Lyric Reading Revisited: Passion, Address, and Form in *Citizen*

*Nikki Skillman**

The connotations of lyric reading have always been pejorative. Paul de Man coins the term in "Anthropomorphism and Trope in the Lyric," an essay in which he presents one sonnet by Charles Baudelaire as a "lyrical reading," or rewriting, of another; the "engraved, marmorean gnomic wisdom" of "Correspondences" (the impersonal, "neoclassical" sonnet), he argues, is negated and inverted in the psychological, personal "interiorization" of "Obsession" (254, 257). The latter poem—the lyrical one, with its expressive "pathos," its "pattern of exchange" between interiority and exteriority, and most significantly, its "represented voice" (256, 261)—is, according to de Man, "deluded" and "fallacious"; it renders the unintelligible falsely intelligible and disavows "the materiality of actual history" in favor of "the desired consciousness of eternity" (262). In the very different context of the New Lyric Studies, in which Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins have revived de Man's idea that "lyric is not a genre" at all, but rather a name that designates "the possibility of a future hermeneutics" (261), lyric reading describes the reductive practice through which twentieth- and twenty-first-century critics have come to interpret all kinds of poems ("songs, riddles, epigrams, sonnets, epitaphs, *blasons*, lieder, elegies, marches, dialogues, conceits, ballads, epistles, hymns, odes, eclogues, and monodramas" [Jackson 183]) as if they were intimate utterances of personal feeling.[1] Anthony Reed observes that the default hermeneutic practice that Jackson and Prins describe, the lyric reading that "forms the basis of the common sense of professional [poetry] criticism," is predicated on an exclusionary concept of

*Nikki Skillman teaches modern and contemporary poetry at Indiana University. She is the author of *The Lyric in the Age of the Brain* (2016).

American Literary History, vol. 31, no. 3, pp. 419–457
doi:10.1093/alh/ajz030
Advance Access publication August 1, 2019

"*the* lyric" that is underwritten by racially encoded aesthetic values (the beautiful, the timeless, the universal)—values that have come to shape "what kinds of things we say about poetry, what kinds of things we think poetry says (especially when it says "I"), which techniques we consider significant and worth study, and ultimately which poems are worth serious attention" (101, 98, 101). Lyric reading then is not merely reductive, it is insidious; it is among the mechanisms by which professional literary criticism has "exil[ed] the 'racial,'" as Lindon Barrett puts it, delineating and maintaining hierarchies of the extraliterary and the literary, "the valueless and the valuable" (6, 4).[2]

By raising unconscious habits of lyric reading above the horizon of critical consciousness, however, these theorists have also made it possible to reimagine what lyric, conceived as a hermeneutic, might look like. "Lyric" is a notoriously contentious concept, but it is also one that dies hard; the values condensed in it, however variously they are interpreted, continue to shape the aesthetic practices of poets who revere lyric and poets who despise it. If professional readers cannot summarily abandon lyric, then—as much as some have wanted to—the term now forces the question of whether it is best to treat the concept of lyric as a sufficiently unified, objective, transhistorical (if also evolving) category of literature or as a method of reading. The former approach is defensible on ontological and practical grounds; as Stephanie Burt puts it, "we can find very good evidence that something . . . a lot like the prevalent modern idea of lyric—introspective, expressive, with much attention to sound—existed, if not in all times and all places, then centuries before the New Critics" consolidated and disseminated that modern idea (430). And the term *lyric*, no doubt, can be handy for distinguishing short, patterned, univocal poems from epic poems, dramatic poems, conceptual poems, etc. In practice, however, the process of adjudicating what kinds of subject positions, forms, and feelings merit inclusion in the category of *the* lyric—the process of determining what features qualify a poem "to participate in lyric power" as Rei Terada puts it—requires the maintenance of a constitutive outside that has too often proven to be racially marked (197). As Dorothy Wang points out, despite the historicizing of lyric as a generic concept under the aegis of the New Lyric Studies, with respect to the marginalization of racialized subjects, the "New" Lyric Studies has thus far remained continuous with the old.[3]

Thus, possibilities that inhere in exercising lyric as a hermeneutic warrant fuller exploration not only because such an approach circumvents the tedious critical obligation of judging which poems count as lyrics and which do not, but also because it raises particularly urgent and exciting questions for the practice of poetry

criticism: Is it possible to retain the concept of lyric as a practice of reading while expunging the presumption of definitional stability and "normative lyric subjectivity" as Fred Moten has put it ("'Poetry'")? Might lyric reading be applied deliberately rather than reflexively, particularly to recent experimental works in which lyric "has remained very much on the horizon . . . if only as a model to be resisted or rejected" (Culler, *Theory* 85)? And might lyric reading facilitate, rather than suppress, more inclusive and politically alert practices of analysis? In other words, is it possible to replace the blunt methodological instrument Jackson and Prins, as well as Reed, rightfully deride with a more refined tool? Claudia Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric* (2014)—an avowedly lyric poem that is unrecognizable, by most objective measures, as a lyric poem, and that implies, but never delineates, the potential of "lyric" to remediate the kinds of dehumanizing exclusions in which the professional study of lyric has been complicit—is the ground upon which I will begin to map out a reconceptualized practice of lyric reading.

Citizen appears to distance itself from formal conventions associated with lyric in ways that have become conventional in experimental poetry and in ways that are distinctly its own: it largely rejects the decorative, ritual patterning of language that makes poems mellifluous and memorable; as its notes make clear, it assembles numerous second-hand accounts of racist language and violence rather than representing the experience of an isolated individual; for the most part, it exchanges the first person, "lyric I" for the second person; much of its language takes the form of unlineated prose; much of its content is not linguistic at all, but is composed of visual images. Rankine's lyric is not even short: excluding endnotes, it runs to 162 pages. Indeed, it has been suggested that the book's outsized popular success can be attributed to its unrecognizability to some readers as poetry at all. "[T]he qualities that mark *Citizen* as 'experimental' poetry," Evie Shockley writes, "are precisely the qualities that make it inviting, despite its disturbing subject matter, to a generally poetry-phobic public." The book's combination of prose, lineated verse, and images ranging from reproductions of fine art to screen shots from *YouTube* has inclined reviewers, according to Shockley, to treat the book as anything but poetry. "It is so out of the ordinary for a work of poetry . . . to be the artistic representation of the American zeitgeist that many readers of Claudia Rankine's *Citizen* seem barely able to think of the book within that genre" ("Race, Reception").

Indeed, even those readers who have addressed the question of *Citizen*'s status as lyric seem to find the book especially compelling precisely because it tests the boundaries of genre, "reinventing" lyric in one way or another. Mary Jean Chan, for example, proposes that

the book "reinvents the American lyric" by juxtaposing found text and original writing in a way that positions the book "'at the boundary between public and private'" and by addressing "exigencies of contemporary politics" with a directness that "rejects the seeming timelessness and decontextualization of the lyric" (146, 139, 147, 146). Erica Hunt notes that "in Rankine's reinvention, the lyric is a kind of philosophical writing in which the subject 'theorizes the self' and documents subjectivity at the 'moment of crisis.'" Jonathan Elmer observes that "one of the astonishing things about Rankine's achievement [in *Citizen*] is its re-imagining of the meaning of 'lyric' in our society. Most insistently," he writes, "Rankine uses second-person address" that facilitates the "unstable collapse" of private and public speech (115, 116).

Yet all of these forms of putative reinvention and reimagining are widely precedented in the history of lyric; most of them, in fact, have been theorized as essential to the genre at one point or another. Bonnie Costello, for example, describes the lyric precisely as a "foyer" (xv)—a threshold where the social world, with all of its historical specificity and urgent political exigencies, plays upon the sensibility of the individual (who is anything but "decontextualiz[ed]"). It is difficult to imagine a lyric that does not in some way "theorize the self"; readers of early modern poetry, in particular, have emphasized that "a sophisticated interest in . . . endlessly allusive literary self-fashioning," as Curtis Perry puts it, "finds its characteristic expression in lyric poetry after Petrarch" (264). Jonathan Culler has observed that canonical uses of the second person lay bare the defining pretenses of lyric address, revealing the essence of lyric in its purest and most legible form, and Barbara Johnson, in her own post–de Manian theorizing of lyric apostrophe, makes a central example of an instance of the colloquial "you" that collapses the first and second person, private and public speech, just as Rankine does in *Citizen*.[4]

The exhilarations of the book's iconoclasm, then, might not signify generic hybridity or reinvention so much as remind us of the tendency of "lyric" to absorb its others, including its putative opposites—a tendency that has made it a such a difficult concept for theorists to define. In their introduction to *The Lyric Theory Reader* (2013), Jackson and Prins observe that "The many overlapping models of the lyric in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries contribute to making our current sense of lyric poetry very large, so large that we think we know what we mean when we refer to a poem as *lyric* . . . but also too large to mean anything in particular." This expanse of overlapping models, they note, converges on "the general sense that the lyric is the genre of personal expression" (2). The vagueness of this working definition of lyric as the genre of

Erlebnis, "lived experience, intense, private experience," famously leads René Wellek to propose that we "abandon attempts to define the general nature of the lyric or the lyrical," since "[n]othing beyond generalities of the tritest kind can result from it" (49, 51). Updating Wellek's exhortation that we instead embrace subgeneric categories that are ostensibly more stable and precise than "lyric," Jackson and Prins have lamented the "'super-sizing' of the lyric" (5), claiming that "in practice the lyric is whatever we think poetry is." "A resistance to definition," they conclude, "may be the best basis for definition of the lyric—and of poetry—we currently have" (2).

Though these critics and theorists in some cases acknowledge the "overlapping models" that make the meaning of "lyric" difficult to pin down, in practice, they suppress its contradictions and treat the meaning of the term as relatively unified—as a "general sense" that is monolithic and confining enough that it benefits from "reinvention" (by artists) or requires wholesale replacement (by critics). The elusiveness of lyric, however, is the most alluring aspect of thinking theoretically about it; the many secondary and tertiary, sometimes contradictory associations the term carries with it seem to be bound up with its resiliency and its abiding appeal. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that Rankine's own uses of *lyric* in interviews and essays flaunt its mobility. In some cases, she uses *lyric* and *poetry* interchangeably, focusing on formal features ("repetition, metaphor, elision" ["Art of Poetry" 145]) widely attributed to both, while in other contexts, she frames lyric as something more intangible, as a kind of spirit of subversiveness at the vanishing point of prose: "Poetry allows a fungibility that I cherish," she writes. "It's for me the genre that opens out to the most experimentation in its inherent relationship to voice and performance. When fiction and nonfiction writers experiment, it is always said that they have become more lyrical" ("2014 National Book"). Describing the form of *Citizen* as "an obsessive circling of the subject" that strives to avoid both the coercive force of plot or story and the specious representativeness of the single "moment" enshrined in the "individual poem," Rankine seems to disavow forms of temporality and logic that have been ascribed to narrative and lyric, respectively ("Art of Poetry" 147). Elsewhere what she seems to mean by *lyric* corresponds quite closely to the expressive paradigm that Wellek bemoans; she identifies lyric with "internalized consciousness" and feeling per se ("Art of Poetry" 145). As she explains, "I even added notes to say that the truth, as in the facts, are in the back of the book. I am not interested in narrative, or truth, or truth to power, on a certain level; I am fascinated by affect, by positioning, and by intimacy" (Rankine and Berlant 49). Deemphasizing the book's widely observed interests in

historical and personal "narrative," documentary "truth," and oppositional "truth to power," Rankine professes her fundamental interest in forms of feeling that are secured by intimacy—in a kind of poetry that is overheard rather than declaimed.

This farrago of (sometimes inconsistent) associations attests to the "resistance to definition" that Jackson and Prins describe, but it also reminds us that while there is no consensus in the definition of the lyric, there is in fact great consistency in the cruxes at which problems of lyric definition arise. There is, for example, the pretense of privacy that runs up against the aspiration of lyric to be sung or performed. There is the lyric "I" that is by some accounts transparent and unitary and by others always aware that it is a construction. There are the overlapping conventions whereby the poet writes in propria persona, constructs a fictive speaker, and scripts a score for the reader's utterance, conventions that create the potential for poet, speaker, and reader to collapse into one another. There is the aspiration to evoke the intensity of the present (William Wordsworth's "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings") and also the meditative processing of that feeling at a temporal remove ("emotion recollected in tranquility"). There is the opposition between conceiving of the lyric as a site of receptivity (a foyer, say) and as a "virginal" form that turns away from the social world (Adorno 39). There is the status of the lyric poem as "[t]he most delicate, the most fragile thing that exists" and also the most durable, a Horatian monument more lasting than bronze (37). There is the question of at what threshold the political, public, or megaphonic aspects of a poem foreclose its description as a lyric and if that threshold exists. There are the inextricable claims to inclusive, universalizing abstraction and to the specificity of individual experience. There are the tendencies of the lyric to want to represent experience and also to be an experience, an event. Rankine's comments touch on some of these generative sites of friction, and one can think of others; the cruxes are many, but they are also finite, having been defined by legacies of passionate theoretical debate.

Readers have thus become entangled at such signature junctures in their attempts to define lyric, but these very entanglements invest the term with a conceptual affluence that *poetry* lacks. These entanglements also reveal that the term courses with a dialectical energy that any attempt to reduce "the many overlapping models of the lyric in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries" to a vague consensus—"the genre of personal expression"—fails to describe. If we therefore replace the ontological question of whether *Citizen* is or is not a lyric poem with the pragmatic question of whether it is illuminating to approach the book with this history of entanglements and contested orthodoxies in mind, we begin to enact a kind of lyric

reading that acknowledges the imaginative possibilities and ideological complicities the concept of lyric has embodied without enforcing a unitary conception of *the* lyric upon the text. Whether Rankine writes from the vantage of "postlyric" (Reed's valuable term), or deliberately sets out to hybridize lyric and antilyric sensibilities, or simply interprets *lyric* in such a way that it comfortably encompasses her artistic practice, are not my questions here.[5] My question is whether a reading of *Citizen* that acknowledges the multivalent, sometimes contradictory meanings *lyric* has held for writers and readers yields profitable insights about the book's construction of meaning.

In what follows I explore three recurring sites of debate in lyric theory: the status of the lyric as a site of rarefied feeling, as a mode of discourse that aspires to simulate human presence, and as a metaphorical enclosure. Each focalizes distinct aesthetic and political dimensions of *Citizen*. I argue that Rankine, subverting philosophical and lyric traditions that have marginalized stupefaction in favor of wonder (its more heightened, ostensibly lyrical counterpart), makes unprecedented aesthetic and political claims for the significance of racialized disbelief. I go on to propose that *Citizen* embraces notoriously "embarrassing," quasimystical features widely attributed to lyric—its ambition to conjure the illusion of a speaker's living presence and its tendency to "confuse" the inanimate world with a responsive, animate one—in order to militate against the devaluation of black lives through the use of rhetorical figures that liberally confer life.[6] Finally, I claim that Rankine's book employs intersecting forms, particularly the coalescence of bounded and semibounded shapes within the formally open welter of free verse and montage, to evoke intersecting but distinct experiential contours of black citizenship, asserting sonic, narrative, communal, and curatorial unities to articulate and undermine the effects of racist objectification.

Citizen powerfully illustrates how exploring the boundaries that poets and critics have asserted in distinguishing the lyric from its others can bring into focus the special significance of those boundaries within the context of race. The study of poetry in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, which has tended to position itself in opposition to the especially inclusive field of cultural studies, has obsessed over the question of what separates the genre from other modes of expression.[7] The special position of lyric as an emblem of the elite literary center makes it a particularly valuable heuristic for exploring articulations of power and privilege condensed in discourses of literary aesthetics. Implicit in critical descriptions of what kinds of feelings are especially lyrical or not are tacit assertions of whose feelings are valuable and whose are not; implicit in critical

The special position of lyric as an emblem of the elite literary center makes it a particularly valuable heuristic for exploring articulations of power and privilege condensed in discourses of literary aesthetics.

descriptions of the scope of lyric are assertions of which themes and perspectives belong in the realm of the literary and which do not. Implicit in critical descriptions of where the boundary between the lyric subject and the "outer," historical world obtains are fundamental assertions of what constitutes, and who really counts as, a human subject. Meditating on these questions reveals the urgent matters of value that lyric cruxes comprehend; to explore them is to explore the racial subconscious of *the* lyric tradition and recover how lyric has been multiply and alternatively conceived.

1. Strange Wonder

Cleanth Brooks begins *The Well Wrought Urn* (1947) by defining poetic language in terms of wonder. On the subjects of wonder and irony—the defamiliarizing effects of paradox that are to him the very essence of the poetic—Brooks cites Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who credits Wordsworth's verse with the ability "to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us" (7). Brooks enters a long tradition of identifying special intensities of feeling with lyric poetry, and the particularly close connection he draws between lyric and the first of the passions, as René Descartes famously categorized it, persists to this day; experimental poets of the past several decades, particularly those associated with Language poetry and literary conceptualism, have defined their own artistic forms and purposes against the "mainstream epiphanic lyric" they associate with aesthetic closure, stylistic conservatism, and the deep past of the genre (Swenson and St. John xx).[8]

If "[l]yric poetry has always, among the arts of time, had uniquely potent means to reach out for the effects of wonder," as Philip Fisher proposes, then the breathless raptures of Wordsworth, John Keats, and Percy Bysshe Shelley seem to have cemented and promulgated the association (22). But Brooks insists in his readings of (white, male) poets from William Shakespeare to Alexander Pope that the connection transcends "the Romantic preoccupation with wonder" (7). Concluding his reading of John Donne's "The Canonization," he claims that "almost any insight important enough to warrant a great poem" must be stated by means of paradox, the figure that generates that noble, religious, "supernatural" experience of awe (17–18). "Deprived of the character of paradox with its twin concomitants of irony and wonder," he writes, the poem "unravels into 'facts', biological, sociological, and economic. What happens to

Donne's lovers if we consider them . . . without benefit of the supernaturalism which the poet confers upon them?" he asks. The answer is straightforward: "[they] become Mr. Aldous Huxley's animals, 'quietly sweating, palm to palm'" (18). In Brooks's influential formulation, the elevating force of wonder demarcates the congruent domains of the lyric and the human.

The transformative, humanizing wonder that Brooks has in mind is the variety that the philosophical tradition has emphasized, too. It is the kind of arrest accompanied by the impulse to ask questions that famously leads Socrates to identify wonder as the origin of our highest intellectual instincts—as the precinct, he says, "where philosophy begins and nowhere else" (Theatetus 155d). But the pre-Socratic poet Hesiod offers an account of the wonder that more aptly describes the category of feeling that *Citizen*, and a long tradition of African American poetry, sets out to describe. According to Hesiod's genealogy, Wonder (Thaumas) had three winged daughters: one was the great beauty Iris, the rainbow, the messenger of the Olympian gods. In the business of heavenly annunciation, Iris connects elusive, heavenly causes to the illegible, chaotic welter of life on earth, signaling the translation of immortal knowledge into usable information on a mortal plane. Thaumas's other daughters were the Harpies, personifications of the sudden tempests that imperil sailors at sea, "who on their swift wings," Hesiod writes, "keep pace with the blasts of the winds and the birds" (25). In Hesiod's archaic version of the myth, the Harpies are winged beauties like their sister Iris, but by the Roman and Byzantine eras, they had come to assume the form of monstrous chimeras with the bodies of birds and the faces of women, known for snatching things away—for descending suddenly and absconding with food, livestock, even people.

Iris represents a variety of wonder that underwrites its privileged place in the Western philosophical tradition; "he who said that Iris was the child of Thaumas," Socrates professes, "made a good genealogy" (Plato 155d). But Socrates makes no mention of the Harpies, the figures who represent a kind of wonder that leaves us with less rather than the promise of more, leaves us, that is, in a state of shocked perplexity that seems to suspend and undo the acquisition of knowledge rather than facilitate it. If the appearance of Iris sets us on a path that "begins in delight and ends in wisdom" as Robert Frost said a poem should, the appearance of the Harpies causes a kind of indignant paralysis that makes it difficult to put one foot in front of the other (777). That this subaltern category of wonder, unacknowledged in Socrates's "good genealogy," continues to be regarded as a minor affect is evident in the words we use to describe it—*astonishment*, *stupefaction*, *bewilderment* and *disbelief*—words

that seem to shrink in dignity and spiritual significance beside *awe*, *wonder*, *sublimity*, and *revelation*.

This foundational devaluation of astonishment by virtue of its association with impasse and stasis rather than intellectual progress anticipates its marginalization in the entwined traditions of Western philosophy and literature, while the simultaneous elevation of wonder seems to script in advance a particularly close affiliation between the sudden, ennobling experience of revelation and the most compressed and rarefied of literary genres.[9] Against this backdrop of affective hierarchy, *Citizen* implies the political stakes of ratifying and evoking racialized disbelief, a category of feeling doubly dislocated from triumphant (white) philosophical narratives of personal and cultural advancement in which wonder begets curiosity, inquiry, and finally knowledge. By dwelling in states of paralysis and suspension and evoking such states in her readers, and by framing racialized stupefaction—an experience that debases and enervates rather than elevates—as a "lyric" emotion, *Citizen* tacitly contests the assignment of philosophical and aesthetic worth to feelings that belong to the privileged rather than to the dispossessed.

Rankine returns constantly to stupefaction to evoke the dehumanizing effects of racist address. In one pair of facing pages, a passage presented in the book's candid, unadorned sans serif font nearly fills a verso page, while at the bottom of the recto page, Rankine places an image of Kate Clark's *Little Girl* (2008), a sculpture that grafts the modeled human face of a young girl onto the soft, brown, taxidermied body of an infant caribou (Figure 1). The pages form an incongruous diptych of text and image. While *Little Girl* arrests the reader first, the amplified, barking voice of a therapist who "specializes in trauma counseling" resounds in the vignette, framing the mute significance of Clark's sculpture. In the scene Rankine describes, a new patient approaches the trauma counselor's home at the residential front entrance rather than the entrance at the back normally used by patients; when the door opens, "the woman standing there yells, at the top of her lungs, Get away from my house! What are you doing in my yard?" The vignette concludes not with the sudden opening of consciousness we associate with awe, but with stupefying disorientation:

> It's as if a wounded Doberman pinscher or a German shepherd has gained the power of speech. And though you back up a few steps, you manage to tell her you have an appointment. You have an appointment? she spits back. Then she pauses. Everything pauses. Oh, she says, followed by oh yes, that's right. I am sorry.
>
> I am so sorry, so, so sorry. (18)

Fig. 1. "Little Girl," courtesy of Kate Clark.

In this tableau of impotent actors and sterile ironies, Rankine reserves her only metaphorical language for the image of the therapist as a wounded guard dog "that has gained the power of speech." The sudden appearance of this monstrous, human–animal hybrid, like the violent annunciation of the chimerical Harpies, marks the astonished moment in which "everything pauses" for the stricken speaker.[10] Juxtaposed with the anecdote, the image evokes the vulnerability and particularly the silence of the traumatized would-be patient standing dumbfounded in the "deer grass," just as Rankine identifies the frustrated, sublinguistic sighing and moaning that racist address elicits with an abject animality elsewhere in the book: "To live through the days sometimes you moan like deer," she writes. "Sometimes you sigh . . . What else to liken yourself to but an animal, the ruminant kind?" (59–60). Rankine's pun on *rumination* in its zoological and cognitive senses (of cud-chewing and "revolv[ing], turn[ing] over repeatedly in the mind" ["ruminate"]) marks a strange convergence between states of dehumanization and curiosity. Indeed, Rankine describes her own response to Clark's "deer-like, mythic creature" ("I am invested"), as she puts it, as one of being "transfixed," pierced through. In looking at the sculpture, she explains:

> I was transfixed by the memory that my historical body on this continent began as property no different from an animal. It was a thing hunted and the hunting continues on a certain level. So when someone says, 'I didn't know black women could get cancer,' as was said of me, I see that I am not being seen as human, and that is fascinating to me, even as it is hurtful in a more superficial way. (Rankine and Berlant 49)

Rankine's primary emphasis on perplexity and secondary emphasis on pain in response to this insult point to a pattern of dislocations surrounding the representation of anger in *Citizen*. Given its themes, readers might expect its central passion to be the one most widely credited with the intuitive discernment of injustice. But the speaker of *Citizen* tends to express anger obliquely and in ways that lead back to unresolved confusion. In *Citizen*'s account of Serena Williams's anger, the speaker recalls her response to a series of bad calls by a line judge in the 2004 US Open: "No one could understand what was happening. Serena . . . began wagging her finger and saying 'no, no, no,' as if by negating the moment she could propel us back into a legible world" (27). Though she recalls having "felt outrage for Serena" (28), in her interpretation of the event, the speaker stresses her own experience of being propelled out of a legible world and the reverberating forms of "[shock]" that Williams's body, with her "black sneaker boots" and "dark mascara"—"graphite" against the "sharp white background" of the professional tennis world—generates (26). The perplexity of the audience anticipates the speaker's summary statements about the scene, which interpret Williams's outrage as an effect of a more profound astonishment. Rankine asserts a fundamental connection between the hierarchal order of the US racial imaginary and the state of "disbelief"; "it is difficult," she writes, "not to think that if Serena lost context by abandoning all rules of civility, it could be because her body, trapped in a racial imaginary, trapped in disbelief—code for being black in America—is being governed not by the tennis match she is participating in but by a collapsed relationship that had promised to play by the rules" (30). Rankine stresses that the tennis court provides a crucial frame of reference for Williams's disbelief, for the court is a space governed by transcendental rules purporting to maintain fairness but upon which the racial biases of the world beyond its rectilinear frame supervene nonetheless. The court is a figure for the ostensibly inclusive space of US citizenship, where the expectation of fairness and equality, maintained as assiduously as the illusion of fairness in sports, turns out to be a "trap." While anger is undoubtedly among the speaker's responses to that illusion's exposure, *Citizen* returns constantly to the feeling of being propelled into an illegible world, where problems of interpretation, signaled by the book's surfeit of questions, proliferate.

Questions continually mark the limits of the knowable that emerge in those astonishing moments when the magnitude of historical injustice comes suddenly and ephemerally close. "You don't know," Rankine writes, describing the experience of hearing a racial insult coming from a friend:

> You don't know what she means. You don't know what response she expects from you. . . . For all your previous understandings, suddenly incoherence feels violent. You both experience this cut, which she keeps insisting is a joke . . . and like any other injury, you watch it rupture along its suddenly exposed suture. (42).

This unintelligibility feels to the speaker like the fresh tearing open of an old wound, an "incoherence" that she imagines as a violent physical strike against the body. Elsewhere in *Citizen*, as if in reference to the derivation of *astonishment* from the Latin for *thunderstruck* (*extonāre*), the poet writes that "certain moments send adrenaline to the heart, dry out the tongue, and clog the lungs. Like thunder they drown you in sound, no, like lightning they strike you across the larynx. . . . After it happened I was at a loss for words." In this instance, the speaker has in mind recollected moments in which a "close friend who early in your friendship, when distracted, would call you by the name of her black housekeeper." In the wake of her recollection, the speaker asks herself a series of questions: "you never called her on it (why not?) and yet, you don't forget. If this were a domestic tragedy, and it might well be, this would be your fatal flaw—your memory, vessel of your feelings. Do you feel hurt because it's the 'all black people look the same' moment, or because you are being confused with another after being so close to this other?" (7). Such interpretive questions—about how to construe racist address, about the distortions of the racial imagination, about the limits of interracial intimacy in the "domestic tragedy" of American social life, and so on—form a secondary phase of questioning that tends to follow the spare questions that immediately mark moments of disbelief in *Citizen*: "What did he just say? Did she really just say that? Did I hear what I think I heard? Did that just come out of my mouth, his mouth, your mouth?"; "What did you say?"; "What did you say? . . . What did you say?"; "What do you mean? // Exactly, what do you mean?" (9, 14, 41, 47).

Though *Citizen*'s political convictions—its opposition to white supremacist ideology, its condemnation of law enforcement and legal institutions for perpetuating the legacies of the American slave state, among others—are clear, and though the moments of dehumanization Rankine describes often involve forms of certainty (the basic recognition that one's diminished worth has been asserted, for example), such moments are in *Citizen* defined most consistently by a sense of the unknown. If lyric has often been opposed to rhetoric on epistemological grounds—on the basis that states of uncertainty (Keats's "negative capability," W. B. Yeats's "quarrel with the self," W. H. Auden's "clear expression of mixed feeling") are less suited

to political expression than states of conviction—*Citizen* demonstrates the powerful political force that can inhere in forms of doubt.

By acknowledging the affiliation between wonder and lyric that practitioners, theorists, and detractors of the genre have widely, though by no means universally observed, we derive more potent means to perceive how *Citizen* summons stupefaction from the philosophical and aesthetic margins and leverages the unanswered and unanswerable question to political ends. Viewing *Citizen* in light of this affiliation, however, does more than prime us to discern the book's elevation of racialized astonishment to a position of prominence and appreciate the challenges such elevation poses to hierarchies of value embedded in lyric poetry's association with heightened states of feeling. By focusing unapologetically on this contestable feature of lyric, we are also uniquely positioned to perceive *Citizen*'s unique formal and rhetorical contributions to a long line of American poems that have sought to evoke the failure of reason in the face of racist logic.

The uses to which varieties of wonder have been put in the tradition of African American poetry—from Phillis Wheatley's leveraging of her own status as "one of the most interesting curiosities" in American literature (Loggins 92), to Countee Cullen's disbelief, in "Yet Do I Marvel," that a just God could "bid" the black poet sing his humanity to a deaf culture (5), to Langston Hughes's use of "wonder" in ways that connect racialized states of sudden amazement and sustained perplexity in *Fields of Wonder* (1947) and *I Wonder as I Wander* (1956), and beyond—deserve ampler exploration than I can offer here.[11] The unique contribution of *Citizen* to that tradition, however, becomes clearer alongside its antecedents that have used stupefaction to mark instances of racial annunciation but have represented the feeling much as the histories of philosophy and lyric poetry suggest they should: as small, minor, peripheral, or otherwise incidental. Amiri Baraka's "The Heir of the Dog," for example, adopts conventions of epigrammatic light verse to describe the moment when a black subject is stricken, as Rankine puts it, "with the full force of [his] American positioning" (*Citizen* 14). Befitting the moment of shock it describes, the poem is a single sentence; it describes "How amazed the crazed / negro looked" upon learning "that Animal Rights had / a bigger budget / than the NAACP!" (Baraka, *S O S* 337). The poem's subversive ironies are intricately concentrated, beginning with the punning of the title that overlays the subhuman status blackness supposedly inherited from animality in the American context, the physical self-destruction that can emerge as a symptom of such cultural devaluation, and the possibility that the exclamatory poem itself might function homeopathically, easing racial dysphoria (however temporarily) by articulating

it. But the dark humor and compactness of the five-line poem also recall the connection Sianne Ngai draws between "cuteness"—that most digestible of aesthetics—and two "subgenres of poetry that occasionally overlap": "the lyric" and "the imagist and post-imagist traditions of poems in plain or colloquial language centered on small everyday things" (70). The "The Heir of the Dog" sits normatively within neither category. It is not particularly expressive of the speaker's interiority (if that is what makes a lyric a lyric), and it directs its focus toward a feeling person, not an inanimate object. Still, the poem's stylistic cuteness—its formal minimalism, clever punning, and internal rhyme (rhyme that, incidentally, suggests a causal connection between the man's "amazed" response to injustice and his status as an existentially "crazed" person)—contributes to its assimilability, even disposability, by imputing smallness to the experience it describes.

Cullen's "Incident," also tonally distant from *Citizen*, likewise positions racialized disbelief in an apparently minor aesthetic frame. The poem begins with the euphoria of its child speaker "riding in old Baltimore, / Heart-filled, head-filled with glee"; amid the exhilarating flow of new sights and sounds, he notices a boy staring at him:

> Now I was eight and very small,
> And he was no whit bigger,
> And so I smiled, but he poked out
> His tongue, and called me, 'Nigger.'
>
> I saw the whole of Baltimore
> From May until December;
> Of all the things that happened there
> That's all that I remember. (13)

If, for Brooks, the awakening of the mind in wonder entails "the surprise, the revelation which puts the tarnished familiar world in a new light," here the revelatory world is tarnished irrevocably by the astonishing moment (7). If, for Wordsworth, the revelation of the past in a sublime aspect is a state "In which the heavy and the weary weight / Of all this unintelligible world, / Is lightened" (132), here the moment when one's "self self," as Rankine puts it, comes into contact with one's "historical self" confers, irrevocably, the burden of unintelligibility (*Citizen* 14). "Incident" thus perfectly inverts the ennobling expectations of heightened lyric feelings such as awe in order to evoke instead the dehumanizing force of astonishment in the moment of racist address—and, significantly, its endless psychic aftermath. The event the poem describes is profound, a verbal

counterpart of the "primal scene" of racial violence that Saidiya Hartman presents in her reading of Aunt Hester's beating in *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845)—an act of violence that "dramatizes the origin of the subject" (3). The present tense in the final line—the present tense of a traumatized adult with a still-obliterated memory, who likely recognizes in this experience a harbinger of other "incidents" to come—asserts the formative significance of the moment. Yet the title of the poem, among other things, cuts ironically against the psychological magnitude of the event it describes. As Rachel Blau DuPlessis points out, "Because [the word *incident*] means 'something contingent upon or related to something else,' the title . . . links the subjects of the enounced (two boys) and the narrated incident inside the poem with the subjectivity of enunciation, creating only a 'minor' poem" (17). The sources of the short poem's emotional power lie in its constant reminders that the "subjectivity of enunciation" belongs to a child: the austerity of the poem's language, which disavows Cullen's signature ornamentations and allusions to suggest a child's expressive limits; the conspicuously innocent form of the poem, with its perfect rhymes and metronomic rhythm that reproduce the familiar, reassuring cadences of children's verse; the poem's many forms of tightly contained balance that are ruptured when a smile is met by a slur. Cullen's moving choices to adopt a child's perspective and craft a precious formal compactness are sources of the poem's concentrated force. They also generate a poem whose scale befits a feeling doubly marginalized as both a minor, negative affect and a specifically racial one.

Though these poems possess rhetorical and aesthetic power by means too nuanced to detail here, their emphatic smallness casts an aura of the diminutive around the feeling of having one's human worth diminished or denied. By contrast, *Citizen*'s relentless repetition, on a book-length scale, of stupefying moments of violent racial annunciation, and rumination on such moments in an endless, open process of questioning and reinterpretation, defy the minor status to which philosophical and critical descriptions of lyric feeling have conscripted them. Rankine insists that experiences of disbelief "—code for being black in America—" are as significant to the formation of subjectivity and as worthy of sustained poetic meditation as any spiritually transformative encounter configured in the canonical lyric tradition. *Citizen* claims an unprecedented scale of significance for racialized astonishment and the kinds of encounters (for example, microaggressions) out of which it arises, leveraging the mobility and conflicted history of lyric to build an aesthetic more commensurate, in its scale and historical ambition, with the depths of personal and cultural meaning Rankine ascribes to such moments of painful inscrutability. Affirming the status of racial stupefaction

as a lyric emotion while defying her antecedents' containment of it within narrow formal limits, Rankine thus embodies in *Citizen* Audre Lorde's conviction that "We can train ourselves to respect our feelings and to transpose them into a language so they can be shared. And where that language does not yet exist, it is our poetry which helps to fashion it" (37–38).

2. Life and Lyric Address in *Citizen*

If Rankine makes a case, in *Citizen*, for the political importance of abiding and even inducing the kind of violent "incoherence" that is for her a defining phenomenological feature of black citizenship, astonishment nonetheless leads her back constantly to conditions of emptiness, absence, silence, and erasure. Reminding us that to astonish is, in a sense, to turn to stone—"to deprive of sensation, as by a blow; to stun, paralyse, deaden, stupefy" ("astonish")—*Citizen* responds to the existential danger astonishment poses by embracing two nettlesome, inextricable features widely attributed to lyric. Both involve the lyric's tendency, through simulated utterance, to project human life and social responsiveness where it does not truly exist. The "anthropophanic" ambition of lyric poetry to conjure human presence, as Allen Grossman puts it—its creation of the illusion that the speakerly or authorial self really inhabits the same here and now as the reader—finds its complement in the widely observed habit of lyric poems to foster the reciprocal illusion of a responsive, copresent audience to which it calls out (232). In the case of the latter, the signature convention of apostrophe, in which dead, inanimate, or absent entities are addressed as if they were present and listening, betrays the fundamental tendency of lyric, Culler argues, "to involve the universe in its affects and concerns"—to confer animacy upon inanimate things through acts of simulated speech or singing (Culler, "The Lyric").

In contrast to the deadening astonishment that Rankine, like Hesiod, represents as a violent physical strike, lyric conferrals of life have often been represented through genial metaphors of touch. In *Don't Let Me Be Lonely: An American Lyric* (2004), Rankine alludes to Paul Celan's famous declaration that he could not see any fundamental difference between a handshake and a poem—between the physical touch of recognition and the contact the poem facilitates between writing and reading subjects that are in fact, in most cases, inexorably separated by time and space:

> The handshake is our decided ritual of both asserting (I am here) and handshaking over (here) a self to another. Hence the

> poem is that—Here. I am here. This conflation of the solidity of presence with the offering of this same presence perhaps has everything to do with being alive. (130)

Rankine's premise that a "solidity of presence" is desirable and achievable in a poem accepts the animism that, for detractors, is one of the most embarrassing credences of the expressive paradigm. The proposition that lyric speech—text masquerading as voice—implies the presence of an actual speaker is for de Man (and at least a century of avant-garde agitators against the genre) the "deluded," mystical essence of lyric as a generic concept (262). It is this aspect of the lyric—its willingness to pretend that human consciousness exists where it does not, and its belief in a kind of necromancy whereby "[solid]," living selves are conjured from the lifeless matter of language—that makes the issue of human recognition central to recent accounts of lyric. According to Burt, "if you want to believe in 'lyric,' in the most important current senses for the term, you have to believe that there are persons too" (438).

Burt is addressing poststructuralist critiques of lyric subjectivity on ontological grounds and gesturing toward the ethical dangers of *not* believing that persons exist—of abandoning foundational premises of human value on which conceptualizations of lyric have historically depended.[12] But the complicity of Enlightenment humanism in defining white humanity against black subhumanity, in enshrining white freedom through black enslavement, deeply complicates the trope of lyric presence in the context of African American literary aesthetics. Recent work on experimental poetry by African Americans has dovetailed with the interests of critical race studies in imagining alternatives to "the liberal humanist figure of Man as the master-subject" and in "transform[ing] . . . the human into a heuristic model" as opposed to "an ontological fait accompli" (Weheliye 8); Reed in particular has shown how innovative black poets have used avant-garde forms to represent "a disruption of unmarked notions of the human" embedded in the expressive model of the lyric (8). In light of these discourses, the trope of enunciated presence—"Here. I am here."—provokes "the question of whether the performance of subjectivity . . . always and everywhere reproduces what lies before it" (Moten, *In the Break* 4). It likewise calls into question the very desirability of recognition and empathy, readerly experiences that much avowedly lyric poetry has sought to elicit. Representations of racial suffering risk courting "narcissistic identification that obliterates the other," as Hartman puts it, thereby perpetuating the negations and obliterations that are the source of such suffering. From this perspective, the impulse to offer "proof of black sentience" risks reinforcing the terms and premises of exclusionary

conceptions of the human rather than rejecting them tout court (4, 3).[13]

Tacit in many critical accounts of experimental poetry by African Americans is the conviction that by expressing racial trauma by means of the lyric voice—a creation built by an exclusionary literary tradition to facilitate empathy and identification among inhabitants of the center—the poet at the margin asks to join rather than chooses to resist, summoning (hierarchal) forms of empathy that enable the appropriation of black suffering and threaten to neutralize its radical potential. The result is an apparent double-bind: embrace "expression" and consolidate the power of the center to define and confer human value or disclaim the appeal for human recognition and move, now doubly marginalized, to the experimental fringe where agitation can be purer. But Rankine's apostrophic "you" reveals the extent to which aesthetic militancy against voice has focused on the intransitivity of "expression" rather than the transitivity of "address," overlooking the political affordances of the latter. As a work that takes ubiquitous institutional and personal failures to recognize humanity as its central subject, and that investigates the role of language in conferring, diminishing, and denying personhood, *Citizen* thus proves to be centrally preoccupied with yet another obsession of poets and theorists who have set out to define the nature of lyric: the relationship between animism and structures of address.

Johnson identifies an authorial longing for animation—indeed, *reanimation*—with lyric per se. She observes that through the rhetorical figure of apostrophe, a device that "has come to seem almost synonymous with the lyric voice," lyric speakers in effect say to their addressees, "I will animate you so that you will animate, or reanimate, me" (529, 532). It is when the speaker's own sense of animation has been cast into doubt that the lyric, fundamentally vocative in spirit, comes into being, shoring up speakerly presence by ginning up an audience to bear witness to it. Diverging from paradigmatic uses of apostrophe by male Romantic poets—Shelley, for example, calling out to the West Wind to affirm his living presence and replenish his enervated spirit—women poets, Johnson argues, have found unprecedented and intricate uses for apostrophe in writing specifically about abortion. Claiming that the rhetoric of law and the poetics of apostrophe alike "[bring] to a state of explicit uncertainty the fundamental difficulty of defining personhood in general," Johnson posits "an overdetermined relation between the theme of abortion and the problematization of structures of address" (535, 536). Rankine's own racial themes—connected very differently, but likewise constitutively, to contingent cultural constructions of the human—bear a similarly profound connection to apostrophe as a rhetorical figure. Indeed, they focalize "the connection between

figurative language and questions of life and death, of who will wield and who will receive violence in a given human society" (Johnson 529). While traditional apostrophe mourns irrevocable and often inevitable losses—of childhood, of the beloved, of the dead—Rankine enlists apostrophe to assuage personal losses enacted by a contingent social order, reanimating selves diminished specifically by the dispossessions of racist address.

Use of the second person to address the reader directly has long been a feature of poems claimed by the canonical lyric tradition, as forceful deployments of the "you" by Keats, Walt Whitman, John Ashbery, and many others demonstrate. Culler proposes that Keats's "This Living Hand"—which ends with the poet's outstretched hand asserting his presence ("see, here it is— / I hold it towards you" [365]) and insisting that the reader recognize the illusion as real—consummately demonstrates how lyric address compels us to believe in its own acknowledged falsehoods. "The poem," Culler writes, "predicts this mystification [in which we believe the speakerly self is *actually* present], dares us to resist it, and shows that its power is irresistible" (*Pursuit* 154). Though Keats exercises this irresistible power of direct address in the face of his own imminent death—"This Living Hand" is the final fragment of his oeuvre—Rankine deploys the apostrophic "you" under conditions of spiritual diminution and effacement that rise to the level of physiological affliction: "a friend once told you," she writes, "there exists the medical term—John Henryism—for people exposed to stresses stemming from racism. They achieve themselves to death trying to dodge the buildup of erasure" (*Citizen* 11). By framing the site of enunciation in terms of death and erasure—by beginning the book with her speaker "too tired even to turn on any . . . devices" and ending it with remembered words that hold her "in a chokehold, every part roughed up, the eyes dripping"—Rankine situates her speaker in a position of extreme enervation that verges on lifelessness. It is this precarious state that necessitates the resuscitating explosion of apostrophe onto a book-length scale, with a dilating "you" that ranges from the expansive and indiscriminate to the tightly focalized (5, 156). Beyond striving to reanimate the speaker depleted by verbal and nonverbal racist assaults, Rankine's capacious "you" also uses the symbolic, life-giving power of apostrophe to ironize the default attribution of fully human status to white citizens and exerts the mystificatory power of the vocative to animate (white) objects of address deadened by complicity, complacency, and the distortions of a racist imaginary.[14]

In her use of the direct "you" in the script for "In Memory of James Craig Anderson," for example, Rankine overtly connects "figure[s] of speech" and tacit hierarchies of racial subjecthood and

objecthood (95). The pickup truck that Deryl Dedmon used to murder Anderson comes to stand for whiteness itself, "the crown standing in for the kingdom," the speaker explains. While the crown and kingdom suggest a specifically racial hierarchal order, Rankine's ventriloquism of a rote, textbook definition of metonymy suggests the limits, perhaps even the complicities of such figuration. Personifying the truck-as-metonym, however, enables her to explore the fundamental attributions of animacy and agency embedded in that racial order:

> The pickup truck is a condition of darkness in motion. It makes a dark subject. You mean a black subject. No, a black object.
>
> Then the pickup is beating the black object to the ground and the tire marks the crushed organs. . . . (93–94)

Rankine initially elevates the truck to human status, enacting the default attribution of personhood to white subjects ("The pickup is human in this predictable way," she writes [94]); this contingent elevation of white subjecthood yields the semantic awkwardness of "the pickup . . . beating the black object." But when Anderson's name first appears in the script, demanding authorial and readerly recognition of the very literal, irremediable fact of his death, Rankine drains the truck of the human power she has conferred on it and exchanges personification for apostrophe:

> James Craig Anderson is dead. The pickup truck is a figure of speech. It is the crown standing in for the kingdom. Who told you it was a crown? Did we tell you the pickup was as good as home? You are so young, Dedmon. You were so young.
>
> James Craig Anderson is dead. What ails you, Dedmon? (95)

We might expect Rankine to orient the animating potential of direct address toward Anderson, to bring the innocent victim (symbolically) back to life. But to face the attenuation of Dedmon's humanity in his act of racist violence (attenuation we come to hear ringing in the sounds of his name) and to summon him, as an avatar of white supremacy, from the realm of the unaccountable to the accountable, are more urgent aspirations of her address. At stake in the questions Rankine poses to him—"What ails you, Dedmon?"—is not just James Craig Anderson's death but the ongoing history of the destruction of black life.

Rankine draws the reader into this economy of contingent humanity in the script for a Situation video about Hurricane Katrina.

Interspersed among quotations collected from CNN's coverage of the crisis, Rankine embeds refrains in the second person that suggest both the astonished exclamations of witnesses and a direct authorial rejoinder to pitiless journalists and viewers, calling them to responsibility through address—"Have you seen their faces?," "Have you seen their faces?," "Did you see their faces?" (83, 85, 86). Alongside these questions, which are set off by white space as if to address the reader in a series of asides, Rankine presents Toyin Odutola's portrait *Uncertain yet Reserved* (2012), enlarged into prominence across two pages—an image of a man's light-dappled black face cocked up, eyes glistening with tears, looking directly at the reader. Like Odutola's portrait, Rankine's frontal questions call for the recognition of "the reality of a person"—the reality and suffering of the speaker and of the Katrina victims (Odutola). But as apostrophes in a nominally lyric context, they also imply that the object of their address—here, the reader—might be like the indifferent natural objects of Romantic lyric that must be brought to life and *made to care* in response to the speaker's psychic needs. In this sense, the apostrophe suggests the inhumanity of the indifferent or inured reader and longingly confers the potential for vital (ethical) responsiveness where it does not yet exist.

Rankine represents dehumanizing address as part of an enervating din that pulses constantly in the background of black citizenship, a kind of dispossessing language that necessitates recourse to the forms of address by which lyric speakers, imputing living human presence even to absent and nonhuman audiences, "repossess their lost selves" (532). In "Anthropomorphism and Trope in the Lyric," the seminal essay in which de Man both defines and maligns "lyrical reading," he derogates the anthropomorphism of the lyric as a kind of "confusion" (241)—"the *taking* of something" (a literary trope, the illusion of voice), "for something else that can then be assumed to be *given*" (a real voice, marking the presence of a specific person). In *Citizen*, however, this confusion of the virtual and the real pointedly answers Americans' historical conception of black subjects as chattel. The past is unalterable, but at a symbolic level at least, the power relations that underpin that historical injustice are pliable, and the dehumanizations of racist address can be remediated specifically through the reciprocal construction of literary voice.

Juxtaposed with the therapist vignette, for example, the image of the dead animal upon which Kate Clark grafts the expressive face of a human child evokes both the vulnerable, silent patient *and* the therapist whom Rankine characterizes as a "wounded" animal upon which the distinctly human "power of speech" has been surreally endowed. The diptych thus makes the speaker and the therapist into distorted reflections of one another. In addition to suggesting that

both are dehumanized by the therapist's racist speech, Rankine also implies that the therapist's prejudice is itself a kind of psychological wound, an impairment she suffers within a racial imaginary. But even as the vignette dramatizes the false perception of the human as less than human, it reciprocally corrects that dehumanization through the illusion of speech—the marker of human presence that asserts, in Rankine's terms, "I am here." With brutal irony, the trauma counselor's potentially healing voice viciously paralyzes and silences the patient, but the patient, her own voice detectable only as indirect statement (she barely "manage[s] to tell" the therapist she has an appointment), in turn regains her "power of speech" through the act of simulated utterance. She becomes the "speaker" of the text itself. She pointedly speaks over the therapist's withering address by representing the therapist in turn as an animal that in its blind violence and obedience to its training falls short of claiming anything that resembles the ideals of human freedom and accountability. Here Rankine's assertion of voice betrays a conviction she inherits from James Baldwin: "The endless struggle to achieve and reveal and confirm a human identity, human authority, contains, for all its horror, something very beautiful" (qtd. in *Citizen* 128). *Citizen* thus claims clear ethical motives for committing itself to the embarrassing, "deluded," "nostalgic" pretenses for which de Man disparages lyric, marshalling its tendency to extravagantly confer life against the power of racist perception and address to stupefy, silence, and otherwise obliterate the self (262).

3. Intersecting Forms

The association of lyric with rarefied states of feeling such as wonder is by no means universal, and its association with the illusion of human presence, we have seen, is by no means universally valued. Both associations nonetheless intersect, however tangentially, with the idea of lyric as "the genre of personal expression" (Jackson and Prins 2). The exclusion of form from this "general sense," as Prins and Jackson put it, of what lyric poetry is at once bespeaks the vast range of short and long, lineated and unlineated, sonically patterned and unaffectedly plainspoken poems that the term *lyric* has come to encompass and belies the significance of form to the long history of lyric poetry's self-conception as a genre. That history continues to be inscribed in the discourses that surround lyric, which return obsessively to the metaphor of enclosure. In contrast to *poetry*, which is capacious enough to encompass the grand scale of historical epic, the multiple perspectives of dramatic verse, and formally open literary experimentation in the legacy of radical

modernism, formulations of lyric have been especially prone to bringing metaphors of bounded spaces to bear in framing its thematic, formal, and epistemological scope. Spatializing both the lyric text and the subjectivity it "contains," these metaphors often draw congruent boundaries between the literary and extraliterary, subject and object, self and world. Affiliating these ubiquitous metaphors of aesthetic and ontological closure with the elitism of lyric, Terada observes that "the circularity of lyric has made it seem the most literary corner of literature" (197).

Indeed, criticism of *the* lyric on the grounds that it is a privileged domain of high literary discourse more accessible to some than others—and that it has thus focalized its academic stewards' "'anxiety about corruption, about containment, about penetration'" (Barrett 132)—consistently finds expression in terms of spatial exclusion and confinement.[15] Claude McKay's implicit comparison of the sonnet to the "cultured hell" of America itself (McKay 153), for example, mobilizes what Caroline Levine has described as an ingrained "homology between the bounded wholeness of the lyric poem . . . and the bounded wholeness of a nation" (25); McKay figures himself as a rebel who has penetrated the "walls" of the sonnet/state, defiantly asserting his presence as a black poet in the hostile territory of an exclusionary lyric tradition (153). Applying the conventional spatial metaphor of lyric encapsulation to the habits of reception that surround lyric, Reed defines the prescriptions of "racialized reading" as a kind of "hermeneutic enclosure" (98).

At stake in the concept of lyric enclosure are thus some of the most urgent political questions that have bedeviled lyric theory and that have made the genre a glaring target of political critique. McKay's use of the sonnet form to inveigh against the exclusions of the literary tradition in English is itself evidence, however, that forms do not possess essential ideologies. As Mutlu Blasing, among others, has stressed, radical techniques need not signify oppositional politics: the "ahistorical alignment of given technical strategies with moral, metaphysical, or political values" in the context of postmodern American poetry "is a historically specific confusion" (2). Moving beyond the context of poetic form per se, Levine proposes that unities—the concept, the argument, the community—can also confound and subvert the repressive enclosures that seek to contain them, even as "the valuing of aesthetic unity implies a broader desire to . . . dominate the plurality and heterogeneity of experience," or worse, implies "political control and totality, ranging from fascist wholeness to liberal assimilation" (25, 31). She therefore proposes that even though we often refer to "the form" (singular) of a poem, we might do better to understand literary texts "as inevitably plural

in their forms," staging competing arrangements of power and value in superimposed geometries (40).

Rankine deploys a range of intersecting forms that demonstrate the limitations and possibilities of shapelessness and enclosure alike for representing racial experience. Special attention to instances of wholeness reveals how bounded shapes cut across and complicate the open, deconstructive, modernist techniques that have made the poem so recognizably experimental, thereby creating more layered affective and political evocations of lives violated by racial injustice. If avant-garde rhetoric tends to represent a resistance to closure as the natural embodiment of utopian iconoclasm, *Citizen* demonstrates how the formation of wholes working inside and in tandem with fragmentation can produce an integrated political and poetic project out of forms that have too often been configured as politically opposed. *Citizen*'s hermetic enclosures and semibounded shapes, in concert with its montage effects and other open aesthetic features, exemplify the complementary operation, within a single text, of what Shockley has called "black aesthetic*s*, plural"; the book combines a disparate array of unitary and fragmented, collective and hermetic, expressive and illegible modes that register Rankine's "wrangling with competing expectations or desires" for the representation of blackness in literary art (*Renegade* 9).

In the lineated sections of *Citizen*, for example, Rankine's choice of free verse recalls Black Arts poets' use of the form to signal iconoclasm with respect to exclusionary literary institutions: "what we *want* is *vers libre*—free verse," writes Amiri Baraka, "Never having been that, *free*, we want it badly. For black people *freedom* is our aesthetic and our ideology. *Free Jazz, Freedom Suite, Tell Freedom, Oh Freedom!* And on!" [*Tales* 119]). But as is often the case in *Citizen*, closure intrudes upon shapelessness; section 7, for example, begins with free verse lines whose involuted repetitions of "you" exemplify, on a minute scale, the "obsessive circling of the subject" that the grand scale of the book-length poem likewise embodies:

> Some years there exists a wanting to escape—
> you, floating above your certain ache—
> still the ache coexists.
> Call that the immanent you—
>
> You are you even before you
> grow into understanding you
> are not anyone, worthless,
> not worth you.

> Even as your own weight insists
> you are here, fighting off
> the weight of nonexistence. (139)

The opening two lines—metrically affiliated, yoked by slant rhyme—mark a shift in tonal register from the vignettes that precede and follow it, a shift that is difficult to describe in terms that do not refer, in one way or another, to spatial terms associated specifically with lyric: with the vertical axis along which elevation and transcendence ("floating above your certain ache") are opposed to the gravitational pull of worldly suffering ("the weight of nonexistence") and with the horizontal axis along which the inner, authentic self (the "immanent you") is opposed to the "worthless" you defined from without. But in addition to these horizontal and vertical spatial metaphors, the lines use the formal enclosures of rhyme (escape/ache/weight) and particularly repetition (ache/ache, you/you/You/you/you/you/you) to suggest the feeling of inescapable, existential exposure; they at once evoke the "you" that reverberates in the mind of an accosted victim ("What are you doing in my yard?") and insistently assert the presence of the subject in the face of dehumanizing erasure. Like the relentless repetitions of racist address in the book's vignettes—repetitions that have been said to produce a "claustrophobic" effect within the book as a whole—such local repetitions make the confinements of racial, historical being felt through form.[16]

This claustrophobia extends to Rankine's configuration of consciousness in terms of storage and involution, as a balance of static containment and dynamic circularity. In one passage, she represents racial trauma both as solid freight amassed or collected within the perimeter of "your flesh" and as an incapacitating whorl of relentless self-questioning:

> The world is wrong. You can't put the past behind you. It's buried in you; it's turned your flesh into its own cupboard. Not everything remembered is useful but it all comes from the world to be stored in you. Who did what to whom on which day? Who said that? She said what? What did he just do? Did she really just say that? He said what? What did she do? Did I hear what I think I heard? Did that just come out of my mouth, his mouth, your mouth? (63)

The flesh—particularly the head—becomes a kind of "cupboard" where these interminable questions are "stored" rather than solved or resolved, accumulating ever-increasing weight. "The head's ache evaporates into a state of numbness, a cave of sighs," Rankine

writes; "Over the years you lose the melodrama of seeing yourself as a patient. The sighing ceases; the headaches remain" (62). If, for Seamus Heaney echoing Shelley, the lyric poem triumphantly "[makes] possible a fluid and restorative relationship between the mind's centre and its circumference" (11–12), Rankine's lyric peers out toward the vacant horizons at the outer limits of the astonished black speaker's understanding, replacing the untroubled touchstone of the "mind's centre" with a cavernous space in which interminable questions resound. De Man derogates the lyric's archetypal "image of the subject's presence . . . as a spatial enclosure, room, or crypt in which the voice echoes as in a cave," its tendency to imagine "the body as the *container* of the voice (or soul, heart, breath, consciousness, spirit, etc.) that it exhales" (256). Rankine, however, reimagines the vale of soul-making as a "cave of sighs," unabashedly invoking this history of lyric metaphors as she describes the aching of consciousness itself under the strain of constant uncertainty. In turn, she wonders how the self, forged under such psychic conditions, takes its shape from them; ". . . feelings are what create a person," she writes, "something unwilling, something wild vandalizing whatever the skull holds. Those sensations form a someone. The headaches begin again" (61).

The evocation of painful psychic confinement, however, is only one use to which Rankine puts formal enclosure in *Citizen*. She uses other kinds of bounded shapes to illustrate the potential of wholes—particularly the wholes of minoritarian solidarity—to subvert the repressive, exclusionary force of dominant, majoritarian bodies. Rankine's "you" is in some ways consummately open, functioning differently depending on the reader's position, but it also summons into visibility an inexorable boundary between readers who have been subjected to racial dehumanizations and who therefore recognize their own experiences reflected in the anecdotes and those who have not. This boundary inverts the conventional directionality of literary inclusion and exclusion in which the universal reader is assumed to be white; although Rankine encourages identification across that boundary, it is nonetheless absolute. Her "you" thus summons into self-awareness a community of readers who have been subjected to racist diminution, a virtual collective within which imaginative solidarity can form. The coalescence of this virtual collective finds thematic configuration in moments of silent, protective community that arise spontaneously in *Citizen*, particularly in the face of racial threats: a distraught mother behind whom a group of men in the subway "stand like a fleet of bodyguards . . . like newly found uncles and brothers" (17); a father whose watchful gaze "envelops" the play of a throng of neighborhood children, so that "You . . . do not want to leave the scope of his vigilance" (149); a

"forsaken" man with an empty seat beside him on the train, who "turns to you. And as if from inside your own head you agree that if anyone asks you to move, you'll tell them we are traveling as a family" (131, 133).

Perhaps *Citizen*'s most distinctive assertion of community through formal enclosure is the book's digestion of the experiences of many people within a monologic structure. Rankine explicitly thanks "everyone who generously shared their stories" in the book's notes, yet in all but a few cases the figure who narrates the episodic vignettes, lineated verse, and essays that comprise the textual content of *Citizen* is remarkably consistent (169). Rankine generally suppresses particularities of voice and circumstance that would mark her sources' nonidentity with the suburban, academic speaker whose specificities of circumstance closely resemble her own. At once creating and exposing the illusion that *Citizen* represents the experience of the poet in propria persona (as in the Romantic paradigm), Rankine's narration stages the drama of a single mind advancing according to the logic of personal memory. "The route is often associative," the speaker explains, proceeding in the book's opening pages from the pleasant smell of her own skin to a childhood memory of a classmate's crippling insult offered as a compliment ("you smell good and have features more like a white person") and onward, from abuse to abuse, along mnemonic sites of cumulative damage (5). Subsumed within the fictive, bounded unity of the speaker are the experiences of a multitude, recalling Grossman's description of "the person who speaks in lyric" as one who "is singular but in a sense . . . also plural. . . . concrete but also abstract" (254). By fabricating an artificial unity that does what a citizen should do—register injustices directed at others as injustices against herself—Rankine fabricates a "one" out of many that models the ideal to which, *Citizen* amply shows, America has failed to rise.[17]

At a global formal scale that encompasses its monologic strain, its images, and its lineated verse, *Citizen* likewise superimposes closure upon openness. The book's images, for example, are distinctive for the interpretative challenges they pose, in addition to the horror and bewilderment they often provoke: a photograph of a lynching in which the victims have been cropped out, exposing a blithe party of white spectators; Caroline Wozniaki imitating Serena Williams at an exhibition match, an image for which the speaker claims there are many possible explanations, some benign; a reproduction of John Mallord William Turner's *The Slave Ship* (1840), the image that closes the book by opening it yet again, propelling readers "into the turbulence of our ancient dramas" (26). But these interpretatively open images are also intricately arranged and curated, subsumed within the larger structure of the book. For Lauren Berlant, *Citizen*

is "a kind of art gallery playing out the aesthetics of supremacist sterility, each segment being like a long, painfully white hall we're walking down, punctuated by stunning images of black intensity and alterity" (Rankine and Berlant 45). In its curating of the incomprehensible per se, its assemblage of "stunning" heterogeneities, textual and visual alike, *Citizen* perhaps also suggests the cabinets of curiosities that prefigured the modern museum. The book is a curatorial enclosure that negates, in a kind of perfect symmetry, the use of such cabinets as instruments of colonial power that conferred upon the curator an aura of mastery over worlds of exotic difference. Rankine collects incidents and objects that prove self-mastery to be an illusion; in her Wunderkammer, she devotes herself to the preservation and protraction of unresolved states of knowledge, preserving the dark mirabilia that mark the annunciation of "what preceded us and is not our own, yet conditions our experience nonetheless" (Rankine and Loffreda 21).

In Radcliffe Bailey's *Cerebral Caverns* (2011), Rankine presents a visual metaphor for *Citizen*'s practices of collection and display that allude to and militate against racial objectifications (Figure 2). Reminded of the infamous "scientific" attempts to prove the superiority of white Americans though phrenology and craniometry, Alana Wolf observes that Bailey's cabinet "recalls . . . the compulsion for academies in Europe and America to amass not only the objects of cultural production but the very bodies of the populations they studied in the name of science." Bailey's cabinet, however, also strangely animates these collected heads, which, though severed from their bodies and starkly exhibited, nonetheless seem to confer genially with one another. Rankine admires the interpretative "open[ness]" of Bailey's work, explaining in an interview:

> There's a line in *Citizen* that says the past has "turned [our] flesh into its own cupboards." We have had to hold the history of this violence in our bodies for centuries. I had that line in my head when I saw Bailey's piece, which both reflected the line back to me, as well as also representing the way bodies are stacked on top of one another in slave ships. The heads are speaking to each other, almost as if they are asking the question, "Did he just say that?" "Did I just hear what I think I heard?" I am projecting wildly but the piece is so open it allows that. ("I am invested")

The curatorial impulses of *Citizen* and *Cerebral Caverns* to contain through the arrangement of objects pointedly respond to the control of objectified black bodies in slave ships, laboratories, prison cells. Yet, significantly, Rankine's "wild projection" makes these objects

Fig. 2. Radcliffe Bailey, Cerebral Caverns*, 2011. © Radcliffe Bailey. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.*

speak. Inasmuch as *Citizen* objectifies what it collects, including reported events and reproduced images divested of their original contexts, it does so to form an assemblage that counters the dehumanizations that its component parts, in various discursive modes, register; *Citizen* speaks with and through racialized objects that themselves speak. Embodying Moten's proposition that "objects can and do resist," *Citizen* thus typifies "the radical materiality and syntax" through which, he claims, black performance both emerges out

of and opposes "political, economic, and sexual objection" (*In the Break* 1, 7).

In this sense, *Citizen* participates in a long tradition of African American cultural production that, as Moten and others have argued, sets out to remake the relation of subjects to objects. *Citizen*'s collection of heterogeneous objects found and made suggestively recalls the practices of subversive, ambiguous materiality that Monique Allewaert identifies with creative practices developed in the black Atlantic in the context of "parahumanity"—a state of being "not . . . conceptually equivalent to human beings while at the same time not being precisely inhuman" (6). Through acts of assemblage, Allewaert posits, slaves and maroons conferred animacy and agency upon things in the form of fetishes that confounded the human/nonhuman binary. Like the assembled visual and textual objects Rankine records in *Citizen*, such fetishes imply "an Afro-American personhood that emerges in relation to, and not against, the materiality of objects" (118).

Allewaert stresses the significance of vessels (kettles, gourds, knotted packets, and bottles) in the production of fetishes that conferred animacy and agency on "mere" objects through assemblage, particularly the significance of semi-enclosed vessels that allow some exchange between inside and outside—"whose effectiveness," in fact, "depends on the circulation" between them (133). She thus reads the fetish as "less invested in the production of a retractive interiority than in a mode of containment that also allows slidings out" (134). Rankine's bounded shapes—the cave of sighs, the display cabinet, the "endless circling of the subject" defined by unanswered, "open" questions—are likewise not fully enclosed. Indeed, Allewaert's description of the *nkisi Nkubulu*, a kind of fetish in which an array of semi- or imperfectly closed packets are tethered together in a "combinatory techne," presents an apt summary metaphor for the forms Rankine assembles in *Citizen* (133). Acknowledging the power of unities (the self, the poem, the collection, the community) while also recognizing that they make and are made by the world that lies beyond them, the vessel that is deliberately made leaky or porous evokes the value of wholes while also rejecting any reductive understanding of the lyric container as "an autonomous world" (Brooks 163). Such vessels (which, Allewaert notes, were likely to contain objects of heterogeneous textures and origins, both "ingredients and songs," "a pharmacological element . . . and a lyric one" [129]), might function ritually, medicinally, or simply as "*gardes corps*" (125). As a metaphor for the form of *Citizen*, they thus bring into view an old, but not universal, association of lyric with ritual power, here conscripted specifically into the talismanic protection of black bodies.

The funerary urn of Donne's poem "The Canonization"—the "well-wrought urn" that Brooks famously holds up as the paradigm of lyric containment—is sealed to prevent human remains from dissolving back, undifferentiated, into the object world. From the out-in-out structure M. H. Abrams describes, in which the landscape and the lyric subject remain constantly "intervolved" (77), to Bonnie Costello's liminal architectural analogy of the "foyer" (xv), to Susan Wolfson's claim that Romantic lyrics demonstrate "the factitiousness of organic coherence, closed designs, and cognitive totality" (19), modern theories of lyric tend to acknowledge that there is no such thing as a hermetically bounded whole in the realm of human making. They recognize that Brooks's model inadequately describes the permeable boundary between self and world, text and context. Such revisions, however, have not explored, as Rankine does, how the contingent status of the human plays out along that threshold of lyric containment, marking the conceptual boundaries between person and thing. How else is such a theoretical contribution to be recognized, if not by "lyric reading"?

I began with the proposition that lyric reading, construed narrowly and pejoratively from its very inception, had been suffocated by its midwives. For de Man, lyric reading entails circumventing the discomforts of "non-comprehension" and seeking refuge in the facile, fraudulent, nostalgic illusions of song and voice that exist "at the furthest remove from the materiality of actual history" (262). For Prins and Jackson, lyric reading is a practice that twentieth- and twenty-first-century readers have adopted too often by default, construing every poem as if it were an "utterance in the first person, an expression of personal feeling"; armed with one interpretative hammer, they argue, we have seen every poem as a nail (1). But *Citizen*, by offering nominal acknowledgment of a "lyric" identity while embodying those modernist "efforts, begun by experimental poets roughly a century ago . . . to denaturalize the lyric as the essence of poetry," invites us to consider the opportunities that inhere in conceiving of lyric reading as a multivalent hermeneutic rather than a monolithic one (Shaw 404). I have suggested, for example, that to read *Citizen* as lyric is to be attuned to hierarchies of feeling associated with the genre, to discern its willingness to embody the "speech" of an openly fabricated, composite, virtual subject that nonetheless demands to be recognized as *real*, and to explore the political possibilities condensed in the formal boundaries it draws. These features become more visible when we perceive the book through the kaleidoscopic lens of lyric, with its history of valued and devalued emotions, its glorifications and derogations of presence, and its metaphors of closed and open form, than when we position the book in the traditions of documentary art, cultural criticism, or

any number of salient discursive contexts within which it also makes its meaning. One effect of lyricization is that the idea of lyric continues to shape the landscape of contemporary poetry. Just as readers across the wide expanse of literary and cultural studies have incorporated close reading into their critical practices without importing the politics of the New Criticism, contemporary poets have consciously and unconsciously integrated lyric tropes and conventions in new configurations that absorb, reject, and revise premises of the expressive paradigm. Lyric reading must be agile and nuanced enough to greet these new configurations on their own idiosyncratic, sophisticated, even inconsistent terms.

The test of such a method of reading is its power to illuminate not only short, expressive texts in the tradition of song but also and perhaps especially works like *Citizen*, which might resist categorization as "lyric" in the most banal senses of the term. Such generically ambiguous works, which transgress or even disregard the boundaries of conventional genres and account for some of the most exciting new literary art in recent decades, frequently reckon with the kinds of entanglements that have particularly exhilarated and bedeviled makers and theorists of lyric: the ontological problem of where the self ends and the world begins; the ethical problem of how the personal voice ought to greet the determinations and injustices that originate beyond it, and if the arena of the literary is an appropriate site of response at all; the formal problem of how best to commemorate, in the shared space of discourse, "feelings that sit uncomfortably inside the communal" (*Citizen* 7). To propose retaining the concept of lyric—against Terada's proposition, for example, that we "let 'lyric' dissolve into literature and 'literature' into culture" (199)—involves accepting its embarrassing associations with narrowness, narcissism, and "deluded" naiveté. It demands reckoning with, rather than suppressing, the exclusions and effacements that have shaped its history. But with this record and the contentious theoretical history of lyric in mind, we also have much to gain. Perhaps most fundamentally, lyric hermeneutics offers strategies with which to read a diverse array of contemporary texts against the grain. Timothy J. Clark proposes that "Lyric cannot be expunged by modernism, only repressed," an assertion that suggests the unique potential of lyric reading as a method of symptomatic critical analysis in modernist and postmodernist contexts, where the conditions of lyricization that Prins and Jackson describe have ensured the prominence of lyric (if not consensus about its meaning) within avant-garde consciousness (401). Lyric reading holds the potential to root out nonobvious points of access to iconoclastic, conceptual, and critical works that enlist strategies associated with lyric, however tacitly, in the pursuit of purposes and aesthetics that appear to be remote from the

historical genre's ethos and forms. The question of whether a work is or is not lyric can thus be replaced with the question of whether situating that work in relation to the history of debates that the term *lyric* condenses can deepen and enliven our understanding of it.

Even as I have emphasized lyric passion, address, and form, other possibilities for reading *Citizen* as lyric beckon. The long history of conceptualizing the genre in terms of time, for example, from the Horatian *monumentum aere perennius* to Sharon Cameron's proposition that lyric poems attempt stasis as they slow to the point of stillness, offers vital terms with which to assess Rankine's use of the historical present and her formal methods of dilating instants of racialized crisis. Attunement to conventional lyric motifs also reveals striking patterns woven into the text—the motif of breath, for example. Rankine replaces the familiar scene of lyric inspiration with scenes in which the breath is taken away or lost all together—in the despondent sigh, in the dehumanizing instant when "the throat closes," in the unfathomable moments when Michael Brown and John Crawford and Eric Garner stopped breathing (156). And yet *Citizen* imagines "a pathway to breath" in the recognition of such moments (60); "to breathe," Rankine writes, "you have to create a truce . . . with the patience of a stethoscope" (156). Imagining her book as an instrument for listening to the breath and the heart, Rankine accepts the risk of an embarrassing association with lyric. In fashioning our own approaches to poetry in an age of benighted lyricization, we do well to accept comparable risks.

Notes

1. For insightful recent appraisals of Jackson and Prins, see Stephanie Burt, Lytle Shaw, and Jonathan Culler's *Theory of the Lyric*, pp. 83–85.

2. Barrett focuses specifically on the protocols of the New Criticism, which Jackson and Prins identify as the major engine of lyricization in the twentieth century (Barrett 131–82).

3. See Wang, pp. 1–47. Sonya Posmentier explores Zora Neale Hurston's contextualist readings of lyric in her ethnographic writings, which demonstrate how "black modernist reading practices . . . rooted in the scholarship of racial difference" formed alternatives to the practice of lyric reading that Jackson and Prins describe as a ubiquitous critical practice during the early twentieth century. Posmentier thus calls into question narratives of literary critical history that figure cultural studies and the New Lyric Studies as challenges to "a falsely stable" picture of literary critical practice during the period when the New Criticism flourished (63). Posmentier, "Lyric Reading in the Black Ethnographic Archive," *American Literary History*, vol. 30, no. 1, Spring 2018, pp. 55–84.

4. See Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs*; and Johnson, "Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion," pp. 135–54.

5. Writing before the publication of *Citizen*, Reed coins the term *postlyric* to describe Rankine's poetics; he adopts the term to delineate a strain of contemporary black experimental poetry that uses "received understandings of the lyric as a horizon of hermeneutic expectation, only to disrupt the very basis of that mode: the assumed solidity of the speaking, universal 'I'" (98–99). His definition presents the poet—wielding experimental form "to break the hermeneutic circle of lyricized and racialized reading"—as the agent of lyric interpretation (97). With the understanding that authorial engagements with lyric are often elusive, and vary considerably with respect to intention and consistency (as Rankine's disparate uses of the term show), my method configures lyric reading as an act of critical interpretation rather than one of literary composition. As much as I agree that Rankine is a postlyric poet in Reed's sense, I want to avoid reinscribing any formulation of lyric as a monolithic generic category with a single "basis" in the "universal 'I.'"

6. Culler characterizes apostrophe as "the figure of all that is most radical, embarrassing, pretentious, and mystificatory in the lyric" (*Pursuit* 136–37); on the many other embarrassing premises attributed to lyric in the later twentieth century, see Gillian White, *Lyric Shame: The "Lyric" Subject of Contemporary American Poetry* (2014), pp. 1–41.

7. See, for example, Marjorie Perloff, "It Must Change," *PMLA*, vol. 122, no. 3, 2007, pp. 652–62, the MLA presidential address to which the founding essays of "The New Lyric Studies" respond (see "The New Lyric Studies," *PMLA*, vol. 123, no. 1, 2008, pp. 181–234).

8. Compare Lyn Hejinian on "the coercive, epiphanic mode" of lyric (41); Rae Armantrout's presentation of the "conventional or mainstream poem" as "a univocal, more or less plain-spoken, short narrative often culminating in a sort of epiphany" (39); Juliana Spahr and David Buuck's summary description of lyric as "poetry that tends to portray, in a quiet and overly serious tone, with a studied and crafted attention to line breaks for emphasis and a moving epiphany or denouement at the end, the deep thoughts held by individuals in a consumerist society" (11); Craig Dworkin's implication of "the hundred-thousandth lyric published this decade in which a plain-spoken persona realizes a small profundity about suburban bourgeois life" in the exclusionary ideology of creativity (xxxix). Armantrout, *Collected Prose* (2007); Dworkin, "The Fate of Echo," *Against Expression: An Anthology of Conceptual Writing* (2011), edited by Dworkin and Kenneth Goldsmith, pp. xxiii–liv; Hejinian, "The Rejection of Closure, *The Language of Inquiry* (2000), pp. 40–58; Spahr and Buuck, *An Army of Lovers* (2013).

9. In light of wonder's perilous, ambivalent inclinations toward progress and stasis, philosophers from Aristotle to Hannah Arendt have stressed that wonder ought to be ephemeral, replaced immediately by investigation into the underlying causes of wondrous effects. I borrow the title of this section from Mary-Jane Rubenstein's *Strange Wonder: The Closure of Metaphysics and the Opening of Awe* (2008), which stresses this suppressed genealogy of wonder in the philosophical tradition (see pp. 1–24).

10. I use the term *speaker* to describe the tonally consistent figure who narrates the episodic vignettes, lineated verse, and essays that comprise the textual content of *Citizen*; I discuss the monologic conceit in greater detail later in the essay.

11. "For Wheatley," Jennifer Billingsley observes, "wonder is that subjective faculty that can breach the gap between man and the world and help negotiate a new

understanding of race and reality after reason fails" (170). Billingsley, "Works of Wonder, Wondering Eyes, and the Wondrous Poet: The Use of Wonder in Phillis Wheatley's Marvelous Poetics," *New Essays on Phillis Wheatley* (2011), edited by John C. Shields and Eric D. Lamore, pp. 159–90.

12. For a theory of lyric *without* subjectivity, see Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Poetry as Experience* (1986, trans. 1999), translated by Andrea Tarnowski, pp. 1–38.

13. In "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness," bell hooks ventriloquizes the appropriation against which Hartman warns. In *Liberalism and Human Suffering: Materialist Reflections on Politics, Ethics, and Aesthetics* (2010), Asma Abbas critiques sympathy and empathy for making suffering "into an object with cause, origin, and explanation, that can also be made to go away" (6). Hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (2014), pp. 145–54.

14. I am not nearly exhaustive here in my framing of the uses to which Rankine puts her "you." I focus here on apostrophe, but her address is often much less like Keats's vocative reaching toward the reader in "This Living Hand" than it is like the displaced first-person "you" in Gwendolyn Brooks's "the mother" (one of Johnson's key examples), a poem in which the "you" is suspended between the first person—"an 'I' that has become alienated, distanced from itself, and combined with a generalized other," as Johnson puts it [532])—and the third person. Rankine also presents the "you" as a dislocated alternative to the unitary, expressive lyric "I" (see section 5 of *Citizen*). For a thorough treatment of such deconstructive experimentation with voice in Rankine's work before *Citizen*, see Reed. See also Brooks, *Blacks* (1945).

15. In his account of the values embedded in the literary and the extraliterary within the context of the New Criticism, Barrett borrows language here from Wahneema Lubiano's preface to Ronald Judy's *(Dis)Forming the American Canon: African-Arabic Slave Narratives and the Vernacular* (1993), p. xx.

16. On the "claustrophobic" quality of *Citizen*, see, for example, Paula Cocozza, "Poet Claudia Rankine: 'The Invisibility of Black Women Is Astounding,'" *The Guardian*, 29 June 2015, web; and Steve Cannon, "Against a Sharp White Background: Race and Decorum in Claudia Rankine's *Citizen*," *A Gathering of the Tribes*, 14 July 2015, web.

17. Rankine translates the line of thinking that generates this conceit into a single question: "How difficult is it for one body to feel the injustice wheeled at another?" (116).

Works Cited

Abrams, M. H. *The Correspondent Breeze: Essays on English Romanticism*. W. W. Norton, 1984.

Adorno, Theodor W. "On Lyric Poetry and Society." *Notes to Literature*. 1958. Edited by Rolf Tiedemann, translated by Shierry Weber Nicholsen, Columbia UP, 1991, pp. 37–54.

Allewaert, Monique. *Ariel's Ecology: Plantations, Personhood, and Colonialism in the American Tropics*. U of Minnesota P, 2013.

"astonish, v." *OED Online*, Oxford UP, July 2018. Web.

Baraka, Amiri. *S O S: Poems 1961–2013*. Grove/Atlantic, 2015.

——. *Tales of the Out & the Gone: Short Stories*. 1st ed., Akashic Books, 2007.

Barrett, Lindon. *Blackness and Value: Seeing Double*. 1999. Cambridge UP, 2009.

Blasing, Mutlu Konuk. *Politics and Form in Postmodern Poetry: O'Hara, Bishop, Ashbery, and Merrill*. Cambridge UP, 1995.

Brooks, Cleanth. *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry*. 1947. Harcourt Brace, 1975.

Burt, Stephanie (published as Stephen Burt)."What Is This Thing Called Lyric?" *Modern Philology*, vol. 113, no. 3, Feb. 2016, pp. 422–40.

Cameron, Sharon. *Lyric Time: Dickinson and the Limits of Genre*. Johns Hopkins UP, 1979.

Chan, Mary-Jean. "Towards a Poetics of Racial Trauma: Lyric Hybridity in Claudia Rankine's *Citizen*." *Journal of American Studies*, vol. 52, no. 1, Feb. 2018, pp. 137–63.

Clark, Timothy J. *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism*. Yale UP, 1999.

Costello, Bonnie. *Planets on Tables: Poetry, Still Life, and the Turning World*. Cornell UP, 2008.

Cullen, Countee. *Countee Cullen: Collected Poems*. Edited by Major Jackson, Library of America, 2013.

Culler, Jonathan. *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction*. Cornell UP, 2001.

——. *Theory of the Lyric*. Harvard UP, 2015.

——. "The Lyric in Theory: A Conversation with Jonathan Culler." Interview by Francesco Giusti, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 27 May 2017.

De Man, Paul. *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*. Columbia UP, 1984.

Descartes, René. *Passions of the Soul*. 1649. Translated by Stephen H. Voss, Hackett Publishing, 1989.

DuPlessis, Rachel Blau. *Genders, Races, and Religious Cultures in Modern American Poetry, 1908–1934*. Cambridge UP, 2001.

Elmer, Jonathan. "Public Humanities in the Age of the Ideas Industry and the Rise of the Creatives." *University of Toronto Quarterly*, vol. 85, no. 4, Fall 2016, pp. 109–17.

Fisher, Philip. *Wonder, the Rainbow, and the Aesthetics of Rare Experiences*. Harvard UP, 1998.

Frost, Robert. *Robert Frost: Collected Poems, Prose, and Plays*, 1st ed., edited by Richard Poirier and Mark Richardson, Library of America, 1995.

Grossman, Allen, and Mark Halliday. *The Sighted Singer: Two Works on Poetry for Readers and Writers*. Revised and enlarged ed., Johns Hopkins UP, 1991.

Hartman, Saidiya V. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. Oxford UP, 1997.

Heaney, Seamus. *Crediting Poetry: The Nobel Lecture*. Macmillan, 1996.

Hesiod. *Hesiod: Volume I, Theogony. Works and Days. Testimonia*. Translated by Glenn W. Most, Harvard UP, 2007.

hooks, bell. *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*. 1990. Routledge, 2014.

Hughes, Langston. *Fields of Wonder*. A. A. Knopf, 1947.

——. *I Wonder as I Wander: An Autobiographical Journey*. Hill and Wang, 1993.

Hunt, Erica. "All About You." *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 8 Dec. 2014. Web.

Jackson, Virginia. "Who Reads Poetry?" *PMLA*, vol. 123, no. 1, Jan. 2008, pp. 181–87.

Jackson, Virginia, and Yopie Prins, editors. *The Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology*. Johns Hopkins UP, 2014.

——. Introduction. Jackson and Prins, pp. 1–8.

Johnson, Barbara. "Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion." 1987. Jackson and Prins, pp. 529–40.

Keats, John. *Complete Poems and Selected Letters of John Keats*. Modern Library, 2001.

Levine, Caroline. *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*. Princeton UP, 2015.

Loggins, Vernon. "One of the Most Interesting Curiosities." *Critical Essays on Phillis Wheatley*, edited by William Robinson, G. K. Hall, 1982, pp. 88–92.

Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. 1984. Forward by Cheryl Clarke, reprint ed., Crossing P, 2007.

McKay, Claude. *Complete Poems*. U of Illinois P, 2004.

Moten, Fred. *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*. U of Minnesota P, 2003.

——. "'Poetry Begins with the Willingness to Subordinate Whatever the Hell it is that You Have to Say': An Interview w/Fred Moten." Interview by Housten Donham, *Open House*, 20 July 2015. Web.

Ngai, Sianne. *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting*. 2012, reprint ed., Harvard UP, 2015.

Odutola, Toyin. "Redefining 'Blackness': An Interview with Toyin Odutola." Interview by Zachary Rosen, *Africa is a Country*, 18 Dec. 2012. Web.

Perry, Curtis. "Classicism." *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 4th ed., edited by Stephen Cushman et al., Princeton UP, 2012.

Plato. *Theaetetus. Plato: In Twelve Volumes*. Translated by Harold Fowler et al., vol. 7, Loeb-Harvard UP, 1995.

Rankine, Claudia. *Citizen: An American Lyric*. Graywolf P, 2014.

——. "Claudia Rankine, The Art of Poetry No. 102." Interview by David L. Ulin, *Paris Review*, no. 219, Winter 2016, pp. 139–66.

——. *Don't Let Me Be Lonely: An American Lyric*. Graywolf P, 2004.

——. "'I Am Invested in Keeping Present the Forgotten Bodies': An Interview with Claudia Rankine." Interview by Ratik Asokan, *The Believer Logger*, 10 Dec. 2014. Web.

——. Interview by Lauren Berlant. *BOMB*, no. 129, 2014, pp. 44–49.

——. "Interview with Claudia Rankine, 2014 National Book Award Finalist, Poetry." Interview by Sandra Lim, *National Book Foundation*. Web.

Rankine, Claudia, and Beth Loffreda. Introduction. *The Racial Imaginary: Writers on Race in the Life of the Mind*, edited by Rankine et al., Fence Books, 2015, pp. 13–22.

Reed, Anthony. *Freedom Time: The Poetics and Politics of Black Experimental Writing*. Johns Hopkins UP, 2014.

"ruminate, v." *OED Online*, Oxford UP, July 2018. Web.

Shaw, Lytle. "Framing the Lyric." *American Literary History*, vol. 28, no. 2, Summer 2016, pp. 403–13.

Shockley, Evie. *Renegade Poetics: Black Aesthetics and Formal Innovation in African American Poetry*. U of Iowa P, 2011.

——. "Race, Reception, and Claudia Rankine's 'American Lyric.'" "Reconsidering Claudia Rankine's Citizen: An American Lyric. A Symposium, Part I." *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 6 Jan 2016. Web.

Swensen, Cole, and David St. John, editors. *American Hybrid: A Norton Anthology of New Poetry*. W.W. Norton, 2009.

Terada, Rei. "After the Critique of Lyric." *PMLA*, vol. 123, no. 1, Jan. 2008, pp. 195–200.

Wang, Dorothy J. *Thinking Its Presence: Form, Race, and Subjectivity in Contemporary Asian American Poetry*. Stanford UP, 2014.

Weheliye, Alexander G. *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*. Duke UP, 2014.

Wellek, René. "Genre Theory, the Lyric, and Erlebnis." 1967. Jackson and Prins, pp. 40–52.

Wolf, Alana. "Radcliffe Bailey Prescribes an Elixir of Multilayered History." *BURNAWAY*, 30 June 2011. Web.

Wolfson, Susan J. *Formal Charges: The Shaping of Poetry in British Romanticism*. Stanford UP, 1997.

Wordsworth, William. *William Wordsworth: The Major Works: Including The Prelude*. Edited by Stephen Gill, Oxford UP, 2008.