly
way.

The negative case first:

The expense of spirit in a waste of shame
Is lust in action, and till action, lust
Is perjured, murderous, bloody, full of blame,
Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust,
Enjoyed no sooner but despised straight,
Past reason hunted, and no sooner had,
Past reason hated, as a swallowed bait,
On purpose laid to make the taker mad.
Mad in pursuit, and in possession so,
Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme,
A bliss in proof, and proved, a very woe.
Before, a joy proposed, behind a dream.

All this the world well knows, yet none knows well
To shun the Heaven that leads men to this Hell.19
Although this compact and hurried course through passion's phases looks like a definition and offers enough of one for the poet to reveal lust as the familiar thing we recognize, from another angle no complete definition actually develops or can develop. The poem silently acknowledges the failure of rational statement-making in the face of lust's contradictory moments. It will not stand still for its portrait. The third and fourth lines disrupt the movement we come to expect of Shakespearean quatrains, stumbling over a list of distressful adjectives as though picking a course through rubble. They present the opposite of love in its courtly varieties, "perjured" recalling the oath-swearing that honest love depends upon, savagery removing lust from the polite world to the animal world and placing it beyond moral codes. In that context the lines are implicitly dialectical and historical: they turn against a host of courtly ideals as a social background and against the sonnet tradition as a literary background.

The second quatrain builds upon this acknowledgement of lust's uncivilized extremity. Not merely rational faculties but the feelings are put off by lust. But a more telling mark against its definability comes in the third quatrain's antithetical view, which contradicts the opening sections, "bliss in proof" being opposite to an "expense of spirit" as lust's consumation. The privileged word in the abortive definition is "dream," which suggests that lust recedes into vagueness whenever one tries to sum it up. Despite dream's resumption of a hindered lyricism that has flashed momentarily in "Bliss in proof" and "a joy proposed" and despite its being confusable enough with love's visions to lead lovers on again and again, its hold on reality is even weaker than madness might claim. Its vagueness would drop the sonnet into skepticism were it not for the final couplet, whose epigrammatic summary performs a rescue mission of sorts. We know well enough the experience of lust, and we know the several faces it presents. What we do not know is how to put it under verbal arrest. Paradoxically, the certainty of the sonnet lies in its defining of that uncertainty; its possession is knowledge of lust's dispossession. Shakespeare's saying this amounts to a final displacement of topics that usually support renaissance love, since courtship should sublimate passion and convert it into the codified social graces that make up a middle ground between Platonist idealism and lust. We know from previous sonnets in the sequence approximately what Shakespeare thinks love should be: certain commonplaces and images should march in support of two parties whose union is a high cause and a powerful symbol of social achievement and status. Here all that ought to be
substantial escapes, and lyricism is stifled at its source, in the very attractions of the object. The only way to avoid that stifling and lyric’s diversion into satire and anatomy is to avoid lust itself.

Problems with definition and possession come with authentic love too, but obviously not of the same kind. As Sonnet 116 conceives of that sort of love, it transcends pursuit and requires statements first about what it is not. Whatever alters or bends or is subject to time, for instance, is not what the poet means. An outbreak of positive feeling comes only when Shakespeare is ready to put a lyric stamp on the emerging definition:

Oh no! It is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken.
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.

So transcendent is this love and so certain its definition—once we cease to look in the wrong places for it—that feeling can be confidently based upon it. The expansion of love’s horizon climaxes in the third quatrain with a glimpse of apocalypse and the sturdiness of a love that “bears it out even to the edge of doom.” “Doom” is placed comparably to “dream” in Sonnet 129 and has a similar function in carrying beyond definable experience. But where “dream” moves toward vagueness as though looking backward toward a vanishing entity, “doom” lies ahead at the borderline between the defined world and another world to come, where love will cease to be tested by vicissitude and like Herbert’s seasoned soul will be definitively placed. In the certainty of that placement, one almost fails to notice how negatives continue to function in it. Love is that which is not shaken; its true worth is unknown. Even bearing it out is a kind of passive resistance to motions that might accompany it. Love may stir us but is not itself moved; it may exist, but we cannot possess it now sufficiently to put it into action.

The commonplace contrast to Shakespeare’s “doom” is the ever-shifting region from which Wyatt singles out woman’s fickleness and the intrigues of court as most destructive to love’s satisfaction. Indeed, instability fills not only Shakespeare’s and Wyatt’s sonnets on time and infidelity but practically all renaissance love poetry in one way or another, which seldom allows possession of what it cherishes in either its English or its continental versions. Instead, it uses love, as Arthur Marotti points out, to encode a complex set of social attitudes toward failure. In Fulke Greville’s Caelica, the setting for Myra’s constancy is the entire mutable nature of things created from the four elements:
The World, that all containes, is ever moving,
The Starres within their spheres for ever turned,
Nature (the Queene of Change) to change is loving,
And Forme to matter new, is still adjourned.

Fortune our phantasie-God, to varie liketh,
Place is not bound to things within it placed,
The Present time upon time passed striketh,
With Phoebus wandring course the earth is graced.

The Ayre still moves, and by its moving cleareth,
The Fire up ascends, and planets feedeth,
The Water passeth on, and all lets weareth,
The Earth stands still, yet change of changes breedeth;

Her plants, which Summer ripes, in Winter fade,
Each creature in unconstant mother lyeth,
Man made of earth, and for whom earth is made,
Still dying lives, and living ever dyeth;
  One only like fate sweet Myra never varies,
  Yet in her eyes the doome of all Change carries.²¹

To that list of forces with which love contends, Greville adds "faction, that ever dwells / In Courts where Wit excells" in Sonnet 19. The lover, like Wyatt's in "The Long Love," must flee to the woods "With Love to live and dye," preferring exile and solitary constancy to still more of fortune's vicissitudes. Or as Wyatt concludes (quoting Petrarch), "Good is the life ending faithfully"—faithfully and fulfilled only as distant devotion. Governing many of these resignations of the lover is the figure of Fortune, which rules over Venus, Mars, and Cupid. Working hand in hand with faithfulness, fortune denies completion and fosters bitterness over the inability of courtly games to produce winners.

Love's losses, then, fall into a familiar pattern of universal ones like those of "Vertue" and often reflect an accompanying social slippage. That mind and heart find their satisfaction only in permanent bonds makes those losses inevitable. Wyatt's "In Eternum I was Once Determined," for instance, entertains assumptions about true love similar to Shakespeare's and Greville's. Idealizing codes do not find expression in the eyes' quaint games:

In eternum I was once determed
For to have loved, and my mind affirmed
That with my heart it should be confirmed
In eternum.

Forthwith I found the thing that I might like,
And sought with love to warm her heart alike,
For as me thought I should not see the like
In eternum.
To trace this dance I put myself in press;
Vain hope did lead, and bade I should not cease
To serve, to suffer, and still to hold my peace
In eternum.

With this first rule I furthered me apace,
That as me thought my truth had taken place
With full assurance to stand in her grace
In eternum.

It was not long ere I by proof had found
That feeble building is on feeble ground,
For in her heart this word did never sound—
In eternum.

In eternum then from my heart I kest
That I had first determed for the best:
Now in the place another thought doth rest
In eternum.22

The lover's initial search is for the right person to fill a form already implanted in the mind. Should such a person turn up, the gap between eternity and the temporal world might be crossed and lyric find a definitive object of praise. The poem implicitly concedes that one's expecting to love for always is unrealistic, but one should not be so readily disappointed. What the lover seeks apparently are some of the satisfactions that a Beatrice or Laura promise or that the lady of Amoretti will later extend to Spenser, supplemented by what he would gain in personal affection if the game were played by the rules (the purpose of courtship being to "warm her heart alike"). Having held up his end, suffered quietly as he is supposed to, and come to the edge of realization—close enough to think truth embodied and grace granted—the lover finds his expectations in error. Concrete proof topples the superstructure of procedures and beliefs.

Awareness that individual cases undo ideals is perhaps what leads Shakespeare to use the similar term "proved" in Sonnet 116. If true minds are not united in eternity beyond error, all love’s language is poisoned at the root and the lyricist possesses nothing. Content then slips out of the poet’s best words, and we should not be surprised to find him saying that if he is wrong about this he must be wrong about everything and has never truly written, no one ever loved. Where Sonnet 129 breaks all ties between emotion and intellect, Sonnet 116 goes beyond feeling to an extreme Platonist assertion. In both cases the poet will have nothing further to do with courtship as Wyatt, Sidney, and the Petrarchans codify it: love belongs to the poet’s ideal realm, or possibly to his and the philosopher’s. It does not belong to historians, to rhetoric, or to
manner; it permits no half-way measures. When Donne in “A Lecture upon the Shadow” fears love’s instant decline after the high noon of its realization and when Marvell later adds that love is a conjunction of minds and an opposition of stars, they too fear that it is too good for this world. Wyatt’s less categorical notion is that what can be won can also be lost. The pursuit of love among the factions of Caesar’s court is a dance, a hunt, a press, a quaint game in his recurrent metaphors. He is realist enough to know that, if not accept it. What makes him aghast, however, is not merely change but sudden change. As “It May Be Good” summarizes, love’s recurrent unsuccess brings a failure of confidence: “For dread to fall I stand not fast.”

That courtship is often unproductive in renaissance love poetry is not due, as Wyatt might seem to imply, solely to violations of its rules, nor are its analogues strictly social and political. Lyric in the view I am proposing always withholds its objects in some way. As both “Vertue” and a good many love sonnets illustrate, a lyric can be fairly sure of its commitments and finished in its definitions—hence be relatively closed as a form—and still not consummate a union of subject and object. If love “bears it out” to the edge of doom, for instance, it must require a good deal of patience and endurance up to that point; lovers must be alert to its perils and therefore a little uneasy with its conditions, if not its essence. In the light of Shakespeare’s other sonnets, Wyatt, Sidney, and the sonnet company, bearing it out cannot be an easy task. Likewise, if the soul “chiefly” lives only after doomsday, it must spend its probationary period getting seasoned in a lesser life. Foreshadowings of end things are beleaguered by an all-to-human fondness for sweet days and roses. Such ambitious lyrics, in looking to the complete possession that love or paradise promises, seek something akin to the equilibrium of Milton’s exiled Adam and Eve—possessed of sure vision and perhaps happier far within because of it but nonetheless proceeding into the main trials of faith. With some caution, we can use Milton’s example as reasonably binding in establishing one prominent renaissance sense of the lyricist’s territorial situation. However, before doing so, I want to examine a final central ingredient in lyric address—its dramatic passage and sense of the coming on of the object.

THE POET CALLED FORTH

Address or apostrophe is to lyric roughly what motives or animation are to drama or narrative and as more distant address is to epistle: in place of agents and actions, lyric is moved by perceptions
of the object in rising or subsiding phases in which the object is not fully seized. Awakenings to presence and realizations of loss are typical of its “plots” or movements. If a thing may “solicit us by its looks” ([eidos] as Heidegger remarks—including its texture, form, and composite appeal)—the critical matter for the lyricist, thus summoned forth, is how and to what end to make his address and what those looks signify. Reading them is, of course, one phase of possession and celebration. Objects and callings thus seem to come always in tandem, though poets are usually less successful when they stand squarely before something: like lovers inspired by the Atlantic ocean between them, they are often more at home with less than full presences, with promising texts of predecessors, for instance, or simply with fictions that allow imagination and convention room to operate and thus to amplify significance.

Whether or not awakenings can be said to be quintessentially lyric, they make a useful index to the mix of possession and celebration. They also provide some assistance in marking period distinctions. They provide telling moments for gauging the nature of the object’s solicitation and the onset of meeting consciousness and of language, since as Heidegger also remarks, “The beautiful belongs to the advent of truth, truth’s taking of its place.” A variety of poets could be called upon to provide examples, but I will suggest only minimal cases here, from Stevens, Donne, and Milton, in order simply to conclude the case for topographical withholding-and-possession and frame a more complete discussion of poetic vocation in its seventeenth-century differences later. To that end one logical place to begin is the bird’s scrawny cry that summons the speaker of Stevens’s “Not Ideas about the Thing But the Thing Itself,” and one place to settle in for a more thorough exploration of the roots of lyric is Milton’s awakening first man and woman. Since the latter is so complex an example in both its setting and its period implications, I will merely glance at it here and devote the next chapter to it.

Stevens’s bird call comes to the waking consciousness at the winter-spring juncture of the seasons, always a precarious and exciting moment in Stevens, and at dawn as well. If his title has any truth to it, we have primarily that highly seasonal and timely call to thank for the poem. Next to awakenings in Donne and Milton, the speaker’s reactions to it appear particularly modern in their absence of metaphysical certainties and illustrative ideas, but as the “clear streaks of bird music” in Ammons and the calls of the romantic nightingales, skylarks, and cuckoos suggest, we are likely to
find self-consciousness in any lyric awakening. Stevens claims not to have appropriated the object, and the speaker tries to remain subject to it despite the same storehouse of expectations that anyone carries. Stevens is clearly not interested in taking the thing as a sign of something other than what it seems and forbids its being subdued by allegory or surrendered totally to definition. Coming from sleep and weakened by a lack of validating coordinates, the speaker concentrates as exclusively as he can on impressions. Failure of the thing either to declare itself or to maintain some distance would abort the lyric effort. The waking mind seeks enlightenment in innocence, as Adam might, then, but without Adam’s theology or integration of creaturely fact with the divine plan. Unlike the nightingale, the cuckoo, or the skylark, this bird is not escaping but coming into range.

From earlier creative stalemates, a sense of inertia from the long sleep of intelligence may still linger. In any case the poem concerns itself with the initial movement only and barely glances at subsequent stages, including a crescendo apparently to come in the fullness of “the colossal Sun, / Surrounded by its choral rings.” The conviction the bird brings does not depend upon that sun, but it is reasonable to assume that when birds begin carolling, summer’s green barbarism is on the way and with it, stronger and stronger summonings to poetic celebration. But Stevens’s main point is that growing presence and the simultaneous onset of something like new knowledge do not require elaborate explanations for an appreciative, newly vital consciousness, which puts predecessors behind it. Despite its tentative outset in this early hour, the self gains authenticity just now, well-grounded in the rising season as it is. It flowers from a stored potency both in itself and in its well-met bird, as it has still more tentatively in “The Sun This March.”

As the postponing of new knowledge suggests, a calling for Stevens is less prepossessing than it is likely to be in awakenings that suppose the mind’s being at home in some totality, which in the Renaissance usually includes something like Marvell’s “Glories of th’ Almighty Sun”—obviously a different sun than Stevens’s. This is a very gradual awakening, and even at the conclusion it is not fully possessed of any greater song the bird may herald with its as yet unsustained and ungraced “C” note. The awakenings of Donne and Milton are to higher realities seen synecdochially in something at hand. But both poets provide a spectrum of solicitations and addresses of varying strengths, from those in which the object is almost fully possessable to those in which the calling fails. Donne
offers several examples both of the poet being summoned and of lovers rejoicing in their mutual possession, which in *Songs and Sonnets* is usually both physical and spiritual. He uses the threat of change and a previous history of imperfect affairs to buttress claims for the permanence of that possession. He implicitly contrasts love’s dialogue to the pleadings of Petrarchan lovers and knows that the best time to understand the nature of love is as it comes into fruition or is threatened. At those critical moments, being is shaded by absence even as the beloved declares itself. As the awakenings of “The Good-morrow” and “The Sunne Rising” indicate, the soul greets as an ideal mate only one who can be fully known—and because known, fully possessed. The lyric force of the negatives in those instances comes from the surrounding world, busy in its lesser pursuits. Love itself does not alter and finds no alteration; nor is it a dream or mere ideal. Vicissitude and the escape of substance from language are fully overcome, or so the speaker maintains.

The poet’s calling is more problematic in the religious poems, which suggest the importance of a transcendent object to one part of Donne and the weakened pursuit of a spotted soul. Where the lover in *Songs and Sonnets* often manages to be either sinless or oblivious to sin, the writer of holy sonnets is neither. As Donne comes to realize in the Anniversaries and “Hymne to God my God, in my sicknesse,” the soul must travel extensively. Specifically, it must journey through death’s straits to be cleansed, its full consciousness paradoxically requiring a preliminary unconsciousness:

I joy, that in these straits, I see my West;
For, though theirre currants yeeld returne to none,
What shall my West hurt me? As West and East
In all flatt Maps (and I am one) are one,
So death doth touch the Resurrection.

Is the Pacifique Sea my home? Or are
The Eastern riches? Is Jerusalem?
Anyen, and Magellan, and Gibraltare,
All streights, and none but streights, are wayes to them,
Whether where Japhet dwelt, or Cham, or Sem. 29

Although Donne plays symbolically with the globe and an expanding sense of place, the geography here is also literal, as again in “Goodfriday, 1613. Riding Westward” and “The Good-morrow.” No one place in it is a conclusive destination.

If awakenings do not come to a satisfactory conclusion, it is because God is withheld, or perhaps also because the calling itself is mistaken. To Milton as well as to Donne, a missed calling is parallel
to spiritual misguidance and indicates that what prohibits a completed crossing is internal as well as external. The archetype of that failing for Milton is Satan, a figure of strenuous negations who addresses hell, the sun, and Eden each in a state of siege. Continually on the verge of lyric, Satan veers recurrently into self-debate and lament. Although the pattern he sets is adoptable by others, its importance is not merely its influence but its indication of the danger of linking possession too tightly to knowledge. But Milton expects successful callings for the poet normally. Blessed by the logos, he hopes to achieve the same vision and power that once prevailed in the creation. To the extent that paradise is equatable with the divine presence, he repossesses it not merely in the future but in the act of writing, his form of adamic awakening. If Satan wages war to seize empire, unfallen angels and humankind sing of it, mixing possession and celebration appropriately. Indeed, *Paradise Lost* offers a comprehensive set of responses at various distances from the creator. Meet conversation and lyric address, for instance, have their prelapsarian mixes of celebration and dominion. Argument, debate, elegy, and anguished meditation follow in due course and introduce their version of the siege of contraries. Milton's study of the first human makers of language includes everything from horticultural advice-giving to love-making, from philosophical discourse to lyric. It not only underscores the distinctiveness of lyric for us but coming as it does in contradistinction to predecessors, it also provides means to establish period differences. It has the disadvantage of being complex and inexhaustible so that whatever one tries to pull from it leaves the rest somewhat reluctantly; but no mustering of renaissance topographical keys to lyric can exclude it or treat it lightly.
So eagerly the fiend
O'er bog or steep, through strait, rough, dense, or rare,
With head, hands, wings, or feet pursues his way,
And swims or sinks, or wades, or creeps, or flies:
At length a universal hubbub wild
Of stunning sounds and voices all confus'd
Borne through the hollow dark assaults his ear
With loudest vehemence.

Paradise Lost, 2.947–54

I saw when at his Word the formless Mass,
This world's material mould, came to a heap:
Confusion heard his voice, and wild uproar
Stood rul'd, stood vast infinitude confin'd;
Till at his second bidding darkness fled,
Light shone, and order from disorder sprung:
Swift to thir several Quarters hasted then
The cumbrous Elements, Earth, Flood, Air, Fire,
And this Ethereal quintessence of Heav'n
Flew upward, spirited with various forms,
That roll'd orbicular, and turn'd to Stars
Numberless, as thou seest, and how they move;
Each had his place appointed, each his course,
The rest in circuit walls this Universe.

Paradise Lost, 3.708–21