Modern and Contemporary Poetry and Poetics

THE POETICS OF THE AMERICAN SUBURBS

Jo Gill

"Seeing the sheets of sleet untouched on the wide streets,
I think of the many comfortable homes stretching for miles,
Two and three storeys, solid, with polished floors,
With white curtains in the upstairs bedrooms,
And small perfume flagons of black glass on the window sills,
And warm bathrooms with guest towels, and electric lights –
What a magnificent place for a child to grow up!"

(from "Sleet Storm on the Merritt Parkway" by Robert Bly)

Modern and Contemporary Poetry and Poetics

Modern and Contemporary Poetry and Poetics promotes and pursues topics in the burgeoning field of twentieth- and twenty-first-century poetics. Critical and scholarly work on poetry and poetics of interest to the series includes social location in its relationships to subjectivity, to the construction of authorship, to oeuvres, and to careers; poetic reception and dissemination (groups, movements, formations, institutions); the intersection of poetry and theory; questions about language, poetic authority, and the goals of writing; claims in poetics, impacts of social life, and the dynamics of the poetic career as these are staged and debated by poets and inside poems. Topics that are bibliographic, pedagogic, that concern the social field of poetry, and reflect on the history of poetry studies are valued as well. This series focuses both on individual poets and texts and on larger movements, poetic institutions, and questions about poetic authority, social identifications, and aesthetics.

Language and the Renewal of Society in Walt Whitman,
Laura (Riding) Jackson, and Charles Olson
The American Cratylus
Carla Billitteri

Modernism and Poetic Inspiration
The Shadow Mouth
Jed Rasula

The Social Life of Poetry
Appalachia, Race, and Radical Modernism
Chris Green

Procedural Form in Postmodern American Poetry
Berrigan, Antin, Silliman, and Hejinian
David W. Huntsperger

Modernist Writings and Religio-scientific Discourse
H. D., Loy, and Toomer
Lara Vetter

Male Subjectivity and Poetic Form in "New American" Poetry
Andrew Mossin

The Poetry of Susan Howe
History, Theology, Authority
Will Montgomery

Ronald Johnson's Modernist Collage Poetry
Ross Hair

Pastoral, Pragmatism, and Twentieth-Century American Poetry
Ann Marie Mikkelsen

(Re:)Working the Ground
Essays on the Late Writings of Robert Duncan
edited by James Maynard

Women's Poetry and Popular Culture
Marsha Bryant

Poetry After the Invention of América
Don't Light the Flower
Andrés Ajens, translated by Michelle Gil-Montero, introduction by Erin Moure and Forrest Gander

New York School Collaborations
The Color of Vowels
edited by Mark Silverberg

The Poetics of the American Suburbs
Jo Gill

The Afro-Modernist Epic and Literary History
Tolson, Hughes, Baraka
Kathy Lou Schultz

The Poetics of the American Suburbs

Jo Gill

palgrave
macmillan

THE POETICS OF THE AMERICAN SUBURBS

Copyright © Jo Gill, 2013.

Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2013 978-1-137-34022-1

All rights reserved.

First published in 2013 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN®
in the United States—a division of St. Martin's Press LLC,
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Where this book is distributed in the UK, Europe and the rest of the world, this is by Palgrave Macmillan, a division of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

Palgrave® and Macmillan® are registered trademarks in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe and other countries.

ISBN 978-1-349-46478-4 ISBN 978-1-137-34023-8 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/9781137340238

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Gill, Jo, 1965–
The poetics of the American suburbs / Jo Gill.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
1. American poetry—20th century—History and criticism.
2. Suburban life in literature. 3. Suburbs in literature. I. Title.

PS310.S875G56 2013
811′.509358209733—dc23 2013024240

A catalogue record of the book is available from the British Library.

Design by Newgen Knowledge Works (P) Ltd., Chennai, India.

First edition: October 2013

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

Part I

Part II

Also by Jo Gill

Anne Sexton's Confessional Poetics. 2007.
Women's Poetry. 2007.
The Cambridge Introduction to Sylvia Plath. 2008.

Permissions

Excerpts from the following are reproduced by kind permission:

From "Sleet Storm on the Merritt Parkway" by Robert Bly. Reprinted by permission of the author.

From "Evening in the Sanitarium" from *Collected Poems: 1923–1953* by Louise Bogan. Copyright © 1954 by Louise Bogan. Copyright renewed 1982 by Maidie Alexander Scannell. Reprinted by permission of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, LLC.

"Beverley Hills, Chicago" from *Annie Allen* by Gwendolyn Brooks © 1971. Reproduced with permission of Brooks Permissions via Copyright Clearance Center.

From "Heat 'N' Eat" by Burge Buzzelle from the *Wall Street Journal* (1956). Reproduced by permission of Dow Jones & Company, Inc.; permission conveyed through Copyright Clearance Center, Inc.

From "Suburban Evening" by Langston Hughes, the author wishes to thank the Crisis Publishing Co., Inc., the publisher of the magazine of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, for the use of the material first published in the April 1967 issue of *The Crisis*.

Carolyn Kizer, excerpts from "The Suburbans" from *Cool, Calm & Collected: Poems 1960–2000*. Copyright © 2001 by Carolyn Kizer. Reprinted with the permission of Copper Canyon Press, www.coppercanyonpress.org.

From "A Poet of the Suburbs" by James Lewis, first published in *College English* (1973) by the National Council of Teachers of English.

From "A Place in the Country" by Elizabeth Ellen Long. Originally published in the November 1950 *Ladies' Home Journal*® magazine.

From “Song of the Suburbs” by Rachel Mack. Originally published in the July 1955 *Ladies’ Home Journal*® magazine.

From “Increment” by Josephine Miles from *Poems 1930–1960* by Josephine Miles, courtesy of Indiana University Press. All rights reserved.

From “Approach,” “$7500,” and “New Tract” by Josephine Miles from *Collected Poems, 1930–1983*. Copyright 1983 by Josephine Miles. Used with permission of the poet and the University of Illinois Press.

From “Panther” by Josephine Miles, first published in *The Kenyon Review* Vol. 18, no. 1 (1956).

From “Sprinkler in the Suburbs” by Julian Mitchell, first published in *The Sewanee Review*, Vol. 69, no. 2 (1961).

From “The Beautiful Lawn Sprinkler” and “Blue Suburban” by Howard Nemerov from Howard Nemerov, *Collected Poems* (1977). Used with permission of the University of Chicago Press.

From “The Town Dump” and “Suburban Prophecy” by Howard Nemerov from Howard Nemerov, *Mirrors and Windows: Poems* (1958). Used with permission of the University of Chicago Press.

From an unsigned poem, “The One Room Apartment,” originally published in the March 1955 issue of the *Ladies’ Home Journal*® magazine.

From Louise Goyol Owen’s poem “Gold Grows on Trees,” originally published in the September 1961 issue of *McCall’s*® magazine.

From “For John, Who Begs Me Not to Enquire Further,” “Funnel,” “Ringing the Bells,” “Noon Walk on the Asylum Lawn,” and “What’s That” by Anne Sexton from *Anne Sexton: The Complete Poems*. Reprinted by permission of Sterling Lord Literistic, Inc. Copyright © 1981 by Anne Sexton.

From Louis Simpson, “In the Suburbs” and “Sacred Objects” from *The Owner of the House: New Collected Poems 1940–2001*. Copyright © 2001 by Louis Simpson. Reprinted with the permission of The Permissions Company, Inc., on behalf of BOA Editions, Ltd., www.boaeditions.org and with the permission of the Random House Group Limited on behalf of Secker & Warburg.

From “A Cardinal” by W.D. Snodgrass from *Selected Poems: 1957–1987* (1987) by Delmore Schwartz. Reprinted by permission of Kathleen Snodgrass for the Estate of W. D. Snodgrass.

From William Stafford, "Elegy," from *The Way It Is: New and Selected Poems*. Copyright 1954, © 1998 by William Stafford and the Estate of William Stafford. Reprinted with the permission of The Permissions Company, Inc. on behalf of Graywolf Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota, www.graywolfpress.org.

From William Stafford's poem, "Suburban," originally published in the July 1950 issue of *The Ladies Home Journal* ® magazine.

From Reed Whittemore, "Hester Prynne," first published in *The Kenyon Review*, Vol. 7, no. 3 (1945).

From "Marginalia," "To An American Poet Just Dead," and "Water Walker" by Richard Wilbur from Richard Wilbur, *New and Collected Poems* (1989). Reproduced with the permission of the author.

From James Wright, "A Girl in a Window" from *Above the River: The Complete Poems* © Annie Wright. Reprinted by permission of Wesleyan University Press.

Unpublished material from the Phyllis McGinley Papers at the Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Library is reproduced with the permission of the Special Collections Research Center and Patsy Hayden Blake.

An early version of part of chapter 3 is forthcoming in *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* while a previous version of some of the material from chapter 4 has been published in *Western American Literature*. I thank the editors of both journals for their interest in this work.

This page intentionally left blank

Acknowledgments

Numerous individuals and institutions have stimulated and sustained the research for this book. Colleagues at the University of Exeter including Tim Kendall, Helen Taylor, Helen Hanson, Phil Wickham, Jane Poyner, Paul Williams, Andrew McRae, Steve Neale, Karen Edwards, Jane Spencer, Michael Wykes, Nela Kapelan, Mark Whalan, Lee Rumbarger, Sinéad Moynihan, Joe Kember, Emily Bernhard Jackson, and Vike Plock are owed a particular debt of gratitude. Julia Davey, Gwen Rumbold, and Anna Dickinson have all helped ease the load at crucial times. I also acknowledge with thanks the University's award of a period of study leave during the early stages of this research. Audiences at the Universities of Leicester, Lancaster, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Kingston, Sussex, Oxford, and at Vassar College and Hofstra University have responded generously to presentations of work-in-progress for which, many thanks. Fellow members of the British Association for American Studies have provided a congenial support group and an inspiring body of scholarship; Martin Halliwell, Catherine Morley, Theresa Saxon, Ian Bell, Nick Selby, Sylvia Ellis, Sue Currell, and George Lewis, amongst others, deserve my thanks. Participants in the Cultures of the Suburbs Network, including Martin Dines, Chris Niedt, Mary Corcoran, Geoff Woolcock, Paul Burton, Choodamani Nandagopal, Tim Vermeulen, and Jill Sullivan have helped to shape my thinking about the suburbs. Thanks, too, to Kevin Young and Amanda Golden for several leads. Former colleagues at the University of Gloucestershire including Simon Barker, Simon Dentith, Shelley Saguaro and the late and much missed Peter Widdowson supported my early work on Anne Sexton and thereby helped to open a route to the suburbs. Stan Smith has been a much valued ally. Lynne Crowley, Patti Roberts and other representatives of the Larchmont Historical Society graciously extended their hospitality on two occasions; my chapter on McGinley benefits from their assistance. I thank Patsy Hayden Blake and Peter Blake, McGinley's daughter and grandson,

for their interest in the project. Staff in the archives at Syracuse University, at the British Library and at British Library Newspapers provided help and invaluable resources. I thank the British Academy for a research grant in support of the initial archival research on McGinley, the British Library Eccles Centre for a Fellowship that allowed me to immerse myself in newspaper and other materials that would otherwise have remained out of my reach, and the Arts and Humanities Research Council for funding that allowed me time away from teaching and administrative duties in order that I might finish the book. I am grateful to Robert Bly for permitting me to quote lines from one of his poems on the cover of this book, and to Brigitte Shull, the editorial team at Palgrave, and their anonymous reviewers for taking the book on and seeing it through. Finally, some personal thank yous: to Frances Hollingdale who has tolerated a shift from "Anne" to "Phyllis" with her usual aplomb; to Sheena and Ray Hennessey; George and Margaret Gill; Andy, Lissie and their families, and to Jeannette (Nana) Gill whose endless support, encouragement and faith are appreciated. The biggest debt, and the greatest thanks and love, as always, to Neil, Jacob, Freya, and Keziah.

Introduction

In a 1989 essay on "The Elusive Soul of the Suburbs" commentator Philip Nicholson asks, "Who sings the song of suburbia? Where is its poet?" In his conclusion he answers his own question firmly and in the negative: "There is no official school or philosophy of suburban culture; just as there is no poet, artist, or sculptor to present its voice, its face or the dimensions of its imagination" (206, 208). The aim of *The Poetics of the American Suburbs* is to establish the presence and to argue the significance of numerous poets of the postwar American suburbs—poets whose work amply, if in previously overlooked ways, demonstrates the "dimensions of its imagination."

Mid-century suburbia has, from the outset, been the object of detailed and sustained commentary on the part of psychologists, sociologists, physicians, planners, historians, journalists, and public intellectuals—a chorus that has been amplified by novelists, filmmakers, and the writers of television sitcoms. This body of work has been extensively critiqued of late by scholars of the suburbs such as Robert Beuka and Catherine Jurca, yet the work of poets of the suburbs and the contribution that their writing made to popular and critical perceptions of suburban space and everyday life, indeed to the construction of what one might call the suburban imaginary, has been entirely hidden from view. *The Poetics of the American Suburbs* seeks to bring this poetry to light and to explicate its significance both in terms of its formal properties, and of its relation to the larger cultural, historical, geographical, and ideological contexts in which it emerged and has been read.

In these respects, the aims and methodology of the present study have much in common with the work of Cary Nelson, Joseph Harrington, John Timberman Newcomb, and a number of other scholars in the broad field of poetic and cultural studies. As the title of Cary Nelson's *Repression and Recovery: Modern American Poetry and the Politics of Cultural Memory, 1910–1945* indicates, his aim—one that I share—is to recover or restore to critical attention poetries that have been occluded. His interest, like mine, is in exploring the processes by which certain kinds of poetry have been privileged in literary history, while others have quietly disappeared. For Nelson, as for others working in this area (including Heidi Bean, Mike Chasar, Maria Damon, and a number of contributors to Damon and Ira Livingston's 2009 collection, *Poetry and Cultural Studies: A Reader*), poetry cannot be understood outside or apart from its social and cultural contexts (for Newcomb, its "discursive networks" (*Would Poetry* xvi) and for Damon and Livingston, its "social matrix" (11)). Nelson finds, and my own project illustrates, that such a process of recovery requires a "general reconsideration of the relations between poetry and the rest of social life" (*Repression* 19); and it involves a rethinking and a further restoration of poetry's sometimes hidden audiences. My work in this regard is informed by, for example, Harrington and Joan Shelley Rubin's fascinating studies of poetry's varied publics and uses. The present study seeks to recover the sensibilities—the right to read and to find meaning in poetry—of a suburban audience more typically dismissed by scholars as, for example, in Alan Filreis's rather scornful (hence "folks") critique of populist poets and their readers:

> There were of course the Edgar Guests of modern verse—market-minded folks who sought an audience among members of a new suburban middle class decorating their mod split-levels with biomorphic furniture and knew the phrase "April is the cruellest month" from ad campaigns for household wares. (300)

What we see here is a kind of shorthand whereby "suburban" is taken to signify a mundane mediocrity that barely merits serious consideration. One of the main aims of *The Poetics of the American Suburbs*, in recuperating this domain (postwar suburbia, its poets, and its readers), is to trace the effects of this persistent disparagement on the emergence of a characteristically self-conscious, even self-doubting, suburban poetic voice.

Inevitably, such a recovery process requires us to ask questions of the canon and about the construction of certain literary historical narratives, and to think again about the ways in which cultural value is ascribed and disseminated and, conversely, denied and erased. For Cary Nelson, the deployment of "schematic two-part contest models [is] a recurrent feature of the way we write literary history" (*Repression* 2). Poetry emerging from the postwar American suburbs—as an historical, cultural, and spatial formation predicated on bridging the perceived chasm between city and country, work and home, public and private—is arguably a uniquely valuable site for the testing and indeed overthrowing of such problematic models. In generic terms, and as the rest of this book will make clear, the poetry of the American suburbs sits in a complex relationship to the perceived binaries of canonical ("heavy") and popular ("light") verse, often traversing these boundaries, speaking to a range of audiences, and thereby throwing up some interesting challenges to our perceptions of the field.

The poetry discussed below might be said to have fallen foul of that tautological process outlined by Bean and Chasar, and by Damon whereby poetries that have not, for all sorts of reasons, met the perceived standard for recognition as "poetry" have thereby gone unnoticed in terms of their contribution to the ongoing definition of the genre. In other words, if we do not consider popular verse about suburbia (such as the work of Phyllis McGinley or the various poets discussed in chapters 1 and 2) to be what we call "poetry" then we can continue to regard "poetry" as a genre that has nothing at all to say about suburbia. The present study seeks to correct this oversight, to ask how such writing "shape[d] emerging notions of what 'poetry' meant" in this period (Bean and Chasar 5), and thereby to make the poetry of the postwar American suburbs *matter*. My project, like Damon and Livingston's, is willing at times to defer aesthetic value judgments (while, like Harrington, implicitly raising questions about their historical origin) in order to ask not, first and foremost, is the poem good? But in what ways is it good for and in a particular culture? (Damon and Livingston 2; Harrington, "Poetry" 267).[1] As Harrington argues, "in order to understand contemporary poetry as it exists, one must do so in terms of the meanings, uses, and effects of poetry in the lives and communities of readers and writers" ("Poetry" 277). The broad question, one implicitly posed throughout this book, is "what do people in certain social moments find beautiful or engaging and why?" (Damon and Livingston 6).

In answering these and related questions, I bring together close readings of the poetry, detailed analysis of other contemporary discourses, and an attentiveness to the materiality of postwar suburban culture. Thus my methodology has much in common with Damon's (*Postliterary* 4) or Rachel DuPlessis's reading strategies; I deploy a critical practice that "mediate[s] between what is said *in* poetry and what is said *as* poetry" (DuPlessis, "Hoo, Hoo, Hoo" 310). My approach exemplifies the indivisibility of poetic and cultural studies; the latter, as Bean and Chasar have recently argued, has "become part and parcel of the warp and woof of poetry criticism—even a necessary method of close reading" (8). My readings emerge from the "intersection" (ibid.) of these fields—a site of often productive "tension," as Tricia Rose indicates (195). This tension is part aesthetic and part cultural and, in the case of modern suburban poetry, offers compelling insights into the ideological pressures of the day.

One of the most important acts of recovery that *The Poetics of the American Suburbs* can undertake is the recuperation of the profoundly political and historical dimensions of this work. If this is an unexpected finding, given the alleged apathy and introspection of postwar suburbia, it is also a measure of the subtlety and craft of the poetry itself, which demonstrates a seductive skill in covering its own ideological tracks. For Jed Rasula, postwar poetry is characterized by what he calls the "suburban epiphany" where "suburban" implies stasis, narrowness, and the refusal to look beyond rather limited boundaries, or to engage with political and historical realities (429). Marilyn Chin similarly complains that: "Poetry has moved to the suburbs. Current literary journals contain a lot of poems about the mythology of the self…American poets have veered away from Whitman's idea of the democratic self…Their poems are self-centered, shortsighted; they don't extend to larger concerns" (qtd. in Sontag and Graham 6). As the rest of this book will demonstrate, I take issue with both assertions. I hope to demonstrate, as John Timberman Newcomb argues of the popular verse of an earlier period, that the poetry of the American suburbs "is as susceptible to historical imbrication as any other sort of text" (*Would* xix) and that, to quote Michael Thurston, it is "clearly doing cultural work beyond just looking pretty" ("Tranquillized" 489).

In thinking about poetry's consensual or conflicting relationship to wider contemporary discourses, my study owes a debt to Deborah Nelson (*Pursuing Privacy in Cold War America*) and to Edward Brunner (*Cold War Poetry*). Both have recuperated the poetry of the period and shown it to be much more than mere psychobiography (D. Nelson) or "inconsequential" space-filler between the excitements of modernism and the radicalism of the Beats (Brunner ix). For Nelson and Brunner, as in my own work, poetry is to be understood as a richly discursive genre—or more properly, a practice—that is implicated in constructing (as well as reflecting on and dissenting from) its own cultural moment. Just as Nelson reads beneath the surface glare of postwar confessionalism, and Brunner reads between the lines of 1950s formalism, I aim to attend to the detail of the poetry of the postwar suburbs, and, as importantly, to assess the work in terms of its deep and persistent engagement with its own historical and cultural circumstances. As Brunner and Nelson's books, and as I hope my own make clear, this is more than simply reading poetry in terms of its historical background; it is an attempt to arrive at an understanding of the ways in which poetry has shaped the background itself.

Although my study clearly benefits from the insights of the scholars cited above, it also diverges from and develops these critiques in several respects, most notably in terms of its consideration of spatial and geographical—in addition to historical—dimensions. Where Harrington urges us to "think historically" ("Poetry" 267), or where Cary Nelson insists that "history should permeate the aesthetics of the poem" (*Our Last* 13), I argue that geography (topography, spatiality) also "permeate[s]" this poetry, and must be taken into account in our reading of its aesthetic form and social function. In light of recent theoretical work in cultural geography by Michel De Certeau, Edward Soja and other scholars outlined below, we must understand that social and subjective domains while historically and discursively constituted are also inflected spatially. Thus when DuPlessis, for example, argues for an historic dimension to our reading of aesthetics, I would propose, too, a spatial critique. To her account (here drawing on Robert DuPlessis) of a reading strategy that might "examine objects, discourses, and practices in order to analyze the meanings, ideologies and social-political functions associated with these *in their time and across time*" [my emphasis], I would add that we might also read in terms of location in space and transition between spaces ("Social Texts" 53). Thus, an interest among scholars of poetic and cultural studies in "analyzing the interfaces of cultural materials with their ideological layers and historical allusions as these saturate texts and are specified within them" (56) is supplemented in my own study by a concern with topographical and spatial allusions. This is by way of saying that *The Poetics of the American Suburbs* while attentive to poetry's formal and aesthetic properties, and to its social and historical resonances, also brings to bear an understanding of its spatial significations.

A cultural poetics provides, in Barrett Watten's terms, a "suggestive possibility rather than a mechanism of literary or cultural construction" (167–8). Its contribution is "to suggest the range of voices, styles and discourses at work in the period, to point toward rather than wholly represent their writing practices, to provide possible entrances into their work, [and] to raise interest in rather than settle the status of these poets" (C. Nelson, *Repression* 19). In like manner, my own study of the poetics of the postwar American suburbs (to my knowledge, the first) aims not to stake out or lay definitive claim to the terrain, but to open it up for future and ongoing enquiry.

Poets and Contexts

The poetry chosen for this study spans the late 1930s through to the early 1970s, although the primary emphasis is on the period that marks the heyday of the postwar suburbs, that is, 1945 through to the mid-1960s. The start and end points are determined by the specific historical events that affected poets, editors, commentators, and readers (most obviously, the end of one war and the start of another), by a number of related economic, political, and social factors, and by the ebb and flow of the poetry itself. Like "the problem of the suburbs" (Haar n. page), a distinctively suburban poetics came to the foreground and then receded from view within this timeframe.

As the first part of this book explains, suburbia was initially the subject of intense excitement, then of detailed scrutiny, and thereafter of anxiety and disappointment. By the middle of the 1960s, the febrile debates that had dominated popular and expert commentary during the peak years of suburban growth had begun to subside. The nation had reached a reconciliation with the seemingly inevitable forces of suburbanization, and had recognized that suburbia while not necessarily the ideal it had once seemed, was nevertheless, not the dystopia alleged by some. Moreover, other concerns (civil rights, feminism, the Space Race, and Vietnam) had come to prominence. The shift in focus is evident both thematically (poets stop talking about suburban concerns) and formally (they start talking in new ways about the new things that now preoccupy them). Cary Nelson suggests that the turn towards open forms at the end of this period represents a rethinking of the relationship between poetry and history as a consequence of the American experience of Vietnam (*Our Last* xi). A similar move may be detected in suburban poetics. From around 1968, poets, publishers, and readers appear to have moved on, and suburban poetry slips out of sight to re-emerge only sporadically in the decades that follow, typically in tandem with concerns about gas prices and the long-term sustainability of the suburban way of life. In the present day, stimulated by popular interest in the environment and in the possibilities of urban regeneration, a new poetry of the American suburbs has emerged as evidenced in the writing of Peter Balakian, Billy Collins, John Hollander, and several others. I regret that it is beyond the scope of this book to examine current (post- or neo-) suburban poetics.

The Poetics of the American Suburbs thus examines the poetry that was temporally, geographically, and discursively implicated in suburban growth during the immediate postwar years. It is a poetry that entered contemporary debates, played its part in promoting and critiquing the suburban dream, and was instrumental in constructing a perception of suburbia as, at times, a stultifying, at times a suggestive, and at times a deceptive space. The interests of this book lie both in the ways in which poetry functions to construct and mediate our understanding of this *topos* and in the particular aesthetic forms and structural devices that it deploys in so doing. Informed by the work of critics in poetic and cultural studies cited earlier, I seek an "interpretative practice at an equal distance from both text and context, as it weaves together strands of both" (Watten 167–8) and I look for common ground across and between poetic and other contemporary discourses as they negotiate the complexities of the era. This study does not attempt to delineate a particular school or movement in suburban poetry; rather, as indicated earlier, it aims to recover some from among the range of hitherto hidden "modern poetries" that occupy what Cary Nelson has described as a "fluid field of both fulfilled and unfulfilled possibilities, a continuing site of unresolved struggle and rich discursive stimulus" (*Recovery* 7, 36).

The work examined in this book sits both within and outside the received "generations" of postwar American poetry and, as chapter 2 will explain, speaks to readers who "occupy positions along the spectrum between the modernist and the traditional" (Rubin, *Songs* 103). Chronologically, it coincides with the writing of the New York School, the Black Mountain Poets, the Confessionals, the San Francisco Renaissance, and the Beats, amongst others. It has some formal and thematic features in common with each of these even as it resists falling neatly into line with any of them. And although the poetry of the postwar suburbs shares some structural and historical characteristics with what Edward Brunner has defined as a distinctive Cold War poetics, the two should not be taken as synonymous. There is common ground in respect of all of these: but also considerable divergence. This is, then, a poetry that resists and thus prompts us to critique the polarizing tendencies of poetic historiography (as Mark Doty observes: "Any division into firmly defined 'schools' is finally a historian's artifice; the movements of the fifties overlapped and cross-fertilized one another to the point that any boundaries tend to blur and finally disappear" (133)). It straddles the gap between the traditional and the experimental, between early 1950s formalism and the avant-garde, language-based, postconfessional, and postmodern poetries coming to prominence towards the end of the decade. Simultaneously, as evidenced in the work of several writers discussed below, it sustains a light verse tradition that makes a virtue of bridging the divide between poet and audience and cheerfully takes the everyday as its subject matter. Thus the most notable feature of the poetics of the suburbs is—surprisingly perhaps given widespread and persistent perceptions of suburbia's homogeneity—its diversity and its propensity to draw on and also to exceed contemporary modes.

The breadth and heterogeneity of this poetry is evidence of the pervasiveness of suburban development and of the widespread social consternation that greeted its growth. Many of the poems discussed later explicitly engage with the conditions of suburban life (Howard Nemerov's "Blue Suburban," for example). Others deploy the various material and abstract signifiers of suburbia—from televisions, picture windows, lawn sprinklers, and Bendix washing machines to conformity, homogeneity, marginalization, and conspicuous consumption—as a way of marking the territory without explicitly naming it (see Donald Justice's "Men at Forty"). Others, conversely, use the adjective "suburban" in passing, and invariably negatively in order to invoke a whole set of assumed attributes, for example in Updike's "Apologies to Harvard" of 1973 where the word "suburb" ("the possible / Is but a suburb, Harvard, of your city") invokes both the perceived limitations of suburban life and the continuing cultural reliance of the margins on the centre (*Tossing* 29). The point confirms historian Lewis Mumford's assertion that "for aesthetic and intellectual stimulus, the suburb remains dependent upon the big city" (562).

In terms of geographical spread, the poets under discussion are drawn from across the United States. However, the very visible emergence of the postwar suburbs in and around New York and California (where enhanced publishing, teaching and networking opportunities were also available) has meant that poetry from these regions has tended to dominate the field. The poetry I have chosen is written by women and by men; both genders shared the experience of suburban growth at this time, and both had something to contribute to the debates even if, as we will see, their perspectives were rather different. Similarly white anglo, ethnic, and African American writers have reflected on the place of the suburbs in their own personal and community histories.

Poets chosen for this study include well-known writers of the period: Anne Sexton, Richard Wilbur, Louise Bogan, Donald Hall, John Ashbery, Hollis Summers, Langston Hughes, Kenneth Rexroth, Louis Simpson, James Wright, Philip Levine, Denise Levertov, Howard Nemerov, Howard Moss, Randall Jarrell, William Stafford, John Updike, and Sylvia Plath, to name but a few. Some of these are unexpected. John Ashbery, for example, is more often associated with an urban locale while John Updike is more usually known as a novelist. Each of them, in a variety of ways, engages with the conditions of postwar suburban life as they see it. I also discuss the work of several largely forgotten poets including Josephine Miles (long-term resident of California and at one time associated with the Berkeley Renaissance) and, most importantly, Phyllis McGinley. McGinley, as chapter 3 will explain, was popularly known as the "housewife poet" and as the "Poet Laureate" of the suburbs. Her writing spans the period under scrutiny and provides a valuable starting point and, subsequently, an important point of reference. It offers an apparently robust defense of everyday suburban life, particularly as experienced by women, and makes intriguing use of traditional poetic form. More than this, though, McGinley's work is remarkable because of the way in which it subtly undermines its own narrative of suburban domestic contentment, thereby inviting a resistant or dissenting reading. It also offers an unexpected model of poetic self-reflexivity—one to which the book's Conclusion returns.

In addition, I assess poems by one-off or amateur poets whose writing is found in a range of popular media, often alongside articles, correspondence, advertisements, and cartoons that further helped to construct an image of suburban normality and thus provide an important material context and resource for this study. As chapter 1 will explain, poetry in the mass media was instrumental in constructing suburbia in actuality and in the popular imagination, in selling its potential, and in evaluating its fulfillment—or otherwise—of its original promise. This "occasional" poetry confirms the pervasiveness of suburban themes and the presence of a considerable audience. My discussion here of poetry in unexpected places that spoke to a wide readership (comprising "incidental" as well as "intentional" readers (Chasar, "Material" 302)) benefits from the recent scholarship in poetry and cultural studies outlined earlier and will, I hope, enhance our understanding of the shape and role that modern poetry has taken outside the purview of established definitions and debates. My account also suggests some important crossovers in this period, and in a suburban context, between elite and mass, high and popular cultures. As chapter 2 will argue, there is a striking commonality of interests, form, and voice across and between professional and amateur poets, and indeed across and between popular and elite periodicals. For every *Saturday Evening Post* poem about suburban growth, there is another in the *Hudson Review* or *Poetry* magazine. Individual poets such as William Stafford, John Updike, and Phyllis McGinley published across both domains, indicating the permeability of these boundaries and the importance of what Chasar has identified as "brow-crossing reading practices" ("Business" 34). Relevant resources were also found in journals such as *The Sewanee Review*, *College English*, and *The Massachusetts Review*, in the general press including in *The New Yorker* and *The Wall Street Journal*, and in political or campaigning journals such as *The Crisis* (the magazine of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, or NAACP). Clearly, the postwar poetry of the suburbs spoke across barriers of class, education, ethnicity, gender, and taste. The wide audience for these poetries was a measure of the significance of the suburbs in the popular consciousness, and an indication that the suburbs mattered even to readers (and, indeed, writers) who did not, themselves, live there. My interest here mirrors Michael Davidson's fascination in *The San Francisco Renaissance: Poetics and Community at Mid-Century* with the ways in which historical, social, and geographical change helped to produce reading subjects (18).

In selecting poems for discussion, I have also drawn on postwar anthologies, on various *Complete* and *Collected Poems* and numerous individual collections. The latter have proved a particularly valuable resource. Their titles alone offer an indication of the significance of the suburbs to contemporary writers, evidencing a shared vision of the suburbs as somehow inauthentic (hence Miles's 1955 book *Prefabrications* or her later *To All Appearances* (1974)), as characterized by glossy or deceptive surface appearances (McGinley's *Stones from a Glass House* of 1946, and Nemerov's *Mirrors and Windows* from 1958), as spaces characterized by transience or mobility, for example, Miles's 1939 *Lines at Intersection*, McGinley's *A Short Walk From the Station* of 1951, and Simpson's *At the End of the Open Road* of 1963, and finally, as uncertain or liminal spaces as in Stafford's *Traveling Through the Dark* of 1962 and Levine's privately printed 1963 collection *On the Edge*.

The suburbs during this period leave their traces in the writing of many poets who were not—or did not define themselves as—suburbanites. In effect the suburbs so pervaded contemporary discourse that everyone had an experience of and an opinion about suburbia, whether they lived there or not. For those who did make the suburbs their home, such as McGinley, the authority of that experience was significant; it seemed to give her poetry credibility in its resistance to urban nay-sayers even though, as chapter 3 will show, certainties about voice and agency are crucially and strategically cast into doubt throughout her oeuvre. Tom Martinson's well-meant contention that "a lot of what we see written about ourselves, out here in the suburbs, is one condescending put down after another" and that if only suburbanites dared to speak for themselves, they would be able to refute the insinuations of "urbanists" (xxiii) is belied by the sometimes disingenuous evidence of the suburban poets discussed below. Other poets were guarded about their origins—a stance that is surely to be expected given the widespread contempt with which suburban culture was treated at this time. Poet Peter Viereck, writing in John Ciardi's influential 1950 anthology, *Mid-Century American Poets*, characterizes his own "anti-urban classicism" by implicitly contrasting it with the scorned suburban "other" which he at first barely dares name and then dismisses by contemptuous and metaphorical comparison with the preoccupations of the "more insidious type of Babbitt" (17). Well after the suburban dust had settled, poet Mark Doty was confidently referring to "the sleep of the suburbs" and willing to deploy Robert Lowell's well-known characterization of the "tranquillized fifties" to indict a "tranquillized" suburbia (134, 143). Such caricatures, as this book will explain, belie the considerable tensions building up in the period and place, and latent in its poetry.

Literary and Suburban Studies

Given the wealth of material outlined above, and addressed in detail below, it is surprising that *The Poetics of the American Suburbs* is the first full-length study of this field. The larger discipline of Suburban Studies, morphing into a "New Suburban History," has grown enormously of late. Fine recent work by Rosalyn Baxandall and Elizabeth Ewen, Dolores Hayden, Tom Martinson, and Kevin M. Kruse and Thomas J. Sugrue, building on pioneering studies by Kenneth Jackson, Robert Fishman, and Sam Bass Warner, amongst others, has informed the argument to follow. The fiction and film of the suburbs has registered in passing in some of these interdisciplinary studies, and has been the specific focus of excellent recent work by Catherine Jurca (*White Diaspora: The Suburb and the Twentieth-Century American Novel*) and Robert Beuka (*SuburbiaNation: Reading Suburban Landscape in Twentieth-Century American Fiction and Film*) both of which go some way to addressing the occlusion of the literature of the suburbs from the scholarly record. In each case, though, the emphasis is exclusively on novels and short stories and, in Jurca's book, on the writing of the interwar period. The poetry of the American suburbs has, as yet, received almost no scholarly scrutiny. The evident privileging of suburban prose over poetry may be taken as a symptom of a broader trend across American literary history. As Harrington explains, narrative form has typically been taken as the source of "cultural critique" while poetry has been (dis)regarded as "the repository of 'aesthetic value'" ("Poetry" 274). In Newcomb's terms, the tendency has been to "define a historicized American literature as fiction, or at least prose, making poetry into something less than an afterthought" (*Would* xviii; see also Davidson, *Ghostlier* xi). A study of suburban poetry, then, has the potential both to recover a range of lost poetries and poets, and to reorientate our understanding of postwar American cultural history

Just as poetry has been overlooked in general studies of the suburbs and of suburban literature, so too the suburbs have been overlooked in accounts of postwar poetry. The only exception of note is to be found in the conclusion to Robert Von Hallberg's 1985 book *American Poetry and Culture: 1945–1980* wherein a brief coda rather apologetically points to evidence of suburban poetry from the mid-1970s onwards (of Robert Pinsky's work, Von Hallberg observes, with some surprise, that it proceeds "without a touch of embarrassment at being suburban" (239)). Jed Rasula's *The American Poetry Wax Museum: Reality Effects, 1940–1990*, published in 1996, cites and critiques Von Hallberg's position, but succeeds only in replacing one set of prejudices with another (in the latter's case, targeting just one poem as an example of the perceived limitations of a suburban poetic). In other studies of mid-century, mid-generation writing, poems of the American city and countryside earn extensive coverage while poetry of and about suburban space remains unnoticed. Current scholarship in poetic and cultural studies, where it mentions place at all (for example in

Kristin Ross's examination of Rimbaud and social space and Ian Davidson's recent study of space in contemporary English, European and American poetry) tends to focus on urban areas and communities. The same is true of recent work on poetic form such as Jahan Ramazani's, *Poetry of Mourning*, which discusses the effects of "urbanization" but not *sub*urbanization on the emergence of the modern elegy (15) or Ann Marie Mikkelsen's *Pastoral, Pragmatism, and Twentieth-Century American Poetry,* which, again, considers the pastoral mode in relation to cities and rural areas, but not to the suburbs (2, 171). *The Poetics of the American Suburbs* seeks to explicate, and to fill, gaps such as these.

Mid-century poetry—that is poetry of the period under scrutiny in this book—has been typified as a poetry of "irony and control" (Dickstein 185), of "patience and restraint" (Von Hallberg 131), of "the center" (Rasula 6), and as a body of work still under the shadow of the New Critical commitment to order (Doty 131–2). For Marshall Berman, such writing is typified by a "mainly earnest optimism" and by a "reluctance to engage" (83, 309) while, according to John Ciardi, it is "tentative, self-questioning, introspective" (*Mid-century* xxx). Marjorie Perloff, looking back on the period in her 1985 study, *The Dance of the Intellect: Studies in the Poetry of the Pound Tradition*, identifies as typical the "neo-Romantic poem of intense subjectivity" (ix). Each of these attributes is evident to some degree in the poetry that I go on to examine. But none of them alone properly exemplifies the poetics of the postwar suburbs. And as the close readings that follow show, this poetry of apparently quiet affirmation frequently hides a more critical and transgressive heart.

According to Michael Davidson, conventional form has often been used not to consolidate but to expose the social conformity regarded as a feature of the postwar suburbs:

> Poets such as Richard Wilbur, John Hollander, Stanley Kunitz, Louise Bogan, Alfred Corn, Anthony Hecht and James Merrill utilize regular meters and layered diction to parody social rituals . . . In each of these poets, formal language mocks its own superciliousness, flaunting a kind of social propriety while exposing its darker repercussions. (*Guys* 118)

Michael Thurston makes a similar point, arguing that in the poetry of the 1950s, "poetic form is related not to a comfort with consensus but is instead a register of tensions to be managed" (489). As we will see in the discussion of Richard Wilbur, Donald Hall, and their peers later in this book, surface regularity—although perceived as a symptom of homogeneity and of political and aesthetic conservatism—may offer a way of isolating and critiquing the conventions of suburban life, and thereby of providing a necessary framework within which a more quizzical or disruptive voice might emerge.

The form of the sonnet, although deployed extensively by many of the poets discussed later, most notably by Phyllis McGinley, proves unexpectedly subversive in this respect. Its characteristic turn at the end of the octave make it particularly amenable to the establishment, and then the rethinking, of a rhetorical position. In other words, the formal convention allows her and others to pursue and then undermine an ideal of suburban daily life. The sestina is used only rarely, as for example, in William Meredith's 1949 *Hudson Review* poem "Trees in a Grove" where the requirements of the structure, and Meredith's choice of "suburb" as one of his end words, ensure that the location appears repeatedly across the whole poem: each time in a new and interrogative relationship to its various contexts and referents. Free verse becomes apparent in the work of later poets from the mid-1960s onwards and allows for a more ruminant contemplation and a more distanced evaluation of a social experience—perhaps even experiment—that is no longer at its peak. The poetics of the American suburbs are thus characterized by the use of theme, form, language, voice, and context in suggestive and strategic ways in order to offer a range of representations of suburban experience and subjectivity that are often at odds with the stereotypes of suburbia that pertained in contemporary discourse. This is to say, the poetry complicates the caricature, sometimes by inverting it and sometimes, even more interestingly, by elaborating and thereby exposing its terms.

This having been said, in the main the poets of the postwar suburbs work within the conventions of the lyric even as they sometimes push these to the limit. From one point of view, this tendency is commensurate with the wider post (or anti-) modernist ethos of the time. As Alan Filreis suggests, the ideology of the postwar years posited a resurgent poetic lyricism as a counter to the perceived dangers of modernism and avant-gardism (both being equated with communism) of the previous decades (244). The New Criticism—the influence of which was perhaps greatest in this period—helped to foster a politically expedient identification of lyric poetry with the "post-ideological moment," seeing it as "a beleaguered but tough center that would poetically hold" (245). In the hands of the suburban poets discussed here, the lyric assumes unusually plastic properties and is used to unexpectedly critical effect.

Lyric poetry offers what Deborah Forbes terms a rather volatile sincerity effect (3); its authenticity is produced as much by the conventions of the tradition as by the experience ostensibly at its heart. In many of the poems discussed hereafter, what we find is a gap between the insights promised by the lyric (a mode that, after all, assumes what we are to take as the perspective of the interested participant/observer) and the realities of the subject/speaker's position. Such a gap becomes the site of uncertainty for speaker and reader alike. And although the lyric seems to promise intimacy of communication and thereby seems to hold out the possibility of dialogue it is, in Deborah Nelson's terms (and as we see in the work of Wilbur, Nemerov and James Lewis, amongst others), an isolating form:

> The lyric is the form in which we witness the exhilaration—and perhaps also the terror—of autonomy and self-sovereignty. Unlike the novel, which is polyvocal and social, the lyric is the aesthetic and ideological form in which a speaker conveys the experience and / or the fantasy of his or her own privacy and unfettered self-creation. (D. Nelson xvi-ii)

Thus the mode holds out possibilities (albeit deceptive ones) about agency and authority in a culture widely maligned for cultivating a generation of timid conformists. Finally, and as the final chapter and conclusion will suggest, the lyric invites and creates space for a productive kind of self-reflexivity or self-consciousness both with respect to its own speaking position and to its own language and it is these, ultimately, which mark the distinctiveness of the poetics of the American suburbs.

Everyday Spaces

The Poetics of the American Suburbs is informed by new theories of subjectivity and space that have emerged over the past two decades. Such approaches ask us to recognize the importance of geographical in addition to (or, more properly as a critique of) historicist methodologies. In Sara Blair's cogent terms, these perspectives are interested in "spatiality, the affective and social experience of space"; in "space in the abstract, as well as specific places," and they see "the articulation of space as a social product, one that masks the conditions of its own formation" (544).[2] Edward Soja's point of departure in his 1996 book *Third Space: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* has provided something of a model for my own approach to the poetry of the suburbs. His "objective," he explains, is

> to encourage you to think differently about the meanings and significance of space and those related concepts that compose and comprise the inherent *spatiality of human life*: place, location, locality, landscape, environment, home, city, region, territory, and geography. (1)

The present study is not the place for a detailed critique of Soja's work or that of his peers. Suffice it to say that what I take from Soja is an understanding of the significance of "imagined" space (10). From the work of critics such as Gaston Bachelard whose stimulating mediation on *The Poetics of Space* asks how particular spaces *mean*, I derive an interest in the "problem of the poetics of the house" (xxxv–i). With the suburban house as an example, and the poetics of the postwar American suburbs as my medium, I explore the processes of production and reception by which the material and quotidian features of these spaces become meaningful. Doreen Massey's scholarship offers a way of bridging historical and geographical (and other) dimensions and provides insight into the importance of social practice in the experience of (suburban) space:

> The social spaces through which we live do not only consist of physical things: of bricks and mortar, streets and bridges, mountains and seashore, and of what we make of these things. They consist also of those less tangible spaces we construct out of social interaction. The intimate social relations of the kitchen and the interaction from there to the backyard and the living room. ("Space-time" 49)

Michel De Certeau's work has also proved influential to my own thinking. For De Certeau, cities are constructed conceptually and in practice by the process of walking through them; my contention in this book is that many of these poets (Robert Bly, Josephine Miles, Anne Sexton, and John Updike to take just four examples) write the text of the suburbs by walking through, driving across, or flying over them. For De Certeau, the process of looking down on the city from an elevated point represents "the exaltation of a scopic and gnostic drive" (92); we might argue the same of, say, Updike's poem "Scenic," (a view of the San Francisco suburbs from on high) or "Thin Air" whose speaker looks down on suburban sprawl, like "luminous noodles" of highway as his plane comes in to land (*Collected* 283, 240). As chapter 5 will show, the significance of particular viewing positions and of visual apparatus such as the plate glass or picture window in the architecture and thus in the poetry of the period exemplifies this process.

My readings also draw on scholarship such as Henri Lefebvre's 1947 *Critique of Everyday Life*. Instead of reading "the everyday" as something transient and unremarkable, Lefebvre interprets it as a dimension replete with possibility that offers unexpected insight into contemporary modes of existence. He argues for the importance of a detailed critique of the everyday because through such an examination one might arrive at an understanding of the multiple, if quotidian, ways in which social, subjective and even bodily experiences are constructed (29, 95–6). For Lefebvre, the study of the everyday, far from licensing a frivolous distraction from matters of importance, is inextricable from the political: “the critique of everyday life involves a critique of political life, in that everyday life already contains and constitutes such a critique” (92). The everyday, he argues, “has a secret life and richness of its own” (87) and provides insights not available through the abstractions of the external grand view (235). The same, I suggest, might be said of the poetry of the suburbs; it provides access to the hidden detail of suburban experience, and to a level of understanding denied by macro analyses.[3] Siobhan Phillips’s insightful book *The Poetics of the Everyday* affirms the political dimensions of daily life as evidenced in modern poets from Robert Frost to James Merrill:

> There exists a realm of experience other than subjective withdrawal and objective reference; there exists a historicity that is not necessarily historical as well as a sociality that is not necessarily political. One can describe this realm, in part, through everyday time—through its common, consistent, changing over-and-over. (200)

The apparently mundane rituals of everyday suburban life when inflected in and by its poetry thus comprise a suggestive field of enquiry.

The Suburban Imaginary

The argument of *The Poetics of the American Suburbs* is that the poetry discussed in the pages that follow played a vital, if hitherto overlooked and even disavowed, role in the construction and dissemination of an image (or set of images) of suburban landscape, daily experience, and subjectivity. Where Jed Rasula insists that “poets have been disadvantaged by novelists when it comes to contending with the suburban milieu” (429) (confirmation of the broader privileging of prose in literary historiography, mentioned earlier), I would counter that poetry offers a uniquely incisive account of the detail of contemporary suburban life, while also tacitly, or otherwise, engaging with the bigger picture. Poetry allows us to go deeper and get closer than other kinds of account while also, in the very best examples, displaying an awareness of its own processes of perception, reflection, and meaning production. In her influential 1961 study, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities: The Failure of Town Planning*, Jane Jacobs comments of her own methodology: “I have made the daily ballet of Hudson Street sound more frenetic than it is, because writing telescopes it” (64). Poetry more than any other literary form exhibits a similar capacity; it telescopes, or brings into focus, suburban experience. It also crystallizes it; there is something about the concentration and condensation of poetic form and language that bring aspects of individual and social experience, of historical circumstance, and geographical context, into sharp and clear relief. Equally, as I will show later in my discussions of suburban elegies and pastorals, poetry rooted in suburban landscape, community, and daily life forces a revision of some of the forms and conventions of poetic genre.

The poetry considered below devises a language, structure, and voice appropriate to the physical and social formations of the contemporary suburbs; it articulates and responds to contemporary anxieties about suburban growth, and embodies in its surprisingly diverse themes, forms, and idioms, many of the complexities and contradictions of the suburban way of life. Some of the poems chosen play a vital role in sustaining the suburban ideal; others are intent on critiquing that model; others again are neutral or ambivalent about the effects of suburban growth. In each case poetry is central to the depiction and thus understanding of what suburbia means; as Bonnie Costello argues of the poets discussed in her book *Shifting Ground: Reinventing Landscape in Modern American Poetry*: "poetry manifests the differences words and images can make in how we apprehend the world" (14). In its appearance in a number of different media, and thus its appeal to a range of audiences, poetry foregrounds contemporary concerns about literary value and readerly taste. In its own self-consciousness and ambivalence and, finally, in its own moments of silence or aporia, it exposes the weight of skepticism about the possibilities of a poetics of the suburbs, and the near-impossibility of its own self-appointed task. The poetics of the American suburbs are ultimately, I will propose, characterized by this anxious sense of unease about the validity of the subject position from which the poetry is written. The suburbs, from this point of view, are experienced and represented as uncertain, mutable, liminal spaces, or as "indefensible positions," to quote Richard Wilbur (qtd. in Davidson, *Guys* 5).

It is the task of this book to defend the apparently "indefensible," to bring the poetics of the suburbs in from the margins, to examine the conditions in which these texts emerged and have been read, and to present a critique that is attentive to poetry's place in contemporary discourses of suburban growth. By first recovering this poetry, and then reading it in relation to such contexts (and specifically, in relation to broader contemporary debates about, for example, social conformity, frustrated femininity, compromised masculinity, racial segregation, and environmental change), we are able to reach a better understanding of the primary sources themselves and of their wider historical, cultural, and geographical situations. In the end, though, it is by attending to the deep texture of particular poems and to their language, forms, voices, and nuances that we are best able to reach an understanding of suburban topography, experience, and subjectivity in the postwar period—that we are able, at last, to see how and what the suburbs mean.

The first part of *The Poetics of the American Suburbs* surveys the history of suburbia and evaluates the discourses that have shadowed its growth. Chapter 1: Constructing the Suburbs identifies the deep-seated origins of the economic and technological developments and abstract ideals that helped to nurture postwar suburbanization. It draws on a range of historical and poetic resources in tracing the emergence of modern suburbia and looks in particular at the role played by poetry in negotiating key aspects of suburban growth. Chapter 2: Suburban Tastes assesses postwar anxieties about mass taste (or tastelessness) as evidenced in the production and reception of a poetry of the suburbs. This chapter examines the tension that emerges between a received narrative of suburbia and the counter discourses becoming apparent in the poetry.

The second part of the book moves into a more detailed discussion of the poetry itself. Chapter 3 takes the work of so-called Poet Laureate of suburbia, Phyllis McGinley, as an example and test case of the possibilities of the form. Again, questions of taste and readership come to the fore, as do nascent debates about gender, family life, and the everyday. Chapter 4: Suburban Landscapes reads a range of poetries with a view to their representations of suburban development and its effects on the landscapes of different regions (such as California) and diverse communities, including established small towns. It also examines the distinct body of suburban asylum poetry that emerges at this time and evaluates the therapeutic promise of such an environment. Chapter 5: The Look of the Suburbs examines the characteristic architecture and design of the suburbs with particular emphasis on their material properties (epitomized by the iconic picture window and carefully tended lawns) and on the crucial question of who is doing the looking. Chapter 6: On the Margins explores predominantly male poets' evocations of suburbia as a liminal, twilight space wherein the subject seems suspended in space and time. It looks, too, at a group of suburban elegies and asks what these poems tell us both about perceptions of contemporary suburban life, and about the capacity of a poetics of the American suburbs to manipulate poetic convention. The Conclusion turns to the self-reflexivity which I see as a defining feature of the poetics of the postwar American suburbs. This poetry, I will argue, places the apparent unlikeness—even impossibility—of its own project (ironically) center stage. And in so doing, it exposes the ambivalence, the discursiveness, the historical situatedness, and the spatial specificity of its own processes.

PART I

CHAPTER 1

Constructing the Suburbs

The suburban housing developments that have dominated the popular imagination in the years since their post–World War II heyday are a recent manifestation of a phenomenon that is neither particularly new nor uniquely American. As a number of historians have shown, most notably Lewis Mumford in his classic *The City in History* and Kenneth T. Jackson in his still-unsurpassed *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*, suburbia is a social, physical, economic, ideological, and, as this book will argue, *cultural* formation with long and variegated roots. This chapter maps key moments and factors in the construction of what we know as the postwar American suburbs; it begins with a broad historical overview, and then proceeds chronologically through to the middle of the twentieth century. The focus is initially on material pressures and changes (for example on the effects of housing shortages and road building) and then on the causes and consequence of ideological change (in terms of gender roles and racial segregation). Throughout, my interest is in poetry's role in constructing and disseminating an experience and understanding of suburbia. As I will argue, poetry has been implicit from the outset in contemporary suburban discourse.

Part One: Pre–World War II Suburbs

In the middle decades of the nineteenth century, architects and landscape designers such as Frederick Law Olmsted, Andrew Jackson Downing, and Alexander Jackson Davis created what John Archer has called a "new American planning type, the romantic suburb" ("Country" 140).[1] Inspired, in part, by landscaped urban parks in England and aspiring to bring together the civilized and civilizing values of the American city and the aesthetic and moral virtues of the country, the picturesque or romantic suburb offered the promise of calm, stability, and order set amidst an uplifting pastoral backdrop.

For Downing, writing in his 1842 manifesto-cum-pattern book, *Cottage Residences, or, a Series of Designs for Rural Cottages and Cottage-Villas, and their Gardens and Grounds. Adapted to North America*, "rural homes and rural life" were beneficial both to the body and the soul: "how much happiness, how much pure pleasure, . . . in making the place dearest to our hearts a sunny spot where the social sympathies take shelter securely under the shadowy eaves . . . as if striving to shut out whatever of bitterness or strife may be found in the open highways of the world" (iii). His "Design 1: A Suburban Cottage for a Small Family," situated on a 75 × 150 feet lot, comprises a ground floor parlor with pantry and book area; a kitchen and bedroom with four large, and one small (presumably staff) bedroom over. Throughout, simplicity and unity of design are emphasized. A garden, organized into vegetable and ornamental areas, is provided. Potential buyers are advised that "in the suburbs of a town or village, the more common kinds of vegetables may generally be purchased as cheaply as they can be raised by the inmates of such a cottage." However, residents may like to grow their own for "satisfaction" (35–42). In *Suburban Sketches* (1871), William Dean Howells notes of his family's relocation to the suburb of "Charlesbridge," "We played a little at gardening, of course, and planted tomatoes, which the chickens seemed to like, for they ate them up as fast as they ripened" (14). In these as in other contemporary accounts, the suburbs are figured as a new frontier—an Eden-like space ripe for development, a testing ground for pioneering traits of independence and self-reliance, and a locus for the consolidation of a highly gendered model of space and time.

Although early American suburbs were influenced by their European counterparts, they responded to a specifically American set of pressures and needs, ranging from the spiritual and aesthetic through the practical and technological to the social and ideological. Jackson dates the first planned American suburbs to the early decades of the eighteenth century when land developers began to sell residential lots within travelling range of the fast-growing cities of Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. A more systematic process of suburbanization emerged from around 1815 and proliferated across the rest of that century (K. Jackson 13). Innovations in building, specifically the introduction of the "balloon frame" from around 1840 which allowed houses to be erected quickly and cheaply and with minimum craftsman input, facilitated standardization.[2]

Changes in transportation across the nineteenth century (including the introduction of omnibuses, steam railroads and horse cars) were as important as innovations in building techniques to the expansion of the suburbs and opened up whole new areas for affordable commutation (Stilgoe 129; Hayden, *Building* 23) even if, as Howells shows in his gently mocking *Suburban Sketches*, this was at the price of the commuter's "imposture" and "discomfort" (13). Canny developers such as Olmsted and Vaux, anticipating the strategies deployed by road contractors, builders, and automobile lobbyists in the mid-twentieth century, drafted rail lines into their plans in order to ensure the success of their projects (Archer, "Country" 155). Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe confirm the efficacy of such ploys in their 1869 book *The American Woman's Home, or, Principles of Domestic Science; being a Guide to the Formation and Maintenance of Economical, Healthful, Beautiful, and Christian Homes*: "Every head of a family should seek a soil and climate which will afford such opportunities [of "outdoor labor for all"]. Railroads, enabling men toiling in cities to rear families in the country, are on this account a special blessing" (24–5).

Across the nineteenth and into the early twentieth century, the suburbs were regarded as advantageous to spiritual, moral, and physical well-being (in Andrew Jackson Downing's terms, they provided an escape from "whatever bitterness or strife may be found in the open highways of the world" (iii)). They were thought to offer health-bestowing benefits such as access to pleasant and elevating vistas and to space, light, and clean air. By contrast, the city came increasingly to be regarded as the site of immorality, vice, and contagion. In the years before zoning laws (first introduced at the turn of the century), the factories, slaughterhouses, stables, bars, brothels, and dosshouses of a thriving metropolis were often located alongside residential premises, producing various forms of pollution and a perceived threat to middle-class women and children.[3] At a time of mass movement to American cities from an economically and politically troubled Europe, and of post-civil war flight from the southern states, migrant families were thought to pose a particular risk to the health and well-being of the existing urban population—a concern amplified by a growing apprehension of the germ theory of disease (Tomes 11, 111, 129).

The suburbs represented a sanctuary or "retreat" from all this (Mumford 550). Beecher and Beecher Stowe's 1869 *The American Woman's Home* recommends "suburban vicinities" because they "give space of ground for healthful outdoor occupation in the family service" (24). Newly built suburban cottages and estates were typically built on spacious lots with modern sanitation systems while newly formed railroad companies, in league with land developers, specifically advertised the suburbs as healthy locations (K. Jackson 36).

Thus the planned nineteenth-century garden or streetcar suburbs, like the twentieth-century developments to which we will turn shortly, offered an apparently safe, uncontaminated enclave away from the racially, ethnically, and economically mixed cities.

Technological, agricultural, and social changes in the wake of the Civil War contributed to the reorganization of land, labor, and family life and placed a renewed emphasis on the private and domestic sphere as the proper locus of (middle-class) feminine activity and the fundamental—indeed natural and normalized—heart of the American way of life. In an age characterized by the "acceleration of industrialization" (Cordery 111) with its attendant demands both on the resources of the natural environment and on the time and energy of the (typically) male breadwinner, suburban homes set in rural or quasirural tranquility, and maintained by willing housewives, offered a welcome haven. Beecher and Beecher Stowe's *The American Woman's Home*, cited earlier, presents a guide to the "family state" and a manifesto for those white middle-class women whose role as nurturers and moral guardians was being newly recognized. The introduction to their book is explicit in its aims and in its belief in the importance of the home to the nation's well-being:

> It is the aim of this volume to elevate both the honor and the remuneration of all the employments that sustain the many difficult and sacred duties of the family state, and thus to render each department of woman's true profession as much desired and respected as are the most honored professions of men. (13)[4]

In an equation that persisted through into the post–World War II period, investment in the home was regarded as akin to commitment to the nation. Where middle-class women did engage with community work outside the home during the closing decades of the nineteenth century (as arguably in the mid-twentieth century), this was perceived as a form of "municipal housekeeping," or a way of "putting their piety, purity, and domesticity to work in the world around them" (Cordery 115). The security of the private suburban home was thought to guarantee the stability and longevity of the larger public domain. In the late nineteenth century, according to Stephanie Coontz, "building a comfortable home life was the most morally worthwhile act one could undertake" (109). We see this conflation of the private and the public, the ethical and the material in the representations of the twentieth-century suburbs we will go on to discuss. In both periods, one might note, there is an unacknowledged reliance on the labor of an underclass—black domestic servants, immigrant factory workers, agricultural laborers, and so on—whose role is silently and invisibly to sustain, at often minimal wages and with little-if-any employment protection, the middle-class suburban ideal (see Cordery 125ff). Even after the decline in the use of domestic servants in the twentieth century—a decline that is both facilitated by and stimulus for "the development of a specifically suburban type of architecture that combined the requirements for servantless domesticity with the ideal of independence and privacy" (K. Jackson 128)—the tacit support for a system that allows the privileged few to prosper at the cost of the economic exploitation of an invisible service class remained an issue.

The 1910s and 1920s witnessed the consolidation of many of the principles established in the previous century, not least a suspicion of the city and an idealization of home ownership. Anxiety about the apparent threat to enshrined American ideals of self-determination and economic liberty posed by Bolshevik-influenced notions of shared ownership and communal living, coupled with the demands for continuing growth of a capitalist economy, led to a renewed emphasis on the advantages of suburban development. Archer cites Harding and Coolidge's campaign "to make the single-family detached house the ideal of every family in America" ("Suburbia"15) while Becky Nicolaides quotes one developer, speaking in 1919: "It elevates a man to own a home. It gives a certain independence, a force of character that is obtained in no other way... Homes make patriots" (17).

Concomitantly, the boom years of the early 1920s heralded a new "culture of consumption" (Matthews 180). In this period, it has been argued, women in particular ceased to play the role of economic producers (working on the land, keeping poultry or other small livestock, canning and bottling produce) and became, instead, identified as consumers. The suburbs have been seen as simultaneously a cause and symptom of this process. In fact, in many pre–World War II suburbs, for example those established in California during the 1920s and 1930s, limited agricultural and livestock production continued to be a vital part of the economy (Nicolaides 12–38). More generally across the country in the opening decades of the twentieth century, it is not that women ceased to be productive, it is that the nature of that production changed. Women, particularly suburban women, became aligned with new processes and tasks—ones that required novel technological, administrative, and personal skills such as the ability to drive the family from home to railroad or school, to operate new appliances, and to provide educational, medical and emotional support to husband and children (Cowan 69–101). What suburban women produced at this time, then, were stable and functional family units. This role persisted, as we will see, into the postwar years where its inherent demands and contradictions become apparent in the poetry of Phyllis McGinley and Anne Sexton, amongst others.

Other important foundation stones for postwar suburban growth were also being laid at this time. The manufacture and sale of the Model T Ford from 1908 with its attendant promise of "liberation from the daily bondage of place" (Kunstler 86) proved seminal not least because it stimulated a powerful and long-lived road-building lobby. In 1910 some 200,000 automobiles were registered; by 1919 that figure had risen to six million, and by 1929 to 23 million. By the 1920s, traffic was sufficient to form the first "rushes" (Gowans 19, 18). "Sestina of the Fliv," a poem by "H. G. F" collected in W. P. Adams's 1926 light verse anthology *The Conning Tower Book*, registers the excitement and novelty of the moment. "Speaking of autos," the poem opens, with an exaggeratedly casual air, before cataloguing the various different marques the speaker has tried. Only the "Lizzie," (the "Tin Lizzie" or Model T. Ford) can cope with any conditions: "When mud's deep and country roads are more / Like lakes than roads, the flivver beats them all" (Adams 47–8).

The spread of the automobile encouraged infill development between suburban areas that had hitherto been clustered around fixed streetcar, railway, and trolley bus routes (Stilgoe 275; K. Jackson 181).[5] The enhancement of existing rail routes such as the electrification of the Hudson and Harlem lines into Westchester County from 1910, further stimulated suburbanization (Weigold 104). Taken together, the increased efficiency of railroads to and from the city and the new option of driving instead of walking to the commuter station allowed the suburbs to expand as never before.

The Depression and stock market crash of October 1929 affected the growth of the suburbs in numerous ways. In terms of the realignment of family life and of the relations of production and consumption noted above, the closing off of work-place alliances and the dissipation of the power of the unions consolidated a renewed focus on private family life (Cross 120). The economic collapse and natural disasters such as the Dust Bowl conditions of the 1930s prompted the newly dispossessed to settle in regions such as California which offered the hope of employment in agriculture, manufacturing, and other industries. Technological innovation, mechanization (such as the introduction of the Fordson Tractor from 1918), environmental pressure, and population change meant that single-family farming became economically unsustainable, rendering the land ripe for suburban development. In Westchester County where there had been 1528 farms in 1920, by 1929 only 428 remained (Weigold 110).

New Deal programs aimed at addressing housing need and at generating employment opportunities for construction and allied trades led to a number of crucial policies including the establishment of the short-lived Home Owners Loan Corporation (or HOLC) in 1933 and, one year later, its successor the Federal Housing Administration (FHA). Under the auspices of

Roosevelt's New Deal, the HOLC rescued troubled home owners by remortgaging their properties and redesigning the terms such that repayments could be spread over a much longer period than previously. It also devised a standardized system of property valuation. The consequences of this in terms of the formalization of segregation (by the devaluation or "redlining" of properties deemed to be in too close proximity to black, ethnic, or poor neighborhoods) was of major import to the constitution of the postwar suburbs. The 1932 report of the Negro Committee on Housing noted that Baltimore was the first city to establish legislation in 1910 in order to segregate whites and blacks. This "West Segregation Ordinance" was overturned in 1917 by the Supreme Court as "unconstitutional." Nevertheless, covenants on private property and covert practices succeeded where the ordinance had failed (Gries and Ford 36, 41). The point is evidenced in the case of playwright Lorraine Hansberry's father who in 1938 was ejected from his new Washington Park home with the sanction of the State Supreme Court on the grounds "that the property was covered by a restrictive covenant prohibiting nonwhite residence" (Jurca, *White* 216 n 50).

Part Two: The Post–World War II Suburbs

By the end of World War II, many of the conditions were in place for the efflorescence of the American suburbs. Poetry in a range of forms, appearing in diverse media and constructing and speaking to a variety of audiences, played a vital "social function" (C. Nelson, *Repression* xi) in mediating and, by turns, critiquing or perpetuating a vision or visions of suburban landscape, community, and identity.

Housing Shortages

A major factor in this period was the shortage of housing. From the Depression through into the war years, many families had of necessity shared overcrowded city apartments. Gwendolyn Wright records that the problem was exacerbated in the immediate postwar period when some "2.5 million reunited families and recently married couples had to double up with relatives" (242). The situation was unsustainable for anything other than the short term and was rendered more difficult as the war came to an end by the settlement in the United States of displaced persons from war zones, by a steady influx of returning GIs and by a rapidly increasing birth rate (Baxandall and Ewen 120; Coontz 24).[6]

Elizabeth K. Read's article "No Place to Live" in the *Saturday Evening Post* of 16 February 1946 provides a first-person glimpse of the reality behind the statistics. Her story is presented as a "case history" of "what the housing shortage means—the near-tragic story of a family that had just thirty days to find a home." The landlord of Read's rented apartment is about to be sent home from the Navy and gives his tenants notice to leave, thereby forcing them to join the other "12,000,000 families in need of homes for one reason or another" (Read 20). Seventeen real estate agents prove unable to find alternative accommodation, so Read and her husband decide to build their own home. Land is available, but war-time shortages of timber, roofing, furnaces, and bathroom fittings rule out this option (118). In the end, word of mouth, and a serendipitous chain of other relocations provided a last-minute solution to the writer's problem (120).

An unsigned poem in the *Ladies' Home Journal* of March 1955, "The One Room Apartment," confirms the persistence of the squeeze on housing. The rapid rhythm and energetic rhyme scheme evoke the pressure of trying to fit a household's entire furnishings into one small apartment. The five-stanza poem opens:

> If we put the desk where the
> bureau is
> And the bureau next to the
> bed,
> There'd be plenty of room where
> the desk had been
> To put the dresser instead.

The demands of the layout of the magazine (with tight column widths forcing the breakup of each line) only exemplify the chaos of the cramped environment. Yet, in an unexpectedly satirical sign-off, the poem critiques the acquisitiveness of a contemporary society that continues to accumulate consumer goods, space constraints notwithstanding:

> But then when you wanted to
> Open a drawer
> You'd have to sit on the bed.
> So maybe we'd better not bother
> At all,
> And buy a new sofa instead. (211)

In this way, the poem adopts what Bean and Chasar call a "counterhegemonic" position. Alongside other popular poetry of the suburbs in the postwar years, it plays a vital role in affirming, playing out and—as importantly—testing "cultural narratives, social debates, and subject positions" (5). If such processes have not hitherto been noticed, this is in part because of the tendency (outlined earlier) to view prose as the primary register of historical meaning, in part because of the narrowness of our definitions of poetry-worth-talking-about, and in part because of a habitual dismissal of the interests of popular and mass audiences (especially, as in the case of *The Ladies' Home Journal*, of female audiences). All have been compounded by the reluctance thus far of historical, literary, and cultural studies scholars to take the suburbs seriously as engines and repositories of social meaning—an occlusion that this book seeks to address.

The severity of the postwar housing problem was addressed in 1945 by the "Taft Ellender Wagner Act," which aimed to ensure the rights of families to "a decent home in which to live" (qtd. in Baxandall and Ewen 89). The Act allowed for slum clearance and some public housing. More influentially, it made substantial changes to the operation of home loans and insurance, extending the provisions of the FHA by making it easier for builders to borrow against and thereafter develop land in advance of having an agreed purchaser for the plot (K. Jackson 204; Baxandall and Ewen 89, 122). This particular solution did not, though, address practical barriers such as shortages of labor and materials. By early 1946, the Federal Government had taken action, issuing "Veterans Housing Programme Order No. 1" in order to divert building supplies from non-essential projects. As Lee E. Cooper reports in the *New York Times* of 27 March 1946, building companies, "anticipating the order, have been acquiring many large sites, particularly in Queens and Nassau Counties, and are making plans to erect groups of dwellings with greater assurance than heretofore that they will get the necessary building materials" (18).

The house builders cited in the *New York Times* were, indeed, poised to act. Since the 1930s, they—along with land speculators, road builders, automobile manufacturers, gas and tyre salesmen, and other interested parties—had been involved in lobbying *for* policies that would facilitate private housing development for the masses, and *against* public housing and public transport. Changes to the FHA rules cited above coupled with the incoming GI Bill (discussed below), enabled developers such as Bill Levitt to buy huge swathes of defunct farm land in the confidence that he was guaranteed to find reliable purchasers for the properties he proposed to build.

Renovation of existing urban housing stock was not regarded as feasible because of its high cost and low profit margin in comparison with new builds. Simultaneously, appliance and furniture manufacturers were working tirelessly to promote the desirability of the new. "The power of the dream," Baxandall and Ewen note, "was so persuasive that a *Saturday*

Evening Post survey in 1945 revealed that only 14% of the population would be satisfied to live in an apartment or 'used house'" (87). Phyllis McGinley's poem "Song for a Brand-New House," originally published in the *Saturday Evening Post* in February 1940 and collected in the same year in her book, *A Pocketful of Wry*, extols the pleasures of the new, privately owned, suburban home. Its opening stanza invokes the rhetoric of the "City on the Hill," or the longed-for fulfilment of the American "dream" sustained by ownership of a plot of virgin land:

> Our little home is finished,
>   A dream that came to birth.
> Before our eyes we saw it rise
>   Upon our private earth.

A devil-may-care dismissal of the snags that remain in the newly built property ("What if the furnace doesn't work, yet, / If floors are a tint that I didn't pass on") is the prelude to a celebration of the home owners' freedom from the clutches of the landlord: "No more the hired apartment, / No more the rented lair." Yet, as is characteristic of McGinley's work, there is a sting in the poem's tail. With home ownership comes practical and financial responsibility: "Our own the rooftree above us bending, / And ours the cost when it cries for mending." Moreover, with the move to a new settlement comes the commitment to contribute to the cost of its amenities—a particular concern for residents of new suburbs. As the closing couplet of McGinley's poem exclaims: "Behold our dwelling, the spirit's axis. / God bless it and help us to meet the taxes!" (*Pocketful* 128–9). The ballad-like form and the use of common meter, coupled with the repetition of "our" and "ours" (used here as a personal and a collective claim), confirm this to be an experience widely shared among McGinley's likely readers.

FHA changes were complemented by the introduction in 1944 of the "Servicemen's Readjustment Act" (or GI Bill) and Veterans Administration (VA) program. Amongst other things, the latter established a mortgage system that required little, or in the case of GIs, no down payment, and insured loans to be spread out over the long term (K. Jackson 204, 238–9). According to Stephanie Coontz, some "40% of the male population between the ages of 20 and 24" were eligible for its benefits (76). However, as Charles M. Lamb notes, "only an estimated 2 percent of FHA-insured loans were made available to [African Americans] between the mid-1940s and the late 1950s" (13). A consequence of the program was that it became cheaper for many white families to buy a house than it did to rent making this "the *only* economically rational choice" (Kunstler 105 [his emphasis]). The effect of these policies, as far as the development of the suburbs was concerned, was to stimulate a flood of (white) buyers with guaranteed money into a building market ready and waiting to satisfy the demand. In the wake of the GI Bill, the FHA changes of a decade earlier, and related factors, "single-family housing starts spurted from only 114,000 in 1944, to 937,000 in 1946 . . . to 1,692,000 in 1950, an all-time high" (K. Jackson 233).

Land on the outskirts of cities was preferred for these new homes for a number of reasons. The cities, as we have seen, were overcrowded and building plots there were scarce and prohibitively expensive. Moreover, returning soldiers' awareness of the devastation of European cities (from the London of the Blitz to the Dresden firestorm) coupled with the catastrophe of Pearl Harbor prompted a desire to move away from potentially vulnerable urban centers. As Thomas Hines notes: "The Soviet Union's acquisition of the atomic bomb only made civil defense more urgent. A dispersed population seemed clearly to be a more defensible one" (43).[7] These fears supplemented generalized nervousness on the part of some citizens and commentators about the propensity of the city to ferment racial, sexual, and political radicalism. In light of these concerns, it is no surprise that faith in the countryside and, by metonymic extension, in the suburbs as the site of purity, security, and American values of self-determination and prosperity re-emerged and flourished. As Leo Marx observes in his influential *The Machine in the Garden*: "the pastoral ideal has been used to define the meaning of America ever since the age of discovery, and it has not yet lost its hold upon the native imagination" (3).

An idealized vision of bucolic bliss, to which poetry in the popular media was particularly amenable, helped to hurry the exodus from the city. "A Place in the Country" by Elizabeth-Ellen Long (in the *Ladies' Home Journal* of November 1950) exemplifies Marx's point and projects a self-consciously fantasized rural idyll:

O, somewhere there are orchards
    I never yet have seen,
Nor shall, and grassy meadows
    All daisy-white and green,
Which still belong as much to me
    As though the deed were writ,
And plain for anyone to see
    My own name signed to it.

The poem draws on the conventions of the pastoral by setting up a distinction between aspiration and actuality, by evoking the form's characteristic nostalgia, and by assuming the voice of the simple speaker, innocently following a dream. Its idiom and the tension it establishes between what is imagined (or seen in the mind's eye) and what remains unseen—even though, paradoxically, "plain for anyone to see"—recall Joyce Kilmer's enormously popular poem, "Trees." Both are about the seductions of nature, but both are also, as Rubin argues of "Trees," about "nature *and* poems" [my emphasis] or about the process by which one might aestheticize experience or, conversely, reify one's dreams (*Songs* 338). In "A Place in the Country," a home of one's own away from the city represents destiny and fulfillment; more pragmatically, it offers a solution to the increasingly evident problems of urban strife, promising a "refuge" and "retreat," in stanza three, from "all the unloved sights and sounds / of crowded city streets" (206). Trite as it may seem in terms of rhyme, imagery, and sentiment, its engagement with the preoccupations of a particular historical and geographical locus exemplifies Cary Nelson's axiom: "texts that were widely read or influential need to retain an active place in our sense of literary history, whether or not we happen, at present, to judge them to be of high quality" (*Repression* 51). A contemporary poem, "Suburban," by the better-known poet William Stafford in the *Ladies' Home Journal* of July 1950 similarly reads the countryside as self-evidently superior and as a necessary and beneficial foil to the excitement and danger of the metropolis; "In any town," the poem begins, "I must live near the rind." Likening himself to a timid animal, tentatively nosing the margins of human habitation, the speaker concludes:

> That's how we always feel, we
> nibblers,
> Around any kind of city:
> In front of us lights and glory and
> stir,
> But back of us—country, as friendly
> as fur. (74)

Like Elizabeth Long, Stafford exploits the conventions of the pastoral mode, here exaggerating (arguably for ironic and knowing effect) the role of the speaker as "simple rustic" (Williamson 568).

Louise Goyol Owen's "Gold Grows on Trees" in *McCall's* (September 1961) inverts the fable that urban streets are paved with gold in its evocation of the richness of the pastoral scene. Addressed to "city-bred, / Town-locked, and pavement-bound" doubters, the poem proclaims in its central stanza:

> I only wish they could
> Come walk with me, and share in the amaze

> That shakes my heart, these ripe September days;
> Could see the Midas-look of trees that bear
> Treasure of golden peach and amber pear. (206)

The Keatsian echoes imbue the scene with sublime grandeur, but also with a sense of loss as though the glories of the garden are about to recede. As my later discussion of other pastoral and elegiac poems will show, such traditions offer the suburban poet a rich and surprisingly malleable set of tropes. The deployment of these forms in popular and mass market periodicals such as *McCalls* and the *Saturday Evening Post* enable the speaker to situate and stabilize immediate experience within a historical and cultural continuum and thus to implicitly reassure the reader about impending social change. In this respect, as Joseph Harrington argues, poetry "not only communicates; rather, it transmits values" (*Poetry* 18).

Poetic defenses of the unspoiled American landscape notwithstanding, economic, agricultural, and technological developments forced the pace of change, rendering former farmland ripe for settlement. The iconic suburb of Levittown, Long Island, was famously built on some 1,300 acres of former potato plot. In the fairy-tale-like narrative of the 1996 children's book *Our House: The Stories of Levittown*:

> There must have been a greater need for houses than for potato fields, because when a man named Levitt came along with a plan to build, it was as though that farmland had been sleeping and just waiting for him. The farmer was paid a handsome sum for his fields, and it's thought he moved out east farther to buy himself a bigger farm. Then in a short amount of time, where there had once been a potato farm, there were now houses, row after row of houses. (Conrad 2)

Yet even in the case of expired agricultural land—the enthusiasm of *Our House* notwithstanding—the emergence of new-build suburbs provoked misgivings among some observers. An early poem in the 23 March 1946 edition of the *Saturday Evening Post*, Arthur W. Peach's "Farmhouse Abandoned," is representative in its lamentation of the loss of America's supposed national heritage. Here, the natural world that is soon to be effaced by the suburbs is anthropomorphized; the scene is focalized through the eyes and voices of "The wild things" who watch as the surrendering farmer and his wife leave the farm with their belongings, offering not even a backwards glance. The difficulty of making the single-family farm pay is evidenced in images of isolation ("their going made a lonely theme") and mourning (the wagon's wheels are "complaining"). The poem operates by evoking nostalgia for a supposedly authentic, valuable, American inheritance and by ruing impending change. Its unusual rhyme scheme (an assertive *aa* rhyme is repeated throughout, albeit with some variation and several half-rhymes), extended over 18 long, ranging lines embody that tension between stasis (familiarity) and progress (novelty) developed thematically across the narrative.

Two weeks earlier, another poem had made a rather different case. William W. Pratt's "We Must Have Homes" in the *Saturday Evening Post* of 9 March 1946 opens by mourning the threat posed to the family homestead by the encroachment of new suburban housing developments. The second of the poem's five stanzas describes machines like clawed monsters and builders furtively arriving with their tools to lay waste to an environment that had nurtured generations of childhood games. The poem's highly regular rhyming couplets exemplify the process of subdividing and conquering the rural landscape. Yet, as the builders measure and drill, diverting the river and dividing the fields into "neat little squares / To face on the curbing of new thoroughfares," the householder comes to an understanding that "God's noble plan / Must bow to the stilted arrangement of man." The "gay little ghosts" of the past must make way for the new, or for a "bedlam of neighborhood kids" (stanza four). In such a context, the speaker can do little more than patriotically subordinate his own desires to the greater needs of his country (or of a "nation in need"). In the words of the final couplet: "With hopes for humanity chasing my frown, / I stand on my threshold to welcome a town" (100). "We Must Have Homes" confirms that poetry in the popular media in the postwar years played an important ideological role in preparing the nation for the kinds of architectural, environmental, and social change that housing needs imposed, and that the suburbs were designed to fulfill.

Road Building

Across the postwar period, the private automobile continued to dominate transport policy and state investment. In 1947, the government began work on the construction of 37,000 miles of highway, and a decade later, passed a Highway Act mandating the construction of an extra 42,500 miles (Coontz 78). A key figure in this process—to whom we will return in chapter 3—was developer and road builder Robert Moses. According to Kunstler: "The end of World War II found Moses at his most glamorous and most dangerous period... When he began his career, Long Island was rural. When he retired in 1968, it was a parking lot" (100). The expansion of the highways led to quicker and more direct journeys and allowed suburban growth in areas not served by rail lines. John Archer notes that "convenient transportation" has, in every age, been the single most significant factor determining the development of the suburbs ("Country" 152). The paradox, of course, as several critics have noted, was that the new transport technologies that provided access to unspoiled and thus attractive countryside were also the cause of its despoliation (Trachtenberg 19; Mumford 559). It is no surprise, then, that in postwar America—and in the poetry of the postwar suburbs—road building and road travel become the catalyst for and focus of a range of otherwise inchoate anxieties.

Ralph W. Seager's "Owed [sic] to the Country Road" published in the *Saturday Evening Post* in September 1959 laments the obliteration of the natural landscape by "black- / top and concrete."[8] With the loss of the old lane comes the depletion of woodland, of family security, and of the possibilities of reverie, each of which had long been associated with immersion in the American landscape. As a consequence of the encroachment of the "black- / top" road and thereafter of the suburbs, the poem's speaker can no longer sense the ground beneath his feet or the air on his skin. The soft assonance of the poem's opening lines is juxtaposed later with the harsh sounds of suburban development: "Bulldozers gouge and steel / blades cut straight through" (55). Road building in "Owed to the Country Road" signifies geographical dispossession and spiritual loss. More than this, the pun on "Owed" / "Ode" signals a perceived threat to poetic tradition arising from the incursions of roads, suburbs and, most alarmingly of all, their resident masses. What future is there, in such a consumerist (hence "Owed") context for established and privileged cultural forms such as the ode? It is a question that the poem answers in and by its own modification of the tradition in ways appropriate to the new circumstances. "Owed to the Country Road" thereby exemplifies Harrington's argument that "not only do styles change within a genre, but the meaning of a genre changes" in tandem with evolving historical and, I would add, spatial contexts (*Poetry* 21).

The new "Parkways" seemed to many a material harbinger of the social disruption attendant on suburban growth. Conceived originally as a way of facilitating access to the picturesque suburbs beyond the city limits, early examples such as Brooklyn's Eastern Parkway began to appear from the turn of the century (K. Jackson 75).[9] The Merritt Parkway, which connected New York with Connecticut, was constructed in phases from the late 1920s through into the 1930s and is the subject of at least two notable poems, Denise Levertov's 1954 "Merritt Parkway" and Robert Bly's slightly later (1962) "Sleet Storm on the Merritt Parkway." The former was included in Donald Allen's *The New American Poetry* (1960)—an anthology that, as the next chapter will explain, was committed to the publication of an avant-garde poetic and eschewed the interests of the allegedly mundane suburbs—while the latter was selected for Donald Hall's competing anthology, *Contemporary American Poetry*. Hall himself has a late poem, "Tomorrow," which mentions a 31 August 1939 journey down the "new Merritt Parkway / toward Long Island" (Hall, *Collected* 217).

Levertov was born in Essex, England, in 1923 and emigrated to New York City in 1948; her poem arguably registers the novelty and shock of the scale and speed of the suburban Parkway to a settler unfamiliar with such an environment. The form of "Merritt Parkway," with its fluid uneven lines and half-lines, ranged in stanzas of varying lengths and layouts on the page, replicates the ceaseless but unpredictable flow of the traffic. Levertov's use of en-dashes, ellipses, and obliques (for example, "the trees / trees bushes" of line 24) sustains the impression of constant if erratic movement, as though disrupted by occasional changes of lane, gear, or speed. The poem starts *in media res* with an allusion to the ever-moving traffic and ends without any clear conclusion or stopping point, again emphasizing the persistent and coercive flow of automobiles. The refrain "keep moving" in the first, fourth, and fifth stanzas confirms the point. The only constant in this scene is the "star" (evoking the stability of the natural world and by contrast the mutability of a synthetic and mobile society) that, in stanza two, pierces "the haze" of the parkway's polluted air, and keeps constant track of the traffic's progress. Whether we should take this as a welcome beacon, or as an indication that even the natural world has been assimilated by a mechanized modernity, is left unclear.

The opening stanza casts a critical eye on the "they" (humans or autos, the two seem interchangeable) who travel constantly. But the distant, third-person "they" swiftly—even within the same line—becomes a more intimate, second-person "we" as though the speaker, too has been drawn into the flow of traffic. The point is reiterated in stanza three where the speaker, with some surprise, describes "the people—ourselves!" The drivers are shown to be united only by their isolation. This is particularly evident when they step free of their cars at gasoline stations and, sipping their coffees, eye each other nervously before hurrying back to their solitary journeys. The suburbs themselves can be glimpsed only fleetingly "beyond the / sealed road" and between the "trees / trees, bushes." All (automobiles, commuters, the "trees / trees, bushes") are in perpetual motion. The oblique between "trees / trees, bushes" shows that even their identity is fluid, "moving relentlessly" as the final line puts it, in the headlong rush towards suburbanization (Allen, *New American* 61–2).

In Robert Bly's twenty-line free-verse poem about the same stretch of road, "Sleet Storm on the Merritt Parkway" (Hall, *Contemporary* 122–3), the automobile journey is the catalyst for a critique of the affluent suburbs and, by extension, for a meditation on the larger state of the nation. Bly was born in Madison, Minnesota in 1926 and grew up on a farm in the area; by the time of writing this poem (first collected in his second book *The Light Around the Body* (1967)), he had spent two years in the Navy, had studied at Harvard and the University of Iowa, and lived in Norway before returning to the United States to farm (Salzman 27). The poem opens with a journey from Connecticut through the prosperous suburb of Scarsdale to the city of New York.[10] The flat repetitions of "sleet" and "wet" in the first four lines evoke the relentlessness of the journey; the pathetic fallacy mirrors the speaker and his companion's feelings of hopeless despair:

> I look out at the white sleet covering the still streets,
> As we drive through Scarsdale—
> The sleet began falling as we left Connecticut,
> And the wet winter leaves swirled in the wet air after cars[.]

The alienation of the "I" and "we" of the poem—from each other and from the scene of their journey—is conveyed by images of missed or frustrated communication, both oral and physical (hence "hands turned over in a conversation" as though in anger or despair, and the metaphor of the "sheets of sleet" that lie "untouched on the wide streets"). The sleet in this poem, like images of snow in several of the poems to be discussed later, connotes the stasis and deathliness of the suburbs.

The suburb of Scarsdale is scorned for its wealth and apparent homogeneity.[11] The central section of the poem moves from a discussion of the area's "many comfortable homes stretching for miles / Two and three storeys, solid, with polished floors" to a specific and contemptuous rendering of their internal detail, which reveals that inside they are all alike. Here the lines expand across the page as though in an attempt to encompass the excessive abundance:

> With white curtains in the upstairs bedrooms,
> And small perfume flagons of black glass on the window sills,
> And warm bathrooms with guest towels, and electric lights[.]

John Updike's rather later (1974) poem, "Sleepless in Scarsdale," makes a similar point about the same suburb. As a houseguest in an affluent Scarsdale home, Updike's speaker is so troubled by its complacent prosperity (the display of books, the "towels of too many sizes") that he is unable to sleep (*Collected* 130). In lines 13 to 15 of Bly's poem, his speaker angrily turns away from this tantalizing image of plenty, becoming ironic and more explicitly critical in his mockery of the "better-for-children" rationale that sustained contemporary suburban growth:

> What a magnificent place for a child to grow up!
> And yet the children end in the river of price-fixing,
> Or in the snowy fields of the insane asylum.

The hyperbolic exclamation mark, and end-stopped line 13, followed by the "And yet" of the next line emphasize the sardonic point, as does the allusion to the psychical distress then thought to be caused by suburban living. The poem closes with a critique of the concerns and hypocrisy of the suburban elite among whom the speaker now implicitly counts himself.

Consumerism

In the postwar years, a generation of white Americans who had been raised in the Depression and who had survived the austerity and upheaval of the conflict might justifiably have felt itself entitled to the recompense of a secure and well-equipped family home on a private lot away from the overcrowding, expense, and nuisance of the city. This protean suburban market was nurtured by a manufacturing lobby anxious to fill an anticipated gap in its order books after the cessation of wartime production, and a political machine whose success depended either on the maintenance of an employed and thereby secure society or the pacification-through-consumption of the masses, depending on one's political perspective. Companies such as General Motors, General Electric, Chrysler, and Westinghouse, which had all been major World War II suppliers, had a vested interest as the war neared its end in finding or creating newly profitable outlets for their products and by-products (Colomina, Brennan, and Kim 10).[12] Advertising grew exponentially to stimulate and service this demand, rising more quickly than the GNP (Coontz 171).

From early 1945, in anticipation of the end of the war, mass-market magazines such as the *Ladies' Home Journal* began explicitly to target their readers with adverts for the kinds of products they might look forward to buying once manufacturing and trade returned to normal. Some of these advertisements used poetry, thereby continuing a tradition that Mike Chasar has traced back to the interwar years and defines as "a particularly American—and modern—literary form" ("Business" 31). Products were as varied as Beautyrest mattresses, Treet canned meat, and Ford Cars. The message was often explicit, for example in a Windex advertisement "Soldier and Wac They're Wed! They're Back!" in the November 1945 issue of the *Ladies' Home Journal* wherein the returning GI and his wife set up home in a “cute little house / on the edge of the town” and happily share the task of keeping it clean.

The advertisement runs from the top to the bottom of one side of the page, and is set in six numbered boxes, each featuring a line illustration and a stanza of verse. The opening illustration of a married couple in a military jeep on a rutted country road gives way in box two to a picture of a wintery landscape adorned by the idyllic suburban family home (or “a cute little house / on the edge of town”). Flowery soft furnishings and aprons in stanzas three, four, and five promise a fresh start to those with the foresight to choose Windex. In the exhortatory words of the final stanza:

> If the husband you got
>   is like Jack—then hooray!
> And if you’ve got windows,
>   get Windex today!

The poem is more subversive, though, than one might expect, thereby refuting the critical assumption that “commercial poetry” is a “monolithic category of writing that has been irrevocably corrupted by the capitalist marketplace and that, as such, offers little to interest the scholar invested in cultural critique” (Chasar 31).

Most notably, “Soldier and Wac” plays some interesting games in terms of its subversion of expected gender roles. In stanza one, “Amanda and Jack” are equals; they meet when both are serving their country, and are pictured side-by-side in their Jeep. After the war, they become equal “civilians” together. Jack surprises Amanda and the reader alike by proving himself adept at domestic tasks; she is astonished to see him pick up his Windex and start cleaning the windows. She seems alarmed, at first, by what the army has taught him, but lest we be concerned about any putative undermining of American manhood, Jack is able to reassure her (and us) that it is not the army that lies behind these propensities, but rather his “Mom” whose photo is framed in box four. The move is subtle; Jack simultaneously defends his own (and the army’s) masculinity while portraying himself as a loyal son and thus a trustworthy suitor. He also, more subtly still, lays to rest the specter of the overbearing American mother—the target, as we shall see shortly, of Philip Wylie and other contemporary commentators. If the worst that the predatory American “mom” can do is teach her son to use Windex, we can safely ignore his dire warnings. Jack’s proud, if comic, display of his flowered apron in the penultimate box gestures towards the promise of gender equality even if this is a promise that, as we will see later, was gradually to be eroded over the rest of this decade and the early years of the next.

John Updike's 1955 poem "Superman," (*Collected* 270) although comic in tone, similarly speaks to the enthusiastic consumerism of the "more is better" years (Nickles 582) and confirms David Riesman's argument that, "for millions of suburbanites, their post–World War II experience has been prosperous and open beyond their depression-born expectations. For them, the suburbs have been one vast supermarket" ("Suburban" 129). In "Superman," suburban identity is inextricable from consumption. As the speaker jovially—or perhaps sardonically—explains, he drives his automobile "to supermarket," parks in the "superlot," buys "Super Suds" from "Supersalesmen," and eats foods stuffed with "Superphosphates." We should note the deletion of the article, "the," in the first line of the poem such that "to supermarket" becomes an infinitive verb. Donald Hall's slightly later poem "Woolworths" similarly makes consumption the *ne plus ultra* of American identity. Its opening line states, simply: "My whole life has led me here." It then lists the panoply of goods that can be found therein, from resin flowers and garden and hair-care products to "submarines," before reflecting on the path that took the speaker from his ancestors' life on a Devonshire farm to this (very Manifest) destiny. Seeking a city on the hill, the closing lines of the poem imply, he found only Woolworths (Hall, *Blue Wing* 45).

If suburbanites were the nation's "top consumers" (Hine 6) they were also by extension its top disposers in an age when the phrase "planned obsolescence," coined in the 1920s by General Motors, came into its own. The flipside of postwar consumerism is made apparent in poems that excoriate the wastefulness of the suburban way of life. In Howard Nemerov's 1958 poem "The Town Dump" (*Mirrors* 5) the dump of the title forms an uncanny double to the town's affluent suburbs. Nemerov was born in New York City in 1920; at the time of writing this poem, he was teaching literature at Brandeis University on the outskirts of Boston. The dump, located "a mile out in the marshes, under a sky / Which seems to be always going away" is a city "which seconds ours (so cemeteries, too / Reflect a town from hillsides out of town)." The suburbs are aligned with the dumps and cemeteries in that these are all marginal "other" spaces onto which the distasteful or obsolete can be projected. The lines from Shakespeare's *King Lear* with which the poem is prefaced ("The art of our necessities is strange, / That can make vile things precious") asks us to rethink our assumptions about what we value, and what we dismiss, both in material and in emotional terms. Nemerov's "town dump" is disturbingly humanized; the garbage shelters in "cardboard tenements, / windowed with cellophane" (note the presence in this outlying suburb-of-the-suburbs of the iconic picture window) and resolutely "glare[s]" at the speaker "out of stove-in, sunken heads." Two things dominate: treasure seekers picking over the rubbish in the hope of striking gold, and flies that swarm the festering scene, vividly portrayed as: "A dynamo / Composed, by thousands, of our ancient black / Retainers." Both mark this out as a constantly changing and liminal space. As the penultimate stanza puts it, although the dump is supposedly the last resting place of people's jettisoned rubbish, in fact "Nothing finishes."

A contemporaneous (1962) Updike poem, "My Children at the Dump," establishes a slightly different and more poignant connection (*Midpoint* 70–1). Updike was born in Reading, Pennsylvania in 1932 and grew up in nearby Shillington, the focus of several of the poems to be discussed later. After studying at Harvard and Oxford Universities, he lived in Manhattan where he briefly worked for *The New Yorker* (a periodical with which he had a lifelong association); in 1957, he moved with his young family to Ipswich, Massachusetts, an area where he was to remain for some two decades. In "My Children at the Dump," the dump is the locus for the negotiation of multiple kinds of loss, both actual and imagined (Updike himself did not divorce from his first wife until some 20 years after this poem). "The day before divorce," as the poem's opening phrase explains (we might notice the absence of the definite article "the" or the possessive "my" here as though the speaker were reluctant to acknowledge his complicity in the situation), the speaker takes his children on an at-this-point unspecified trip. On arrival, the speaker invites us to share his astonishment-cum-horror at the abundance of waste or "wonderland of discard" that he sees around him. The discarded objects are metonyms for the consumerism characteristic of the contemporary suburbs (featuring televisions, automobile sparkplugs, and even a lawnmower). The depiction of rejected objects as found treasure ("nuggets") implicitly contrasts this heap of detritus, encountered on a spontaneous day-trip, with the spoils of a previous generation of dedicated American pioneers and gold prospectors. To the speaker, as to his children, "the waste seems wonderful" even as it stimulates a desire to preserve (stanza two). But the garbage is also a metaphor for the irretrievable breakdown of the speaker's relationship and family circle. In spite of his children's enthusiasm for restoring these depleted and discarded items, the speaker cannot accede to their demands. As he finally explains to his daughter in response to her desire to salvage a damaged doll, "Love it now, but we can't take it home."[13]

Gender

During wartime, women had entered the labor force in significant numbers. Gwendolyn Wright calculates that at one point, there were around 20 million in paid employment (242) even though their participation was regarded by some as a "temporary expedient" (Miller and Nowak 149). At the end of the war, many of these women relinquished their jobs, willingly or otherwise, to returning GIs and assimilated the ideology that told them, repeatedly, that they were free to enjoy their natural-born roles as mothers, homemakers, and consumers.[14] Phyllis McGinley's poetry, discussed in chapter 3, offers an unexpected insight into some of the ambivalences of this situation. A recurrent concern among commentators of the period—touched on in the Windex poem cited a moment ago—was the alleged feminization of men who were perceived to be at risk from too close an alignment with what Erich Fromm, amongst others, labeled the matriarchal suburbs (155). William J. Newman, writing in 1957, opined that suburbia is "Above all else a place for women and children. It is to these women and children that the 'Masters'—we will see how masterful they are—come home, for whom they work, and from whom the whole suburb is supposedly created" (257). As he proceeds to argue, men are "in, not of, the suburb" and are vulnerable to emasculation by too closely identifying with it (260 ff).[15]

John Updike's early poem, "Bendix," (first published in *The New Yorker* in February 1958 and collected in the 1963 book *Telephone Poles*) exposes some of the tensions of this evolving situation. It takes the eponymous washing machine as a metonym for suburban growth and a signifier of the changes to domestic, familial, and gender relations that characterized the postwar years.[16] "Bendix" succeeds—its unpromising subject matter notwithstanding—by yoking the mundane with the fantastical and the everyday with the sublime. The innovative "porthole" on the front of the modern machine (previous models had featured a solid door in the top) opens up a new world to the observer, a world where one might see the ocean perpetually tumbling round and round, where a "stocking wrestles with a comb, / And cotton angels wave their sleeves." The paean to the "Bendix" exposes what Riesman called the "mechanization" of domesticity; that is, the application of science and technology to quotidian chores, often, as here, to alienating effect. Traditionally used by women (the rather sinister "Mother" of the final stanza of Updike's poem), these gadgets deployed "push-button technology" in part so as to appear irresistibly modern and in part so as to appeal to male purchasers who, to cite Riesman again, were "willing to become domesticated" only if they could flatter themselves that they had "been promoted from dishwashers to operators of dishwashers" ("Suburban" 140).[17] For Leslie Fiedler, writing in *The Vanishing American*, the "effeminate culture" of the family home marks it out as a place from which real men should flee (qtd. in Kozlovsky 198). Updike's speaker's familiarity with and enthusiasm for the laundry routines (routines that should be hidden from men's eyes) encodes the strangeness of his position, and adds a political edge to this apparently inconsequential poem. There is something self-consciously queer about his intimacy with the suburban domestic regime, a queerness that the contempt towards the mother of the final stanza seeks to exorcise, but which nevertheless lingers.[18]

Race

Across the period, a move to the newly emergent suburbs was proffered as the right and proper solution, particularly for relatively affluent white families, to a set of actual (overcrowding) and inchoate (urban strife) problems. The barriers to black suburbanization were many and varied (as illustrated in Ann Petry's 1946 novel, *The Street*, and Lorraine Hansberry's 1959 play *Raisin in the Sun*) even if, as both of these examples show, the aspiration to a better life beyond the urban center, was not unique to whites. The provisions of the GI Bill did not fully extend to returning black GIs while the FHA's "redlining" policies, restrictive covenants imposed by landowners and developers, and other covert means of segregation functioned to deny black and ethnic communities any real choice about their place of residence. According to Charles Lamb, such effects were directly caused by government strategy:

> From the 1930s to the 1960s, the federal government became an accomplice to housing segregation in the United States. Home mortgage insurance, highway development, urban renewal, public housing placement, federal income tax deductions, and the location of federal jobs contributed to the housing pattern of blacks and whites. (12)

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peoples (the NAACP) campaigned against the FHA's "racist housing practices" and in 1948, the US Supreme Court ruled against restrictive covenants of the kind that had affected Hansberry's family (Baxandall and Ewen 175). Even so, it was many years before the FHA changed its position and the effects of more covert exclusionary practices remained to be felt.

As damaging as the structural restrictions outlined above, was a pervasive ideological imperative of long gestation which persuaded white residents that the suburbs were their birthright and destiny, and instructed black families that these were no-go areas. This having been said, Kruse, Sugrue, and Wiese have recently argued for a rather more complex and contested picture, and have cautioned against the acceptance of a homogenizing narrative of white, middle-class development:

> Scholars have assumed that public and private policies of racial exclusion worked flawlessly and, as a result, they have come to believe that

> suburbia was more or less the all-white environment that popular imagination and popular culture would have us believe. They have overlooked the real presence of racial minorities in the suburban environment and perpetuated an interpretation that assumes homogeneity of race as well as class. (4)[19]

And even though on the surface (for example, in sitcoms, films, and other cultural forms) the suburbs have been depicted and naturalized as a white space, a closer look at these and other discourses, including poetry, reveals the presence of other experiences and narratives.

The postwar poems discussed below illuminate the ways in which space was constructed as belonging to certain groups, black and ethnic incursions into the suburbs were signaled as fraught with danger on both sides, and white dominance was naturalized. By what means, and to what effect, was black and ethnic presence restricted to certain topographical and social areas and largely rendered invisible?[20] What other domains, beside the physical, were denied to blacks as active citizens and as writers? In what ways were barriers against actual suburban integration replicated in cultural and literary contexts? In other words, what was poetry's place in these debates? Who has been permitted to sing the song of the suburbs? My analysis here is informed by Jurca's recent and invaluable account (*White Diaspora: The Suburb and the Twentieth-Century American Novel*) of white male novelists' depiction of white, male subjects as victims rather than agents and of their suburban environment as their unfortunate lot rather than a self-determined and privileged choice. Jurca uses the term "diaspora" ironically in such a context in order to expose the "rhetorical chicanery by which the privileged came to be seen and to see themselves as the disadvantaged and the dispossessed" (*White* 8). My account diverges from and implicitly develops Jurca's by addressing the suburban *poetry* of her chosen period and beyond. Such a focus enables me to identify a suggestiveness, ambiguity, polyvocality, and figurative density arguably elided in the fiction that is Jurca's main concern. Moreover, where Jurca's account explicitly reads white, male, middle-class fiction as ultimately rhetorical (19), my argument throughout this book is that poetry functions as one of many discourses (or, for Jurca "interventions" (15)) that together *constitute* a culture, perception, and experience of suburbia. In other words, the effect is more than simply rhetorical.

For Amiri Baraka (formerly LeRoi Jones), black exclusion from the suburbs is merely one among many strategies by which white privilege is sustained. Writing about the racially exclusive practices evident in the selection of poems for Donald Allen's 1960 anthology *The New American Poetry*, he comments "American poetry, &c anthologies are like memberships in the same ofay suburban social clubs of the walkaround world" (qtd. in Golding, "New" 196). Baraka's point confirms Lawrence Levine's analysis of changing perceptions of cultural value in the mid-to-late nineteenth century wherein alien or immigrant others were perceived as posing a threat to the standards and boundaries of a cultural elite:

> These worlds of strangers did not remain contained; they spilled over into the public spaces that characterized nineteenth-century America and that included theatres, music halls, opera houses, museums, parks, fairs, and the rich public cultural life that took place daily on the streets of American cities. This is precisely where the threat lay and the response of the elites was a tripartite one: to retreat into their own private spaces wherever possible; to transform public spaces by rules, systems of taste, and canons of behavior of their own choosing; and finally, to convert the strangers so that their modes of behavior and cultural predilections emulated those of the elites. (176)

Black and ethnic citizens, from this point of view, had not only to be barred from certain physical or topographical spaces, but also to be restrained from figuratively entering particular areas of cultural privilege—the two domains, of course, depending on each other for the establishment and maintenance of their mutual boundaries. Failing that, they must be converted to sharing the dominant elite's cultural preferences.

Langston Hughes's short, late poem "Suburban Evening," published in *Crisis*, the journal of the NAACP in April 1967, speaks explicitly to the first kind of exclusion, and implicitly to the second and third. This unsettling poem of just 23 mostly monosyllabic words plays a number of subtle games. The apparently benign "Suburban Evening" of the title invokes, parodies, and thereby critiques the titles and themes of contemporary poems by white writers (Howard Nemerov's "Blue Suburban" or Louis Simpson's "In the Suburbs," for example). The "Suburban Evening," which for Nemerov and Simpson is the time of a welcome return home and much-earned repose is, for Hughes, occasion for "fright."

The poem opens, ominously "A dog howled." For white suburban families, the pet dog is a reassuring signifier of belonging. In California poet D. J. Waldie's recollections, the sound of dogs barking represents "the whole neighborhood clearing its throat before going to bed and sleep" (*Holy Land* 3) while for Joanne Jacobson, in her memoirs of a childhood in the Chicago suburbs, the street was known and is best recalled through the names and types of the local pet dogs (35). For Langston Hughes's speaker, and for

African American communities, the dog represents something altogether more threatening—the presence of guard or police dogs protecting territory and tracking perceived interlopers. The howl signals a shift from security to vulnerability. The night (which in other poems provides a safe space to hide) seems suddenly threatening; in line two "Weird became the night." The perceived threat is intangible and possibly even irrational ("No good reason / For my fright—"), but nevertheless exemplifies the speaker's historical sense of being out of place. The brevity of the lines and the shortness of individual words suggest a need for haste, as though the speaker were watching over his own shoulder, performing the self-surveillance characteristic of Cold War suburbia although here with an exaggerated because personal urgency. The rhymes and pararhymes on "night," "fright," and "quiet" register the word "white" without ever explicitly articulating it. In this way, the poem conveys the presence of whiteness as a component part or trace of black experience and thereby suggests the presence of black existence in the shadows or margins of white representations of suburban daily life. The "quiet / Unreasonable / Ghosts" who haunt the speaker in the poem's final lines are simultaneously the legacy of past generations of African Americans who have been hunted out of particular locations—be they physical, cultural or political—and the shades of the white people whose own fear circumscribes the lives of the black other.

"Suburban Evening" offers an important reminder that the representations of suburban experience discussed thus far have, to varying degrees and with certain qualifications, deployed the voices of white privilege. Hughes's evocation of his "Suburban Evening" is experientially and aesthetically different. Fear shapes his poem—not primarily his own "fright" in and of this threatening environment, but prior and foundational to this, fear on the part of white suburban communities of the black and migrant settlers whose presence in the cities motivated the former's own move away from urban population centers. From this point of view, suburbia is built on and sustained by a pervasive dread, one that paradoxically unites cities and suburbs and is shared, albeit from polarized perspectives, by black and white communities alike. As Sigfried Giedion explains in his influential book *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition* (the fifth edition of which was published in 1967, the same year as Hughes's poem):

> Today research laboratories and the offices of large organizations or insurance companies flee from the great metropolitan cities to barricade themselves with an undisturbed green belt of privacy. A feeling of uneasiness and dissatisfaction with the urban situation has crept over the whole earth. (xxxiv)

The rhetoric of "fright" (Hughes) and "uneasiness" (Giedion), coupled with the perceived need to erect metaphorical "barricade[s]" is common to contemporary discourses of the suburbs. The point is illustrated by the opening lines of Becky Nicolaides's account of change in suburban Los Angeles:

> On a warm August night in 1965, the white residents of South Gate stood guard over their beloved homes…As the violence crept ever closer to home, residents raised physical barriers around their community, giving material form to the policies and practices they had followed for decades. (1)

The move out of dilapidated inner-city areas into better neighborhoods and, ultimately, the suburbs, first by relatively affluent white settlers and then, in turn, by some black and ethnic groups, was described by contemporary commentators as a process of "invasion and succession":

> Pushed by business and industrial pressure and pulled by the desire for residence in higher status areas, successive waves of population move outward from the central city entering and dominating progressively more distant areas in a cycle of invasion, reaction, influx, and climax. Although the wealthy American stock leads the process, immigrant and racial groups leave the zone of transition where they are first concentrated and follow at different rates. (Zeul and Humphrey 463)

When the black population reached what Morton Grodzins calls the "tip point," (qtd. in ibid.) white residents "begin moving out in large numbers, and Negroes move in."[21] In their analysis of this process, Zeul and Humphrey cite some evidence for a white reluctance to move on; "nevertheless," they conclude, "many whites do panic some time after invasion" (464). In Hughes's poem, white "panic" (reified by the howling dogs) is displaced onto the black subject who becomes the person in the whole exchange who might legitimately experience the fear and "uneasiness" elsewhere claimed by whites. Leo Marx yokes such hostility towards, and fear of, the city with the idealization of the countryside noted earlier. Such a sentiment, he argues:

> is an expression less of thought than of feeling. It is widely infused in our culture, insinuating itself into many kinds of behavior. An obvious example is the current "flight from the city." An inchoate longing for a more "natural" environment enters into the contemptuous attitude that many American adopt towards urban life (with the result that we neglect our cities and desert them for the suburbs). (5)

One might argue that the contempt for the city identified here is fundamentally a contempt for its black and ethnic residents. Moreover, the diffuse, sentimental pastoralism of which he speaks is in part (and specifically during the civil rights era) a longing for an imagined state of pure, white experience before any consciousness of white dependence on, and exploitation of, black, native American and ethnic others had begun to impinge. The fear of, and hostility towards, the city and to its black and ethnic populations is indivisible from the valorization of a white, semi-rural, domestic paradise.

An uncollected poem, "Panther," by California writer Josephine Miles (whose work is discussed in more detail in a later chapter) allegorizes white suburbanites' fear of black others, and their idealization of an imagined pastoral idyll. "Panther" was first published in the *Kenyon Review* in 1956. Like Hughes's poem it refuses to determine which party is more entitled to their fear. The long opening line, "A panther made of whole cloth set out through the suburbs of Los Angeles" embodies this indeterminacy. "Whole cloth" is both a complete sheet of fabric (a garment made of "whole cloth" is cut from one piece, rather than being stitched together from disparate parts) and, colloquially, a statement that is made-up or false—in other words, something hermetic or self-contained that seeks no validation outside itself. The "panther," then, is simultaneously coherent and self-determining, but it is precisely this autonomy that makes it unfamiliar and suspicious. The "panther" connotes, problematically in many respects, a stealthy, animal-like black identity (the panther, cougar, or jaguar is found in several parts of North America, including in California). The Black Panther party was not founded until some ten years after this poem, but the name "Black Panthers" had previously been taken up by the (segregated) 561st US Army Tank Battalion.

Miles's panther functions metaphorically to evoke the presence of a feared, alien other in the strange and threatening landscape of the privileged white suburbs of Los Angeles. Why, the poem asks, in this Eden-like place (hence "Elysian Park" in line three) should we not expect to see such creatures?[22] The panther's right to be here is invoked by the languorous, confident free-verse lines and the familiarity and ease with which he occupies the space:

> A panther made of whole cloth set out through the suburbs of
>   Los Angeles
> Lapping his way as he went.
> Set out to scream in a thicket of Elysian Park
> But did not get there in time.

In "Panther," as in Hughes's poem, it is not clear who has most to fear, or who haunts whom. The panther does not reach the "thicket" of safety in time, and so "Somebody else gave out the scream for him." There is a strange paradox here in that if, as I have suggested, there has been a white silence about black presence in the suburbs (that is, a naturalization of whiteness and an effacement of blackness), it is the presumably white observer who is finally able to speak blackness even if the consequence of this is that blackness itself remains silent. This act of ventriloquism gives the black voice to the white observer in a sign of the persistence of white authority (and denial of black agency), and in evidence of the mutual fear of both sides.

Marginalized and stripped of a voice—stripped even of ownership of his terror—the panther becomes an outcast, condemned always to prowl the margins:

> Lonely he wandered, much of an island,
> Behind busses, in refrigerators and matinees,
> To Elysian Park his purposes,
> But never got there, in every underbrush
> Somebody set up such a wailing and crying.

Hunted down like the figure in Hughes's "Suburban Evening," he is prey to other people's watchfulness ("At night then the big lights") and guard dogs ("bloodhounds came out for this panther / So people could sleep peacefully in their beds again"). White suburban serenity, it seems, can only be achieved at the price of the violent exclusion of the alien black other. In this context, as the final stanza explains, there is no safe space; even the panther's usual hiding place near the peripheral railroad tracks is about to be placed out of bounds. At the end of the poem, the predators find him "napping" there where "the S line curves past the ironworks. / Somebody screamed at the sight." The panther's vulnerability (emphasized both by the image of him "napping" and by the soft sibilance of the diction) renders him an unlikely threat. The final anonymous scream—like the reaction in Hughes's "Suburban Evening"—emerges from the mouth of those with least to fear.

The anonymity of Miles's "Somebody" indicates, as Gans found in *The Levittowners*, that although many suburbanites were opposed to the integration of housing, few would frankly declare their position: "only 4 per cent volunteered racial change in their neighborhood" as the reason for their move from the city to the suburb, although as he goes on to note, some "twenty per cent checked it as one reason among many" (37). Others arguably hid behind alternative rationalizations: "49 per cent checked 'we just wanted to get out of the city' and 34 per cent, 'the neighborhood is poor for raising children'" (36). Such disavowals notwithstanding, Gans's study provides plentiful evidence that race was a primary and persistent factor in white people's housing choices:

> Until the state enforced a non-discrimination law, salesmen refused to sell to Negros and assured whites who asked about Negroes that the community would be as lily-white as the other Levittowns. After the law was enforced, the salesmen protected themselves by citing the law, and promised to locate people who did not like to be near Negroes away from them, but also discouraged those who were strongly biased against Negroes from buying in Levittown. (14)

Levittown, New Jersey, was desegregated in 1960 through a sequence of political and economic strategies which resulted in Levitt, for PR and ultimately commercial reasons, preempting the rule of the courts.[23] If the decision was, as Gans notes, "not favored by the community's majority," neither was it a topic on which residents wished publicly to speak (371, 373). In many of the poems discussed in this book, race similarly lingers as the issue about which the poem will or dare not explicitly speak.

As the discussion above confirms, poetry in the postwar years did not merely reflect a society in flux. Appearing in a range of media and addressing the causes and effects of material and ideological change, it played a vital role in constructing what we understand "suburbia" to mean. When read alongside other contemporary discourses including cartoons, prose essays, sociological accounts, advertisements, and fiction, we can see that it was thoroughly implicated in the constitution and reception of the suburban way of life. It played an ideological part in persuading a postwar populace to tolerate suburban incursions on rural land; it contributed to debates about economic and material factors such as the pressures of postwar consumerism and the construction of parkways, it helped to shape (and critique) new ideologies of family and gender, and it exposed and tested insidious processes of racial segregation. In Damon and Livingston's terms, "the poetic is inseparable from its context, against and with which it constitutes itself" (11). Conversely, the context itself—that is, the suburbia we think we know—is constituted textually by a range of discourses, including poetry. Such poetry also worked to constitute, engage, and consolidate a suburban readership—often, as the next chapter will show, in the face of considerable skepticism from a metropolitan literary elite.

CHAPTER 2

Suburban Tastes

The modern American suburbs were simultaneously subject and object of a set of highly charged discourses. They were seen as compensation for the deprivations of the war years, as a solution to the perceived and actual problems associated with urban overcrowding, and as the supreme manifestation, even *telos*, of American perfectibility. Tied to the promise of postwar suburbia were all kinds of other aspirations—to satisfying and well-paid work, to material prosperity, to companionate marriage, to the raising of well-adjusted children, to a meaningful civic life, and to full participation in a thriving consumer economy. A great deal—perhaps too much—was invested in these tightly entwined ideals. The disappointment evident in contemporary critical commentary and latent in some of the poetry offers a measure of the height and thus unattainability of such dreams.

The first part of this chapter draws on a range of sources in order to trace shifting attitudes towards the suburbs (its architecture, its residents, and its way of life) across the immediate postwar years. The aim is to understand the ways in which the suburbs were constituted in the popular imagination—first as an ideal, and then as a problem—and to assess poetry's place in sustaining and / or critiquing such representations. The second part of the chapter addresses the changing place of poetry (its forms, its publication history, and its readership) at this time. It asks how particular tastes, genres, and audiences were constituted and understood and examines the role of the poetics of the postwar suburbs in redrawing what Mike Chasar has termed the "American browlines" ("Business" 34).

"Nowhere"

Contempt for the suburbs came from many directions and spanned most of the twentieth century. Early examples include Sinclair Lewis's influential critique in *Babbitt* (1922) and Margaret Woodbury's first-person account of the banality of suburban life in a 1930 article, "Retreat from Suburbia" wherein she alleges "suburbia is a suburb and nothing else; nobody lives there for any reason other than its convenience as a commuting place" (571). Urban intellectuals across the interwar period displayed an acute anxiety about the cultural tastes of the new suburbanites, thereby "establishing the lines of argument still evident today" (Stilgoe 5).

Scott Donaldson dates the "often emotional attack on suburbia" to "the Eisenhower years of the middle and late 1950s" (vii). Donald Katz identifies 1959 as a turning point: "suddenly, suburban family life was under fire from all quarters" (121). Karal Ann Marling confirms this view:

> Suburbia, USA, represented the breakdown of an established order, and as such it was a worrisome proposition for the guardians of American values. In 1959 it was also a headache to many of those who lived there. That was the year of the "suburban jitters," when paradise on the commuter line became "Ulcerville" and the American Medical Association issued stern warnings about the stresses associated with upward mobility and keeping up with the Joneses in the acquisition of house-hold gadgets. (254–5)[1]

According to Nancy A. Miller, "By the late 1950s, an elitist cultural backlash against the suburbs was well underway" (61). Unease about the negative impact of the suburbs was inextricable from a generalized anxiety about the state of the nation in this post–World War II, post-Korea, post-Suez, and post-Sputnik period, stimulating what Richard Hofstadter has called "a periodic surge of self-conscious reappraisal" (4). Across the 1950s, as Miller and Nowak observe, Americans "made best-sellers of books telling them of their shortcomings" (11) including David Riesman et al's *The Lonely Crowd*, William H. Whyte's *The Organization Man*, Erich Fromm's *The Sane Society*, and Vance Packard's *The Status Seekers*. Nevertheless, it was the suburbs that attracted the most attention and ire. Studies such as those named above, alongside John Keats's *The Crack in the Picture Window* of 1956, Richard E. Gordon, Katherine Gordon and Max Gunther's 1960 polemic, *The Split-Level Trap* (marketed as a "Kinsey Report on suburbia") and, of course, Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* of 1963, provide evidence of the shift in attitude. James Gallagher's 1958 *Harper's* essay "After Hours: That Lived In

Look" offers a rare defense of suburban living and in so doing illustrates the scale and focus of contemporary hostility:

> I am convinced that most stories about our megalosuburbia on Long Island (population 17,500) are written from the Savarin Bar in Penn Station in Manhattan. The only research used by these amateur sociologists must be an aerial photo, taken in 1951 or so, of the serried rooftops, with peas-in-a-pod houses as though in bas-relief against the barren potato fields. One look, and these experts leap to their theses: Levittown is bad. Too many houses, all alike; too many families the same age; a single stratum of income and interests. (80–1)

By the end of the 1950s, then, the suburbs had become the object of deep concern and the focus of sustained hostility on the part of sociologists, psychologists, public intellectuals, and novelists. Marvin Bressler, writing in the journal *Public Interest* in 1968, summarizes the trend: "For a decade following World War II, academic sociology, followed quickly by its vulgate tongue, middle-brow journalism, had an ingenious view of suburbia which was summed up in such reproachful terms as 'homogeneity,' 'conformity,' 'conservatism,' 'matriarchy,' 'rootless,' 'status striving' etc" (97). In John Hartley's rueful words, "no one seems to have had a good word for the suburbs" (184).

A slew of fictional representations including John Cheever's short stories, Sloan Wilson's 1955 novel *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, and Richard Yates's *Revolutionary Road* of 1961 amplified this critique even if, as in the case of *Revolutionary Road*, the narrative was intended not as a dismissal of suburbia, but as an exposé of the protagonists' personal failings. As Yates later observed: "The book was widely read as an anti-suburban novel, and that disappointed me. The Wheelers may have thought the suburbs were to blame for all their problems, but I meant it to be implicit in the text that that was *their* delusion, *their* problem, not mine" (De Witt and Clark 66). Nevertheless, these and many other best-selling examples constructed an influential picture of suburban discontent, alienation, frustration, and despair.

Central to many of these debates was an implied comparison between suburbia as a barren and even barbaric space and the city as the seat of civilization. In Kenneth Jackson's characteristically perceptive terms: "Offering neither the urbanity and sophistication of the city nor the tranquility and repose of the farm, the suburb came to be regarded less as an intelligent compromise than a cultural, economic, and emotional waste land" (244). In *The City in History* Mumford similarly describes the suburbs as a "treeless communal waste" (553) or as an environment lacking in culture and in taste while Riesman depicts them as a place of "aimlessness, a pervasive, low-keyed unpleasure" ("Suburban" 142). For Robert Putnam, writing more recently, the suburbs have "come to resemble theme parks, with uniform architecture and coordinated amenities and boutiques" (209–10). James Kunstler dismisses them in his pointedly titled book *The Geography of Nowhere* as an empty space that has "simply ceased to be a credible human habitat" (15). Even Baxandall and Ewen, authors of the invaluable *Picture Windows: How the Suburbs Happened*, concede that "Initially we didn't understand that suburbia even had a history, we imagined it as an anaesthetized state of mind, a no place dominated by a culture of conformity and consumption" (xv). The assignations "no place," "*Nowhere*" and, to go back to Margaret Woodbury, "a suburb and nothing else" typify readings of the suburbs as the inverse or "other" of the dominant metropolis—a failed utopia unable to escape its own dystopian limits. Such tensions are registered in the poetry itself, and in the contexts in which it was produced and read, including in contemporary debates about culture, taste, audience, and authorship. The discussion that follows pays close attention to the language of the discourse both in popular and intellectual commentary and in poetry from a range of sources. This approach helps to illuminate the tensions within the period, to disclose the "ideologies and social meanings that are condensed in and propelled by those linguistic and rhetorical choices" (DuPlessis, "Social" 66), and to demonstrate the role that poetry played in mediating suburban concerns to a diverse audience.

Class and Conformity

The growth of the mass-produced, mass-market developments of the postwar years triggered an emphatic reversal in critics' views of the potential advantages of suburban living. As Gans notes, "talk about 'suburban malaise' dates only from the development of the postwar housing developments" (*Levittowners* 240). Critical contempt for the suburbs, he insists, "is a thinly veiled attack on the culture of working and lower-middle-class people, implying that mass-produced housing leads to mass-produced lives" (*Levittowners* 171). In short, hostility emerges when elite culture is perceived to be at risk. Mumford draws a comparison between the ancient and admirable ideal of the suburb as a "convenient retreat near the town" (552) and the present-day actuality of "mass movement into suburban areas" where, in an often-quoted caricature:

> A multitude of uniform, unidentifiable houses [are] lined up inflexibly, at uniform distances, on uniform roads, in a treeless communal waste,

> inhabited by people of the same class, the same income, the same age group, witnessing the same television performances, eating the same tasteless, prefabricated foods, from the same freezers, conforming in every outward and inward respect to a common mould. (553)

Concerns about conformity were brought to prominence by David Riesman, Reuel Denney and Nathan Glazer's landmark study *The Lonely Crowd*, published in 1950.[2] Riesman and his coauthors saw a transition in the postwar years from "inner-directed" behavior, wherein character is shaped by the "internalization of adult authority," to an "outer-directed" stance wherein one's character is determined by "overt conformity" to one's peers (v). Paradoxically, though, the adjusted, conformist, "other-directed" citizen remains "a lonely member of the crowd because he never comes really close to the others or to himself" (v). In *The Lonely Crowd* we find the roots of that often-sympathetic preoccupation with the solitary, apparently misunderstood figure (usually male), isolated in a sea of uncomprehending and anonymous others, to be found in several subsequent studies and in a number of the contemporary poems to be discussed later.

William Whyte's articles on the Park Forest, Chicago, suburbs published in *Fortune* magazine between May and August of 1953 and subsequently collected in his best-selling book *The Organization Man* (1956), proved similarly influential in establishing a narrative of postwar conformity and alienation. For Whyte, the "packaged villages" of suburbia are the natural home of the organization man, and the breeding ground for its next generation of recruits (14). Other mid-1950s studies came to similar conclusions. Frederick Lewis Allen, for example, in consecutive 1954 reports in *Harper's Magazine* worries that the postwar suburbs, constructed on the "mass-production principle," will prove unable to escape becoming "natural breeding grounds for conformity" ("Big Change" 23, 26).

Vance Packard's 1959 book *The Status Seekers: An Explanation of Class Behavior in America* examines the tension between a popular perception of American classlessness and what he sees as a "hardening" of class lines deriving from an intensification in "status-straining" (12). This process is exacerbated, he argues, by "the growth of mass-produced, one-layer suburban communities" and by the ploys of the marketing men. Suburbanites, he insists, in a rendering of suburban passivity common to much contemporary commentary, "are ripe for any goods sold to them as keys to social acceptance" (272). His perception of the dangers of the suburban environment imply a worrying credulity on the part of suburbanites—an impression that is dispelled by the knowingness and the authority of its poetry and the potential ingenuity of its readers. Josephine Miles's "Approach," for example, repudiates this reading of unthinking consumer acquiescence in its depiction of consumption as a highly charged activity, fraught with contradictions and strategies of resistance (*Collected* 19) while poems such as that used in the Windex advertisement, cited earlier, invite a range of transgressive reading practices.

Taste and the Masses

The GI Bill and subsequent Federal investment in education (the latter in part a reaction to the Soviet Union's Sputnik launch in 1957 and America's consequent dread of Soviet scientific-technological superiority) helped to generate a vast new supply-and-demand for culture in various—and perhaps dangerously unpoliced—forms (Miller and Nowak 16; Von Hallberg 145). Kenneth Rexroth observes that now, "there is something for everybody... it is certainly part of an immense, inexhaustible market, the child of the new leisure and the GI Bill" (*World* 200–1). In Erich Fromm's terms, describing the Park Forest, Chicago, suburbs where William Whyte had conducted his studies, a fundamental "aspect of alienated conformity is the leveling-out process of taste and judgment" (152). Ktsanes and Reissman summarize (and subsequently critique) the widely held view that the suburbs foster "social forms of unrelieved monotony that dull aesthetic tastes" (189).

Similar concerns are articulated again and again in the commentary of the period as, for example, in Packard's summation that:

> The old class lines that preserved "culture" as a monopoly for the aristocrats... have slowly been crumbling with the growth of literacy, democratic forms, and mass-production processes. Opera is being marketed in the hinterlands, and reproductions of art masterpieces are hanging on the walls in tens of thousands of American homes. (*Status* 135)

Such patrician alarm persisted even into the 1980s as evidenced by Robert Von Hallberg's concern that because of economies of scale, only mass-market, lowest common denominator poetry might find its way into suburban book stores where it would be likely to meet "an inclusive readership that displays no very definite characteristics of taste" (16). Joan Rubin situates such concerns in the wider context of print culture: "From the beginning the spread of print also carried an attendant risk: that audiences, misappropriating or even ignoring their genteel instructors' meanings and intentions, would seize on cheap novels rather than serious literature" (*Making* 17).

As the mandarin speaking position of many of the contemporary commentators mentioned thus far indicates culture—and the right to produce, distribute and evaluate it—was the assumed privilege of an intellectual, and implicitly urban, elite.[3] To metropolitan critics who had long assumed the power to speak for and about cultural (for which read "high" cultural) issues, the enthusiasm and economic wherewithal of the new suburban classes appeared as a threat to the "cultural hierarchies" which, as Harrington explains, had been established over the early decades of the twentieth century:

> With the accession of the New Criticism in the U.S. academy, the preeminent genres had become discursive and meditative poetry, the period styles and authors a handful of metaphysical poets and high modernists. The taste had been created, the market share prepared, and popular audiences and poetries extirpated from literary history as well as excluded from legitimate and legitimizing institutions. (*Poetry* 23)

The *Partisan Review* energetically debated such topics in its special issue "Our Country and our Culture" of May—June 1952, giving voice to a growing tension in contemporary culture between an affirmative, democratizing spirit, and a mood of anxious defensiveness. The reverberations were felt for years, even decades, afterwards.[4] In David Rosenberg and David Manning White's *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America* (a response to the *Partisan Review* discussions), Rosenberg accuses mass culture of "present[ing] a major threat to man's autonomy." "Never before," he cautions, "have the sacred and the profane, the genuine and the specious, the exalted and the debased, been so thoroughly mixed that they are all but indistinguishable" (5). Mass culture, it is alleged, "threatens not merely to cretinize our taste, but to brutalize our senses while paving the way to totalitarianism" (9). Rosenberg's coeditor, David White, takes an entirely different stance, asking:

> Is it really true that the media have transformed the greatest part of the American population into this nebulous "mass mind" one reads about so often? Do the media contrive with all their cunning, Madison Avenue, grey-flanneled wit to keep Mencken's booboisie on the thirteen-year-old level? (15)[5]

The architecture of the suburbs was alleged by some to have engendered a dangerous lowering of cultural standards; Macdonald regrets the "homogenizing effects of kitsch" and sees "suburban Tudor" as a sign that "the artisans of Mass Culture have long been at work" (66, 59). Elsewhere, but in a similar vein, W. H. Auden complains of W. B. Yeats's interest in the occult that it is "so essentially lower-middle class—or should I say southern Californian—so ineluctably associated with suburban villas and clearly unattractive faces" (qtd. in Von Hallberg 115). The point echoes Riesman's assertion that exposure to homogenous suburban architecture will harm the next generation: "the sense for visual imagery of Americans remains stunted, and the children of the suburbs grow up accepting the neat, the new, the shiny, but with minimal awareness of vista, proportion, or independent critical judgment of the look of life around them" ("Suburban" 145).

Herbert Gans, writing in his 1974 survey, *Popular Culture and High Culture: An Analysis and Evaluation of Taste*, tries to reconcile these various positions, proposing an inclusive reading of the "equal worth" of different "taste cultures" and arguing that "popular culture is, like high culture, a taste culture, chosen by people [i.e., suburbanites] who lack the economic and educational opportunities of the devotees of high culture" (*Popular Culture* xi, x). Even so, as the rather regretful term "lack" indicates, there remains an underlying valorization of the taste—and role as arbiter—of a cultural elite. Moreover, Gans's attempt at a compromise proved self-defeating in that the notion of the middle (conflated with the middlebrow) had as little cultural value as that of the masses. In some contexts, indeed, the two were regarded as synonymous. The battle lines had already been drawn by the 1930s (Harrington notes that from this time "poetry populists and popularizers grew increasingly defensive in response to [the] modernist offensive. If modernists located inauthenticity in convention, middlebrow critics felt the same way about what they saw as modernist affectation or snobbishness" (40)) and looked set to be consolidated in the postwar years. Morris Dickstein concludes that "nothing was more characteristic of the fifties than its weakness for hard-and-fast cultural distinctions, exclusions, hierarchies—between a poem and not-a-poem; between masscult and midcult, or highbrow, middlebrow, and lowbrow" (4).

Urbanity

The charge against the suburbs, and suburbanites was that they lacked taste howsoever this may be defined. There is evidence, though, of equal and opposite distaste on the part of suburban residents for what they perceived to be metropolitan, elite cultural choices. Gans notes of the Levittown community that "the most disliked outsider is . . . the cosmopolitan with his 'Brookline values'" (*Levittowners* 189). The Levittowners, he goes on to explain, "do not feel themselves to be mass men simply because they buy a mass-produced item" (190). Mike Chasar makes a similar point about audience resistance to the messages of the Burma Shave advertisements that appeared along roadsides between the 1920s and 1960s: "ordinary readers do not always consume commercial poetries as passively or predictably as one might think" ("Business" 32). From this perspective (one that has proved particularly fruitful to studies of poetic and cultural studies, including my own), the "reader, auditor, viewer, user or consumer" might be understood "as a site of meaning-making and ideological or counterhegemonic activity on a par with literary production" (Bean and Chasar 8–9). In the postwar suburban context, a refusal to conform either to the standards and expectations of the elite *or* of the masses paradoxically creates a new space somewhere between the two, but proudly kowtowing to neither (this mid-way position is not quite a "middlebrow" stance, but neither is it quite as independent as its adopters may have intended). In Joan Rubin's terms, it is a cultural space that reflects "a society in transition" (*Making* xx).

Just as the concept of the masses, and of the middlebrows is worthy of scrutiny, so too is the term "urbane," which signals a number of different and often contradictory attributes in discussion of suburban cultures across the postwar years. For some commentators, the "urbane" was a feature of transnational modernity; as Kunstler rather cynically suggests of early twentieth-century American architecture: "The stage was set for the transformation of American architecture. Americans, with their chronic sense of cultural inferiority, were mesmerized by the refugees with their foreign accents and urbane manners" (77). Also in design terms, the typeface of *The New Yorker* magazine, which had a huge market among the suburbs—even as its ostensible appeal was to Manhattanites—was intended to evoke "upscale urbanity" (Yagoda 13).

The *Oxford English Dictionary* has "urbane" as follows: (1) of, or pertaining to, characteristic of or peculiar to, a town or city; and, (2) having the manners, refinement or polish regarded as characteristic of a town; courteous, at ease in society; also blandly polite, suave. As these definitions indicate, the "urbane" is, in some contexts, to be valued and in others ("blandly polite, suave") to be treated with suspicion. Moreover, although the conceptual and etymological link with the *urbis* does exist, the term "urbane" has often been transposed into other contexts and given a particular aesthetic resonance. For Jerome McGann, for instance, the poetry of the suburbs displays a "surface urbanity" (625–6). Gerard Previn Meyer's 1954 *Saturday Review* profile of Phyllis McGinley labels her the "urbane suburbanite" (11). Sam Pickering, in his review of William Harmon's 1979 *Oxford Book of American Light Verse* observes that the light verse mode with which McGinley is usually associated is known for its "intelligent urbanity" (xcvii). On the other hand, poet Mark Doty, writing in 1991 caricatures the suburbs as soporific (he refers to "the sleep of the suburbs") and posits the "urbane wit" of New York writers such as Frank O'Hara as a counter to the poetics of "an increasingly transient nation, settling and resettling in areas around the country which grew more and more to resemble each other" (134, 133). Updike observes in a 1975 interview that "this country has never been really at home with urban or urbane ideals. Its notions of virtue are all kind of countryside notions" (qtd. in J. Plath xiii). To confuse things further, John Ciardi describes the poems chosen for his influential 1950 anthology, *Mid-Century American Poets* as "urbane and cultivated" even though his selection includes the work of poets who engage with both the city and the suburbs (xxix). The poetry under discussion in the remainder of this book tests the relationship between geography and aesthetics, space and style, and it places the concept of urbanity under scrutiny. Is it possible to have an "urbane" poetry from the suburbs?

Audience

Discussions of culture and of taste are inextricable from a consideration of audience, and the consideration of audience is indivisible from the wider historiography of twentieth-century poetry. In a continuation of the process that—as Filreis, Harrington, Cary Nelson, and several others have argued—dominated the interwar period, a persistent and increasingly polarized set of debates insists that the audience for "poetry" is in decline, even as the definition of "poetry" is itself progressively diminished. A complete explanation of how and why this came about is beyond the scope of the present study. It is evident, however, that "literary history as a modern academic endeavor is a special institutional project to be consciously (if imperfectly) separated from literary history as it may actually have taken place" (C. Nelson, *Repression* 6).

The "salient point for the social construction of poetry," as Harrington notes, "is to be found not in a statistical representation of the audience, but in the *rhetoric* of popularity. Here the audience became a 'phantom public,' a hypothetical entity or nonentity that served as the site of ideological combat" (*Poetry* 278). This combat was played out energetically across the 1950s—fuelled, as I have indicated, by concerns about the potentially volatile cultural choices of the new suburban masses and an exponential decline in adequately equipped readers of "proper" poetry. John Ciardi complains in his introduction to *Mid-Century American Poets* that the readership for poetry is pitifully small: "Why is it," he asks, "that in a nation of 146 million presumably literate people, the average sale for a book of poems is about 500 copies?" (xvi). Simultaneously, Donald M. Allen, here following in the footsteps of a number of modernist writers of an earlier generation, makes a virtue of the limited circulation of the poetry collected in his anthology, *The New American Poetry*, a body of work that "so far has appeared only in a few little magazines, as broadsheets, pamphlets, and limited editions" (xi). Inaccessibility, from this perspective, is more esteemed than accessibility, and the popularity of a piece of work is an inverse indicator of its cultural value.[6] Poet Kenneth Rexroth takes the complaint a little further:

> Nobody much buys poetry. I know. I am one of the country's most successful poets. My books actually sell out—in editions of two thousand . . . The problem of poetry is the problem of communication itself . . . A painting decorates a wall. A novel is a story. Music . . . sooths a savage breast. But poetry you have to take straight. (*World* 50–1)

Elsewhere, critics of the insurgencies of mass and popular culture lamented the fact that poetry (among other elite cultural forms) was being squeezed out by comic books, radio, television, and film. On finding that 48 percent of Americans claimed never to read, Randall Jarrell mourned the fact that "newspapers and magazines and books and motion pictures and radio stations and televisions have destroyed, in a great many people, even the capacity for understanding real poetry, real art of any kind" (*Poetry* 28). The complaint was not particularly new. Sinclair Lewis observes in his 1936 essay "Rambling Thoughts on Literature as a Business" that:

> The movie, the automobile, the road-house, bridge, and, most of all, the radio are the enemies of magazine-reading, book-reading, and homicidally, the enemies of book-buying because they absorb both the leisure and the share in the family budget which our poor, wretched ancestors devoted to books . . . we have room enough for one or two cars, for one or two coffin-sized radios, for the electric refrigerator and (if you live in a suburb as I do) for a "game-room" decorated in the style of a rathskeller, but certainly no room for a couple of hundred books. (*The Man* 179)

Ciardi and Rexroth's lament about poetry's low readership is replicated by Von Hallberg who notes: "that poets have only small audiences in relation to other literary audiences is not even yesterday's news" (11–12). Of course, as Chasar's work on "incidental" poetries in newspapers, advertising, and elsewhere has demonstrated:

> Far from being unable to keep pace with comic books, movies, radio shows, and dime novels for readers' attention, most American poetry

> actually thrived in this environment. While readers may have encountered it in incidental ways, it was far from incidental in their lives and is thus essential reading for today's scholar who is hoping to understand the broader range of cultural uses that poetry served in the twentieth century. ("Material Concerns" 304)

Even in the case of poetry aimed at the "intentional" reader, there were a number of poets in this period who sold a great many more than 500—or even Rexroth's 2000—copies. McGinley's 1954 collection *The Love Letters of Phyllis McGinley*, for example, sold some 150,000 copies (Bellafante). Moreover, and as indicated earlier, poetry in this period by a surprising range of poets continued to gain regular circulation and a huge audience in the pages of established, mass-market, and women's newspapers and magazines such as the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, the *Ladies' Home Journal* (with a six million circulation by 1959 (Ziesing)) and, of course, *The New Yorker* whose circulation rose by 40 percent to 464,119 between 1950 and 1964 (Yagoda 309).[7]

The New Yorker played a particularly important role in publishing poetry (including the light verse of McGinley and Updike) and in disseminating a wry, knowing vision of suburban daily life. The magazine's ambivalence is worthy of note. Although ostensibly appealing to Manhattanites, much of its audience was made up of newly exiled suburbanites. In 1930, according to Ben Yagoda, "30% of *The New Yorker*'s 82,000 readers lived outside the metropolitan area." By 1932 this figure was 50 percent and by 1945, 73 percent (58–9). This was not only because the magazine's original readers left the city for the suburbs (although this is part of the story), but also because of first-time subscribers. Mary Corey records that by 1947, some 50 percent of *new* readers lived outside the city (179). The magazine's self-conscious cosmopolitanism, she argues, should be read as a form of resistance to the "cheery orthodoxy of the postwar consensus." Contemporary criticism of the suburbs played into *The New Yorker's* hands by "reanimating the idea of the city as a mecca of art and intellect, a reversal that helped to increase *The New Yorker*'s cultural authority" (Corey 9). The magazine, and poems such as McGinley's and later Updike's, arguably spoke to an unease among suburb dwellers about the conditions of their newly chosen lives, and a desire for reassurance from the city—metonymically represented by *The New Yorker*—that they still, in some way, belonged.

Popular magazines were major poetry publishers during these, the last golden days of magazine publishing before the mass adoption of television decimated their circulation and advertising revenues and forced them into decline.[8] A typical 1950s issue of the *Saturday Evening Post* would publish at least three poems per week while the *Ladies' Home Journal* would publish between six and twelve poems per month including, in the July 1950 issue, William Stafford's poem "Suburban," in the August 1956 issue, Marianne Moore's Columbia University Phi Beta Kappa poem "Blessed is the Man" and "Lullaby" by Adrienne Rich, and in September 1961 a Theodore Roethke poem, "The Young Girl." When Updike first started writing poetry in the late 1940s and early 1950s, it was still "fairly common not only in magazines but in newspapers" (Christian 165). The paradox is that the popular media, widely blamed for weakening the country's taste culture, was actually ensuring poetry's continuing visibility and, indeed, the economic survival of many contemporary poets. This is not, however, to say that such poetry was always taken seriously. Writing of the new West Coast suburbs in a 1953 issue of *Harper's*, Bruce Bliven observes that:

> Not only does California consume literature; it produces writing of all types and every quality. Magazine editors know that the Golden State provides far more than its fair proportion of manuscripts that come in unsolicited…the state swarms with amateur writers who go on cheerfully year after year, getting published at long intervals or not at all. If you had an eight-line poem in the *Ladies' Home Journal* in 1952, that fact is worth mentioning every time you are introduced at a writers' conference, up to and including 1955. (39)

There was, then, a huge readership for poetry among popular and women's magazines—a readership that, being female, has tended to be either ignored or dismissed (Harrington, citing Andreas Huyssen, notes contemporary hostility towards "the popular, the feminized, and the mass" (*Poetry* 49)). John Ciardi condemns the influence on contemporary writing of "the ladies of the poetry societies" and their taste for sentimental poetry, or "poesy" (*Mid-Century* xix). Poet Louise Bogan makes a similar point, blaming women writers' implicitly undeserved success on the presence of "A new and eager periodical and newspaper audience, with the sort of pioneering background which holds women in high esteem, [and which] awaited bits of feminine sentiment and moralizing dressed up in meter and rhyme" (*Poet's Prose* 315). The critical legacy of a slightly earlier period is evident here. Suzanne Clark argues in her illuminating study, *Sentimental Modernism: Women Writers and the Revolution of the Word*, that modernism emerged out of a disdain for what it regarded as the sentimental, the feminine, and the popular; it "gendered mass culture, identifying woman with the mass and regarding its productions as 'kitsch' as 'camp,' and, like advertising, as objects of critical disdain" (4). It is but a short step to adding "suburban" to this mix. Anything that is read and enjoyed by suburban women is dismissed from notice—a tendency that has implications for the reception of a poetics of the suburbs.

Anthologies

Across the 1950s and early 1960s, poetry anthologies proliferated. This was in part an inheritance of a long tradition of American poetry-publishing going back through Louis Untermeyer's *Modern American Poetry* (the first edition of which appeared in 1921 and was revised regularly across the next four decades) to the turn-of-the-century compendiums described by Newcomb and Rubin. But there was also a specifically postwar, and even suburban, context that made this a uniquely receptive time for such selections.

Anthologies such as F. O. Matthiessen's 1950 *Oxford Book of American Verse*, which was aimed "for broad public consumption," (Golding, *From Outlaw* 26) provided short and palatable snippets of contemporary literary culture to a new generation of suburban readers with some time to spare, but insufficient knowledge or inclination to read beyond a prepackaged selection. In this respect, and from a cynical perspective, the poetry anthology was not far removed from the *Reader's Digest* condensed books and other similar series that emerged at this time and were marketed for busy suburbanites. Randall Jarrell, in his 1953 essay on "The Obscurity of the Poet," infantilizes as he mocks the man who reads, "with vacant relish, the carefully pre-digested sentences which the *Reader's Digest* feeds to him as a mother pigeon feeds her squabs" (*Poetry* 28). An advertisement on the inside back cover of Shirley Jackson's *Life Among the Savages*, a memoir of a family transplanted to "unexplored territory" (3) beyond the city limits, offers subscriptions to the new "Books Abridged" service, described as: "A Sensible Plan for Busy Men and Women who 'can't find time to read books.'"[9] Miller and Nowak observe that in the postwar era of increased affluence, "it was *culture* that American boosters boasted of most" (9). In such a context, poetry offered a degree of cultural capital and stood as one of several forms of conspicuous consumption. Moreover, poetry anthologies performed a service for a large cohort of GI Bill college students who lacked the privileged education of earlier generations and the financial wherewithal to accumulate their own library of canonical works (as Rubin indicates in *Songs of Ourselves*, this is not to say that these were novice readers; as school children and even while in the services, this was an audience that had long been exposed to both canonical and popular verse).[10] For readers such as these, the anthology filled a role in ensuring their access to appropriate works of current literature, the caliber of which had already been guaranteed by the editor-cum-arbiter.[11] Rubin points to the paradox by which "people in search of self-reliance could attain it only by becoming dependent on a superior authority outside themselves." (*Making* 14).

The perceived authority of such experts was not to be underestimated. Several commentators have noted the reliance of these new, young, suburban communities (separated from their childhood and adolescent peer groups, from their extended families, and from the authority figures of their original neighborhoods) on the advice of experts about everything from child rearing to poetry reading (Hine 27). Writing in *Harper's* in December 1953, Harry Henderson notes that "in the absence of older people, the top authorities on child guidance are two books: Spock's *Infant Care* and Gesell's *The First Five Years of Life*. You hear frequent reference to them" (84).[12] The insight is confirmed in John Updike's poem "The One-Year-Old," from his first collection *The Carpentered Hen*, which opens with the parenthetical epigraph: "(*After reading the Appropriate Chapter in* Infant and Child in the Culture of Today, *by Arnold Gesell and Frances Ilg*)." In six rhyming couplets, mimicking the platitudes of the expert guide, the poem traces the baby's typical routine, from waking through crawling to feeding, a regime accompanied by his own incessant babbling or "jargon[ing]" (*Carpentered* 46). Updike's poem echoes Phyllis McGinley's "About Children," published in 1951 in *A Short Walk From the Station* wherein heroic couplets are used first to cite and then to mock the authority of the expert:

> Why, if (according to A. Gesell)
> The minds of children ring clear as a bell,
> Does every questions one asks a tot
> Receive a similar answer—"What?" (26)

In both examples of light or occasional verse, the speakers manipulate structure and rhyme in order to satirize the views of the expert and to assert the value of plain common sense.

Poetry in anthologies also performed an ideological function in inculcating among Americans a sense of national character. Again, the immediate historical context provides an important precedent. As Rubin proposes, here citing Paul Fussell, the poetry anthology "exerted strong attraction in war-time partly because the 'principle of variety' underlying its arrangement was 'a way of honoring the pluralism and exuberance of the "democratic" allied cause'" (*Songs* 226). According to Irving Gersten, summarizing the views of James J. Lynch and Bertrand Evans, authors of the compendious *High School English Textbooks: A Critical Examination* of 1963: "Anthologies should be the repositories of the very best ever thought and written in the spirit of the humanistic tradition and the Anglo-American heritage; whatever does not fulfil these criteria has no place in the anthology" (5). In this respect the postwar anthology continued that goal of "transmitting civic ideals" identified by Rubin as characteristic of poetry publishing between 1880 and 1950 (*Songs* 168). However, in attempting to instill American traits, the anthology risked enforcing conformity and a certain homogeneity of taste. Gersten warns that in some anthologies, material is selected in order to "'socialize' rather than 'humanize' the student, as if the first goal of literary study is to learn to live in a group instead of with oneself" (7). His comment reveals the pervasiveness of concerns about the protean and thereby potentially volatile tastes of the new and allegedly conformist suburban masses.

In the earliest of the anthologies that dominated the period, John Ciardi's 1950 *Mid-Century American Poets*, the "latest generation of American poets—those poets reaching their maturity around the mid-century" (x), are introduced as the inheritors of several intertwining traditions including Walt Whitman's oracular style, Robert Frost's vernacular, and the technical sophistication of Ezra Pound and his peers (x–xiii).[13] As well as being located in this specific time, Ciardi's poets are unmistakably identified by place: "the poems of the poets here presented could only have been written by men who grew up with American suburbs and metropolis and countryside in their speech." This is "final evidence" according to Ciardi, "that America has found its own literature" (xii). His chosen poets, several of whom will be discussed below, include Randall Jarrell and Delmore Schwartz.

George P. Elliott's 1956 book, *Fifteen Modern American Poets* similarly focuses on what he defines as "the middle generation of American poets," (xi) that is, on poets born between 1904 (Richard Eberhart) and 1921 (Richard Wilbur).[14] Wilbur, along with others chosen by Elliott including Josephine Miles and Howard Nemerov, form part of the discussion below. Donald Hall, Robert Pack, and Louis Simpson's *New Poets of England and America* (1957) features poets born between 1917 and 1935. The book is regarded by some as being rather conventional in its choices; Alan Golding describes it as representing the "cooked" in American poetry, to borrow Robert Lowell's well-known distinction, as opposed to the "raw" of Donald Allen's counter-anthology, *The New American Poetry* of 1960 (Golding, *From Outlaw* 28). Hall, Pack and Simpson's anthology selects, amongst others, Robert Bly, Howard Moss, and James Wright—all of whom are discussed later.

Allen's *The New American Poetry* offered a more explicitly radical choice of poets, voices, and modes, arguing in its introduction for a "total rejection of all those qualities typical of academic verse" (xi). Allen identifies three key generations in modern American poetry: an older generation (William Carlos Williams, Pound, Marianne Moore), a "second generation" (Bishop, Lowell, Rexroth) that "emerged in the thirties and forties" and in some respects dovetails with the preceding anthologies, and a "strong third generation, long awaited but only slowly recognized" (xi) that forms the focus of his selection. This group includes Denise Levertov, Frank O'Hara, and Gary Snyder. In a sign of the problems of the generational schema (which tends to erase internal differences and to overlook poetries that resist or work outside the model), poets of Allen's second *and* third generations such as Rexroth, and Levertov are considered in my discussion below. Two years later, Donald Hall's *Contemporary American Poetry* selected poets who he defined as successors to the modernist and new critical orthodoxy rather than—as in the case of the poetry advocated by Allen—its radical over throwers. As Hall's introduction indicates, he approves and therefore selects a poetry of responsibility rather than of bravado (17). It is "a poetry of experience more than of ideas . . . it is the poetry of a man in the world, responding to what he sees" (21–2). In an essay published almost a decade earlier, Hall had noted the critical contempt then being meted out on poets who seemed to have conformed to the contemporary, suburban status quo:

> Attacks on the new poetry have three main resources. Poets are ridiculed as teachers: the patronage system established by the universities supports many of the poets I have mentioned. Is there any reason why an opium den is intrinsically more poetic than a Senior Common Room? In this attack is only the romantic cliché of the poet as starving revolutionary—a cliché contradicted by the contemporary poet who lives in a suburb and lectures to undergraduates. ("The New Poetry" 246)

Looking back on this period, Rasula reports that "as poets resigned themselves to university life they became recognizable variants of the 'organization man.' Under the pressure of conformity implicit in such institutionalization, the topic of the poet as Brooks Brothers mannequin became a familiar fifties reference." The risk, according to contemporary commentator R. P. Blackmur, was that poets would become assimilated into the normative regime and "dominated by those sedative reassurances of suburbia" (Rasula 194). Randall Jarrell commented with some astonishment in a letter to Elizabeth Bishop, "who'd have thought that the era of the poet in the Gray Flannel Suit was coming?" (qtd. in Rasula 191). The unfamiliarity and discomfort of this position helps to shape the poetics of the American suburbs, and becomes particularly apparent in the anxious, self-reflexive poems discussed in chapter 6 and my Conclusion.

Light Verse

Contempt for an audience is indivisible from contempt for a mode: hence the description that Ciardi draws in *Mid-Century American Poets* between "poesy" and "modern poetry," or, between poetry that is "comfortable" and familiar (domestic, *heimlich*) and poetry that is "unique" and "complex" (xx, xxi). This distinction is frequently modeled as the opposition between "light" and "heavy" verse. Morris Bishop, for example, writing in *Harper's* in 1954 proposes that:

> In the beginning was the Bard, singing the best words . . . immediately after was the Clown, mocking the Bard in falsetto, mingling nasty words with the noble. And all the people made harsh glottal explosions, signifying pleasure. Thus light verse was born.
>
> The aim of poetry, or Heavy Verse, is to seek understanding in forms of beauty. The aim of light verse is to promote misunderstanding in beauty's case-off clothes. (32)

Russell Nye dates to the late nineteenth-century the distinction between high "poetry" and popular "verse" (94). The *Saturday Evening Post*, in tacit recognition of the difference dropped the label "Poetry" from its regular feature in the mid-1950s and began to use the term "Verse" instead. Updike registers the distinction in his comments in a 1968 interview: "Eventually, I'd like to aspire to the proud title of poet . . . In the past, I've written what they call light verse, though I thought a lot of it was serious" (Reston 21).

Light verse, for W. H. Auden in the introduction to his 1938 *The Oxford Book of Light Verse* is associated with the representation of the everyday, and with a closing of the distance between poet and audience (viii).[15] William Harmon in his 1979 *Oxford Book of American Light Verse* notes its restraining function and thus implicitly (a point to which we will return), its political edge:

> The spirit of comedy, which pervades all of the many species of light verse, is a spirit of contrariness, opposing disorder to rigidity . . . but in virtually the next breath correcting disorder with regularity . . . Comedy, that is, polices. (xv)

For Reed Whittemore, the dichotomy between heavy poetry and light verse, the serious and the popular, is easily transposed onto the suburbs and, specifically, onto characteristic features of its architecture. Writing in 1964 on "The Two Rooms: Humor in Modern American Verse" he introduces "the notion of two distinct rooms, one for light and one for heavy verse." Heavy verse, he opines, belongs in the more serious, more established "stone room" while light verse (the work of, say, Ogden Nash or McGinley) resides "in what is usually called these days the rumpus room" (186, 191). The "rumpus room"—also known as the den, family room, or rec. room and usually sited in the basement of the new ranch and split-level homes—was a distinctive feature of suburban architecture, opening up a valuable space for the pursuit of family and leisure activities.[16] A circular set of associations thus links light verse with informality, with popular taste and thereby with the suburbs; all, we should note, are disdained by an urban intellectual elite. I am very far, here, from arguing that light verse and suburban poetry are synonymous. However, I do wish to identify some areas of contiguity and some commonalities in terms of authorship and readership (McGinley and Updike, for example, work across both domains and in a range of media speaking to diverse audiences) and in terms of the ways in which both have been critically maligned, either explicitly or by omission. In this respect, to develop a point made by Joan Rubin, to "restore to view" serious, light and suburban poetries, readers, and reading contexts is to "arrive at a more accurate as well as a more democratic portrayal of American culture than we have previously possessed" (*Songs* 6).

The poetry of the postwar suburbs emerges in a historical and cultural context that is exercised by interrelated questions about taste, value, and popularity. This is not simply a matter of suburban poets asserting the significance of suburban life as a subject for poetry, and urban critics denying the same in an endless and finally unwinnable exchange (although this process does have its place in the story). This is about poetry of, from, and about the suburbs engaging with questions of culture, taste, audience, class, creativity, and agency in numerous, often unexpected, and characteristically knowing ways. The poetry of the American suburbs is always deeply aware of, and often willing to exploit, the strange unexpectedness of its emergence as a cultural form in an allegedly "cultureless" place. It plays with the shock of its own presence, sometimes self-deprecatingly, sometimes ashamedly, and at other times with a willful, defiant exuberance.

PART II

CHAPTER 3

The "Poet Laureate" of Suburbia

Having established the historical and discursive contexts in which the suburbs emerged and were understood we turn now to a detailed study of the poetry of this place and time, beginning with the work of once-acclaimed, and now largely forgotten poet, Phyllis McGinley. Popularly known as the "Poet Laureate of Suburbia" (Deedy 22–7)—an appellation that trumpets the apparent incongruity of its terms, even as it attempts to broach them—McGinley was one of the best-known and most widely read poets of her generation.[1] Her selected poems, *Times Three: Selected Verse from Three Decades* (1960), won the 1961 Pulitzer Prize for poetry while her prose excoriation of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, titled *Sixpence in her Shoe* (1964), spent over six months on the *New York Times* bestseller list ("Telltale" 74–8). For reasons that will become clear below, her work provides a compelling test case—or more properly a limit case—for accepted readings of mid-century suburban life and of the history and readership of American poetry, and it operates in subtle and often unexpected ways to register contradiction and dissent.

Biography

McGinley was born in Oregon in 1905 of distant German and Irish origin and raised on a remote ranch in Colorado and then, after the death of her "fiddle-footed land speculator father," in Utah ("Telltale" 75). In later life, McGinley was quick to point out the contrast between these inauspicious beginnings and the material and cultural plenitude of suburban life. In Colorado, as she explained:

> The only school was three miles from home, often there was no teacher, and usually my brother and I were the only children in the school. So there weren't library facilities and for my reading pleasure I had to fall back on the books I owned and those on my parents' shelves. (Atlanta Book Fair)[2]

McGinley briefly attended the University of California and completed her studies at the University of Utah, a "seat of learning rather short on expansive thinking, for all the soaring scenery that encircles it," as a 1948 profile in *County Life* rather sniffily puts it ("Larchmont's Mrs. Charles Hayden" 16). In 1925, she gained her first major poetry acceptance when "The Street of Little Houses" was bought by the *Ladies' Home Journal* (Wiley).[3] Heartened by this early achievement, McGinley moved to New York to make a career as a writer. To buffer herself against the uncertainties of freelancing during the Depression era, she taught junior high school in the suburb of New Rochelle ("Telltale" 75) and then worked as an advertisement writer and editor for *Town & Country* magazine. In 1932 she began publishing poetry in the recently established *The New Yorker*, receiving the offer of a first-reading agreement in 1937, and placing almost 300 poems in the next three decades (White, Letter 28 February 1934).[4]

The association with *The New Yorker*, although in many ways auspicious (it gave McGinley an entré into a metropolitan elite from which her birth, education, and gender might otherwise have excluded her) and certainly lucrative, proved—in the end—detrimental to her literary reputation. The magazine had acquired a reputation for its arch style and for attracting a middlebrow, unadventurous readership and even though, in time, it was to publish Langston Hughes, Theodore Roethke, Sylvia Plath, and Elizabeth Bishop, amongst others, it was typically looked down on by the literary *cognoscenti*.[5] Yagoda notes the dullness of the magazine's aesthetic, and reports that Wallace Stevens "once advised Richard Wilbur that publishing in *The New Yorker* would be the worst thing he could do for his career as a poet" (21, 173). A 1955 review in *Renascence* of McGinley's collection *The Love Letters of Phyllis McGinley* remarks: "She is not a philosopher—except by *New Yorker* standards" (Tobin 50–1).

The advice McGinley received from her first editor on the magazine was to shape the rest of her career. In an undated (probably late 1960s) draft of an article, "Why We Teach," commissioned for a correspondence course run by the "Famous Writers School," she explains: "This [the mid-1930s] was the high era of Dorothy Parker and Edna Millay, of the lovelorn poem with the sting in its tail. They served me as models." Such a path was not to *The New Yorker*'s liking. In a 1935 letter rejecting an unidentified poem on an "Irish" theme, her editor Katharine White advises that she should eschew the kind of personal idiom that she had deployed in recent submissions—a style associated with "lady poets"—and that she should, instead, maintain the detached view that had hitherto been her forte (Letter, 18 January 1935). McGinley later recalled, "I took the suggestion to heart and never wrote another poem in that vein. I turned to different subjects and a different tone, both satiric" ("Why We Teach"). Her willingness to bow to editorial and market pressures was not lost on her readers and critics. Sylvia Plath, at one time an interested reader, dismissed her as a possible model in a *Journal* entry of March 1958: "Phyllis McGinley is out—light verse: she's sold herself" (360). Nevertheless, as the discussion of the poems below shows, social themes remained of interest; in a 1954 talk to the *Cosmopolitan* book club she explained: "The subjects I take are ordinary ones—but they are universal. And I like to think I have illuminated them a little" (n. page).

In 1936, soon after the publication of her first collection, *On the Contrary* (1934), McGinley married Charles Hayden, an executive for the Manhattan-based Bell Telephone Company, and moved to the picturesque garden suburb of Larchmont, a privileged turn-of-the-century enclave in Westchester County, New York. There, the couple raised two daughters and threw themselves into the life of their affluent community, with McGinley apparently relishing the housewifely role soon to be critiqued by Friedan and other contemporary suburban skeptics. Throughout this time, McGinley was developing a lucrative career as a writer of poetry, children's books, and articles about suburban family life for publication in popular magazines. She had a huge and celebrity readership. Fans included Groucho Marx who conducted an enthusiastic correspondence in the early 1950s and Kirk Douglas who wrote to her in 1963, enclosing a self-addressed stamped envelope and his copy of *The Love Letters of Phyllis McGinley* asking that she autograph it. In 1961, she was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for poetry. One of the judges, Louis Untermeyer, alerted her in advance to the deliberations of the panel (Letter, 7 December 1960). McGinley was astonished to learn that she might win, replying to Untermeyer:

> Never, never, never will the P________r [sic] Prize be given to a writer of unserious poetry. It will go this year as in other eras to some one more intellectual, more grave, more gnomic than I. And doubtless much more deserving. (Letter, 9 December 1960).

When the prize did "go" her way, McGinley was so shocked that she gave up writing poetry: "I decided to call it a day. I had done my best, I could do no better, and perhaps would do worse" (Letter to Linda Wagner).[6]

In 1963, McGinley's daughters having left home, she and her husband relocated to rural Connecticut—a decision that, as unpublished papers in McGinley's archive make clear, proved deeply distressing. By May of 1965, McGinley and her husband had returned to Larchmont and remained there until his death in the early 1970s when she moved to Manhattan where she died in 1978.

The "Poet Laureate of Suburbia," or, Why McGinley?

McGinley is an apt starting point for this study for several reasons. In terms of readership, she was widely understood to be a spokesperson for a growing and increasingly self-aware suburban constituency. This is a platform that she seemed to embrace, for example in her essay "Suburbia, Of Thee I Sing" (first published in *Harper's Magazine* in December 1949 and reprinted at the beginning of her 1951 collection *A Short Walk From the Station*) and in a range of poems, written over several years, even though one might note that as a Roman Catholic, McGinley may have been less wholly assimilated than at first appears.

The assumption of the role of Laureate of the suburbs was in many respects expedient. McGinley's use of light verse and familiar form gained her a ready and growing market in the popular media which, as we have seen, were preoccupied with emergent forms of suburban domesticity and conscious of the requirements of a growing cohort of suburban readers. Her writing on these themes generated a significant income.[7] As early as 1937, she was being paid $2.50 per line of poetry by *The New Yorker* (Fleischman). Using the most conservative of possible calculations, this would amount to some $83 per line today. Tax returns in the early 1960s show that she earned $18,000 per year from writing (her husband, a senior executive for a telephone company was earning around $2000 per year less), translating to a minimum of $159,000 and $141,000 per annum respectively at today's values. By 1966, she had secured a "first-reading" contract with the *Ladies' Home Journal*, promising $3000 per article (Jacobson, Letter 26 January). In 1969 she queried a fee of $3,300 from the *Reader's Digest* for a 2000 word essay on "Telephone Manners," prompting her agent to explain, with some exasperation, that this was a generous fee, particularly considering that the piece had not required copious research (Jacobson, Letter 20 March). $3,300 at today's value would equate to a conservative $20,255.[8]

John Ciardi, writing in 1959 to a fellow poet, reports a chance conversation with McGinley about their respective earnings:

> A while back when I had collected a fat $10-a-line check from *Ladies' Home Journal* I ran into Phyllis McGinley who was aglow with *Ladies' Home Journal* gelt and was saying "What lovely rates!" Whereupon I was chortling right back with her, in such wise as, e.g.: "Boy, kiddo, you said a mouthful!" or words similar. Whereupon in the happy bubbling of both our percolators I heard her say in the same tone: "Imagine, $750 for two sonnets!" (*Letters* 185)

Such high fees from periodicals were a measure of the circulation of the magazines that accepted McGinley's work, of a wide public interest in suburban issues, and of her own popularity among readers.

McGinley's interventions were particularly resonant at a time of considerable anxiety about what the suburbs were doing both to those who lived in them and to the American character at large. From the late 1950s onwards, as we have seen, the suburbs were the object of relentless critique by various "experts." In each of these studies, life in the suburbs was experienced as a problem; for Friedan, famously, the "problem that has no name" (*Feminine* 30). For McGinley, the suburbs did not seem to be a problem at all. Where Friedan saw the suburban home as a terrible trap, McGinley saw it as a place full of possibilities. Friedan's work shattered illusions about the "happy housewife heroine" who held an idealized place at the heart of the suburban home—an ideal that McGinley stands accused of perpetuating—and has widely been taken as authoritative in its representation of this place and time. McGinley's example points to the nuances of the debate; it gives voice to the much-maligned suburban housewife, and offers a spirited alternative to Friedan's reading of white, middle-class domesticity as "always oppressive for all women" (J. Giles 155).[9] More than this, it speaks back to influential contemporary commentators such as Lundberg and Farnham, and Philip Wylie who, as the previous chapters indicated, successfully peddled a vision of women as parasites bent on emasculating their men folk and destroying the nation. It brings the daily round of the suburban housewife into view as something worthy of attention (not least because, to refer again to Lefebvre, in its own easily overlooked dailiness it inscribes the possibilities of its own critique). By focusing on women's ordinary suburban lives in all their frustrating and rewarding detail she offers a valuable model for successors such as Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath, and Carolyn Kizer, even if this was a model that they were ultimately to overturn.

McGinley's poetry offers salutary evidence both of the historical range of suburban development and of its diversity. She began writing about the suburbs in the early 1930s, that is, before the postwar boom that was subsequently to provide her with a platform and to focus attention on her work. As Stilgoe cautions: "suburbs differ from one another . . . and lumping them together . . . perpetuates the confusion that overwhelmed observers in the years just following World War II" (2). McGinley's suburb (or suburban village, as she preferred to call it) was one of established, spacious homes and thus a far cry from the tract houses of the popular imagination. She was at pains to distinguish her own milieu from the more typical suburbs of the postwar years. Writing to a Mr. Whipple at *Life Magazine* in February 1956 she explains: "I have even invented a game where everyone has to relate his idea of Hell. Mine is living in one of those new suburbs where every house looks alike." McGinley (as, indeed, the other poets in this study), lived in and reflected on a suburbia that was not static, but rather, in constant flux. John Deedy (the journalist who coined the "Poet Laureate of Suburbia" label) points out that she was the "bard" of a suburbia that had already ceased to exist:

> Phyllis McGinley was suburbia's poet laureate in suburbia's best days. In a way, too, she has been its historian, for her writing constitutes a mirror of a place and a people. If her images today appear sentimental and rather romantic, it is only because there was a time when suburbia was a sentimental spot, and suburban life a romantic concept. Suburbia was, in fact, a frontier of sorts of the century's middle decades, an unspoiled corner of spoiling America. Phyllis McGinley sang suburbia's song well, and it is no fault of hers that the Promised Land turned out to be thin on milk and honey. (Deedy 23–4)

This dialectic between stasis (epitomized in the literature and social commentary of the period through anxieties about homogeneity, conformity, exclusion, and entrapment) and change (realized in ideals of transformation, mobility, and social informality) lies at the heart of the poetics of the American suburbs. It is manifested, as this and the following chapters will show, in poems that address spatial and social change and the strange liminality of the suburban condition.

In the light of widespread condemnation of the suburbs, McGinley's defense offers a salutary reminder of the partiality, and thus inaccuracy, of much contemporary commentary. Her poetry provided the suburbanites of, and for whom she spoke, with a saving respite from the onslaughts of critics and, indeed, of other writers such as Cheever and Yates for whom the suburbs often stood for narrow conformity, for acquiescence, and for the closing off of personal, social, and creative opportunity. As she explained in a draft introduction to a reading from *A Short Walk From the Station*: "mine was the first articulate voice to be lifted in defense of that world which had been the whipping boy for satirists for the last three or four decades" ("Draft Introduction" n. page).

She typically wrote in a mode—light verse—that seemed small-scale and inconsequential and thereby, according to the ideology of the day, feminine. Like many other women poets of her and indeed succeeding generations, she was roundly patronized by a literary and metropolitan elite. Auden supplied the foreword for *Times Three*, damning her work with faint praise in the first few lines alone: "Phyllis McGinley needs no puff. Her poems are known and loved by tens of thousands. They call for no learned exegesis" ("Foreword" ix). The *Guardian*, reviewing the collection in 1961, opined that, "her world is largely the daily round of domestic triviality; she writes like a housewife who has gone on noticing her surroundings" (Leslie n. page). Likewise, *The New York World Telegram* in an otherwise approving profile of 1946 noted that "in the ordinary conversation of Phyllis McGinley there is little to reveal a literary talent extending beyond the ability to compose short readable notes to a milkman" ("Woman Poet's Pen" 9).[10] She took her place within a critical culture that, as Clark has observed, found it impossible to perceive "literary or moral value" in what it regarded as sentimental and banal (2). McGinley herself demonstrated a sure sense of the resonance of her work, conceding that although she wrote out of her "own experience," "I try to do it with wit. And by doing this, I hope to illuminate a social pattern and a larger world" ("Kappa" n. page). She was at pains to point out the profundity of what may, on the surface, appear to be merely frivolous, commenting in a 1960 *Newsweek* profile:

> I'm so sick of this "Phyllis McGinley, suburban housewife and mother of two . . . ," she said. "That's all true, but it's accidental. I write about the village here, and the family, but that's only an eighth or a tenth of my work. The rest is different. There's a hell of a lot of straight social criticism." ("Lady" 120)

Her work demonstrates that poetry has a social and historical function (and that this is even, or especially, true of conventional and "light verse" written for a popular audience) and it offers valuable insight into the establishment, policing, and marginalization of poetic styles and reputations in the mid-century period. It exemplifies Cary Nelson's point, and extends his argument into the postwar years:

> As one begins to reread both poets now classed as minor and poets essentially written out of the story of modern literature, one discovers,

> for example, that traditional forms continued to do vital cultural work throughout this period. Far from being pre-eminently genteel, poetry in traditional forms was a frequent vehicle for sharply focused social commentary. (*Repression* 23).

Her rise to prominence and fall from grace as a female poet and light versifier prompt testing questions about the trajectory of contemporary poetry and about the gendering and critical dismissal of the audience for a suburban poetics. McGinley's primary and sizable market, as unpublished fan mail in her archive illustrates, was among housewives such as herself who did not recognize their own image in any of the populist and alarmist reports about suburbia then emerging, including in *The Feminine Mystique* whose critique of the trap into which women had fallen—or more precisely stepped—explicitly cites the title of one of McGinley's poems:

> And so the American woman made her mistaken choice. She ran back home again to live by sex alone, trading in her individuality for security. Her husband was drawn in after her . . . Does his meek willingness to wax the floor and wash the dishes when he comes home tired on the 6.55 hide from both their guilty awareness of the reality behind the pretty lie? What keeps them believing it, in spite of the warning signs that have cropped up all over the suburban lot? What keeps the women home? What force in our culture is strong enough to write "Occupation: Housewife" so large that all other possibilities for women have been almost obscured? (Friedan, *Feminine* 180)

McGinley's immense readership resented such summations of their experience. As one typical letter from a fan exclaims:

> How I have smarted lately under the stir of the numerous articles railing against educated women who "waste" their knowledge and abilities being "merely" housewives and mothers. How guilty they have made me feel! Yet, beneath this feeling, I have felt so deeply the thoughts which you being out so clearly . . . Thank you, dear Miss McGinley. (C. B. Letter)

In terms of her wider influence, her poetry offers a number of formal, tonal, and metaphorical models that later poets of the suburbs were to develop. Sonnets such as "The 5:32," self-elegies like "The Doll House," and poems of acute social observation such as "Country Club Sunday" establish what we might begin to identify as a distinct poetics of the suburbs. They inspire the many emulators to be seen in the pages of the *Saturday Evening*

Post, the *Ladies' Home Journal* and among the light verse contributions to the *Wall Street Journal*'s "Salt and Pepper" column, and they provide a template for the many other accomplished poets who succeeded and, in some cases, wrote back to her as, for example, in Sexton's poem "Self in 1958," which was completed and first published in 1965, although originally drafted in 1958 under the title "The Lady Lives in a Doll House" (*Complete* 155). From McGinley's model (her "The Doll House" was first published in *The New Yorker* in 1954), Sexton takes the figure of the forlorn suburban housewife who, although surrounded by markers of prosperity and femininity, lacks agency and proves unable to perform the role expected of her.[11] Sexton was long an admirer of McGinley's writing. The tight rhyme schemes of some of the former's early work reveal the debt, as do poems about family and specifically mother–daughter relationships. She is fulsome in unpublished letters to McGinley about what this influence has meant to her: "I wonder if I've said how much I admire and relate to your poems and many other pieces of prose etc. In many ways we are quite close. There are few women, of course, who write deeply of their womanhood" (Letter).

Sylvia Plath, too, acknowledged McGinley's influence, albeit with some qualifications.[12] Her 1962 poem, "Lesbos," tacitly evokes her predecessor's work and specifically responds to McGinley's widely circulated poem "Eros in the Kitchen." As Elaine Tyler May and Deborah Nelson have shown, by the early 1950s a privatized suburban domesticity—metonymised in what Sexton's "Self in 1958" calls the "all-electric kitchen"—had come to stand for a carefully demarcated and defended American homeland. The suburban kitchen was regarded as the place where women could fulfill their ordained role and use their premarital experience and education for its proper purpose—the service of men and the nurturance of a new generation of sons. McGinley's "Eros in the Kitchen" (first published in *The New Yorker* in January 1952 and reprinted in her 1954 collection, *The Love Letters of Phyllis McGinley* and then in *Times Three*) assimilates even as it questions this ideology. The stability of suburbia and of the suburban housewife's subjectivity is achieved only at the cost of the constant policing of the behavior of other members of the household (here, "Our cook"). The poem's title "Eros in the Kitchen" is both bathetic and satirical. Eros is the Greek God of Love but also—significantly for the underlying tension that develops within this poem—represents Sigmund Freud's pleasure principle or, "the instincts of self-preservation and…the preservation of the species" (*Autobiographical Study* 36). What we see in the poem is not unadulterated pleasure but a site of resistance and conflict.

At first, the opening and expansive vision of domestic disarray seems comic, benign, and even endearing (an example of what Laura Shapiro calls the contemporary "literature of domestic chaos," as also seen in Peg Bracken's 1961 *I Hate to Cook Book* and McGinley's neighbor, Jean Kerr's, comic tale of suburban family life, *Please Don't Eat the Daisies* (144–5)). The usual order is jettisoned (hence the inversions and personifications in line three) as desire takes over first the cook and then the house:

> Our cook is in love. Love hangs on the house like a mist.
> It embraces us all.
> The spoons go uncounted. Confused is the grocery list,

In time, though, the effect becomes disorientating or even uncanny. There is something increasingly unsettling about the way in which the cook's desires are assimilated or subsumed under the weight of the "Mister or Madam" – the suburban couple whose prior unity is established in the first word (the emphatic "Our"), reiterated throughout the poem, and confirmed in the recapitulation of the final line: "Our cook is in love." An unspoken racial tension underpins the narrative. The "Our cook" of the opening and closing lines whose romance causes such inconvenience is in all likelihood African American and, in this period and in this poem, rendered instrumental *and* subservient to the white "Mister or Madam" even as her love affair enables her to resist the humdrum pressures of her daily life. As the poem demonstrates, the cook's pleasures cannot be allowed to exceed the parameters of the suburban couple's; hers must be controlled, tamed, repressed. Having said this, the tone of "Eros in the Kitchen" is wistful. The 21-line opening section is followed by a break and then a 12-line coda or addendum which shifts into a more elegiac mode and implies that, after all, the cook's passions are to be welcomed because they have reignited the long-dead ardor of the suburban couple themselves who now smile at each other and resume the kind of social life more commensurate with their courtship days. The final two lines: "We remember what we had forgotten. The hallways are bright. / Our cook is in love" subtly, but nevertheless powerfully, gesture towards—even as they gamely resist—the deadening ennui of suburban married life soon to be documented by Friedan and others (*Times Three* 88).

Sylvia Plath's October 1962 poem "Lesbos" (*Collected* 227) writes back to McGinley's "Eros" in several important ways. It emulates her strategy of displacing emotions, desires, and repressions onto domestic objects; reworks her emphatically shared subject position in order to display the isolation of the 1960s' housewife's role; and allows the anger and frustration, so tentatively figured in McGinley's work, to come to the fore. Thus it responds both to the surface ideal portrayed in McGinley's poem and, I would argue, to its underlying discord, emphatically dismissing the first but also registering and confirming the second.

At first, the "Viciousness in the kitchen!" with which "Lesbos" contemptuously opens seems the absolute antithesis to the "Eros in the Kitchen" of McGinley's title. In this abrupt dismissal of contemporary ideologies of femininity, family, and home, Plath's speaker evokes the frustrations of her generation. There is no room here for Eros, the pleasure principle. Instead, the relentlessly end-stopped lines catalog the woman's rage, resentment, and despair. Children, animals, husband, and self are all bitterly indicted. The chaos has accelerated from the mild disturbance of McGinley's poem (controlled by a sedate alternating rhyme scheme) to a nightmarish scene of absolute squalor. In "Lesbos," inescapable but erratic rhymes combining couplets and even triplets with auto- or null rhymes suspended across whole stanzas, such as the word "hate" used in lines one and nine of the penultimate stanza, emphasize the mania and claustrophobia of the scene. McGinley's image of a peacefully sleeping child ("There's a smile on the face of the sleeper") is replaced in Plath's poem by a disturbing vision of the infant, lying on the kitchen floor, like an "unstrung puppet, kicking to disappear." The secure "Our" of "Eros in the Kitchen," is substituted in "Lesbos" by a solitary "I," set up in opposition to an always separate and often hostile "You." The polarization of roles is consolidated by the use of the singular "my" who takes possession of the child ("my child" and "my girl"). Everything here is in disarray; self, husband, and child are overwhelmed by and finally indistinguishable from the accouterments of modern suburban life (the fluorescent lights, staticky radio, and sleeping pills) to form what Marsha Bryant terms the "domestic surreal" (279). What had seemed benign and affectionate in McGinley (cold food, domestic disorder) here becomes grotesque, pathological. The small, if vicarious, comfort that McGinley's speaker is able to take from her cook's romance is emphatically denied to the speaker of Plath's poem. The pleasure principle (Eros) has been displaced by the death drive (Thanatos). Both poems illuminate Michael Davidson's point that poetry should be understood as "a palimpsest of the quotidian, a writing upon other writings in which prior traces are left visible, in which the page retains vestiges of its evolution" and, moreover, as evidence of "the degree to which texts speak to their moment as well as to other texts and writers" (*Ghostlier* xii, xiii). Thus Plath's poem retains traces of McGinley's, and McGinley's in turn looks back to earlier traditions of domestic light verse and love poetry, each of which is recast for the suburban present.

Plath's ingenious interpretation and revision of McGinley's "Eros in the Kitchen" paradoxically confirms that the latter's work is significant precisely because its evocations of suburban daily life do not, quite, deliver what they seem to promise. Although her poetry seems to defend the status quo, and seems content to square up to urban critics of suburbia and contemporary poets of the metropolis, a close reading which also contextualizes it in relation to contemporary debates and in the light of evidence in her unpublished archive, indicates that her oeuvre is rather more ambivalent than at first appears. McGinley's characteristic use of satire, wit, irony, and a number of other tonal and figurative techniques function to qualify her own otherwise affirmative account of postwar suburbia. From this point of view, the "Poet Laureate of Suburbia" appellation is something of a misnomer, unless we concede—as I think we should—that to be a poet of the suburbs is to engage with the mutability and ambivalence of this place and time. In this respect, we might read McGinley's so-called Laureateship not as a sign of a laudatory endorsement of suburbia, but as a mark of her thoughtful awareness of its complexity. If, as Catherine Jurca argues, "in the postwar novel, hating the suburb is precisely what it means to live in a suburb" ("Tales" 175), we might add that in postwar poetry—the genre most attuned to nuance and to the richness and indeterminacy of meaning—expressing *ambivalence* about the suburbs is precisely what it means to live there. To identify McGinley as "Poet Laureate of Suburbia" is to recognize the undecidability both of her own work and of the suburbs to which she belongs.

It is useful in assessing McGinley's work to divide it into two approximate phases covering the pre- and postwar periods, while also registering the presence of occasional crossovers, as for example, in the poem "Valentine," which was first published in 1941 and collected in 1946. This strategy allows us to trace both an apparent shift in her thinking about cities and suburbs, and over time, an intensification of debates in the field.

Early Poetry

The first poem in McGinley's first collection, *On the Contrary* (1934), originally published in *The New Yorker* on 24 March 1934, offers a comic lament for the travails of the suburban commuters who were its earliest readers. "Song from New Rochelle" is written in three fast-paced, largely iambic tetrameter and trimeter stanzas of 8, 8, and 22 lines, linked by a refrain which, as an initial note directs, is "to be chanted solemnly by a chorus consisting of N.Y., N.H. & Hartford R.R. Conductors, Passenger Agents, and John Coolidge."[13] The poem's rhythm mimics the urgent sounds of the commuter train as it hurries the speaker out of the civilized city and into the suburb, while the presence of the chorus establishes a dramatic, if rather bathetic, tension between actor (commuter) and observers. The poem opens with a folk truism from the well-known rhyme "Monday's child is fair of face," rewritten for the modern era. McGinley's Monday's child is fortunate enough to have a handsome chauffeur; her Tuesday's child takes yellow cabs. Only the affluent few, the poem indicates, can afford to travel privately. In 1930, registrations of private cars were some 150 percent higher than ten years previously (K. Jackson 175); by 1934, the influential and powerful figure behind New York City's prewar development, Robert Moses, had constructed the Long Island Expressway, and the Southern and Northern State Parkways—routes that, as Marshall Berman and others have noted, were built for private transportation only.[14] Transport policy left less affluent suburban commuters (those unable to afford a chauffeur, or a yellow cab or, like "Wednesday's child," a "red coupé") at the mercy of the under-funded public transport system. In the original folk rhyme, "Saturday's child works hard for a living." In McGinley's poem, worse still, she commutes.[15]

The chorus in "Song from New Rochelle" represents the monolithic power of the railroad company, able to dictate the suburban commuter's access to urban culture. The refrain that precedes stanza two offers an official disclaimer and denies responsibility for any mistimed or cancelled trains. The poem confirms that a metropolitan elite is literally at home, and at ease, within the cultured city while the suburbanite's access is fraught with difficulty and determined by the power of the machine: Saturday's child, as stanza two concludes, has to take the "eight-sixteen." The metonymical representation of the train as a sequence of numbers is seen elsewhere (for example, in McGinley's "The 5:32" and Cheever's story "The Five-Forty-Eight") and might also be said to evoke the ways in which the suburbanites themselves are dehumanized by the conditions of their commute. The long final stanza mourns all of the activities from which the commuter is excluded such as late night parties, bridge games, and the opera. A coda from the chorus confirms her powerlessness: "*The schedules shown herein are subject to change without notice*." Thus the poem, light-hearted though it is, evokes the circumscription of the suburban way of life and the pressures that drain one's liberty and determine one's leisure (*Contrary* 3–5).

A slightly later poem, "Valentine for New York," first published in *The New Yorker* on 15 February 1941 and then used as the opening poem of the 1946 collection *Stones from a Glass House*, again evokes the work, or "all the deeds," of developer Robert Moses. The poem is an unexpected one, perhaps, to open the collection and indicates an early uncertainty on McGinley's part about the consolidation of her position as the voice of suburbia. The title of the book is itself significant because of its early evocation of the architectural idiom of the suburbs (with its characteristic plate glass and picture windows), and because of its acknowledgment of some of the latent tensions then emerging between advocates and critics of suburban development. In metaphorically throwing stones from a glass house, McGinley demonstrates her willingness to critique her own environment and, crucially, makes it clear that her authority to speak derives from her own experience.

The tone in "Valentine for New York" is celebratory. McGinley had, by now, left New Rochelle and moved further away to suburban Larchmont thereby altering her relationship with the city and its suburbs. The strictures of the "Song from New Rochelle" commute are forgotten, perhaps because McGinley has now joined the ranks of the affluent automobile owners, or because she has fully committed to suburban life and has thus lost the wistfulness about the convenience of the city that marks the earlier poem. In addition, World War II had broken out, providing a rationale for the poem's patriotic tone. The "from" of the title to the first poem ("Song from New Rochelle") becomes now the more neutral "for" ("Valentine for New York") as though the speaker were reserving the right to inhabit a position inside and outside the metropolis at the same time. In fast-paced and Whitmanesque fashion, McGinley sings the praises of this "Tumultuous town, absurd and wonderful." Successive stanzas applaud the Empire State Building, the New York Public Library, penthouses, and walkups. "Valentine for New York" is a hymn to the modern metropolis, with its multiple voices ("single or together"), its tourists and residents, its mixture of ages, genders and ethnicities (hence the "St. Patrick's Day parades" of the penultimate stanza), its schools, churches, offices, art galleries, restaurants, "subway, danceteria, picket line" (*Stones* 11–12).

McGinley's "A Day in the City," published in her 1937 collection *One More Manhattan* (30–2) imagines the return to the city of a more ambivalent recent exile—Mrs. Suburbia Smith. The mock epic tone satirizes the subject's own sense of daring and wonder on the momentous occasion of her visit. The rapid trimester lines and regular rhyme emphasize the speed and enthusiasm of her flight *from* the suburbs and the different pace of life to be found in the city. The variation in stanza length (from four lines to sixteen) further exemplifies its stop-start rhythms. Mrs. Suburbia Smith's frenzied escape is depicted as an opportunity for consumption, whether, material, social, or cultural. In stanza three, she rushes in and out of the stores, catching up with a friend at Radio Center, visiting an exhibition, and hurriedly purchasing books for her "Reading Committee." The pressure is evidently on as she strives to accomplish all of her tasks on what the final line of the stanza describes as her "Day in the City" (the capitalization emphasizes the day's significance). The implication throughout the poem is that the barrenness of the suburbs can only be assuaged by periodic raids on the city, hence the military metaphors (of desertion, violence, and "battalions" of shop assistants) in stanzas four and five.

Mrs Suburbia Smith's escape has strict parameters, both physical (the distance she must travel on her return journey to her suburban home) and temporal (her day is bookended by the "nine-twenty-one" and "five-fifty-eight" trains). Her freedom to consume is the freedom to consume for others (her husband, children, and local community). The suburban housewife's role is to buy her family the happiness it desires, thereby ensuring the economic health and stability of the nation. In this way, her rampant consumerism can be made to seem a selfless and thereby feminine gesture, or a succession of "good works." Thus we can see that "A Day in the City," while on one level frivolous and amusing, on another traces the complex relationship between suburb and city and citizen and community, and the roots—and price—of a feminized suburban subjectivity.

A companion piece to this poem, "A Place in the Country" (*Manhattan* 102–3), satirizes the aspirations of city dwellers who, as they tire of chaotic city life, opt for a "simple life" in the country (for which, as the poem insists, read "suburbs"). With a tacit nod to popular pastorals such as Elizabeth-Ellen Long's "A Place in the Country," the poem mocks the contemporary nostalgia for a traditional and rural way of life which masks an underlying reliance on the luxuries of modernity: "*We'll delve in the earth and we'll drink from a brimming pool. / (Remind me to see about tiling the swimming pool).*" The use of italics in stanzas two, four, and six imply the presence of a chorus or mass of voices all sharing the same ideal; parenthetical asides expose the speaker's (or the community for whom she speaks) hubris. The poem indicates that the search for simplicity is as troubled by the demands of a modern consumer culture with its plethora of choices and attendant status anxiety (should the speaker choose fancy curtains or simple blinds?) as is the urban fast track. Moreover, the poem develops, in order to undermine, a sustained metaphor of frontiership. As we have seen, the ostensible self-reliance of the suburbanites was predicated on extensive, if hidden, federal subsidies (road building, guaranteed mortgages, and so on) and their hardiness was sustained by the labor of anonymised others such as the "man" who puts "the awnings up" (stanza three) and by regular deliveries of household supplies (stanza four) which include such delicacies as canned caviar. McGinley's aspiring suburbanites depend for their survival on the proximity of the city and its services. The poem exemplifies Mumford's point about the motives of early settlers of the European suburbs who wished "to overcome the chronic defects of civilization while still commanding at will the privileges and benefits of urban society" (Mumford 553).

Another poem from this same early period, "Musings Aboard the Stamford Local," subtitled "During an Expedition into Darkest Westchester" (*Pocketful* 82), uses a similarly mock heroic tone. This time, it reverses the direction of the satire and instead of mocking the brave Mrs. Suburbia Smith on her journey to the metropolis, pillories nervous city dwellers for their fear of the suburbs. Spoken in the voice of a visitor/observer, the poem oscillates—even from line to line—between noting the advantages of the suburban way of life, and identifying its drawbacks. Ingenious and deceptive *aabb* rhyming couplets emphasize the apparent disjunction between these two positions. In each stanza an ideal is established, and then undermined:

> ’Mid lawn and tree and fringed gentian
> And furnaces that need attention (stanza one)
>
> With sun at all the curtained casements
> And water frequent in the basements (stanza two).

The authority of the suburban naysayer’s critique which, in “Song from New Rochelle” was based on the persona’s own experience and thus right to speak, is thrown further into doubt by the qualified tone and thus uncertainty of the evidence presented; in stanza three: “stately houses front the sound, too. / Mosquitoes there *I think* abound too,” and in stanza four: “Lovely doth every vista look there. / *I hear* it’s hard to get a cook there” [my emphases]. The uncharacteristic lameness of the rhyme in both examples (emphasized in the null rhyme of the final couplet: “How much of good has life to give there / *I know* some people who even live there”) further weakens the critic’s credibility. The closing comment’s tentative claim to some kind of personal connection fails to convince and thereby casts the judgment into doubt.

In this and other poems, McGinley is conscious of and indeed troubled by the terms of a debate that would cast her and other suburbanites as the passive objects of other people’s scrutiny. At the same time, as we have seen, she is reluctant to defend the suburbs at any cost. In poems such as “Musings Aboard the Stamford Local” it is the urban experts’ views that she takes as her primary target, but she also indirectly exposes the pettiness of the suburbanites’ concerns (with flooded basements and a lack of household help), especially when compared, as in the final stanza, with “urban cares that fret and fester.” In “Marginal Note” (also from *On the Contrary*), she explicitly castigates acquaintances from the suburbs who mock the city (58) and “live for gardens and whitewashed pickets,” while “Suburban Newspaper” (*Stones* 96) satirizes the preoccupations of a local newspaper’s editor and readers.

Each of these poems demonstrates a profound self-consciousness, and a degree of unease, about the relationship between and relative status of city and suburb, and each keeps the city at least partly in its sights. A sequence of three early "Suburban Portraits" (from the 1934 collection *On the Contrary*) turns its attention more directly to the suburbs and suburban manners. Even here, though, the suburbanite is represented aslant or metaphorically through the anthropomorphized figures of the sparrow ("Suburban Portraits I: Booster"), the mocking bird ("II: Mimic"), and the wren ("III: Householder") who collectively form a modern-day Parliament of Fowls. A knowing and anonymous narrative voice introduces the birds and, in permitting them to speak, provides them with sufficient space to expose their own folly. The device of the birds at one and the same time defamiliarizes the suburbs, exposes the manners and morals of the suburbanites, and provides McGinley with a convenient mask for her satire.

The first poem in the sequence, "Suburban Portrait I: Booster," unveils the snobbishness of the suburbanite (ironically here represented by the lowly sparrow): "There isn't any town, he says, / With Featherstowe's advantages." The aside "he says" reveals an ironic gap between the sparrow's own opinion and the actuality of his position. The "advantages" enumerated by the sparrow are deeply symbolic: "A wealth of grass, a lack of slums, / A higher grade of buttered crumbs." The "wealth of grass" signifies both suburban affluence and the suburbanite's archetypal obsession with lawn maintenance—a trait emphasized in several poems to be discussed later. The apparently throwaway phrase "a lack of slums" registers the complex and interrelated processes of white flight, ghettoization, and racial exclusion that were to dominate suburban growth in the decade to follow. In this sequence, the "flight" is literalized in the figure of the three birds. The allusion to the "higher grade of buttered crumbs" exposes the tendency that Packard and John Kenneth Galbraith were later to critique in *The Status Seekers* and *The Affluent Society* respectively by which mid-century Americans sought to upgrade their material and social standing regardless, one might suggest, of the cost to those left behind in the rush to the suburbs. The rhyme of "slums" and "crumbs" forces a recognition of the relationship between individual aspiration and broader social consequences.

As the poem proceeds to make clear, the sparrow's true rationale for moving to the suburbs (and here, again, his decision offers a critique of the ulterior motives of a generation of suburbanites) is the desire to mix only with a certain class and race of like-minded others, or, with "the Nicer Sparrow." The capitalization causes the reader to pause momentarily and thereby to register all of the nuances of class, race, ethnicity, and social value that are signified by the label. The poem admits many of the disadvantages of suburban living such as the visiting city friends who cannot locate one's house, snow in winter, and leaking roofs, and ends on a note which, instead of boosting the advantages of suburbia, merely concedes its adequacy for the kind of person who is happy to live there. In other words, in a rather dispiriting closing tautology, emphasized by the minimal final rhymes, the suburbs are ideal for those who like living there, and those who like living there will find them ideal: "And since by trivial wing he's rooted here, / It's very nice that he is suited here." The passive construction makes suburban settlement seem an inevitable fate rather than an active choice. The conclusion reiterates Sinclair Lewis's point, made in a draft introduction to *Babbitt*, about standardized communities: "For those that like it—that is what they like" (*The Man* 32). The duplicity of the narrator's position in both texts provides a model for the double-voiced discourse of later suburban poets such as Richard Wilbur and Louis Simpson whose ambivalent subjectivity, as subsequent chapters will suggest, both inhabits and dissociates itself from the suburban domain.

The second poem in McGinley's sequence, "Suburban Portrait II: Mimic," shifts from an exploration of the rationale for a move to the suburbs to a satire on suburban society. Set at a social gathering, it resumes the first poem's fascination with "the Nicest people." But in so doing, it exposes the bad faith at the heart of the community. The mocking bird, the opening lines reveal, is welcome at every party because of its ability to mimic absent friends. Participation in the social game is assured by the shared fear of being condemned in one's absence. Thus in exaggerated and to an extent whimsical form McGinley exposes the social pressure or disciplinary regime that ensures suburban conformity. The tone of the poem is light but as in later poems such as "Country Club Sunday" and "Hostess," the "pearly" surface masks a gritty core.

The final poem ("Suburban Portrait III: Householder") is shorter than the other two (14 lines to their 28 and 24). The effect is to focus on issues of substance for the married couple at the heart of the household. The opening is emphatic in its representation of the suburban housewife as busy wren; she is unceasingly identified with her domestic duties. But in revealing this position to be an article of faith (the wren "*Believes* [my emphasis] the home should be a Shrine, / And its attendance half divine"), sustained by nothing more substantial than her personality, commitment, and energy, McGinley exposes the insubstantiality of the separate spheres ideology and thereby of the suburban dream. The stark rhymes and urgent pace of this short poem emphasize the ceaseless energies of the wren as she "uncompromisingly" seeks to maintain the domestic order. And although she is the one charged with all the "labors," it is the man who is the "householder" of the poem's title and who thereby retains the real power. The wren's drudgery, we learn in a half-comic and half-cynical final couplet, is devoted primarily and fruitlessly to ensuring the householder's continued patronage and protection. Her endless and finally thankless maintenance of suburban hearth and home notwithstanding, it is the flighty birds passing by who attract her mate's "wistful" attention (83).

Later Poetry

Most of the poems discussed thus far might be regarded as transitional or liminal texts which bridge the boundaries between city and suburb and cast an amused or sardonic eye on both. In her postwar books *Stones from a Glass House* (1946), *A Short Walk From the Station* (1951), and *The Love Letters of Phyllis McGinley* (1954), and in her Pulitzer Prize-winning collection *Times Three: Selected Verse from Three Decades* (1960), McGinley more explicitly identifies herself with the suburbs. Even or especially here, though, the perspective remains quizzical. The sonnets of *Stones from a Glass House*, for example, while ostensibly sung in praise of the suburbs, reveal an often melancholy uncertainty. The poems of *Short Walk*, on the other hand, seem to have found a degree of reassurance, and are the most expansive of her oeuvre in their valorization of the suburban ideal. *Love Letters* and *Times Three* readmit some of the doubts and uncertainties of the earlier work and represent a final ambivalence about the suburban project.

In "Country Club Sunday," the second poem in *Stones from a Glass House* after "Valentine for New York," McGinley depicts a typical weekend among the elite, leisured suburban classes. Originally published in *The New Yorker* on 13 July 1946, the sonnet implicitly celebrates the first summer after the cessation of World War II hostilities: "It is a beauteous morning, calm and free" as the opening line avows. The revision of the opening lines of William Wordsworth's sonnet, "It is a beauteous Evening, calm and free; / The holy time is quiet as a nun" (first published in 1807) tacitly prepares the reader for the sequence of unsettling reversals to follow. For now, though, in McGinley's poem as in Wordsworth's, "tranquility" sets the scene. All is right and implicitly white in this magical world; the "fairways sparkle," everything is under control (hence the "shaven" lawns of line two), and the servants know their place. Teenage rebellion is neutered; there is just one "shrill" and thereby emasculated "adolescent" under constant surveillance in the club's private pool. The pressures of suburban conformity—metonymized by the sumptuary code—extend even into leisure time, as shown by the uniformly "sandaled women" who take their places on stage-like "terraces." Their stylized position presents the country club, in common with other suburban environments, as a "space for looking" (Spigel, *Welcome* 2).

The postwar promise of a fresh start for the nation, tied up with the establishment of a feminized suburban domesticity, is invoked throughout the opening eight lines of the sonnet. But this Edenic ideal carries the seeds of its own destruction. As in Wordsworth's poem, powerful forces lie beneath the surface. The hyperbolic and brittle opening scene (with "sparkling fairways," ice, glasses, and lipstick applied as though a coat of armor) shatters into pieces in the closing sestet. Now we see that the "beauteous morn" may be no more substantial than a socially agreed convention, discursively constructed: "It is a beauteous morn, opinion grants." With the same inevitability as the sun rising, it dawns on us that this is the morning after the night before.[16] The ranks of sandaled women whose "terraces" seem now like battlefield vantage points monitor the men in order to judge, punish, or, as seems more likely, to compensate for their behavior. Their look is focused, more attentively than ever, on the "listless mate who tugs his necktie loose, / Moans, shuns the light, and gulps tomato juice" (*Stones* 14). The twofold implication is that men have transgressed and thus need extra surveillance, and that this is a habitual role wherein women are expected to retain perpetual oversight.

In this way, the poem assimilates contemporary readings of the dominance of suburban women and the exponential incapacity of suburban men. Vance Packard quotes approvingly a 1958 sociological survey of "mate appeal" and notes that its author was "so impressed with the evidence of male passivity—in his intense study and from more general studies—that he suggested the 'Thurberian' marriage may be one of the commonest types of marriage among modern college-educated people from middle-class backgrounds" (*Status* 143).[17] Significantly, in the original *The New Yorker* setting of the poem, the "listless mate" of the later version's penultimate line who "tugs his necktie loose" is a "listless male" seen "pulling" his tie. The shift from "male" to "mate" in the collected version of the poem dehumanizes the man and, implicitly, his relationship with the woman which now becomes merely procreative rather than romantic. The choice of "tugs" instead of "pulling" invokes a purely instinctive, perhaps violent, gesture rather than a cautious and controlled process. The change is clearly intentional. A rejected draft of the setting copy of the *Glass House* version had an alternative penultimate line ("husband who, with no excuse"). In opting, finally, for "mate," McGinley both animalizes the man and, to an extent, anonymizes the poem, distancing the narrative from her own experience.

The form of the sonnet is particularly effective in establishing the difference between a superficial rendering of suburban mores (whether positive or negative) and a more nuanced second layer of meaning which undermines or displaces the first. McGinley, like her near contemporary

Edna St. Vincent Millay, uses the sonnet in order to claim, in Artemis Michailidou's words, the "respect associated with traditional, classic forms of poetic composition" (80) or, to cite Joan Rubin, to encourage "the reader's ready comprehension of her message by retaining traditional lyric structure and rhyme as the vehicles for her conventional themes" (*Songs* 94). In McGinley's case, as in the popular poets of an earlier period, the appropriation of some of the "conventions of genteel verse for use in forms more relevant to the actual textures of modern life" is both effective and energizing, revitalizing poetic traditions while imbuing the quotidian with unexpected significance (Newcomb, *Would* xxv). One might also read McGinley's choice of established poetic form as akin to what Brunner identifies in Cold War poetry as a preference for strict forms that provide secure boundaries in order to better contain and "guard" the "private voice" (xiii, 6) even if, as Thurston argues, evidence remains of the intense pressures that lie beneath (489). In "Country Club Sunday," for example, the calm surface is maintained only at the price of constant, punitive, and mutually reinforcing surveillance. Suburban freedom is fraught with constraints. And the new promise of the suburbs (established in the octave) is precariously built on the potentially corrosive relationships and behaviors revealed in the sestet.

Another sonnet in the same collection, "Occupation: Housewife" (also originally published in *The New Yorker* on 13 July 1946), similarly exposes the malaise that lingers below the surface of suburban, and here specifically feminine, well-being. The poem opens by cataloging the myriad things about which the suburban housewife might feel grateful—her good health and her youthful appearance (she "owns," we are told, to "forty-one"). From the outset, though, we see that all may not be quite as it appears; if the subject "owns" to forty-one, might she not in fact be older? Her hair, although described as "bright" is cosmetically enhanced in order to keep it so. Her two "well-nourished children" board away from home. The woman's identity is thus built on subterfuge and absence. Lacking substance, she derives meaning from others (her family, social callers) and from her status as a conspicuous consumer of material objects such as "chintzes" and "Early American glass," displayed in an "English breakfront" (*Stones* 37).

Packard observes the significance of antique collecting in the suburbs as a way of pretending to a history in a place that seems to lack such roots (*Status* 65–71). Stereotypical perceptions of the cultural deprivation of suburban life are pointedly invoked by the long enjambed line straddling the closing line of the octave, and the opening line of the sestet: "Last year she took a class // In modern drama." The suburban housewife's thirst for artistic fulfillment (a need that poems such as "Valentine for New York" and "Day in the City" confirm) anticipates April Wheeler's fateful enrolment in the suburban theater group in Yates's *Revolutionary Road*.

In this poem, rather like in "Country Club Sunday," suburban femininity is represented as a form of masquerade or performance, established by constant and watchful display. Nancy Walker has suggested that these poems reveal an awareness—albeit a hesitant one—of the possibilities of a rewarding life outside the suburban daily routine. But I think the text is more complex than this because here, again with a knowingness that anticipates *Revolutionary Road*, the self-confessed search for something different and better is itself a kind of pose or performance. It is as though—to paraphrase Catherine Jurca's indictment of male novelists' suburban ennui—a signifier of the condition of suburban femininity is the desire to flee that condition ("Tales" 175). In other words, when McGinley's subject "often *says*" [my emphasis] that she might have become an artist or writer, we are to understand this self-expressed desire for escape as a mannerism or attribute no different from, and thus no more credible than, her propensity to choose expensive curtains or to collect antiques. These are all tokens of affluent suburban femininity and thus are to be read as manifestations of dissatisfaction.

The title of the poem tacitly registers the pressure on women to define themselves by their domestic responsibilities in censuses and surveys. But unexpectedly, and rather uncomfortably, in trying to show the ways in which women's daily lives exceed the simple label "Occupation: Housewife," the poem ends up merely confirming the existence of a new set of parameters. This housewife can barely conceive of *who* she is. The closing couplet shows her life dwindling to nothing as, through dieting and playing "Contract," she seeks to forestall or delay the "encroaching desolation of her days." The "Contract" to which she refers signifies Contract Bridge, the contract of marriage, and a more ambiguous commitment to the maintenance of a stylized and thus insubstantial and finally unsatisfying suburban femininity.[18] Her options, such as they are, are entirely negative (refusing to eat, postponing the inevitable). The final rhyming couplet indicates that the relentless encroachment of the "days" will continue to oppress her, regardless of her own attempted "delays."

The poem might also be read as an indictment of the newly fashionable market research practices of Gallup and other pollsters. Sarah Igo explains that mass surveys emerged after World War I and marked a shift from nineteenth-century studies (predominantly focusing on welfare cases) towards a broader interest in the "average" American (see also Creadick). In the light of work such as the Lynd's study of *Middletown* (1929, 1937), Gallup's public opinion polls (from 1935), and Kinsey's reports of 1948 and 1953, such mass surveys became widespread and "as natural—and invisible—as the air Americans breathed" (Igo 13). McGinley had first cited Gallup in her 1940 [?] poem "Ballad of the Preëlection Vote" (*Wry* 9) wherein expert pollsters are parodied as they "Gallup forth / With averages and charts" and confuse, rather than clarify, voter intent. The later, and pointedly titled poem "The Forgotten Woman" (collected in 1954's *The Love Letters of Phyllis McGinley*) opens by asking "Who are the friends of Dr Gallup?" and proceeds to outline all of the products and issues of potential interest to market researchers, including political candidates, "breakfast food," "Nembutal," and "coonskin caps." Again and again, though, the poem reflects on the suburban woman's exclusion from this process. Although "odd men" in unexpected places are sampled, nobody asks her anything. And although, by her own admissions, she holds "ample" opinions, "Nobody begs me will I be his sample."[19] The tone, as is typical of McGinley, is light-hearted. But it masks a more serious point about the marginalization of women as citizens. As the penultimate stanza puts it (note the stark, condensed and inverted second line): "the checkers pass me by. / Ignored am I." The final plea—to be counted—is on one level a desire to join the ranks of the surveyed, and on another a plea for a voice: "Won't *some*one sample me?" (*Love* 76)

"P.T.A. Tea Party" in *Stones from a Glass House* (62) examines the civic roles open to middle-class suburban women at this time. The "Tea Party" of the title belittles the significance of women's participation and thereby questions their authority. A 1948 interviewer noted that the poem "reaped a nice crop of hate mail" when it was first published ("Larchmont's Mrs Charles Hayden" 16). In "P.T.A. Tea Party" the conventions of the sonnet visibly and audibly struggle to contain the frustration and even hostility of the sentiment. Caesurae, inversions, and multisyllabic rhyme words ("pretty" // "Committee") impede the flow, emphasizing the awkwardness of this encounter between domineering mothers and inexperienced teachers, a situation that McGinley reflects on with the benefit of having played both roles. Assonance from line five onwards indicates the beginning of a move from anger to despair such that, by the closing sestet, the mood is somber and melancholy. The proceedings are largely anonymous, the participants deindividualized, hence "*someone*" [my emphasis] lights the candles. The suburban women's unique identities are masked by the fixed roles open to them ("Madam the Chairman" and the "Milk-and-Midday-Lunch Committee") and homogenized into a rather overbearing "vested motherhood." Any potential bonds between them are curtailed by the demands of ritual (the costumes appropriate "to the season" and the lighted tapers that, in line eight, are "set geometric") and of protocol—a protocol that sets women in formal and thereby inhibited relationship with one another. Only the "secretary" comes close to being realized as a discrete subject, and even her actions are curtailed and her voice muted as she confuses her papers and "murmurs inaudibly."

The effect, though, is duplicitous. As Walker argues, McGinley's work—like that of her peers Jean Kerr and Betty MacDonald—functions as a "contradictory 'double text' for the postwar period."[20] Beneath the "surface of the humor are significant signs of restlessness and unease" (Walker 99). More than this, though, the poem while it mocks suburban motherhood also, in a covert and rather courageous sleight of hand, defends it against the hostility and scorn of contemporary critics such as Wylie (author of the 1942 book, *The Generation of Vipers*), and Lundberg and Farnham whose notorious but influential *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex* appeared in 1947. Wylie's book roundly condemned this generation of women for emasculating their sons, disempowering their men, and bringing a once-great American nation to its knees. For Wylie, the much celebrated American "mom" is in truth a "destroying mother" (215), the "Queen of Hell…the black widow who is poisonous and eats her mate" (216)—a theme to which he returned in a 1956 article for *Playboy* on "The Abdicating Male and How the Gray Flannel Mind Exploits him through his Women." Lundberg and Farnham's tract *Modern Woman* opens with an astonishing sentence that sets the tone for the rest: "the central thesis of this book is that contemporary women in very large numbers are psychologically disturbed and that their disorder is having terrible social and personal effects involving men in all departments of their lives as well as women" (v). The "P.T.A. Tea Party" when exposed, as in McGinley's poem, to be amateurish and risible is at least shown to be far less malign than Wylie and his peers were concurrently alleging and, indeed, to be bringing something of value to the community. For reasons of space it is not possible to pursue this argument in detail here; suffice it to say, though, that McGinley's complex and opaque poetry sometimes inverts the position it appears to be endorsing and—as in this case—finds unexpected ways of defending suburban womanhood.[21]

The final poem we will look at from *Stones from a Glass House*, "The 5:32," confirms the subtlety and indirection of McGinley's engagement with, or Laureateship of, the suburbs. "The 5:32" seems, at first, to be a sonnet expressing pure contentment with the suburban routine, or better still, regime, whereby men commute to work and women spend their day waiting for the moment when they can collect them from the station. The poem is not unique in its evocation of such a scene. Rachel Mack's derivative "Song of the Suburbs" in the *Ladies' Home Journal* of July 1955 opens, chirpily enough:

Two go down and one comes back
By the road that follows the railroad track
and leads to the morning train;

Mack's poem, although shorter (10 lines to McGinley's 14) nevertheless borrows its theme and some of her rhymes. In Mack's case, the whole poem is shaped by a pattern of abandonment followed by restoration—a bizarre variation on Freud's *fort / da* game—that can only be resolved by the husband's return home in the evening. Only then does the suburban woman's life become meaningful:

When evening comes and two drive back,
And the circle of day is done,
The day with home at the heart of it
For two, for one. (14)

In McGinley's "The 5: 32," the separate spheres of home and work, suburb and city, women and men seem untroubled by dissent. The poem's languid tone, established in the assonantal opening lines, relishes the stability of the scene. The speaker, as she awaits her husband's returning train, vows that come what may ("She said, If tomorrow my world were torn in two"), she will cling to her memories of "this hour." Yet the curious voice—or rather, voices—of the poem undercut the apparent contentment. The third person "She" who introduces the poem (and then reappears in the ninth line) acts as a sponsor or spokesperson for the first person "my" and "I" heard throughout. In this way the speaker—who is both the anonymous voice describing the "She" and the voice behind the disguised "I"—is able simultaneously to articulate a position and to distance herself from it and thereby to qualify the assumed satisfaction of the suburban woman's everyday experience. Moreover, the sonnet's muted voice, twilight setting, and Keatsian echoes seem to wish to suspend time somewhere between day and night, home and away, private and public, summer and autumn and thereby to liberate itself from the demands of the daily routine which it it is simultaneously celebrating. In this respect, the poem's curious mixing of tenses (from conditional future to present to past and then back to present) becomes particularly appropriate as a way of establishing the tension between actuality and desire, disappointment and hope.

"The 5:32," although on one level a paean to the rituals of suburban life is also implicitly a plea that nothing should change, that the evening of domestic service and the loneliness of the following day should be forestalled. The speaker longs to seize and to fix that moment when her husband smilingly walks towards her on the station platform and when both expectantly turn for home, with "dinner waiting, and the sun not yet gone down" (120). In Siobhan Phillips's terms, "the necessity of quotidian experience" becomes both an "aesthetic and experiential opportunity" (1). However, whereas for Phillips this process signifies "renewal" and "affirmation" (2, 5), in McGinley's poem the effect is perhaps less positive. There is little comfort to be found in the ceaseless repetition of the daily cycle. As in "Occupation: Housewife," the "days" persist relentlessly, and each evening's reconciliation is, arguably, no real recompense for the earlier and newly impending loss.

McGinley's next collection, *A Short Walk From the Station*, published in 1951, expands on the topography and routines of suburbia. It is here that McGinley is most staunch in her defense of, and evident admiration for, the suburban way of life. The book opens with McGinley's prose essay-cum-manifesto, "Suburbia, Of Thee I Sing," first published in *Harper's* in December 1949 as a rejoinder to several attacks on the suburbs in previous issues, including Eric Larrabee's "The Six Thousand Homes that Levitt Built" in September 1948, Frederick Lewis Allen's "At Home, Five to Seven-Thirty" of June 1949, and Carey McWilliams's "Look What's Happened to California," published in October of the same year. McGinley's essay describes people and places in a thinly disguised Larchmont, or what she labels this "epitome of suburbia, not the country and certainly not the city." "Spruce Manor" as she names it is "a commuter's town, the living center of a web that unrolls each morning as the men swing aboard the locals, and contracts again in the evening when they return." During the day, she explains, "it is a village of women" (10). With polite assurance, she dispels stereotypical expectations of the conformity, homogeneity, and status anxiety of the suburbs, pointing out the diverse interests of her neighbors, and the lack of competition engendered by their heterogeneity. She also takes issue with contemporary novelistic representations of "lechery at the country club and Sunday morning hangovers," of the commuting husband who knows "nothing about Picasso" but whose "ideas spring ready-made from the illiberal newspapers" (12–13), and of the suburban wife who "plays politics at the PTA and keeps up with the Joneses" (ironic defenses all in the light of "Country Club Sunday" and "P.T.A. Tea Party"). Her aim, she explains, is to "challenge" these "clichés." "For the best eleven years of my life I have lived in suburbia," she declares, "And I like it." (13)

The suburbia she celebrates is a benign one. It is built, she concedes, out of a succession of compromises. It is ideal for children, within reach of the city for those who seek work or culture, and peopled by like-minded others who are happy to make an acquaintance but equally happy to coexist independently. And it is regulated by routine:

> There is something delightfully ritualistic about the moment when the train pulls in and the men swing off, with the less sophisticated children running squealing to meet them. The women move over from the driver's seat, surrender the keys, and receive an absent-minded kiss. (21)

It is the very stability of this white, middle-class suburban environment that for this late-marrying, Depression era, working mother is its greatest attraction. But it is also a milieu whose advantages are best understood in their wider historical and political contexts. In a postwar world still reeling from the conflict and its aftermath, from a nascent Cold War, and from other social changes (the emerging civil rights movement, among others), established suburbs such as "Spruce Manor" seemed to offer an anchor to the (imagined) past, some kind of secure foundation from which to withstand the onslaughts of incipient change:

> Someday people will look back on our little intervals here, on our Spruce Manor way of life…with nostalgia and respect. In a world of terrible extremes, it will stand out as the safe, important medium.
>
> Suburbia, of thee I sing! (22).

The defense seems heartfelt; but it is typically multiplicitous, particularly when read in the light of some of her contemporaneous poems. And it is characteristically rhetorical. As we have seen, McGinley was a professional writer who wrote to commission and was not averse to assimilating a position for strategic (for which read economic) purposes. It is also a defense that begs a number of questions. To her credit, McGinley is explicit about writing only about the suburb she knows. Nevertheless, there are various lacunae in her representation of this particular suburban ideal including, but not limited to, her oversights in respect of race and class.

Gwendolyn Brooks in a *Chicago Sun-Times* review of McGinley's 1959 book of essays *The Province of the Heart* (a collection that reprints, "Suburbia: Of Thee I Sing") is skeptical:

> Average reader will close this hymn to Suburbia and the life suburban with a sigh, thinking, "most things are nice in Phyllis McGinleyland."
>
> The life depicted in this collection of articles…seems so full of sun and sweet reasonableness that Average Reader takes heart and is glad—glad to realize that, in various areas of modern society, so rugged, generally, with the horrors of fear, sick speed, and hatred, there can be found charm and joy at home and abroad. (4)

The point is well made. And as Brooks implies, the oversight is not restricted to race. McCarthyism, the accelerating atomic race, and other "horrors" are likewise missing from McGinley's oeuvre. As Brooks's pointedly capitalized and repeated invocation of the "Average Reader" indicates, McGinley's observations are "Average" only for a protected, white, middle-class elite.

Brooks's own poem "Beverley Hills, Chicago" (from the 1949 book *Annie Allen*) had directly compared the experience of affluent, white suburbanites (reliant on the attentions of black gardeners to clear the "dry brown coughing" of the autumn leaves falling at their feet, and residing in orderly and spacious homes where even "the refuse is a neat brilliancy") with that of African American communities whose life choices are represented in a rather different way. The poem is voiced by an African American visitor (here assuming a collective voice, or speaking in the first person plural), passing by the suburb of Beverley Hills, Chicago, and observing the seductive ease of the environment and its inhabitants. The difference between white residents and black passers by is demarcated by the persistent "we" and "they" of the poem's idiom. The suburb is depicted in soft and restful assonance, and a whispering sibilance (as though the speaker dare not disturb the peace); hence the white suburbanites are seen in stanza two as they "flow sweetly into their houses / With a softness and slowness touched by that everlasting gold." The same "sun and sweet reasonableness" as Brooks finds in McGinley's representations is latent in this gilded vision ("These people walk their golden gardens"). Even when trouble strikes, as Brooks assures us it might, "it is trouble with a gold-flecked beautiful banner." The "reasonableness" of McGinley's portrayal is amply and explicitly appropriated by Brooks's poem, particularly in the final stanza which, with a clarity born of careful and hard-wrought control (and indeed of relentless work hence the repetition of the homonym in the penultimate line), insists:

> We do not want them to have less.
> But it is only natural that we should think we have not enough.
> We drive on. We drive on.
> When we speak to each other our voices are a little gruff.
> (*Annie* 48–9)

Brooks's poem, and her critique of McGinley's work, provide a devastating corrective to the apparent narrowness of the latter's vision. As indicated earlier, though (for example, with the latent racial tension in "Eros in the Kitchen," the implicit alcoholism and nascent delinquency of "Country Club Sunday," and the hidden frustrations of "Occupation: Housewife") this is not to say that race and other troubling "areas of modern society" do not figure in McGinley's writing in some way. Indeed, one might argue that her determined poetic construction of a suburban sanctuary—precisely because it is designed as a bulwark against forces of social change—registers the pressing significance of the civil rights, feminist, and other contemporary movements even as it refuses explicitly to name them. In other words, these social pressures are there in traces, even if rarely openly addressed. Some of the essays in McGinley's *The Province of the Heart* and later writings (such as her 1968 *Saturday Evening Post* article on "The New American Family") do acknowledge her own, and her generation's, failings in this regard and applaud the willingness of the next ("Brave Generation") to tackle inequality:

> If segregation, for instance, is on its deathbed, it's the young who are administering the *coup de grace*. Senates may legislate, reformers proselyte, but it's boys and girls who keep making the vision a faint reality. To them the thought of discriminating against a contemporary because of his color or his religion is an offense that cries to their ardent heaven. Their parents may close the schools in the South. The young petition to open them. When a fraternity chapter loses its charter because it has elected a Negro or a Jew or possibly a Catholic, it's the alumni who have done the closing not the undergraduates. (*Province* 48)[22]

The final poem in *Short Walk*, "I Know a Village," bookends the opening essay. In this quiet, contemplative seven quatrain poem (with the emphatic repetitions "the streets are named for trees" in the last and first lines of stanzas one and two, and in the antepenultimate line of the sixth stanza), McGinley pays her respects to her adopted home. The consolidation of the rhyme scheme with its pantoum or sestina-like returns (for example, the repetition in stanzas one, two, and six of the "seas" / "trees" rhyme) affirms the security—which may also be the claustrophobia—of suburbia. Both are further evoked by the reference in stanza two to the "safely fenced" houses and in stanza three to the "solid pavements." As the opening essay of the collection avowed, and as the closing poem confirms, suburbia is a place of compliance not excess, of the middle ground, not the extreme. Its gifts, taken singly, seem meager (the pavements are "solid," the sails of the "little boats" are white, "In winter there's a hill for sledding"). Taken together, though, this is an idyllic place. As the closing stanza avers:

> It looks haphazard to the shore.
>   Brown flickers build there. And I'd not
> Willing, I think, exchange it for
>   Arcadia or Camelot. (174–5) [23]

A Short Walk From the Station from its opening essay to this, its final poem, constructs a dream of suburban contentment. It is a dream that, as Gwendolyn Brooks's critique indicates, speaks to a specific audience. But it is one that, by establishing an ideal of affluence, social mobility, and personal contentment, interpellates the many (as Kruse and Sugrue have noted, the aspiration to suburban stability was not unique to white families). This is a dream constructed, in part by repetition. Several poems here are carried over from earlier collections including "Country Club Sunday," "Occupation: Housewife" (retitled "Executive's Wife"), "P.T.A. Tea Party," and "The 5:32" from *Stones from a Glass House*, all now grouped as a sequence of "Sonnets from Westchester." In several cases, the structure of the poem is changed for this new setting; the Petrarchan sonnet form of the original versions (octave followed by sestet) is now dispersed across two quatrains and a sestet or, in the case of "The 5:32" across three quatrains and a closing couplet. The effect, for example in "Country Club Sunday," is to attenuate the "turn" in the poem, making it more difficult to identify a single moment where celebration of the scene turns to qualification or critique. The retitling of "Occupation: Housewife" as "Executive's Wife" in *A Short Walk* renders the woman as something other than a mere statistic to be counted by market researchers, while nevertheless marking her as little more than an appendage to her husband. The effect of the recapitulation of poems from earlier books is to affirm, and perhaps even to overstate, McGinley's commitment to the suburban ideal. A consequence of this reiteration is that the suburbs begin to seem to lack substance. Their pleasures are overdetermined; it is as though only by repeatedly asserting their value and stability that their advantages can be proven.

If the suburbs of *A Short Walk From the Station* seem overdetermined, then the depiction in McGinley's final volume of poetry (before her 1960 collected poems, *Times Three*) is exponentially reticent. The poems in this 1954 collection *The Love Letters of Phyllis McGinley* anticipate the turn against the suburbs evident in popular and critical commentary towards the end of that decade and confirm that the Arcadian vision of the "Spruce Manors" of mid-century America was, indeed, too good to be true. These suburbs are fragile places; the domestic bliss they once promised seems vulnerable. "Sunday Psalm," for example, adopts the rhetoric of Eden or Paradise familiar from earlier poems, emphasized by italicized quotations from Psalm 118 (*This is the day which the Lord hath made, Let us be glad and rejoice therein*). These bracket the first stanza's contradictory allusions to "Eden," "sin," "glitter," and "shade" (26) thus juxtaposing the affirmative Biblical refrain with a less positive and more cynical view of the scene. Here, as also in "Country Club Sunday" and "Occupation: Housewife" ("Executive's Wife"), the glittering surface proves insubstantial; it forms a tantalizing and dazzling mask which hides corrosive and ultimately violent depths. The landscape seems hyperreal, threatening in its bright allure. Successive and disturbing images (of "sin," "shade," "metal," "glass," a "blade," "wasp," and "clouds") take us to the closing stanza where we find a further and more explicit warning about impending doom ("the dark will begin") and a reprieve of the passage from the scriptures cited at the poem's opening. The effect is claustrophobic and unsettling; the appeal to the Psalms offers little real comfort in such a disturbing, even Hellish, suburban context.

Another poem from this period, "The Doll House," laments what McGinley's successor, Anne Sexton, was to refer to as the "diminishment" (*Complete* 21) of life in the suburbs. In the essay "Suburbia, Of Thee I Sing," in interviews and in correspondence, McGinley had confirmed the widely held perception that the suburbs were primarily spaces for children (or, what Wunsch calls, a "bivouac or camp for child-rearing" (648)). In an undated draft speech to a local Larchmont society she writes "children are the necessities of suburbia. Without them it has no point" (n. page). She mourns the loss of that *raison d'être* in the deceptively elegiac "The Doll House." An unusually long poem for McGinley, it opens with a nine-line single-sentence stanza which describes the retrieval of a no-longer-used doll house from the suburban attic. The extended enjambment of the opening section helps to convey the swift and seemingly inexorable passing of time, which is the poem's larger subject. As in "The 5:32," the poem's subject is an unnamed, third-person "she"—a suburban everywoman akin, to go back further still, to the "Mrs Suburbia Smith" of "A Day in the City." No longer required to devote herself to her family, and to domestic routine, the anonymous "she" sublimates her energies, desires, and arguably her grief in the care and maintenance of the doll house, which thus serves as a literal object and as a metaphor for the newly apparent insubstantiality of the maternal housewife's role. Her investment in her family over all these years can be figuratively shelved just as the doll house itself has been discarded; it is only by restoring it that she can preserve any vestiges of her own former identity—however faint. The bobbed lines, caesurae, and erratic use of enjambment combine to unsettle the flow of the lines, thereby evoking the woman's distress and unease as she reflects (while absent mindedly fixing "A drapery's pleat, smoothing a cupboard shelf—") that "Always, from the beginning, / This outcome had been clear." The middle section of the poem pretends relief that the doll house, once restored, will remain unspoiled by the comings and goings of a real family and that she will rule as the "sole mistress" of a "tranquil and complete domain." But the allusion to family life merely confirms the emptiness and insubstantiality of this pretend home. The closing stanzas painfully recognize (like in "The 5:32," the tone is Keatsian) that to freeze time in order to avoid change and its companion, loss, is also to lose the intensity of human experience (*Love Letters* 27–9).

The poem is noteworthy for several reasons. First, it brings to life an aching loss familiar to McGinley's generation of housewives and mothers in these child-centered suburbs—a loss that commentators such as Friedan were soon to note (according to Friedan, "A woman today who has no goal, no purpose, no ambition patterning her days into the future, making her stretch and grow beyond that small score of years in which her body can fulfil its biological function, is committing a kind of suicide" (*Feminine* 293)). Second, it brings the resoundingly domestic and feminine into the heart of poetry (thereby providing, as we have seen, a provocative model for Sexton and Plath). Finally, as a lament for a lost family, a lost purpose, and a solitary future, "The Doll House" strikes the elegiac note that, as we will see in later chapters, is one of the most persistent features of the poetry of the suburbs.[24]

The publication of *Times Three: Selected Verse from Three Decades*, the book that earned McGinley the Pulitzer Prize, was also, as previously noted, the catalyst for her decision to cease writing poetry. Arranged in three parts (opening with poems from "The Fifties" and then going back through "The Forties" to "The Thirties"), the volume reproduces some 300 previously collected poems and 70 others, including a previously uncollected poem in the 1930s section called "View from a Suburban Window."

McGinley's choice of title is significant. In the 1954 talk to the *Cosmopolitan* book club, cited earlier, where McGinley defends the range of her poetry ("The subjects I take are ordinary ones—but they are universal") she goes on to explain: "I look at the world from a small suburban window." By positing the "suburban window" as the site both of external vision and, as in this poem, of internal contemplation, McGinley confirms the panoptic aspects of suburban life. The "suburban window" is a vantage point for insiders looking *out* and a focal point for outsiders looking *in.* It is also, as importantly, the lens or mirror through which the suburbanite studies herself and the abstract conditions of her own existence. In all of these respects, this early poem is an important precursor for the work of subsequent poets of the American suburbs who yoke the particularities of suburban design with the production of a particular and surveillant culture, and in turn with the construction of a suburban subjectivity.

"View from a Suburban Window" takes as its starting point John Milton's Sonnet XIX ("When I Consider How My Light is Spent") albeit with considerable formal and thematic modifications. The bathos is used to deliberate effect and, rather like in "Occupation: Housewife" and "The Doll

House," exposes and questions the apparent insubstantiality of suburban women's daily lives. Milton's poem represents a profound soul-searching, a moment of spiritual uncertainty occasioned by his devastating loss of sight. McGinley's, although ostensibly more trivial and carried out not in communion with God but under the guidance of "grocers and the dentist," nevertheless portrays a similarly troubling moment of self-doubt. The Petrarchan sonnet form allows McGinley to establish the tedium of her everyday routine ("papering shelves or saving for the rent") and the impossibility of escaping the ceaseless demands of the "grinning household muse," in the octave and then to propose an alternative way of life in the first few lines of the sestet. Here she posits that in some distant city, she might "be furthering a Career" and living independently in a "single flat." Yet the poem's final two lines, although seeming to favor the suburban road already taken, refuse ultimately to affirm that choice. The conditional "might" used twice in the closing couplet leaves the decision tantalizingly open: "When I consider this, it's very clear / I might have done much worse. I might, at that" (*Times Three* 269). For John Milton's messenger, "They also serve who only stand and wait." For McGinley, the value of that subordinate and suspended position is less clear. Her work establishes, but cannot finally endorse, the suburban way of life. Seduced by its attractions, she nevertheless retains a critical distance.

McGinley's poetry sets up a vision of suburbia that is shaped by material, social, and ideological factors. Crucially, though—and it is here that her poetic ingenuity comes into its own—her writing exposes the discursiveness and vulnerability of the structures and ideals that it has, itself, been complicit in establishing. By such means as heavily loading the turn in the sonnet, by deploying the Trojan horse of light verse in order to make a satirical and thus political point, by reworking for the modern suburban age canonical poetry by such as Keats, Wordsworth, and Milton, and by manipulating poetic voice, rhyme, and meter to strategic and often subversive effect, McGinley artfully—and I would say knowingly—questions the origins and value of the suburban ideal. Her work invites us to explore, in DuPlessis's words, "the verbal complexities, formal particularities, and aesthetic intricacy of the poetic text" while also attending to the social and political nuances registered and disseminated therein ("Social" 66).

McGinley's most successful sleight of hand lies in achieving all this while nominally serving as the "Poet Laureate" of suburbia. I referred earlier to what I see as a double-voiced discourse in her work, by which I mean—to put it simply—that her poetry might be read in (at least) two entirely contradictory ways. Strategic use of poetic structure and voice enable her to achieve this effect. But so, too, does her willingness to continue to play the role of suburban booster for a market and readership that will accept no less even as her work questions and undermines that position. The fascination of her work lies in its technical accomplishments, in the insights it offers into everyday suburban life, and in the intriguing gap that it opens between the poems' manifest and latent significations.

CHAPTER 4

Suburban Landscapes

Phyllis McGinley's poetry speaks from and of a specific suburban subjectivity—one constructed in particular historical, geographical, and social circumstances, and one that uses conventional forms and the mass media to reach a popular audience. Other poets, working in rather different environments (temporal, spatial, and cultural), enter into new dialogs and devise a range of different poetic strategies to novel effect. The present chapter asks how these suburban poetries negotiate the cultural materials available to them in their specific contexts (Watten 165). The contexts, as I will argue (here, as intimated in the introduction, I extend the parameters of other recent work in poetry and cultural studies) are geographical as much as historical. The two are indivisible; both play a part in the emergent poetics of the American suburbs. By way of example and starting point, I turn to the West Coast of America and to the rich poetry that developed there in tandem with the new suburbs. I then move on to examine poems that draw on the (sometimes fraught) relationship between small towns and new developments, and finally at the therapeutic promise of suburban landscapes as perceived in a distinct body of suburban asylum poems.

California

The California suburbs, as chapter 2 indicated, developed in distinctive ways in order to meet the needs of those seeking work during the 1920s and 1930s and to service a growing military presence in the buildup to and aftermath of World War II.[1] The dispersal of business and housing laterally away from the central core of cities such as Los Angeles gave the city's suburbs a particular character (Fishman 15–17)—one that, in the eyes of some contemporary commentators, was emblematic of the worst excesses of development elsewhere in the nation. Bruce Bliven, for example, complains in *Harper's* in 1953 that "new suburban developments are opened, one after the other, like popcorn over a hot fire. It's hard not to envisage the California of a few years hence as one vast suburb, spreading from the mountains to the sea" (36).[2] In terms of design, the topography of the region meant that the suburbs of California were characteristically flatter, more regular, and architecturally more homogeneous than some of their East Coast counterparts. William Garnett's 1950 aerial photographs of the razing of the Californian land, and the erection of the suburb of Lakewood (published in *Fortune* magazine, and widely reproduced thereafter) arguably disseminated a vision of West Coast suburban development that was to inform the imaginations and representations of poets such as Barbara Gibbs, Josephine Miles, and even John Ashbery in the poems to which we will turn shortly.[3]

Barbara Gibbs (later Barbara Gibbs Golffing) was born in California and studied at the University of California, Los Angeles; her poetry was published in *The New Yorker*, in *Poetry*, and elsewhere across the 1940s and 1950s, and was collected in several volumes including *The Well* (1941) and *The Green Chapels* (1958), although it appears, until now, to have fallen from scholarly favor (Alan Golding cites Charles Olson's dismissal of her work (*From Outlaw* 125)). Her three-part "California, An Ode," published in *Poetry* magazine in December 1957, addresses a California already in the throes—and perhaps even beyond the cusp—of change. The choice of form (the ode) gives the text a perhaps unexpected dignity (we recall Bliven's account of trashy California developments, and prior to that W. H. Auden's conflation of the southern part of the state with "suburban villas and clearly unattractive faces" (qtd. in Von Hallberg 115)). Similarly, the apostrophe to "California" personifies a landscape hitherto thought to be developing in ways that defy human comprehension. The long free-verse lines, arranged in stanzas varying in length from four to twenty-one lines and in three sections, offer a snapshot of the despoiled suburban present set against the backdrop of an idealized virgin past. They also invoke the experimentation with expansive and open forms characteristic of the new poetries then coming to prominence on the West Coast. Stanza one, in recognition of this influence, commends the work of these "real poets, / and wild youngsters" taking refuge in the "free spaces still left to you."

"California, An Ode" opens by establishing the ugliness of the present, especially when compared with the implied grandeurs of the unspoiled past (invoked by the single opening word "Before"): "Before the smog, the bright cars, the clover-leafs, / The housing developments" (152). The rhetoric of the real estate brochure is appropriated in order to exemplify and by exaggeration to critique the commodification of this once-virgin land:

> Four rooms, one bathroom, one garage,
> One electrical kitchen, one portion of fence, of grass,
> The galloping consumption appropriate to a Utopia
> Where all have what they want and all want exactly the same[.]

The careful enumeration of these synthetic assets is contrasted in stanza two with the innate richness and plenitude of this paradise of oceans, mountains, and fertile land, depicted at the close of the day in images of burnished orange and lush gold. Look again, though, as the poem insists that we do, and we see that the division between past and present, heaven and hell, the natural and the manufactured, is less clear-cut than might appear. This Eden has always been populated, always shaped by human hand, hence allusions in stanza two to fishing boats and ocean steamers, and to the artificially planted grove of oranges. The suburbanization of which Gibbs writes is, it transpires, but the most recent manifestation of a process that began with the first native American settlement and exploitation of this environment. Today's suburban pioneers are but the latest in a long line stretching back through Franciscan monks and native peoples to the ancient spirits of the mountains and the sea (Gibbs 153). For Neil Campbell, as for other recent scholars of the "American New West," the region derives its meaning from "those who have lived within it, passed through it, conquered it, settled, farmed, militarized, urbanized, and dreamed it. The West is a multicultural, multiaccented, multilayered space whose various cultures exist both separately and in dialogue with all the others that exist around them" (2). Gibbs's poem is arguably prescient in its evocation of this racial and imaginary mix.

Section II of "California, An Ode" seeks in the speaker's childhood memories of the mountains, deserts, and lonely beaches of this landscape, a lesson that might be passed on to new settlers whose carefully delineated suburbs (the "four rooms, one bathroom, one garage" of stanza one) may otherwise be all they know of this sublime terrain. For Gibbs, as for her successor and fellow California poet, Gary Snyder, "To walk in the landscape is to establish connections between animate and inanimate realms…re-enactments, testifying through the poetics of open form to the vitality of an open universe" (Davidson, *San Francisco* 13). It is in California, the speaker insists, that she found her own poetic calling, hence images throughout this section of language, voice, and inspiration and the allusion to the Sligo beaches that were W. B. Yeats's poetic home. But the poem also looks for communalities between past and present, *rus* and *urbis*, refusing the binary that would see settlement as always and inevitably the negative of unspoiled nature. And it refuses to see all cities as identical, rendering Los Angeles in hot and colorful hues, and San Francisco with a cooler, sharper color palate (155). The landscape of the speaker's childhood recollection and more recent experience provides her with a source of identity and stimulation as a poet (a self-reflexivity that, as the Conclusion will show, is common to the poetics of the postwar suburbs).

In the third and final section, Gibbs's speaker achieves an unexpected and, in some respects rather ambivalent reconciliation with the processes of change that she now presents as necessary to California's achievement of its full potential. The focus shifts here; the direct apostrophe of the first two sections is replaced by a more public and declamatory voice, one that gestures towards the "Atomic Age," critiques the forces of violent change, and closes with an appeal to the "old beauty" of this place, which must be allowed to continue to shine. Such perfection may, she concedes, be barely conceivable (hence images of transience and fragility such as "veil" and "cobweb" (255)), and will not be achieved without further cost to the "ravished" and "ruined" landscape. In this respect, Gibbs's poem marks a growing recognition across this period of the threat posed to the environment by industry, the mechanization of agriculture, road transport, and suburban sprawl. The poem was published some five years before the serialization of Rachel Carson's *The Silent Spring* in the June 1962 issue of *The New Yorker* but postdates her influential earlier works, *Under the Sea Wind* (1941) and *The Sea Around Us* (1951). By portraying the current situation (where suburban settlers are imagined as petulant children whose "present toys" will in time "grow shabby") as just one part of a greater temporal and spatial whole—carefully depicted across each of the three sections—the poem imagines the possibility of reconciling the needs of the landscape and the desires of the people. In the end, "California, An Ode" proposes, we might learn to value and to live in harmony with the region's natural resources. In the final two lines, "cabin lights" (signs of human habitation) and "first stars" appear simultaneously; the metaphors are ambivalent, suggesting either the happy coexistence of humanity and landscape, or the perpetuation of a struggle between them.

In a succession of poems published over some three decades (in *Lines at Intersection* (1939), *Local Measures* (1946), *Prefabrications* (1955) and *To All Appearances* (1974)), Gibbs's contemporary, poet and scholar Josephine Miles, contemplates the growth of the Californian suburbs in this her adopted state. The relatively early date of the first of these books and the titles chosen indicate both the interwar origins of these particular developments, and the poet's deep-seated interest in suburban architecture and social life. Miles was born in Illinois in 1911 but settled as a child in California and studied there at the University of California, Los Angeles before moving to Berkeley where in 1947 she became the first woman professor to achieve tenure (Burr 67). She was associated in the postwar years with the poets of the "Berkeley Renaissance"—Davidson calls her its "major poet"—and thus with Robert Duncan and Jack Spicer, amongst others even if, as Davidson notes, the relationship with Duncan was often "uneasy" (Charters 584; Davidson, *San Francisco* 40, 175).[4] Her poetry, although at first widely noticed and anthologized was, like McGinley's, faulted for its interest in the everyday and for its formal proficiency which seemed, to some critics, to mask an absence of heart.[5]

One of her earliest works, "$7,500" (*Collected* 12), first published in the 1939 collection *Lines at Intersection*, is an astonishingly accomplished poem, which performs a similar sales pitch to that noted in Gibbs's "California, An Ode." Its subject matter (a new suburban home for sale) may seem slight, but the manner in which the poem simultaneously performs and undermines its own sales patter is deeply telling, and wholly evocative of its time and place.

The poem—or, more specifically, the dramatic monologue—opens by admitting, presumably for rhetorical effect, the impossibility of its own project: "I cannot tell you what a bargain this is." From this perspective—the one, presumably, intended by the sales person/speaker—the inability to convey the size of the bargain is precisely to be taken as evidence of its magnitude (it is too good a deal to be encapsulated in words). From another perspective, that of the skeptical poet/reader, the point is to expose the thinness of an offer that cannot be told because it does not merit articulation. And, as it transpires, the poem does not "tell" us "what a bargain this is." Indeed, it barely tells us what "this" is at all. The suburban home is never actually named, never identified as a complete structure. Instead, it is represented as a set of assets that are simultaneously financial ("built at a cost of seven thousand, selling / For seven five"); material ("all utilities / In"); aesthetic ("Landscaped front and back"); and affective ("And a southern feeling"). As in Gibbs's "California, An Ode," the attempt to encapsulate the scene in the language of numbers serves merely to diminish its value. The suburban "home" lacks substance or coherence and cannot be said to exist other than as a catalogue of promised and in several cases insubstantial attributes, hence the "strings up for a lawn" and the "echo, echo, echo" of the hall. The form of the poem is inextricable from its critique with each 3½-line stanza ranged on the page like the floor plans of the new tract homes when seen on the planner's blue print. The *abcc* rhyme scheme emphasizes the terminal qualifying line in each of the *cc* couplets and is used to devastating effect in the final stanza where a third-line moment of potential and expansive lyricism ("So like a snowdrop sprung, white, delicate and new") is violently deflated by the clichéd closing pitch: "With mountain view." Rhyme is employed strategically, highlighting the incongruous value of "utilities" and "trees," questioning the extent to which a particular kind of "ceiling" can bestow any worthwhile "feeling," and diminishing the grandeur of the "view" by proclaiming it "new."

A second poem from the same early collection, "Approach," addresses the alleged consumerism, which is also the feminization (the two being indivisible), of the suburbs. It takes as its subject the travails of a "hosiery salesman" for whom California's new housing developments are a modern-day purgatory:

> The hosiery salesman walking up the hill
> Holds out for mercy and receives it not,
> Perceiving at the top against his will
> How flat the blocks ahead are and how hot.

The salesman is implicitly likened to Sisyphus—condemned in perpetuity to roll his boulder to the top of a hill—or to Dante in his Inferno who has no choice but to roam ceaselessly and fruitlessly in search of comfort. The inversion in line two wherein the salesman "receives it not" emphasizes his entrapment and the thanklessness of his task. The poem's regular tetrameter lines, rising rhythms, and usually iambic, or occasionally anapestic feet, replicate the monotony of suburban housing and of the salesman's footsteps as he trudges his "flat" route (a later poem, "Now That April's Here" from the 1941 collection *Poems on Several Occasions* describes the "level tracts" and "luminous levels" of the suburbs (*Collected* 35)). The monosyllabic rhymes ("not" and "hot," for example) reiterate the point. Similarly, the repetitions in stanza two evoke the extent to which the physical environment regulates (there is "little out of line") those who travel through it. This suburban world is constituted by boundaries and borders, by "blocks," "hedge," "arch," "edge," "step," "line," "doors":

> How from porch to porch and hedge to hedge
> In neo-Spanish neatness of design
> There is a long perspective of arch and edge
> Of roof and step and little out of line.

Stanza three makes clear that the salesman is out of place in this feminized territory and powerless to penetrate the cool, dark interior of the suburban home. He cannot communicate with the women who exert the power to accept or reject his advances: “No eager discourse on what silk is best / Will sound in his ears right.” Even prostrating himself before them (“hold[ing] out for mercy”) proves ineffective: “These doors will close to his toe one like the rest.” The poem ends with a deeply resonant question—one which has implication for others who find themselves excluded from the suburban domain:

> How shall a man proceed among the noises
> Of scooters, rakes, and babies on the lawn
> When the sober Spanish doors and the cool voices
> Reject all small familiars but their own?

“Increment,” (from the group “Neighbors and Constellations,” published in 1960) is preoccupied by the apparent plenitude, and paradoxical emptiness, of the suburbs. The poem records the sights and sounds of suburbia, forging a unique aural and visual landscape:

> So populous the region
> That from the next region
> The crowing of children, barking of cars could be heard,
> So that a continuous linkage
> Of sounds of living ran
> In the limber air[.] (*Collected* 121)

The relentless enjambment (the 17-line poem is one continuous sentence) replicates the oppressive ceaselessness of the noise. Animal, human, and mechanical sounds are confused, rather like in Plath’s near-contemporaneous “Lesbos,” to create a bedlam of “crowing” children and “barking” cars. The suburban developers’ and realtors’ promise (again invoking the rhetoric of the sales brochure) of the privacy of a (bed)room of one’s own, or of a retreat to a den in the basement (an “upstairs island of thought withdrawn, / Or basement of submerged magnificence”) proves undeliverable in the face of such frenzy.

A rather later poem, “New Tract,” from the 1974 book *To All Appearances*, is similarly attuned to the sounds of the suburbs. Like its predecessor, “$7,500,” the poem depicts in concrete form the architectural properties of the suburbs as though seen in outline plan or from above. The fact that some three decades separates Miles’s early and late poems on these themes is evidence (as also in McGinley’s case) of the persistence of the “problem” of the suburbs in the popular and poetic imagination. Each stanza of “New

Tract" has a prominent first line (representing, perhaps, a porch or carport or L-shaped wing) and each abuts the next, giving the impression of a row of tract houses. Line spaces between the stanzas evoke the garden or yard surrounding each home—a selling feature designed to attract buyers oppressed by too-close proximity to their neighbors in urban apartments and row houses. A closer look, though, reveals that each stanza (house) is a little different from the next, reflecting the slight modification in the basic template offered by many developers once they had realized that uniformity was a disincentive for buyers. These subtle variations also reflect the improvements made over time by individual home owners. James Gallagher's defense of the new suburbs, cited previously, explains that:

> today, the urge to non-conformity has created many streets where no two houses are alike on the outside, and even floor plans have only a familial relation to one another. In some, the brick fireplace wall is about the only structural element that has defied our inventive remodelers. (80)

"New Tract" describes a generic suburban scene as night approaches. The perspective is similar to that in "$7,500" in that the suburban home itself is barely identified. With the exception of a curiously worded reference to "the coming of home" in stanza two, it is registered synechdocally in terms of tree-lined streets, lamp-lit windows, and the "car in the port":

Streets under trees
lamps in their windows
gathering dark,

Comfortable coming of home,
fussing and crying, tears of the tired, yet lamplit
windows under the trees,
trees under opening stars.

There is no fixed referent in this poem, no home, no "it." Instead, we have the signifiers of suburban development ("street after street in the town to the mountains and on, / state after state in trees of the plains with a plenty or spare") without any clear signified. The repetitions of "street" and "state" and the use of persistent internal and half rhymes ("mountains," "plain," "plenty," "street," "state," "spare") exemplify the monotony of the West Coast suburban scene. The overall effect is unsettling; our glance is directed—we know not by whom—to the sights and sounds of suburbia but the home and its residents evade our scrutiny. Even the children are represented only by the "tears of the tired." The assonantal and pararhymes ("streets" / "trees," "cleared" / "asleep," "held" / "hold,") further emphasize the disjunction between what we expect to see, and what is actually visible.

There is something simultaneously reassuring and disturbing about this "New Tract." The lamp-lit windows of stanzas one and two seem, at first, familiar and inviting. They seem to offer, as in several of the poems to be discussed in the next chapter, the promise of warmth, hospitality, and a safe return home. Yet at the same time, they are "gathering" instead of dispelling the dark. The "lamps *in*" the windows of stanza one become "lamplit / windows *under* the trees" (my emphases) in stanza two, thereby suggesting a rather troubling and here uncanny disturbance of inside and out, the domestic and the natural. The "comfortable coming of home" in stanza two is simultaneously unexceptional and unsettling; do we go home, or does home come to us? The present participles "fussing," and "crying" connote the ceaseless misery of this place while the clipped, elliptical idiom ("work done, car in the port, / children cleared") evokes the tiredness of the displaced suburbanites and the mechanistic routine that dominates their lives. One of the most startling aspects of the poem, though, is the absence of people in an environment built and sold on the promise of community (*Collected* 189).

John Ashbery's 1970 poem "The Bungalows," perhaps unexpectedly, registers some of the same concerns. Ashbery is widely thought of as an urban (and an urbane) poet whose work is more readily associated with cityscapes than with suburbs. Nevertheless, as Mark Ford suggests, although ostensibly from New York, Ashbery is not truly of it: "it is the neutrality of New York that licenses his imagination to rove at will through the literal and cultural geography of America" (xi). He was born in Rochester, and spent his childhood on the family farm in Sodus before studying at Harvard, Columbia, and New York Universities, living for a decade in Paris where he worked as an art critic, and then returning in 1965 to New York (as Costello notes, "New York," in his case, often meant "two hours away in the relatively rural Hudson, New York" ("Landscapes" 63)). His extended and elliptical style seems often to be working in a rather different register, and to different effect in respect of reference, voice, and representation, than the predominantly short, expressive, lyric poetry which is my main resource in this study. Nevertheless, for Ashbery, as indeed for most (all?) American poets growing up in the United States in the postwar years, the rise and consequences of suburbanization are part of the cultural milieu and, as in Ashbery's case, register themselves in subtle but nevertheless intriguing ways. As a curator and art critic, Ashbery is sensitive to the built environment even if – as a novel and as-yet-insubstantial architectural oeuvre – suburban design as yet defies straightforward categorization (hence "boxes, store parts, whatever you want to call them" in the lines quoted below). Like Gibbs, Ashbery uses an extended and contemplative line in order to move away from referentiality and towards abstraction; his work is receptive to the intangibility of place and to the contingency of subjectivity.

"The Bungalows" (from his 1970 collection *The Double Dream of Spring*) notes the homogeneity of suburban housing and sees in its uniformity a risk of isolation. The poem opens by establishing a tension between humans, or the nonspecific "we," "them," and "us" of the first line ("Impatient as we were for all of them to join us") and a landscape of "gray steel / towers" and "other things—boxes, store / parts" (*Selected* 114–6). Rather like in Miles's poem "New Tract," the speaker seems unable to name the suburb and can only gesture towards its component elements; to "boxes" and "store parts" and, in stanza two, to "rectangular shapes / . . . so extraneous and so near." The implication in the allusions to "revolutions" and "combat" in this opening section is that the "Bungalows" of the poem's title (and of suburban development in general) were constructed as a necessary sop to a postwar generation under pressure from urban over-crowding and hungry for the long-promised spoils of war. The suburbs' ability to meet these needs remains, though, uncertain; the image of washing "billowing like scenery" in the breeze in the first stanza's final line is common to several poems about the suburbs including Updike's "Wash" and Edsel Ford's "On a Warm Winter Day in a Residential Street" and signifies both the idealized domesticity of the scene and the elusiveness of the goal of stability. Suburbia, Ashbery's poem suggests, is produced by desire—hence the impossibility of definitively naming it; it is but a "*presumed* landscape" and a "*dream* of home" (my emphases). David Herd notes of this poem, and a companion piece, "Sunrise in Suburbia," that they "build obstacles to themselves if only by locating poetry in environments where it is likely to meet with resistance" (118). There is thus a deep self-consciousness about the propensity of suburban spaces to generate meaning.

The characteristic layout of the suburban home where internal and external spaces are brought into proximity and, indeed, made interchangeable, is questioned at the beginning of stanza three: "How does it feel to be outside and inside at the same time [?]". The promise of such architecture proves undeliverable; the landscape itself repels the new suburban developments (it responds with "dismay" to these inroads). Better, stanza five suggests, to retain the cultural values and characteristic style of the cities than to tolerate the implicitly uncivilized, even protean, suburbs that are here figured, in an unseen second speaker's quoted words, as something "trivial" and a thing of "sludge and leaf-mold." In the final stanza, the speaker is forced into reconciliation with the forces of change that motivate the whole poem. Yet the final phrase, after a strategic caesura for emphasis, also reminds us that in some cases stasis (that is, valuing what we have in the present) is equally important: "standing still is also life."

Development

In each of these examples, the poetic text is wholly imbricated with historical, geographical, and social circumstances. The work of a number of other poets of the 1950s and 1960s similarly negotiates the causes and consequences of suburban change. The explicit focus of these poets' work is the impact of suburban growth on established, small-town communities and citizens. Implicitly, one can identify in this work a struggle to forge a novel poetic identity commensurate with this new time, place, and audience—a project that helps to shape the poetics of the American suburbs.

The suburbs of Josephine Miles's poetry typify the new built developments that were said to be proliferating "like popcorn over a hot fire." And as we have seen, many iconic postwar suburbs did take root on previously unsettled land. Others, though, grew gradually and in piecemeal fashion on the fringes of extant small towns (Martinson xvii). Given the privileging of small-town architecture, community, and identity in America's narrative of itself, this apparent threat to what was perceived, and indeed naturalized, as a stable foundation of the American social order, was cause for commentary and concern.

In several of Donald Hall's poems spanning the two decades after the end of World War II, including "Exile," "Christmas Eve in Whitneyville," and "The Wreckage," suburban development is identified with the loss of tradition and ritual, and with a traumatic break from the past. Hall was born in New Haven, Connecticut in 1928 and raised in the suburbs (Hall and O'Siadhail). He studied at Harvard, Oxford, and Stanford Universities and served across the 1950s as poetry editor of the *Paris Review*; in 1957 he coedited the influential anthology, *New Poets of England and America* (cited earlier) and in 1962, edited *Contemporary American Poetry*. He taught at several colleges including the University of Michigan and spent the middle and later years of his life on his New Hampshire farm. His first collection, *Exiles and Marriages*, was published in 1955 followed by *The Dark Houses* (1958), *The Alligator Bride* (1969), and numerous others in the decades that followed. In a 1990 interview with Michael O'Siadhail, Hall reflects on the "tension" he perceives between the culture of the countryside and that of the suburbs, characterizing the former as a place of repose and the latter as one of "acceleration." His poems seek to reconcile these apparent (although not necessarily definitive) poles, to find a space—topographically and imaginatively—where past and present, lost community and newly exposed self, can be brought into productive alignment. The appeal of these poems is often nostalgic, by which I mean that they look back to a chimerical time and place of security and contentment; poet D. J. Waldie points out in his memoir of the California suburbs, *Holy Land*, nostalgia does not, as is often thought, mean an acute longing for the past, but rather a yearning to return to particular places (184).

Hall's "Exile" (1952) takes suburban development as the catalyst for a meditation on the twin processes of temporal and spatial change, exploring the ways in which we move both literally and imaginatively away from childhood places, experiences, memories, and subjectivities (*Old and New* 8—11). These perhaps timeless and universal processes are, the poem implies, concentrated and thus felt most acutely in the relocation to the suburbs or in the changes wrought on established towns and cities by suburban development.[6] From this perspective, the suburbs accelerate and magnify the schism between present and past, here and there, establishing what O'Siadhail calls a "tension between continuity...and disjuncture" (Hall and O'Siadhail 8). And although in broad sweep, this summation seems accurate, I would argue that Hall's suburban poetry—"Christmas Eve in Whitneyville," in particular—finally complicates any such apparent polarity. In other words, it implicitly valorizes a now-lost sense of community and indicts an alienated suburban modernity, but even as it posits these binaries, it begins to dismantle them.

The 11 long, fluid, *ababccdede* stanzas of "Exile" (with the central *cc* couplets maintaining the impetus across the text) emphasize the inevitability of change and generate an inertia that is replicated in allusions across the rest of the text to growing and moving. The poem opens with an emphatic "Each of us," followed by an account in the first six lines, as subsequently, of the collective losses ("our pictures gone; / Our furniture has vanished") that accumulate with every move to a new place. Now, "Even the contours of the room are strange / And everything is change." In stanza one, the words "us" and "our" are used in eight of the ten lines, making this an inescapably shared experience. The loss of "our pictures" and "our furniture" signifies both literally and metaphorically, for what we lose when we move to the suburbs are the imaginative vistas (the "pictures") that pertained to our past life and the personal, familial, and social structures (the "furniture") that gave this life shape. The point is reiterated in stanza three where the clearing of trees to make way for new suburban streets symbolizes physical, and also emotional, change; with the loss of the pine groves comes the loss of those imaginative childhood attachments that peopled them with mysterious "Indians."

Hall's poem registers the uncanniness of suburban domestic architecture: that is, the presence of the familiar in the unfamiliar. In stanza one, we wake with the early light, but what we see bears only passing resemblance to what we used to know, either in detail (the pictures and furniture have changed) or in structure (even the "contours" seem altered). In stanza seven, "each door and window is a spectral frame." For Anthony Vidler, "architecture reveals . . . a disquieting slippage between what seems homely and what is definitively unhomely" (ix). It pushes our experience and understanding of the "conditions of estrangement" that pertain in modernity, providing a "powerful trope for imaging the 'lost' birthplace, against the deracinated home of post-industrial society" (xi). In Hall's poem, the "deracinat[ion]" is doubly achieved; the "Indians" of stanza three are physically removed from view even as they are already only visible to this child in his own imagination.

The poem speaks to and for a generation of transient suburbanites (Packard notes "the great increase in moving about of the population" (*Status* 31)), waking anew and in unfamiliar surroundings with each relocation.[7] Paradoxically, what these transients have in common, along with their enthusiasm for trading up and moving on, is their shared sense of alienation and isolation. "We move to move," as stanza two puts it, in a seemingly perpetual process that pushes "us into loving only loss." The repetitions and alliteration deny the reader (one of the "us" and "we" of the poem) any chance of escape.

The alienating aspects of suburban experience, evident in Hall's poem, are developed to an extreme in a number of contemporary poems about suburbs even stranger than our own, for example, in John Malcolm Brinnin's "Dachau," which opens with deep and dispiriting irony:

> Such a merry suburb!
> Floats of ice cream colored building blocks,
> Acres of laundry, strenuous underwear. (Field 370)

It is clear as the poem proceeds that it is the banal brutality of the Nazi concentration camps that is the object of Brinnin's critique. Nevertheless, the invocation of the "merry suburb" as shorthand for enforced conformity, sterility of design, and displacement confuses the familiar and the unfamiliar; the strange (and thus threatening) and the known. Similarly, Josephine Miles's 1960 poem, "A Foreign Country" (*Collected* 111), and John Updike's "Leningrad," written four years later as one of a sequence of "Postcards from Soviet Cities" (*Collected* 45) draw on, and defamiliarize, the suburbs of the Soviet Union in order the better to articulate the strangeness of the native form. The implicit allegation here is that the postwar American suburbs are totalitarian in form and social effect. This is a serious charge in the period, and a sign of the high stakes of the debate.

Hall's 1958 poem "Christmas Eve in Whitneyville," an elegy for his father first published as "Christmas Eve in Whitneyville, 1955" in the *Kenyon Review*, also contemplates the effects of suburban encroachment on small-town social relationships (*Old and New* 21–3). Here, even the ritual of Christmas carol singing—a putative sign of community and a connection with the traditional ways of the past—is changed, changed utterly, under the conditions of suburban modernity. The poem opens on a contemporary Christmas scene where as the day draws to a close, "momentary carolers complete / Their Christmas Eves," and then rapidly vanish "Into their houses on each lighted street." The *abab* rhyme scheme, carefully sustained across the poem's 14 stanzas, replicates the limitations on social intercourse that have emerged in this newly suburbanized town. There is no space or time here for expansiveness, spontaneity, or community. The caroling is but "momentary," the singers do not linger. Christmas is an individual experience rather than a collective event hence the possessive "Their Christmas Eves," and "their houses." "Each" suburban resident in the poem is atomized (a similar construction is used, as we have seen, in "Exile"); they may appear to be partaking of a communal experience but they do this separately thereby remaining, as Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* insists, "a lonely member of the crowd because [they] never really come close to the others or to [themselves]" (v). Stanza two also indicts the uniformity of the suburban masses and specifically of suburban manhood. As Michael Kimmel proposes, the "cookie-cutter men" of the period "were raised for sameness" (242). In Hall's poem, "Each car is put away in each garage" and "Each husband" on his return from work occupies himself with setting his own Christmas tree as straight as everyone else's. Even at Christmas, it seems, the pressure to conform persists.

From this present-day and rather dispiriting scene, the speaker's thoughts turn back in stanzas three and four to the Whitneyville of the past. The unique qualities of the town (the "main street" of which, although apparently insignificant to the speaker at the time, now seems valuable precisely because it was haphazard and idiosyncratic rather than planned and homogenized) have been erased by suburbanization. Whitneyville now resembles everywhere else with its "Ranch houses" sprawling outwards, and its "Same stores and movie, same composite faces." The *abab* rhyme (with rhymes on "places" and "faces," "square" and "air") affirms the conformity, homogeneity, and restrictiveness that were assumed to be the social symptoms of this physical environment. Yet, having established the dulling effect of this change from idiosyncrasy to uniformity, the poem contradicts itself in continuing to identify the enlarged settlement's still-unique features. In spite of new developments, the architecture of the past (older homes, the cemeteries that bear witness to past grief) retains a presence. Suburban encroachment does not always or only obliterate history; sometimes it adds to it. The ritual of carol singing with which the poem opens continues, albeit in a different way. The suburbanized town generates it own narratives, its own history, and its own community, hence the storytelling bond in stanza seven between the speaker and "the boy"—perhaps a neighborhood child or grandson who comes into his spatial inheritance through tales passed down from generation to generation. The suburbs are thus constructed discursively over time and are neither identical nor unchanging.

The elegiac note is subtle, but nevertheless plays an important part in the poem, specifically in its farewell glance at past times and places—a theme that, as the final chapter will show—is used to explicit effect in a great many other suburban poems of the period.[8] "Christmas Eve in Whitneyville," and arguably "Exile," exemplify what John Vickery characterizes as the modern elegiac temper. Both "look backward to a national past of preferred security and achievement" and in so doing display an "implicit political dimension" (3). Both also show the speaker achieving some kind of accommodation with the inevitable, in this case the death of the father and the emergence of new forms of suburban landscape and community. As stanza ten of "Christmas Eve in Whitneyville" explains, suburbia may against the odds provide some form of "solidarity." Separately, each unit may seem vulnerable; together they provide a degree of mutual support. The challenge for the speaker is not only to let go of the past, but to reconcile himself to the present, to concede that there may be something of value here.

"Christmas Eve in Whitneyville" and "Exile" are intriguing in their examination of the familiar costs, and unexpected rewards, of suburban development. Both use, even as they critique, a set of discursive tropes; both establish binaries that they then unsettle. And both risk the kind of personal attachment which has elsewhere, for example, in Edward Brunner's analysis, been regarded as atypical of Hall's poetics. Recounting Hall's response to criticism of the "domestic" tenor, apparent provincialism, and lack of interest in the political exigencies of the day in the poems selected for his coedited anthology, *New Poets of England and America*, Brunner alleges that Hall himself repudiated domesticity and drew on family situations only as a stimulus for the display of particular poetic techniques: "Hall viewed his family as a pretext for composing intellectual meditations; for the purpose of his poetry, the members of his family were subjects to be incorporated into literary tradition" (239). The evidence of "Exile" and "Christmas Eve" belies such a reading. In both, personal recollections, intimate relationships, and historical and spatial change are woven together to form a suggestive reflection and commentary on the contemporary suburban scene, particularly as it relates to the small town of myth and memory.

From the same period, John Updike's poem "Shillington," written, as a note in the collection *Telephone Poles* indicates, to mark the "semi centennial celebration of this borough's incorporation in 1908," offers a more explicitly affirmative reading of a similar scene. The *abab* ballad form is particularly appropriate for the retelling of a narrative for a public audience and for consolidating the point that change is a paradoxically reassuring constant. The poem takes its place in what Joan Rubin identifies as a longstanding tradition of "community commemoration." Commemorative verse of this kind "assumed the audience's receptivity to the power of place; such texts were paeans to the history and promise of a village, town, or city"—as indeed, in this case, to a suburb (*Songs* 169). One might also read "Shillington" as an example of the kind of "topographical" poetry recently discussed by Stephen Burt; such a mode, he argues, remains "legible" because it "comes with a set of formal signals: the name of the place, often in the title…, present tense (we stand, walk, ride along with the poet, right now); and a structure involving movement or perspective" (602). Updike's poem delivers in each of these respects.

In "Shillington," transience is to be celebrated rather than lamented. Nothing stands still for long in this poem or, by extension, in the town hence the abundance of verbs used throughout: "Diminish," "sinks," "crowd," "setting out," "arrive," and so on. Reflections on the past are barely allowed to register; indeed, they cannot be acknowledged or owned by the speaker himself. Instead, they are obliquely referenced by means of curiously passive constructions without any clear agent or subject, hence "the vacant lots are occupied" in this "good remembered town." The choice of the word "Occupied" implies that, to some, change might seem invasive; yet this danger is defused by the gentle, conciliatory tone and affection of the poem as a whole, registered reassuringly in soft sibilance and perfect rhymes. Ceaseless change—be it personal, geographical, or cultural—is, the poem goes on to suggest, a "condition of being alive." Each generation, stanza three proposes, overwhelms the last, and each brings the past into the present and gives it a future; Shillington (the town and the poem) is thereby offered as a gift from one generation to the next. As the final line of the poem puts it, "the having and leaving go on together" (*Telephone* 60).

What is it, then, that is being commemorated? More important than the object of our scrutiny (Shillington) is the perspective of the person doing the viewing. Look back, the poem cautions, and we will "find our snapshots inexact." As children, we were in awe to the mysteries of our environment but new children now await these pleasures. There is no perfect place or time; there is only memory and imagination and each of these shifts and changes. The poem's role is to commemorate not just the place itself (the "Shillington" of the title) but the collective and now poetic process of imagining, remembering, and tracing the textures of lost and present times, places and communities.

Therapeutic Landscapes

As chapter 1 indicated, from their earliest origins, the suburbs were identified as places of sanctuary from the perceived dangers of the city. The safety offered was not only physical. Semirural or borderland locations were also thought to promise much needed respite from the psychological stresses of urban living. Mumford's identification of the earliest suburbs as places of asylum or "retreat" (561) set amongst restorative nature became particularly pertinent in the twentieth century as growing urbanization and industrialization seemed to threaten the peace of mind of the urban populace. Faith in the restorative power of nature (and anxiety, conversely, about the damaging effects of the urban environment) was reified in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by the building of asylums, hospitals, penitentiaries, and reform schools in the supposedly "safe" suburbs, well away from the physiological, psychological, and moral contamination of the city. Suburbia thus became, in Roger Panetta's words, "a place of healing for the social casualties of the industrial-immigrant city" (62). The asylum at the end of J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* to which Holden Caulfield's brother "drove over last Saturday" (192) is implicitly set outside the city while the TB hospitals in Westchester County and Long Island that Yates uses as the settings for some of the stories in *Eleven Kinds of Loneliness* are examples of similar institutions.[9] The irony, of course, was that by the 1950s, the suburbs as well as offering the hope of a cure, were regarded as being potentially injurious to mental well-being. Keats's *The Crack in the Picture Window* was explicit about the causal connection: "Today's housing developments…actually drive mad myriads of housewives shut up in them" (xii). In report after report, from Fromm's *The Sane Society* to Gordon et al.'s *The Split-Level Trap* and, most famously, Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, the suburbs were indicted as pathogenic, malign, lethal.

In an early suburban asylum poem, Donald Justice's "On a Painting by Patient B of the Independence State Hospital for the Insane," first published in *Poetry* magazine in 1954, the asylum is depicted in several oblique and disturbing ways. Justice was an accomplished poet, translator, and teacher.

Born in Florida in 1925, he studied locally and then at the University of North Carolina, before embarking on a long association with the Iowa Writers' Workshop. His first collection, *Summer Anniversaries*, appeared in 1960 and his next, *Night Light*, in 1967. The formality of the title of his poem "On a Painting by Patient B of the Independence State Hospital for the Insane" establishes an initial and saving degree of distance. This is not, it reassuringly declares, a poem *about* the state hospital; rather, it is a poem about a painting of the asylum. In this way, the insight is mediated. The anonymization of the artist ("Patient B") further separates viewer from experience. Yet at the same time, the promised distance is broached by the rendering of the asylum as a cluster of houses, orientated towards each other, albeit at peculiar angles. In this way, the institution is implicitly likened to a suburban settlement, and made to seem familiar or, more properly, uncanny in that the familiarity is made apparent in a defamiliarized context. The second section simultaneously and troublingly establishes both distance and proximity. Gazing at a detail of the painting, the speaker shows us images of children playing with tame leopards but he is not confident in his own ability to interpret what he sees, recognizing that perhaps there are no children, "but only leopards / playing with leopards, and perhaps there are only spots." Thus his and our own judgment as viewers and readers (our inability to distinguish between the real and the fantastic) is, like that of the hospital inmates, rendered suspect. This is a troubling sensation emphasized by the repeated qualifications "perhaps," "possibly," "or." Speaker and reader, like the inmates, struggle to establish the meaning of this environment. The allusion to "children" in the poem signals both the perceived rationale for suburban relocation and the disempowerment or infantilization of suburban adults.

The third and final section of the poem refuses to give us any clear steer as to how we are to interpret the scene. The distant skies which formed the backdrop to the picture in section two are now shadowed by ominous, if still indecipherable, clouds that are likened to empty speech bubbles from a cartoon drawing. There is a refusal of meaning here—an aporia—which, as we will see in some of the poems to be discussed in the Conclusion, is common to the poetics of the American suburbs. The painting and, by extension, the poem can only approximate to a true rendering of the scene. The institution and its inmates, signifying in turn the wider suburb and its residents, keep their meaning to themselves, refusing outside interpretation and judgment, and impassively turning their backs on the outside world.

Published some two years later in the *Sewanee Review*, Philip Booth's "Red Brick" conveys a similar, if this time even more sinister, interiority.[10] Where the suburban setting in Justice's poem is depicted in terms of domesticity, the innocence associated with childhood, and a suggestive creativity, in the second poem it is the restrictiveness of the suburbs that is emphasized. Booth's use of the Meredithian (16-line) sonnet, in exceeding the more usual 14-line form, allows him to expand and reinforce his point within an authoritative structure. Half-rhymes throughout register both the constriction of space in this environment and the pressure from within to break its boundaries. The overall effect is one of hard-won control.

The poem opens with a double image of confinement ("Behind red brick, blank windows"). The alliteration on the "b" sound, the preposition ("Behind") and the unyielding blankness of the windows clog or obstruct the expression, further exemplifying the claustrophobia of the scene. The depiction of the residents as an anonymous and even dehumanized "they," "some," and "most" who cower in the shadows as the dawn breaks has a similar effect. Their vision, instead of being focused on their environment (as in Justice's poem) is firmly self-directed. This self-surveillance is replicated and reinforced by the all-seeing "meshed moon" of line two that, nightly, "patrols the long wards." The moon, although often connotative of fertility and cyclical change, here represents stasis (hence "meshed") and sterility; the inmates, line five indicates, are "coupled in childless dreams." The conflation of suburbia and child-centeredness is inverted and questioned. The suburban landscape in which the asylum is situated is rendered silent, mute, and uncomprehending; it "lie[s] deaf, / while maimed innocence paws the window frames." From "blank windows" in line one to "window frames" in line seven, and from thence to "they stare at windows" in line 13, we follow the inmates' attempts to see something "outside of themselves" (to rework a line from Sexton's poem "For John, Who Begs Me Not to Enquire Further"). Yet this attempt to find some external trigonometric point is frustrated; they stare "at" the windows, but not through them. In this way, Booth's poem anticipates the privileging and questioning of the suburban picture window in the poems to be discussed in the next chapter. It also covertly implies a contiguity between the inmates of the hospital (caught "behind red brick, blank windows") and the larger suburban population which, according to some of the critiques examined in chapter 2, shared a comparable fate. The final lines of the poem return to the same image of "blank red brick" as the beginning, implying that asylum residents and the "quick commuters" seen now hurrying to work suffer under the same conditions of confinement.

From the same period, Louise Bogan's "Evening in the Sanitarium" (*Collected* 118–9) portrays the suburban sanitarium as a liminal site where the inhabitants are suspended in space and time. Bogan was born in Maine, educated at Boston University and spent most of her life in New York City where she was poetry editor for *The New Yorker* from 1931 to 1968. Her poem constructs a complex rhetoric of interior and exterior space, of freedom and constraint, confusion and clarity. In the opening lines, the inmates' own liberty, now displaced onto the coming evening, "fades" from view and can only be glimpsed, similarly to Booth's poem, through "the windows fastened / with decorative iron grilles." The warmth and safety of the interior domestic space are signaled by lit lamps, even as such lamps primarily function to allow better surveillance of the inhabitants within: "The lamps are lighted; the shades drawn; the nurses are watching a little."

The women in this particular environment appear to have attained at least a degree of respite; they have "half-healed hearts; they are almost well. / Some of them will stay almost well always" (stanza two). The repetition of "almost well" protests too much, giving the impression that the speaker herself is not entirely convinced by the women's therapeutic gains. Similarly, although an apparently ebullient third stanza seems to praise the progress of the treatment, and posits a return to the suburban home as evidence of the restoration of the women's health, the solution to their crisis appears indivisible from the stresses that first took them to the asylum:

> O fortunate bride, who never again will become elated after childbirth!
> O lucky older wife, who has been cured of feeling unwanted!
> To the suburban railway station you will return, return,
> To meet forever Jim home on the 5:35.
> You will again be as normal and selfish and heartless as anybody else.

The allusion to the "5:35" recalls McGinley's ambivalent representation of the rewards of such a routine in her poem "The 5:32." The sequence of (Freudian) negations in the following section indicates that the return to the suburbs may be more problematic than at first appears: "Everything will be splendid: the grandmother will not drink habitually" and "The sons and husbands will no longer need to pay the bills. / Childhoods will be put away, the obscene nightmare abated." So idealized is this scene of suburban domestic contentment ("The fruit salad will bloom on the plate like a bouquet / And the garden produce the blue-ribbon aquilegia") that it ceases to be credible; the assonance of the apostrophe to the "fortunate bride" and "lucky older woman" bears the sound of lamentation. As the final lines of Bogan's poem reveal, the image of the world beyond the sanitarium "grille" is no more than a chimera, masking the perpetually disordered actuality within: "Mrs. C. again feels the shadow of the obsessive idea. / Miss R. looks at the mantel-piece, which must mean something."[11]

Three poems from Anne Sexton's first collection *To Bedlam and Part Way Back* (1960) circle around the same theme. In "Ringing the Bells" (*Complete*

28–9) the rituals of asylum life—rituals that mimic the routines of postwar domesticity and the powerlessness of the suburban housewife—are paradoxically proposed as a cure. The inmates of "Bedlam," like so many suburban housewives at the archetypal "Kaffeeklatsch," sit in a circle "in the lounge of the mental house / and smile at the smiling woman" (Henderson's 1953 report on "The Mass-Produced Suburbs" gravely notes that "The Coffee Klatsch is an institution everywhere. A kind of floating, day-long talk-fest, shifting from house to house, it has developed among young women to help fill their need for adult conversation" (28)). Given some pointless task (bell-ringing), a chore that seems "as untroubled and clean / as a workable kitchen," the inmates obediently perform. A dispiriting final line discloses that: "although we are no better for it, / they tell you to go. And you do." As in Bogan's poem, the supposed cure for the stresses on women of suburban daily life simply reinforces her passivity and confirms her incarceration.

The next poem in Sexton's collection, "Lullaby," similarly draws on markedly domestic and suburban imagery ("window sills," "the TV parlor," "linen on a shelf") in order to evoke the relationship between the asylum (suburban or institutional) and imprisonment. The poem was originally drafted under the title "Habit" and exposes the ways in which the routines of everyday suburban domesticity (the possible cause of the breakdown) are paradoxically recapitulated in the asylum as the putative route to a cure. Finally, in "Noon Walk on the Asylum Lawn" (*Complete* 27–8), the trees and grass of the landscaped asylum setting signify a nature that promises, but struggles to deliver, the restoration of health; as the opening lines indicate, "The summer sun ray / shifts through a suspicious tree." The sibilance emphasizes the sinister nature of the scene while the unexpected use of the singular "ray" adds to the sense of the uncanny. The sun itself, instead of being the source of light, insight, and life proves suffocating, even punitive: "It sucks the air / and looks around for me." In the final stanza too, "The sky breaks. / It sags and breathes upon my face." The natural environment is thus seen as debilitating rather than restorative.

Hayden Carruth's important ten-part poem "The Asylum" (published in *Poetry* magazine in 1958) expands these representations. The poem is part of a longer sequence based on Carruth's own experience of incarceration in the Bloomington Asylum, White Plains, New York after service in World War II. Once part of the New York Hospital, the Bloomington Asylum was relocated from the center of the city in 1890. "The Asylum" meditates on the relationship between a fractured subjectivity, place (or more properly displacement), and a traumatic history. Throughout, the poem questions the nature and value of the asylum sought by the speaker. A disturbing "whispering wind" and a "twisted beech" signal the propensity of the natural world to exacerbate rather than relieve the speaker's inner turmoil. Howard Moss (who was then the poetry editor of *The New Yorker* and to whom Sexton sent many of her early poems) offers a similar critique of the flawed promise of nature as guarantor of health and stability in his slightly later (1965) poem, "Finding them Lost" (*Selected* 105). There, trees, lawns, and "stubborn grass" represent a deeply destabilizing force. Hope of respite comes in the form of a potentially nurturing and feminized nurse / muse, sent to accompany him through the thicket of mental breakdown. But even this hope of salvation is, finally, left unrealized. Abandoned by his guide, the solace of a longed for "green lawn" is denied him, and he is left with nothing but his dreams of "home." Sexton's poem concurs with Moss's in its dejected concluding lines: "The world is full of enemies. / There is no safe place." The underlying anxieties of the Cold War era are manifest here. Suburbia had seemed to offer a secure space. And the suburban asylum had seemed to offer a place of safety when even the retreat to suburbia had failed. If neither is able to effect a cure, then the situation seems particularly hopeless.

Suburban development is recognized in each of these poems to be part of a relentless and multilayered process that has environmental, social, and personal consequences. In the poems discussed in this chapter, suburban landscapes—from the new suburbs of California to those that cluster around already established communities to the therapeutic environment of the asylum—are incomprehensible and inexplicable (they can neither be known nor represented) without reference to the historical, spatial, and ideological contexts that fostered their growth. The next chapter turns its attention to the specific "look" of suburban architecture and daily life from its characteristic picture windows to its carefully tended lawns and examines the processes by which suburban experience is brought into focus and made meaningful.

CHAPTER 5

The Look of the Suburbs

From a discussion of the broad dimensions of suburban landscape, we move now to a more detailed focus on specific and iconic aspects of suburban design: the plate glass or picture window, and the lawned lot. The picture window in particular has provided a resonant metaphor for poets. On a straightforward level it has allowed them to signal metonymically the larger physical, social, and ideological environment. More subtly it has offered a way of exploring the indeterminacy of suburban space (to quote Ashbery's "The Bungalows," discussed earlier, "How does it feel to be outside and inside at the same time" (*Selected* 114)) and of experimenting with a range of different viewing positions. As the chapter proceeds, it moves from an examination of the architectural "look" of the suburbs to an exploration of the actual process of looking, and from there to a discussion of various—perhaps unexpected—voyeuristic practices as exemplified by what I am defining as a suburban flânerie. Finally, we examine the place of that other icon of suburban development, the carefully manicured suburban lawn, asking how this feature further exemplifies the surveillant culture of the postwar suburbs and what it reveals about (particularly male) experiences of the suburban day-to-day.

Architecture

By the mid-1950s, pressure on land, even in the suburbs, coupled with demand on the part of new suburbanites for additional and more flexible space for their ever-growing families led to the spread of open plan and split-level housing (Hine 52–3). Such architectural developments mimicked Frank Lloyd Wright's innovative prewar ranch houses. His novel reorientation of domestic space was first apparent in the open ground-floor plan of his own Oak Park home (1889–90), flourished in his developing conception of the "Prairie House" (Levine, *Architecture* 8), and exerted a strong and lasting influence on the suburban architecture of the middle decades of the twentieth century.[1] For Wright, features like open plan spaces and glass walls fulfilled aesthetic, philosophical, and even democratic functions. The prairie house was, in his words, designed in order to "bring the outside world into the house, and let the inside of the house go outside" (qtd. in Levine, *Architecture* 30)). His "Usonian Houses," which were built from slot-together blocks aligned within a metal grid on a concrete slab, were similarly designed to invoke and maximize such "sense of space as should belong to a free people" (Wright, *Natural* 14).

Editorial features in popular magazines in the immediate postwar years, complemented by poems such as "We Must Have Homes," discussed earlier, spoke to a mass audience and helped to pave the way for architectural, technological, and social change. A regular feature, "Homes for Modern Living" by the *Ladies' Home Journal*'s architecture editor, Richard Pratt, showcased the kinds of homes that might be available after the war. The January 1945 contribution, "Easy to Live In," offers a half-page photo, a detailed line plan, and an enthusiastic description of one modern, single-story, three-bedroom family home with an innovative "inward-sloping" roof (chosen because it is easier and cheaper to construct and maintain than conventional structures) and open-plan living areas designed to promote "the pleasure of family living." "Glass walls," which will make the house more economical to illuminate and keep warm, and "such charming features as an indoor-outdoor garden" complete the design. The title of the article, "Easy to Live In," and references to "the living convenience" of the open-plan design, illustrate the importance to the popular imagination of what a later article in the series called "liveability" (Mercado). "Nothing like this is available now," warns Pratt, but new manufacturing techniques and the open-mindedness of the market, or "consumer acceptance," are all that are required to make the concept a reality. In a final attempt at selling the dream, Pratt signs off:

> Where a house this size would have been composed of fifty thousand individual parts and pieces, the parts for one like this will be numbered in the hundreds, all ready to fit and fasten into place. And the more you like the houses that are made this way, the sooner you will have them. (116)

A letter to the *Journal* of April 1945 from reader Mrs W. H. Southworth of Madison, Wisconsin, indicates that Pratt's plea may have met its target:

> Right now Richard Pratt's homes for modern living are the main prop for our sagging spirits whenever we contemplate the inadequate, poorly planned—not to mention dirty—flat that is all we could find when, with high hearts we set out to find a permanent home in Madison. If Mr Pratt could deliver a prebuilt home tomorrow, it wouldn't be too soon. (13)

Not everyone, though, was persuaded by the dream of easy, open-plan living, illuminated (or exposed) by walls of plate glass. Dorothy P. Albaugh's poem "Lines to an Architect," which appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post* on 2 March 1946, one year after Richard Pratt's "Easy to Live In," mourns the principles behind Pratt's design, or what Thomas Hine calls the drive towards "informality and spontaneity" (27). Urban and other prewar dwellings had typically featured a number of small, separate spaces such as the "library" and the "parlor" within which the family's various activities would be conducted privately, often along strictly gendered lines (Cross 115–16). By the early decades of the twentieth century, these were replaced by a "living room" for shared occupation, and thereafter, particularly in the basement of the split-levels that emerged in the mid-1950s, by a less formal, more inclusive, family room, den or rumpus room.

Albaugh's poem laments the design trend that dictates that "dining room must go" and celebrates traditional architecture with its carefully demarcated private spaces. Its 17 lines use regular iambic meter, with occasional pyrrhic or unstressed feet, in order to demonstrate tight control over the material and thereby to exemplify the virtues of conventional design. In the now-obsolete dining room, the speaker avows, one could linger over food and enjoy the companionship of others while children with their "outspread" schoolbooks completed their homework under the watchful eye of their "conscientious" elders. As the final stanza exclaims, "Folk were fed" both emotionally and physically in this now-threatened space whose "cheer / Was something to be held forever dear." A closing couplet counsels, "Be careful, builder, in your zeal for art, / Lest you design a house without a heart!" (69). Thus "Lines to an Architect" speaks to a nostalgia for an ordinary if mythical Americanness; it invokes a growing anxiety about postwar parents' dereliction of their duty to their children; it implies a schism between the ordinary "Folk" and the intellectuals (the egghead "Architect" of the title and his perhaps unwitting accomplice, the "builder" with his "zeal for art"), and it implies that the modern, open-plan home is a sterile, soulless, heartless place.

Albaugh's poem, although unremarkable in aesthetic terms, is notable in respect of its synthesis of a number of emerging concerns about the future of American housing and, in particular, about the open-plan style common to the new-build suburbs—concerns that are later developed in the work of a number of more established, and accomplished, poets. It also implicitly raises a point, which was subsequently developed by Vance Packard, about the class divisions implicit in contemporary architectural debates. The working classes wanted the privacy afforded by walls and doors ("the open layout characteristic of 'contemporary' houses . . . frightens them") while intellectuals sought avant-garde and open-plan architectural designs:

> A West Coast builder of "contemporary" houses has become famous in home-selling circles for his success as a master builder for eggheads . . . eggheads have enough self-assurance so that they can defy convention, and they often cherish the simplicity of open layout. (*Status Seekers* 72)

Picture Windows

The glass walls and picture windows that appear with striking frequency in the commentary, fiction, and poetry of the period, for example, in Keats's *The Crack in the Picture Window*, Wilson's *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, Yates's *Revolutionary Road*, Cheever's short story "The Cure," Randall Jarrell's "Windows," and John Updike's "Suburban Madrigal," reflect the dominance of this relatively recent technological innovation in postwar suburban architecture and, by extension, the privileging of the visual in the construction and understanding of suburban subjectivity. Contemporary advertisements and cartoons repeatedly portray picture windows to the extent that they become the dominant metonym for suburban living. Newman, writing in 1957, enthuses: "The property of a suburb can do wonderful things for the mind, soul, and body. The material shell of the escape is gratifying to the eye; never has the American suburb been more slick; never the picture windows so large" (262).

Sheet glass of sufficient size, stability, and affordability to form large windows first became available as a consequence of technological and manufacturing advances in the late eighteenth century (Isenstadt 148–9). Anne Friedberg has shown that it was used to form shop windows in panels of around 12 × 16 inches from 1786. Jeremy Bentham's 1790 design for a Panopticon, she further notes, was "dependent on sheet glass" (65). By the middle of the nineteenth century, it had become possible to produce floor-to-ceiling glass panels—often used in the new department stores of the growing cities. In William Stafford's 1962 poem "In Medias Res" the plate-glass windows of the new suburban malls undermine small-town family life, tempting the speaker's wife away from the home that should, the poem implies, be her primary concern (*Traveling* 12).[2] In the twentieth century, glass manufacturers and retailers quickly recognized a potential market among developers of new homes and worked hard to promote an image of their product as simultaneously convenient and liberating (Isenstadt 146–214). Plate glass has been said to have played an "overtly political role" in that it represented, at one and the same time, the "paradigm of total control championed by Jeremy Bentham and recuperated under the guise of 'hygienic space' by modernists" (Vidler 168) and, by opening out interior space, the promise of that "freedom—to which our U.S.A is entitled" (Wright, *Natural* 90). Isenstadt reports wartime California journalist Bertha West's argument that by the correct siting of the picture window "a distant scene might be simultaneously framed by dozens of individuals of varying incomes, each following individual lines of sight to enjoy the same landscape in complete privacy, becoming equals in enjoyment of the same view" (157). John Updike's 1956 poem, "Scenic," from his first collection, *The Carpentered Hen*, exemplifies the complex relationship between these two apparently opposing readings of the ideological weight of plate glass. "Scenic" surveys the city and suburbs of San Francisco. The local topography exaggerates the visibility of the houses to each other: "Across a multitude of sills," each home-owner spies "other houses, other hills." Yet, what "every picture window" also sees, in the poem's sardonic and bathetic final lines, is an uninterrupted view of the Bay with Alcatraz in the center of the frame. The notorious prison's domination of the field of vision reminds the viewer/reader of their own paradoxical confinement in an environment and culture that had promised them freedom and delivered, it seems, its opposite (15).

Developers across the period were able to build on the association between architectural glass and modernity established by Chareau, Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe and other influential architects of the immediate prewar years, and to present the modern, glass-walled, outward looking and open-plan home as everything that the old, small, dark, crowded urban apartment was not. There were differences, though, between avant-garde and suburban uses of plate glass. For Le Corbusier, his peers and successors (such as Philip Johnson), the plate-glass window and the concomitant use of open-plan layouts had an aesthetic and a philosophical function. Le Corbusier's pragmatic rationale for using the horizontal sheet-glass window was that it "illuminates better" while his fundamental aim was to efface orthodox distinctions between interior and exterior spaces (Colomina, *Privacy* 306; 334). In the mass-produced suburbs, by comparison, the motive for the use of such windows was primarily economic in that they gave the illusion of more space for the money. The view that they provided was itself of little consequence and typically comprised a small back yard and rows of near identical houses (Hine 52).

For Le Corbusier the window represents, "first of all, communication." As Colomina explains: "He repeatedly superimposes the idea of the 'modern' window, the lookout window, the horizontal window, with the reality of the new media: 'telephone, cable, radios . . . machines for abolishing time and space'" (*Privacy* 332). But in the poetry of the postwar suburbs, the window often represents the refusal of communication or, more properly, a deceptive promise of openness both for the insider looking out and the outsider looking in, coupled with a reluctance to enter into any such exchange. As the poems discussed shortly show, the glass wall simultaneously offers and screens insight. I use the term "screens" to denote the contradictory processes of hiding something from view, and of projecting a sometimes-deceptive image for public scrutiny.

For Deborah Nelson and for Lynn Spigel, picture windows should be read within the context of the Cold War and in relation to a concomitant rethinking of the boundaries between intimate, private spaces and shared, public domains. For both critics, Cold War—and specifically McCarthyite—anxieties about the vulnerability of each site led to the simultaneously dangerous and legitimized penetrability of both. In the case of postwar suburban poetry, the plate glass or picture window is used to evoke concerns about the relationship between self and other, family and *polis*, here and there, subject and viewer or voyeur. It signifies the liminality of the suburbs and offers a sublime and highly charged site for the testing and transgression of these binaries.

John Updike's early poem, "Suburban Madrigal," from his second collection *Telephone Poles* (1963)—a collection that he described as representing his most "serious" work (qtd. in J. Plath 39)—is just one of many to draw on the image of the picture window in its evocation of suburban life. The window metonymically encapsulates the visibility of suburbia, the vulnerability of the suburbanite to scrutiny by neighboring others, and the strange modernity of suburban space. The "Madrigal" of the title is a complex Tudor musical form which is dependent on multiple interacting parts, and is used by Updike to strategic effect in order to draw attention to the reciprocity of suburban social experience, the mutuality of the gaze, and the incongruity of content and poetic form. James Fenton makes a similar case of W. H. Auden's madrigal, "Twelve Songs, II": "The charm of 'Madrigal,' as the poem was once called, comes from the contrast between its centuries-old idiom and its grimy (1930s) setting" (4).[3]

"Suburban Madrigal" uses the central image of the picture window in order first to establish, and then rather pointedly to shatter, the ostensible boundary between inside and outside, self and other, speaker and neighbor. Keats's 1956 polemic *The Crack in the Picture Window* had, a few years earlier, imagined a similar scene. His caricatured newly wed suburbanites John and Mary Drone take a first look around their suburban tract home: "Through their picture window, a vast and empty eye with bits of paper stuck in its corners, they could see their view—a house like theirs across a muddy street, its vacant picture window staring into theirs" (*Crack* 21). "Suburban Madrigal" opens with the speaker emphatically and even defensively (hence the repetition of the possessive "my" throughout the stanza) locating himself at the centre of such a domain, and glancing obliquely out of the window and towards his neighbor's house across the street. What the speaker sees as he looks out is his neighbor's "sun-porch windows; / they are filled with blue-green"—a color that we first read as a reflection of the fresh air and green lawns promised by the suburbs. A strategic line break disabuses us of this impression; the "blue-green," it transpires, is the color of the speaker's own car, parked outside his house but beyond his direct line of vision such that he can admire it from afar in the reflection it casts in his neighbor's picture window. The speaker is proud of this sleight of hand, of the way in which his car is simultaneously hidden from direct sight and indirectly visible. The ostensible neighborliness of the suburbs is put to the test as one party (the speaker) in effect imposes his possessions and his will, on the other. The strategically and "legally parked" Ford becomes a weapon with which the suburbanite is able to violate his neighbor's space. Its dominance is asserted in the poem's final lines wherein the automobile leaves its indelible mark on the neighbor's territory: "a gorgeous green sunset streaking his panes." Significantly again for the received rhetoric of suburban community, the neighbor himself is never seen. We know him only by his possessions—a symptom both of the alienating and acquisitive aspects of postwar suburbia. The window functions as the site of display (or what Ewen and Ewen call an "abundant theatre of commodities" (239)) even as the onus, and perhaps shame, for looking at these objects is displaced onto the outside observer.

The violation proudly reenacted in Updike's poem evokes the speaker's transgression of the neighbor's private space. Yet an uncertainty in the poem's closing lines, rendered by the use of a parenthetical aside, "(to me)," reminds us that we are seeing things only from the speaker's own perspective and alerts us to the possibility that this transgression may be entirely reciprocal. The reflection of "myself, my car" is satisfying "to me" but it may well be matched by an equal and opposite vision and thus violation on the other side; this is to say, the neighbor may, himself, be enjoying a reflection of his own car in Updike's speaker's window. Thus each party, although seemingly secure in his suburban home, is vulnerable to scrutiny and violation by the other. The poem depicts the mutual watchfulness of subject and neighbor and presents suburbia as a Benthamite or Foucauldian Panopticon.[4] The "goldfish bowl" architecture of the suburbs was, according to Spigel, instrumental in enforcing compliance with social norms (*Welcome* 42; see also Gans on the "mutual observation that makes the block a goldfish bowl" (156)). Subject always to the unseen gaze of others, the suburbanite polices his own behavior—hence his "legally parked" and "well-insured" car—in visible obedience to the norms of the time.

My understanding of the gaze draws on Anne Friedberg's useful definition:

> I use the term *gaze* to describe mobilized and virtual visuality. While "the male gaze"—aligned with voyeurism and with fetishism—was an early staple of feminist film theory, the gendering of the gaze remains an historical problematic. By questioning the historical paradigms of the panoptic gaze, I wish to reclaim the gaze as a different form of visuality and to continue to interrogate the psychic and physiological relation between body and psyche. Benjamin formulates a description of the gaze of the flâneur...which relied on physical and psychical mobility. The common contemporary connotation of the "gaze" relies on the (more panoptic) Lacanian description of the "inside-out" structure of the gaze where the subject only sees itself being seen. (13)

In the present study, both of these interpretations of the gaze are germane. I am interested, as the discussion to follow will show, in gendered viewing positions particularly as these are distributed in particular suburban contexts, in the fetishization of the (female) body, and in strategies of resistance to such processes. But I am also interested, in Friedberg's terms, in the mobility—literal and figurative, or "physical and psychical"—of these positions and in the ways in which the suburban environment seems to foster a certain kind of self-reflexivity. This is an unavoidable and, as in Updike's "Suburban Madrigal," a chiasmic process whereby in watching someone else one also watches oneself doing the watching. In McGinley's "View from a Suburban Window," discussed in chapter 3, the speaker similarly shows herself by showing us how others—the grocer, the dentist, her children—might see her (*Times Three* 269). Her subjectivity is constituted only in relation to other people's unseen surveillance.

John Ciardi's rather later poem, "Suburban" (originally in the 1979 collection *For Instance*) refuses the coercions of such a regime, willfully taking ownership of a crime not of his own doing in order to break the stranglehold of social surveillance. In this sardonic, regular, four-stanza poem with its exaggerated caesurae and snatches of reported speech exemplifying the disconnection between subject and addressee, the first-person speaker's neighbor telephones to complain that the speaker's dog has "just deposited—forgive me—/ a large repulsive object in my petunias." The choice of "petunias" here and again in the penultimate line is surely rhetorical on Ciardi's part, and invokes even as it parodies contemporary critiques of the kind of suburban poetry of which this is a example. Writing in *The American Sublime*, Rob Wilson implies that the "petunia-ridden enclave of *The New Yorker* poem" is an improper place for poetry; Ciardi's poem indicates that it is precisely in this environment that events of great social, ethical, and aesthetic moment might occur (200).

The speaker reacts to his neighbor's accusation with exaggerated and deceptive politesse. His own dog was away from the family home at the time and so could not have been responsible for the terrible deed, but he chooses to act as though it were and in the final stanza, "scoop[ing]" and "bow[ing]," carefully carries the offending object back across the boundary between the two territories. This act of self-abnegation—which is also a gesture of personal agency—paves the way, as the poem's distinct final lines indicate, for "the glorious resurrection // when even these suburbs shall give up their dead" (*Collected* 481).

In Reed Whittemore's 1945 *Kenyon Review* poem "Hester Prynne," the "suburbs" are deployed in the third stanza as a metaphor for the judgmental and conformist eyes of the crowd. The physical "scaffold where dishonored Hester stood" may, as the first stanza explains, have been taken "down." Nevertheless, the pressure to conform remains:

> But at that time—yes, the suburbs came;
> And all the earth (and Hawthorne saw one more)
> Her punishment and private shame
> Shameful public witness bore. (449)

By yoking the punitive forces of Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, here rendered in a sonorous, Biblical idiom, with the surveillant culture of contemporary suburbia, Whittemore offers an indictment of the latter. The privileging of visibility in this poem and others is a reminder of the wider imperatives of the McCarthy years. Miller and Nowak observe that in a 1954 survey, 78 percent of respondents "thought it a good idea to report to the FBI neighbors . . . whom they suspected of being communists" (23). Poems such as Updike's "Suburban Madrigal," Ciardi's "Suburban," and Whittemore's "Hester Prynne" exemplify these broader concerns about privacy and surveillance, about seeing and being seen, and about the risks of nonconformity to established social norms.

Randall Jarrell's poem "Windows," published in *Poetry* magazine in 1954, does not explicitly name the suburbs but portrays a sufficiently domestic, ex-urban and, most significantly *visual* domain for me to read it alongside McGinley and Updike's indictment of the mutuality of suburban sight-lines.[5] This long (43 line) free verse poem opens with an inversion ("Quarried from snow, the dark walks lead to doors") the effect of which is to trouble the reader's sense of place and order. The point is sustained by the uncertainty of the speaker's own viewing position. Is he outside on one of the "dark walks," or is he surveying his neighbor from inside his own home (hence the allusion to "at me at my window" in the second stanza)? His insistent possessive adjectives anticipate Updike's use of the same idiom some ten years later in "Suburban Madrigal." The harshness of the contrasts and the uncertainty of the location imbue the scene with Gothic qualities.[6] The presence of snow tacitly registers the difference between suburban spaces (relatively close to nature) and the city (distanced and detached from natural cycles). As Margaret Halsey notes in her comic memoir of postwar suburban life, *This Demi-Paradise: A Westchester Diary*: "Everyone is agreed that the uniformity and stifling comfort of the suburbs are bad; but the suburbs do provide a sense of the changing seasons and the revolving year that is hard to come by in the city" (47). This alertness to seasonal change, or to the "myth and fact of the changing seasons" in Angus Fletcher's terms, is akin to the preoccupation with the routines of everyday life evident across this poetry; in both cases the cyclicality is a sign simultaneously, and seemingly perpetually, of regret for what has been lost and of desire for what is yet to come (8). The snow in these poems also has the effect of effacing the often-maligned garishness of suburban domesticity. To quote Halsey again, when snow falls, "suddenly, in a life of pastel garbage pails and rainbow-hued plastics, there is a merciful absence of color" (16). More urgently, images of snow, ice, and frozen paralysis bring to mind Sigmund Freud's understanding of the instinct towards death which manifests itself in images of coldness and stasis (310)—a motif that we see in the suburban elegies to which we will later turn.

In Jarrell's poem, the suburban home appears to be a place of security; the snow-covered houses are personified as a sleeping couple with the "the bedclothes pulled around them." The sight is a compelling one, presenting an ideal to which the speaker/outsider aspires. As he concedes at the end of stanza one, this is a seductive world that he longs to join. At the same time, the opening phrase of the poem ("Quarried from snow") invokes the image of "quarry" or prey, as though the sleeping suburban couple are vulnerable creatures, trapped in their suburban comfort. The point is reinforced by line two's allusion to darkness and to shut doors. In the second stanza of the poem, the speaker steps imaginatively a little closer as he describes, with a familiarity born of sustained watchfulness or even voyeurism, the rituals ("rite[s]") of the suburban residents. These unknown inhabitants are visible but inaudible. They gesture but cannot communicate; their meaning remains inscrutable. Suburban life in "Windows" is wholly characterized by what we might call, after Laura Mulvey, its "to-be-looked-at-ness." It is pure spectacle, constituted by "dead actors" who are suspended in a dark interior (lines 13–14) and silently playing out ritualized parts which remain incomprehensible even to themselves. Like one-time stars of their own silent movie, or actors in a television sit-com, they perform their roles within the frame of the windows and through the screen of the glass; as line 18 has it, they are caught within a "windowy world" (314).

The rise of the suburbs (and the widespread installation of the picture window) coincided with the growth of television as a domesticated, privatized medium uniquely suited to meeting the cultural, leisure, and consumer needs of a new mass audience. The introduction of the television was not, though, unproblematic; while regarded as a necessity of modern suburban life, it was also viewed as a disruptive element that needed to be managed. Spigel describes a profound ambivalence on the part of suburbanites about having their television too prominently on display; contemporary magazines, she explains, "treated the TV set as if it were a problem window through which residents in the home could be seen" ("Installing" 26). Television also played a social and ideological role in forging a novel kind of community appropriate to the new landscape of suburban life. Mark Doty's description of the place of television in postwar culture precisely captures the context and helps to explicate the poem's imagery and is thus worth quoting at length:

> Never before had a culture spent its evenings collectively viewing images of itself. What began as novel entertainment became, by the end of the decade [the 1950s], the salient fixture of the American home, a small screen which gave the culture back to itself in a homogenizing and idealizing electronic mirror . . . the glowing blue-and-gray screen seemed to engender a surety that all the world was the same, that lives were lived within the orderly realm of the hierarchical family. The neatly trimmed suburbs of the Cleavers and the Rees became a new sort of American mythology. (134)

In Jarrell's poem, the "windowy world" proves finally impenetrable or, more properly, unyielding. The suburban home can be possessed only by traversing or breaking through its glass boundaries. One evening, as the penultimate section insists, after a long pause across the first part of the line as though the speaker were battling with indecision or steeling himself to act: "I will push a window up and step inside." For Gaston Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space*, poetic representations of the intimate spaces of the home precisely stimulate such "longing." They allow us to think that "by living in such images as these, in images that are as stabilizing as these are, we would start a new life, a life that would be our own" (33).

To penetrate the interior world of the suburbs is, in the discourse of this poem, to enter the realm of the dead. And in the closing section, the speaker/voyeur imagines what it will be like, at last, to access this sanctuary which is also a morgue. Using the future tense, he envisages being silently welcomed, fed, and put to bed. The final stanza, which slips chillingly into the present tense, reveals suburban domesticity to be a site of suffocation, experienced as a warm, smothering hand across the sleeping face (314). In this respect, the poem reads as an admonition to be careful what one wishes for; a cozy domesticity is exposed as a fatal trap particularly, if implicitly, for men. The silent, suffocating, snow-bound suburbs that are the object of his fascinated desire are also and simultaneously a place of horror.

The Suburban Flâneur

In this poem, the speaker assumes a watchful role akin to that of the flâneur. For Walter Benjamin, the flâneur is the archetypal figure of *urban* modernity. He ranges widely and unseen through the labyrinthine streets of the modern city assimilating and articulating (for Lefebvre, "appropriating") urban spaces, characters, and experiences as he proceeds (Benjamin 417; De Certeau 97–8). The flâneur frees himself from the constraints of temporality and immerses himself instead in the new rhythms and demands of the spatial (Soja, *Thirdspace* 173). While conventionally read as a male figure (see, for example, Janet Wolff's argument that "there is not and could not be a female flâneur" (qtd. in Pollock 71)), Deborah Parsons, Elizabeth Wilson, and others have recently proposed reading the role as containing "gender ambiguities that suggest the figure to be a site for the contestation of male authority rather than the epitome of it" (Parsons 5–6). The position of the voyeurs in the three poems discussed here, I argue, exemplifies Parsons' point.

The flâneur walks alone and unseen among the crowded city streets. The suburbs offer a different set of conditions. To walk in the suburbs is, itself, an atypical and thus remarkable act, hence the discomfort of Mile's travelling salesman in "Approach" (see chapter 4). Of course, people did walk in the postwar suburbs (to neighbors' homes, to walk the dogs, to access local amenities such as the PTA meetings, hair salons, and local libraries we have seen in McGinley's poetry). But by and large, the modern suburb, as the Parkway poems discussed in chapter 1 confirm, has been predicated on driving. To walk in the suburbs, as in Jarrell's "Windows" and the poems discussed below, is a strange and even furtive activity, yet one that gives access to an immediacy of sensual experience denied to the driver of the automobile. Walking delivers a different experience of time—an effect that we see on the page by comparing the speed and freneticism of the line in, for example, Levertov's "Merritt Parkway" with the more muted, tentative lines of, say, "Windows." In this example of what Joseph Gilbert defines as the "walk poem," there is an attempt to bring "language and bodily sensation" into alignment (4). The walker "remains *in* the world, actively engaged with it, but also is constantly looking *at* it as it passes; the world is both something to be negotiated and something to be perceived" (18).

Walking, although not a habit that we routinely associate with the suburbs, signals the opportunity for acute sensual experience, for intense introspection, for a startling—because thought lost—connection with the natural world (in these poems, signified by images of earth, stars, trees, and snow) and, albeit always through the mediating lens of the window, for an insight into the lives of others. As Griselda Pollock explains: "The flâneur symbolizes the privilege or freedom to move about the public arena of the city observing but never interacting, consuming the sights through a controlling but rarely acknowledged gaze" (67). The subject of the suburban walk poem is thus a curious misfit; unseen among a homogenous crowd which is intent on disappearing into its own private realm (as for example in Hall's "Christmas Eve in Whitneyville" where "The momentary carollers complete / Their Christmas Eves" and promptly vanish "Into their houses on each lighted street" (*Old and New* 21)), he is simultaneously anonymous and vulnerable. Prowling the "dark walks" and gardens of the suburbs, he "appropriat[es] the topographical system," (De Certeau 97–8), absorbing and making sense of the suburbs experientially.

In Jarrell's "Windows" the speaker/external viewer is implicitly masculine, and the suburbs that threaten to engulf him implicitly feminine. A similarly gendered perspective is adopted in James Wright's "A Girl in a Window" from his first book, the 1957 collection *Green Walls*, which is voiced by a suburban flâneur and gives access to an explicitly feminine domain. Wright was born in 1927 and raised in Martin's Ferry, Ohio, where his father worked—ironically perhaps in light of the titles of this poem and collection—at the Hazel-Atlas Glass Factory. After the war, and on the GI Bill, he attended Kenyon College and subsequently taught at the University of Minnesota and, latterly, at Hunter College, New York

(Wright, *Above* xxxiii–xxxv). In “A Girl in a Window” the picture window becomes a threshold or, in Pollock’s terms, an “interstitial space” (70) where exterior and interior, male and female, subject and object positions meet. The “girl” of Wright’s title (the “she” of the first line) is situated within the home, and rendered autotomously in a succession of body parts: “arms,” “hips,” “Bosom,” “long thighs.” Each is glimpsed in fragments, as though partially and tantalizingly obscured:

Now she will lean away to fold
The window blind and curtain back,
The yellow arms, the hips of gold,
The supple outline fading black,
Bosom availing nothing now,
And rounded shadows of long thighs. (*Above* 12)

The masculinity of the observers (introduced to us in stanza two as they “sit by trees”) is implied by their projection of the woman as other, by their association later in the stanza with “Blundering autos” and a “passing train”—in other words, with the masculine world of commuting—and by their incongruity against the “unfamiliar curve” of the landscape, which stands both for the characteristically curvilinear layout of the suburbs and for the shape of the woman’s body. The picture window becomes in the male imagination the frame for a suburban striptease. The soft furnishings (“the window blind and curtain back”) are mere props for the better display of the female form which is here fetishized and rendered luminous (“yellow” and “gold”). Such is the brightness of the image that it seems to overwhelm the viewers’ sight. The female object is rendered complicit in the display and is blamed for its withdrawal. At the end of the first stanza, the speaker complains “How can she care for us, allow / The shade to blind imagined eyes?” The plurality of viewers (the “us” of the poem’s second stanza) renders the scene all the more unsettling, and the woman all the more vulnerable. At the same time, we might argue that the woman retains some degree of agency, refusing to return his look or satisfy his gaze. The vision of “A Girl in a Window” is constructed in desire, and completed by loss. The final stanza relinquishes its gaze (the perspective of the “watchman walking by too late”) even as the tightness of the structure and rhymes indicates that the freedom the poem ostensibly grants remains the gift of the controlling speaker/voyeur:

Soon we must leave her scene tonight,
To stars, or the indiscriminate

Pale accidents of lantern light,
A watchman walking by too late.
Let us return her now, my friends,
Her love, her body to the grave
Fancy of dreams where love depends.
She gave and did not know she gave. (12)

Delmore Schwartz's 1959 [?] poem, "I Did Not Know the Truth of Growing Trees" (*What Is to Be Given* 43), like the two poems cited above, pictures the suburban home as seen from the outside. It, too, adopts the perspective of the suburban flâneur and exposes his voyeuristic and even scopophiliac desire. And it presents the suburbs from a perspective that embodies the sensations of dislocation, atomization, and loss frequently ascribed to suburban living in the discourses of the time. In his touching biographical sketch of Schwartz, published in Schwartz's posthumous *Selected Essays*, critic and friend Dwight Macdonald explains of the bond that both shared: "We were alike: New Yorkers by birth and upbringing... urban (though not urbane) types to whom 'the country' was like the moon, interesting but alien and a little scary" (Schwartz, *Selected* xvii).

The poem opens by first invoking, and then rapidly qualifying, the claimed security of the suburban street scene where "guarded by patient trees / Two family houses huddled." The adjective "patient" at first glance seems benign; the soft sibilance of the line diminishes any threat. But by line two where we see the "family houses" lying "huddled" we understand that the guard-like trees are there not only to protect the suburban homes, but also to ensure that from them there is no escape. Oppressed suburbanites, represented by their houses, bend under the strain of surveillance. The prominence of these metaphors of repression and control indicates that the ostensible safety and predictability of the suburban environment masks latent forces of disorder. The closely rhyming couplets throughout the text emphasize this hidden tension. Snow features in this poem, as in Jarrell's "Windows." This time, it erases any obvious distinctions between light and dark, inside and out, presence and absence, observer and observed and thereby complicates any straightforward reading of the scene. There are degrees and nuances here (hence the differentiation in lines two and three of "lamplight" from the "snow's light").

The outside conditions (the cold wintery evening, illuminated by a chill snowy light) are able to penetrate the suburban home, reducing the warmth of the domestic interior to a cold shadow of its former self, just as the "blond girl" who in line five is seen glancing out of the window, is able to "pierce" the snow outside with the "hot-bed" of her look. In this chiasmic exchange, the gaze of the outside observer and inside subject meet through the suburban window, stimulating a moment of mutual recognition, which is also one of crisis. The shared gaze breaches the defenses of the carefully "guarded" suburban home and shatters the speaker's (and reader's) ideal of suburban contentment signified by the lamp-lit home glowing like a beacon. The effect is immediate and physical. The shock of what the implicitly male voyeur sees—the blond girl's hot hatred—leaves him clinging for safety to the vestiges of the real (represented, as in Wright's poem, by the tactile, organic "bark of the nearest tree"). Thus the natural world is taken to signify authenticity and truth while the feminized suburban home is sign of inauthenticity and deception.

In "I Did Not Know the Truth," the iconic picture window proves to be the flaw or weak spot in the suburban home's defenses. It allows the girl to look out (thereby offering an emotional release) and exposes to onlookers the dysfunction within, giving access to a hidden narrative of suburban frustration and disillusionment akin to that imagined by Yates in *Revolutionary Road* and documented by Keats in *A Crack in the Picture Window* and Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique*. The long, stuttering lines of the final section (marked by the frequent use of the colon) with the delayed turn (the second part of line 11 of this quasisonnet) exemplify the "Truth" perhaps soon to be hidden by the "Growing Tree"—the truth that beneath the surface beauty lies a "diseased death-ridden toad." For Gilbert, the "walker's bodily engagement with the world, requiring as it does a continuous stream of data for navigational purposes, in fact permits the sense of connection to emerge more fully than in mere passive looking" (*Walks* 19). In "I Did Not Know the Truth," the insights delivered by the walk, that is, by the speaker's flânerie and voyeurism, are less affirmative. Seeking knowledge, by the end of the poem he knows even less "than I thought I knew."

The adoption of the position of the suburban flâneur in this context represents a male response to, and anxiety about, the widely understood femininity of this environment. And, as in the case of "Windows," "A Girl in a Window," and "I Did Not Know the Truth," the narrative offered by flânerie is—unwittingly perhaps—one of male powerlessness (thereby confirming Parson's point, cited earlier, that the figure of the flâneur may be "a site for the contestation of male authority rather than the epitome of it" (5–6)). In each case, it is the men who are finally marginalized and the women who control the spectacle. Parsons proceeds to argue that "The flâneur is a hypersensitive and observant type of the indifferent individuals who co-exist as part of the urban crowd. He is physically part of this crowd yet also mentally detached from it" (225). In these suburban poems, such self-conscious distancing is fundamental. It allows the speaker to engage with his environment while simultaneously (and self-protectively) to register a knowing difference from what he sees. This is a guise that protects the suburban flâneur from too close an association with the suburbs, while licensing his continuing, enthralled engagement with them. In other words, the male viewer by adopting the guise of the flâneur, can simultaneously gain access to and signal his own separation from this domain (he is always the outsider looking in). This is a position of some rhetorical superiority enabling him to gain the privilege of insight while ostensibly disavowing his own investment. The role of man in a (lonely) crowd enables him to display his acute sensitivity and to exercise his critical irony; it is at once hubristic and self-doubting and, as my Conclusion will suggest, generates a degree of self-consciousness. The stance is of a kind with the "self-pitying alienation" that Catherine Jurca has identified and critiqued in the work of male novelists of the suburbs including, most recently, that of Richard Ford, which, she argues, takes "suburban self-consciousness and self-pity to a new level" ("Tales" 173, 176).

Kitchen Windows

In other poems, particularly those deploying the perspective of suburban women, the picture window is more suggestive, and more yielding and, as in the case of Anne Sexton's work, provides a productive space for contemplation and articulation. Anne Sexton identified herself as a child of "the suburbs of Boston, nothing special" ("Last Believer" 19). This disavowal notwithstanding, her work offers a compelling vision of postwar suburban life, particularly as experienced by the at-times conflicted subjectivities of housewife, mother, and poet. In this respect, as we saw earlier, it speaks back in interesting ways to McGinley's work. In Sexton's peculiar 1959 poem "What's That" the suburban kitchen window represents the meeting place of self and mysterious other (the "that" of the poem's title). The setting is emphatically domestic, suburban, and feminine hence the image of the womb-like moon waxing and waning. The kitchen window is the speaker's vantage point on her world, allowing her to examine the unnamed "it" as it approaches the sanctuary of the home:

> Before it came inside
> I had watched it from my kitchen window,
> watched it swell like a new balloon,
> watched it slump and then divide,
> like something I know I know—
> a broken pear or two halves of the moon,
> or round white plates floating nowhere

> or fat hands waving in the summer air
> until they folded together like a fist or a knee.
> After that it came to my door. Now it lives here.

"Watch it," "watch it," "watch it," the repetitions in lines two and three caution, thereby registering the importance in this place and time of constant surveillance. The speaker is unable to risk, even for a moment, taking her eyes off her unknown visitor and by refusing to name "it" invites us to share her combined uncertainty and fascination. For speaker and reader alike, the "it" seems uncanny; in the words of line five, it is "like something I know I know." Marsha Bryant notes a similar moment in Sylvia Plath's "A Birthday Present" (1962) where the speaker "senses a spectral presence as she works in the kitchen" (*Women's Poetry* 132).

In Sexton's poem (drafted in March 1959 and very likely workshopped later that year in the Robert Lowell poetry class that she and Plath attended), the strange mixture of tenses from past perfect to present and then back again further contributes to the uncanny effect. Sexton's "it" resembles a strange pregnancy (she sees it "swell like a new balloon / watched it slump and then divide") or a distorted domestic ideal (figured by the image of the "round white plates floating nowhere") akin to the "surreal" images that Bryant identifies in Plath's poetry. The "it" is also a metaphor for creativity, invoking a strange, but nevertheless welcome muse emerging in an unexpected shape and place to give the speaker access, as stanza two makes clear, to the lost narratives of her past. The repeated phrases "Now it lives here" and "It's here" of stanzas one and two emphasize the speaker's own surprise at the unlikeliness of the encounter—a surprise replicated in critic and poet Louis Simpson's dismissal of the suburbs as an unpropitious place for poetry to flourish; of Plath's home he notes "a white frame house is particularly dispiriting, antiseptic and antipoetic" (*Studies* 91). In Sexton's poem, the unlikely visitor/muse brings something—poetic inspiration, perhaps—that is "as real" as the "outside cars" which "whisk by on the suburban street / / and are there and are true." One of Sexton's best-known poems, the 1959 manifesto "For John, Who Begs Me Not to Enquire Further," noted briefly earlier, is similarly insistent about the validity of the suburban kitchen as a creative space and a site for the exchange of poetic insight:

> This is something I would never find
> in a lovelier place, my dear,
> although your fear is anyone's fear,
> like an invisible veil between us all…
> and sometimes in private,

> my kitchen, your kitchen,
> my face, your face. (*Complete* 35)

The careful structure of "What's That" with its two artfully rhyming douzaines, followed by the three-line coda (which is simultaneously declarative in its evocation of the phenomenological truth of the automobiles passing by on the suburban street *and* interrogative in its questioning of the aesthetic potential of the scene) keep the real and the imaginary in productive equilibrium. The suburban home in this poem becomes a site of creativity and a refuge for poetry; the kitchen window is a place of communication and of the fertile exchange of meaning. The final lines of "What's That" (recalling the "at *me* at *my* window" of Jarrell's "Windows" and the reciprocity of Updike's "Suburban Madrigal") confirm that this is a medial space, one which allows the speaker to speak out, and others to listen in: "What else is this, this intricate shape of air? / calling me, calling you?" (*Complete* 25–6).

Suburban Lawns

If women are under scrutiny through the picture window, then that other iconic feature of postwar suburban design, the carefully maintained lawn, is a site of surveillance and testing ground for men. Like the picture window, the lawn features in the discourses of the suburbs as a metonym for a particular, uniform and coercive set of standards and obligations; suburban gardens are material signifiers used to ideological effect.[7]

Late nineteenth-century villas and cottages provided space for productive kitchen gardens at the furthest reaches of the plot, with decorative lawns, terraces, and flowerbeds close to the home itself. As land became scarcer and thus more expensive and as the economy shifted from one based primarily on production to one sustained by consumption, suburban gardens shrank in size until in the new developments of the postwar years, they might comprise an open lawn at the front and a minimal enclosed yard at the rear. In middle-class suburbs, houses continued to be spaced apart by as much distance as economically feasible with a plot surrounding all four sides, and strategic planting in order to soften the overall look. Open-plan, horizontal homes such as the one featured in the *Ladies' Home Journal* "Easy to Live In" article, cited earlier, took their cue from innovative architects such as Mies van der Rohe whose Farnsworth house (1945–51) in Piano, Illinois, seemed to float over its surroundings:

> Eight slender columns of white-painted steel support a transparent glass box; two horizontal planes—crisp, parallel bands of steel hovering above

> the ground—represent the floor and the roof. Though barely making physical contact with its site, the house seems securely anchored in the green sea that surrounds it. (Friedman 126)

In many new suburban communities, hedges at the front and between properties were banned so as to give the impression of more space. Stilgoe notes precedents for this practice in turn-of-the-century borderland developments where "Fences, hedges, and other defenses, including high foundation planting, struck nearly everyone as un-American...Federalist" (197). Hine discusses the status in the postwar suburbs of what he calls "symbolic fences—a few lengths of split rail or a bit of picket fence in the front yard—that established boundaries without disturbing the pastoral community." More substantial boundaries, he argues, "were generally disapproved of even more strongly than unmowed lawns. Because you only erected such a barrier out of utter loathing for your neighbors, these became known as 'spite fences', and they were almost universally illegal" (33–4).

The grassed lawn had, by the postwar years, become "an essential aspect of the suburban dream" (K. Jackson 57).[8] A lawn of one's own allowed suburbanites to believe themselves to be back in touch with their native soil and reconnected with their (mythical) past after years of exile in the concrete city. This pastoral idyll apart, lawned lots gave settlers and their children welcome and safe spaces to play. But the upkeep of the lawn was not without its frustrations, particularly for men. Spectorsky notes that "every commuter suffers additional physical strains to varying degrees in the daily need to keep up his home and grounds" (2). The ideology of separate spheres that underpinned the development of earlier suburbs was operative again here. A suburban man's role was to nurture his garden and to maintain his home, wife, and family; his masculinity was measured by his ability to achieve this. In McGinley's affectionate, if slightly mocking poem "Fifteenth Anniversary," the husband's parade around the garden on his return from the office is likened to a military maneuver. In *A Short Walk From the Station*, the poem is accompanied on the page by a pen-and-ink illustration of the husband as medieval knight—the protector of hearth and home, girded in a suit of armor.

Contemporary commentators were nervous about men's ability to perform in this area, fearing that years of city work and the influence of overbearing suburban "Moms" may have softened and deskilled them. Lawn care became a highly charged activity prompting what David Riesman, writing in 1957, called "a kind of compulsory outdoor housekeeping" ("Suburban" 139). The garden, as the visible sign of the aesthetic, moral, and social values of the suburban family, was scrutinized carefully by neighbors and visitors. Although in some newly build developments, formal covenants established minimum requirements for lawn care, in others, public scrutiny was sufficient to accomplish the same aim. In Levittown, the dual pressures of "social control" (Gans, *Levittowners* 176–8) and clauses in the tenants' agreements (Kelly, *Expanding* 71) ensured that no man neglected or, conversely, took too much care of his lawn. Harry Henderson's 1953 *Harper's* essay, "Rugged American Collectivism," confirms the situation: "Failure to cut one's grass and 'keep the place up' causes 'talk' or hints in the form of offers to mow it. Constant attention to external appearance 'counts for a lot' and wins high praise from neighbors" (81).[9]

Suburban gardens feature in an astonishing number of poems by a range of poets across and beyond the main postwar period focused on here. These are sometimes used for comic or observational effect (as for example in McGinley's "Fifteenth Anniversary") but they often bear a heavier representational burden. The point is not so much that men are required to struggle with garden maintenance as that they feel themselves to be under this burden, and they identify themselves as members of an oppressed group in shouldering this load. In defining themselves as the poor souls charged with cutting or watering the grass, these poets signal their own simultaneous disempowerment and rage, their suburban subordination and, paradoxically, their capacity to rise above, critique and remain aloof from this domain. In writing about gardens and about their own labor in maintaining them, suburban poets join and rework a long-established pastoral and georgic tradition to resounding effect.

Pastoral poetry puts "the complex into the simple." It "take[s] a limited life and pretend[s] it is the full and normal one" (Empson 114). Its voice and scope are often rustic, but it retains vestiges of the more sophisticated—and even the urbane. The pastoral tradition embodies nostalgia for a "return to the golden age" (Ettin 29) and to lost (because always imaginary) places. It is predicated on a distinction between the countryside as a place of sympathy and self-knowledge, and the city as a site of illusion and disillusion (Williamson 569).[10] The suburban poets' deployment of the pastoral tradition is used to fascinating strategic effect. Suburban pastoral engages with and implicitly rebuts contemporary perceptions of the uncivilized character of the environment, raising questions about how we define what Ettin calls the "limited life" and a "full and normal one." It explicitly occupies that hitherto occluded space *between* country and city and is in a position—literally and figuratively—to explore those tensions on which the pastoral mode more broadly relies. It is thus surprising that to date no serious study of suburban pastoral has been attempted.[11]

In exploring the contribution of the mode to a suburban poetics I draw attention to the georgic tradition; that is, to a poetry that draws on pastoral settings, conventions, and motifs, but deploys the voice or perspective of the laborer in conveying its implicit message. Examples include Hollis Summers's "The Lawnmower" and Howard Nemerov's "The Beautiful Lawn Sprinkler." By convention, the subject of georgic poetry is a lowly figure, seen fleetingly enjoying a moment of rest from his labors in the heat of the midday sun. In suburban pastoral or georgic poetry, the setting is more likely to be twilight or the weekend—the period when the suburban breadwinner returns to the suburb to recuperate from his working day in the city. The lawn-care poems discussed below offer a surprisingly modern, suburban, inflection on these traditions, invoking a range of precedents including Andrew Marvell's "Mower" poems. The conflict between manufactured and virgin landscapes, art and nature, technology and organic growth is played out in this new context, with the beleaguered suburban male assuming the role of Marvell's "Mower Damon."

In Hollis Summers' apparently tongue-in-cheek "The Lawnmower" (published in *Poetry* in March 1954), the speaker constructs a caricature of suburban constraint as evoked by the "clipped boulevard" in the opening octet. But this is only in order to convey the might of the organic world which, in the second stanza, manages to overwhelm even the combined forces of suburban home maintenance. The tension here, as in Marvell's "The Mower Against Gardens," is between nature and artifice. At first, technology dominates in the guise of a lawnmower that is simultaneously anthropomorphized ("blind from birth") and dehumanized ("unhampered by soul"). This "Juggernaut of the yard," as the second line puts it, dominates, emasculates, and disempowers the speaker, forcing him to perform the part of the machine, and matching him step for step as together they traverse the "miniature pastoral scene." The suburbs themselves are belittled (hence "miniature") and the suburbanites' fantasy of a *rus in urbe* ("pastoral") is mocked. Before long, though, nature asserts the upper hand. The lawnmower and, by extension, the forces of suburban convention are no match for the plants themselves that, with athletic power, spring back to life once the mower has passed by. Thus the "muscular weed" triumphs over the powers of civilization (invoked by a veiled reference in the penultimate line to Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn," a poem that itself alludes to Marvell's "The Garden") (319).

Published four years later in his 1958 collection *Mirrors and Windows*, New York-born poet Howard Nemerov's sonnet "Suburban Prophecy" similarly evokes the weekend ritual of grass-cutting. Weekends, as Gary Cross suggests, were an "essentially suburban phenomenon" (that is, they emerged as a consequence of the separation of home from place of work) and although an ostensible time of rest and recuperation were also, as many of these lawn poems show, a period of conflict and frustration (108–31). The same might be argued of the barbecue which, according to Kristin L. Matthews, came into its own as a suburban leisure pursuit in the postwar era. Several poems note the tensions that arise at barbecue time—particularly in relation to changes in gender roles. "Heat 'N' Eat" by Burge Buzzelle in a 1956 edition of the *Wall Street Journal's* regular light verse column, "Pepper and Salt," observes that "From the barbecue pit / To a what-not shelf, / The trend is for hubby / To do it himself" and complains that the opposite is the case for women who seem now to prefer serving processed foods (12). Three years later Philene Hammer's "The Lady's Not for Broiling," in the *Saturday Evening Post*, gives an alternative view. It opens, "Next time, I swear, I shall eschew / The jolly Back-yard Barbecue," mocks the quality of the food, and complains that such "affairs . . . / Do not bring out my sex appeal" (34).

Nemerov's "Suburban Prophecy" opens prophetically enough with an indication that on this, the first day of the weekend ("On Saturday,") anything might happen. In fact, as the rest of the quatrain reveals, the day is overwhelmed—even before it has properly dawned—by the insistent demands of the lawnmower:

> On Saturday, the power-mowers' whine
> Begins the morning. Over this neighborhood
> Rises the keening, petulant voice, begin
> Green oily teeth to chatter and munch the cud.

In a practice that mimics the projection of domestic frustration onto inanimate objects in McGinley's "Eros in the Kitchen" and Plath's "Lesbos," the suburban male's stresses and complaints (keening and whining) are displaced onto the machine. The lawnmower is described in the third person in the first stanza; in the next it is apostrophized, before a degree of separation is achieved in the final section as the speaker attempts to assert his mastery over his environment. Here, the suburban male imagines and indeed glorifies himself as a brave soldier tackling a dangerous foe:

> Monster, crawling the carpets of the world,
> Still send from underground against your blades
> The roots of things battalions green and curled
> And tender, that will match your blades with blades.

The "neighborhood" (signifier of civilization and modernity) risks being subsumed by the primordial past (populated by "dinosaurs in swamps") such that in the poem's closing lines we find that: "by the time the Sabbath dawns / All armored beasts are eaten by their lawns" (*Mirrors* 60). This particular "Suburban Prophecy" is, then, of the demise of the suburbs. Nature takes back what it once owned in an allegory whose evident relish reveals a kind of wish fulfillment on the part of the hard-pressed mower.

A rather later Nemerov poem, "The Beautiful Lawn Sprinkler" (from his 1973 collection *Gnomes and Occasions*) offers a different view. Indeed, it ends on a poignant note of hope for the suburbs of the future. The poem is one single sentence, maintained across seven lines that mimic the constant motion of the lawn sprinkler as it rises, arcs, and sinks again. Again, the material accouterments of suburban life such as the humble lawn sprinkler are given sentience; in the opening line we are told that "What gives it power makes it change its mind." The effect is to portray the suburbanite himself as subservient to the machine—as little more than a cog in a mechanized world. There is something beneficent, though, in the subordination of self to environment and in the dedication of the individual to the pastoral ideal. The animation of the lawn sprinkler allows the speaker to see in it, or project onto it, some of the emotional demands of his own life. In the movement of the arc of water, he sees a healing "exchange" of "humility and pride" in which both "reverse, forgive, arise, and die again." "The Beautiful Lawn Sprinkler" offers a form of blessing; its ritualized movement spanning dawn to dusk provides reassurance of the promise of a better future. The allusion in the final line ("The rainbow in its scattering grains of spray"), as in Updike's "Suburban Madrigal," invokes God's promise and the renewal of his faith in humanity (*Collected* 439).

Julian Mitchell's slightly earlier poem, "Sprinkler in the Suburbs," first published in the *Sewanee Review* of 1961 (269–70), uses the lawn sprinkler as the catalyst for a broader meditation on suburban anomie. Interestingly in this poem, unlike in the others, the machine is characterized as feminine (akin to the muse, "Juliana," of Marvell's "Damon the Mower") and thereby, in this poem's rhetoric, as weak and superficial yet persistent in its demands. As the opening stanza puts it:

> After its day-long dizziness and swirl
> The sprinkler slows, subsiding on the grass,
> Flipping one final, skittish curl,
> Collapsing necklace of warped glass.

Thus the speaker portrays himself, the man subordinated to the machine, as the victim of a suburban matriarchy, or of what Mary F. Corey appropriately enough describes as the "snake in the grass—women" (173). The opening stanza establishes the tone of resentment that persists throughout.

The image of the feminized (and much-despised) lawn sprinkler—the sign of a claustrophobic and emasculating suburban domesticity—is countered in stanza two by the returning male, the "last commuter [who] turns to watch his train." The exaggerated polarity between home and work, women and men, the wife's neediness and the husband's independence is further emphasized by the metaphor in stanza two of the train's "couplings strained as marriages." The homogeneity and deathliness of the scene are evoked by the lament in stanza five, "The sameness of it all appalls." The rhyme of "all" and "appalls" conjures the word "pall" and thereby invokes a funereal cloth.

Mitchell's speaker's frustration and self-pity are evoked in three sections of reported speech. In the first (stanzas three and four) he laments his wife's passivity and the tedium of his suburban life: "There should be something more than home, / Supper and slippers and a grate." In the second (stanzas six to eight), he complains about his son's timidity (according to some contemporary commentators, the likely fault of the overbearing "mom"). And in the third and final stanza, he turns again to his own disappointments and frustrations, complaining about being tied, like the other organization men of his generation, to his job, family, and mortgage repayments:

> "Too late I count the rising cost of pay,
> Yoked, no way back, (and all I might have been!)
> A sprinkler scattering all day,
> The grass intolerably green!"

The final line offers an awful reminder of the superficiality and garishness of the suburbs. The vivid, Technicolor green seems as out of place here as the speaker feels (or fantasizes) himself to be.[12] Where Marvell's "The Garden" finds solace in "a green thought in a green shade," Mitchell's speaker is repulsed by the vivid hue. And where in Nemerov's later "The Beautiful Lawn Sprinkler," the sprinkler scatters its blessings, in Mitchell's poem—here epitomizing the suburban speaker's sense of his own redundancy—it simply, and apparently endlessly, wastes its potential. According to William Whyte, untended suburban lawns are to be taken as a sign of "malaise" (330). In "Sprinkler in the Suburbs," conversely, it is the well-watered lawn that signals a devastating if well-masked discontent.

The vision in these suburban georgic poems is one of alienated, and to an extent self-pitying, masculinity. The suburbs had promised the American male territorial possession, a position as master of his own domain, and a place of respite from the everyday travails of metropolitan working life. What they deliver is dispossession (the landscape and the machines with which he is supposed to control it dominate him) and disempowerment (he is in thrall to nature and disempowered by the suburban regime, both of which are characterized as feminine and coercive). "Suburban Prophecy," "Lawnmower," and the other poems discussed here depict male personae struggling to acclimatize to the "twilight zone" of the suburbs.

In appropriating and manipulating the conventions of pastoral and georgic poetry, these poems comment on and critique some of the expectations implicit in the form. The speakers adopt the voice of the hard-pressed mower common to the poetic convention in order, as much as anything, to expose perceptions of suburban cultural naivety (in other words, this is a more literary domain than contemporary naysayers have admitted). They inscribe the suburban landscape with a pathos that has hitherto been denied even if in so doing they depict themselves as figures of pity. These poems continue and exemplify the best traditions of the pastoral in their innate capacity to "comment on and criticize contemporary events" such as suburban settlement, changes in gender relations, and the nature of work and leisure (Ettin 6). But they also push us to think again about the fundamental premise on which the suburbs were built and marketed; that is, on the promise of a personally and socially beneficial communion with nature. The suburban pastoral ideal is shown here to be accessible—if at all—only at the price of perpetual labor.

CHAPTER 6

On the Margins

While early and hostile readings of suburbia have depicted it as an insubstantial "no place," suspended between the two (positive) poles of city and country, and devoid of identity, the poetry of the suburbs has specifically embraced this marginal, liminal, in-between space, and has found it to be plangent with meaning. As John Updike explained in a 1966 interview, "I like middles. It is in middles that extremes clash, where ambiguity restlessly rules" (Howard 11). His interest, one which is shared by many of the poets in this book, lies in "middleness with all its grits, bumps, and anonymities, in its fullness of satisfaction and mystery" (qtd. in Ostler 2). It is the "ambiguity" and "mystery" that dominate in the poems discussed below—poems that are often set in the spatially and temporally liminal zone of the suburbs at twilight.[1] The suburbs as night falls represent, for (white) male subjects in particular, a transitional space (Shields 83), one that seems at one and the same time, suffocating and replete with possibilities.[2] The poems that follow use the indeterminacy of this place and time as a way of contemplating the perceived uncertainties of contemporary suburban existence and, more specifically, of exercising the potentially compromised position of the suburban poet who plays the parts simultaneously of spokesperson for and critic of the status quo. This is sometimes a self-pitying position, as seen most bathetically in the group of suburban lawn-care poems discussed already. But it finds its ultimate expression in the striking group of suburban elegies to be discussed later in this chapter and in the profound self-reflexivity that I identify in the Conclusion to this book as one of the distinguishing features of the poetics of the American suburbs.

The Twilight Zone

Two early poems by Richard Wilbur exemplify the contradictory significations of this time and space. The first is "Water Walker" (originally published in *The Beautiful Changes and Other Poems* in 1947). This poem plays with the tensions outlined above and establishes a set of contiguous binaries between action and inaction, movement and stasis, engagement and hermeticism. The poem's conceit is to liken the Water Walker's pond to suburbia (hence images in stanza three of a twilight scene with "A table lamp lit; light stretched on the lawn" and in stanza six of silent houses, "the autos beside them sleeping, / The neat plots" and "Japanese maples, / Lawnsprays and tricycles") but then, instead of reading this as a limiting space, to delineate its potential. Bruce Michelson finds the poem's key images inexplicable: "Why are the remembered trees *Japanese* maples and not, say, sycamores or some other species that belongs on these prairies? Why 'lawnsprays and tricyles,' an odd linking to represent the sleeping place?" (Michelson 105). I would counter that these images function precisely to locate the action in the suburbs, and thereby to signify the broader conditions of postwar American life. The point is that these are unmistakably non-native species of tree and thus easy markers of the supposedly alienating and synthetic properties of suburban life. James Bowden's "Summer in the Suburbs" (published in *College English* in 1968) deploys a "Lombardy Poplar" to similar effect, as does Josephine Miles with the "Japanese Cherry" in her poem, "Cage" (*Collected* 244). By choosing a stagnant pond as his backdrop, Wilbur arguably invokes and then refutes contemporary criticism of the deadly effects of this environment such as Carl Von Rohde's indictment of "The Suburban Mind" in his 1946 article in *Harper's*: "'Suburbanitis' is a sort of sleeping sickness that infests the shaded avenues of Suburbia as malaria hangs about Southern swamps" (295).

What fascinates the speaker in "Water Walker" is the insect's ability to inhabit and, indeed, to thrive in this interstitial space or to "breathe / Air and know water" (stanza one). Later, again, it is the capacity to be and to know (the ontology and the epistemology) that interests him and provides a model for his own relationship to the suburban environment:

> Still pearled with water, to be
>
> Ravished by air makes him grow
> Stranger to both, and discover
> Heaven and hell in the poise
> Betwixt "inhabit" and "know"[.] (*New and Collected* 338)

Neither pole, alone, is enough to sustain the Water Walker or by extension, the suburban speaker/poet. Together, though, they provide a nurturing and creatively fertile space.

A different view is given in a poem published almost a decade later, "Marginalia," published in *Poetry* in February 1954. Again, the setting is a pond. Again, the margins inferred in the title and in the allusion to the pond's "edges" are domesticated and suburbanized:

> Things concentrate at the edges; the pond-surface
> Is bourne to fish and man and it is spread
> In textile scum and damask light, on which
> The lily-pads are set [.]

The position of the speaker is that of the outsider, persistently excluded from the exciting world of the metropolis which can be seen only in passing:

> Descending into sleep (as when the night-lift
> Falls past a brilliant floor) we glimpse a sublime
> Décor [.]

The reference to "Sleep" represents a turn away from the energy of the city and towards what the poem later calls the "night meadows" of the suburbs. The final stanza treats as inevitable that "centrifugal" process by which we are spun from the "whirlpool" of the center towards the stillness of the borderlands. These margins, although they may offer some peace, signify finally a place to languish. One's only hope of escape, the closing line suggests, is by means of "a good drowning" (Wilbur, "Marginalia" 265).[3]

In many poems of the mid-century American suburbs, metaphors of lamps and stars (and occasionally of street and moonlight) help to situate the action in a liminal dawn or dusk timeframe, poised between night and day. The uncertainties of this time provide a suggestive context for the exploration of other polarities—between the micro- and the macrocosm, the personal and the public, the immediate and the historical, the margin and the center. Poems such as Wright's "A Girl in a Window" and Schwartz's "I Did Not Know the Truth of Growing Trees," discussed in the previous chapter, draw an implied comparison between internal lamplight and external starlight. The effect is sometimes to emphasize differences of scale (the diminutive "here" is contrasted with the vastness of "there") or to compare manufactured and natural light and, by extension the synthetic suburbs and a wider, elemental realm. Lamps shining through the windows of the suburban home indicate a welcome but they also when seen from the outside—as is often the case in these poems—connote the hermeticism of suburban domesticity and its exclusionary interiority.[4]

Howard Nemerov's "Blue Suburban" (published in his collection *The Next Room of the Dream* in 1962) distinguishes between artificial and natural light in order to exemplify the difference between the transient insubstantiality of the suburbs and the permanence and grandeur of the firmament. "Blue Suburban" is set in the twilight hours between "six o'clock, or seven," a time that would have been acutely familiar to this generation of suburban male breadwinners as the hour when they returned home from their employment in the cities to be met at the station by their wives, as in McGinley's "The 5:32," and Bogan's "Evening in the Sanitarium." Spectorsky observes that in the winter months, the male suburbanite "may seldom see his home by daylight until the weekend" (2). The opening lines of the poem set the scene and implicitly read the suburbs both as a place of death and, curiously, a poetic space: "Out in the elegy country, summer evenings, / It used to be always six o'clock, or seven." Emphatic prepositions ("Out" and "Over" at the beginning of lines one and four, and "down" in line nine) evoke the marginality of this environment (Nemerov, *Collected* 256).

In this strange, liminal, twilight world, caught between the first illumination of the "small lights" in the "lonely house" and the appearance of "a handful of pale, permanent stars," unnamed friends drink and chat, and then become "bitter" and atomized in a futile attempt to avoid the truth and inevitability of their "industrial ruin or casual disaster." The enjambment (the 13 lines of the poem are one long sentence), coupled with the repeated conjunctions "and," "always," and "where" make this a relentless process, in which the suburbanites themselves are passive victims. These, then, are the "blues" and this the suburban elegy. Paul Fussell writing in the mid-1960s notes that "this kind of vigorously enjambed free verse . . . has become a common style in the last twenty years or so as a vehicle for themes that are sly or shy, or uncertain, or quietly ironic, or furtive" (81). In the case of this poem, the promise of suburban prosperity, and the rituals of the return home and evening drink, are exposed as a mask for a disturbing narrative of dysfunction and despair akin to that which features repeatedly in the fiction of contemporary writers such as Yates and Cheever.

Donald Justice's 1963 poem "Men at Forty" similarly uses the end of the day as a moment appropriate to examining masculinity and aging as these correspond to the strictures of the suburbs. Men in this poem are portrayed as being weakened or pacified by their environment, hence the use of soft, feminine rhymes. The forty-year olds:

Learn to close softly
The doors to rooms they will not be
Coming back to.

The extended second line quoted above delineates the men's initial potential; the abrupt third line signifies its curtailment. These men are stranded in the home, suspended part way up the stairs, as the first line of the second stanza explains; they are neither up nor down but caught in space while the world moves on without them. Michael Kimmell's observation about a more widely shared sense of uncertainty across the period is surely relevant here: "As the 1950s drew to a close, American men still felt temporary about themselves, even more restless in the midst of even greater abundance than even Tocqueville ever imagined" (257). No longer primarily identified as the son of the father to whom he refers in stanzas three and four, Justice's speaker is forced to acknowledge that "men at forty" can no longer regard themselves as young but must, instead, accept the place of their fathers. From the outset, the poem is about the closing down of possibilities—realized in a sequence of architectural and domestic metaphors: the shutting of doors to rooms that will never be reopened, the suspension on the stairs landing and, in stanza three, an imprisoning gaze in a mirror that gives back only a shocking image of the distance the speaker has travelled from his own boyhood. The disempowerment and claustrophobia of the middle-aged suburban male's lot in life are confirmed in the closing stanza where, as twilight descends, the men's entrapment within their "mortgaged" suburban houses is rendered complete and final (Field 223).

Philip Levine's contemporaneous poem, "Lights I Have Seen Before" (from his 1963 collection *On the Edge*) opens with daybreak and closes at dusk (*Selected* 3–4).[5] The poem is firmly located amidst everyday suburban life, signaled by the opening stanza's reference to the first-person speaker's children and to the accouterments of modern domesticity:

                the buzz of current
                        in the TV
and the refrigerator.

Yet the perspective is strangely elliptical or attenuated. The children are "off somewhere," the speaker is isolated, the television and refrigerator provide only muffled and inhuman—perhaps even deathly—sound (hence "the buzz of current" bringing to mind the application of electro shock therapy). Throughout the poem, the use of half rhymes and the unusual alignment of lines and stanzas only add to the sense of dislocation. In stanza two, the speaker's despondency and anomie are transposed onto domestic appliances such as the fridge, seen "groaning" in response to the break of day (similar transferences occur both in McGinley's "Eros in the Kitchen" and Plath's "Lesbos"). The poem registers the sterility of the speaker's suburban life and his vulnerability to external forces that he seems unable to control. Only the machines can speak. And even their utterances are indecipherable (the refrigerator groans, the water pipe cries). The human himself is oppressed into silence, left longing but unable to communicate. Repetitions throughout the poem (of "wanting" and "trying") affirm the urge to speak and the frustration of that desire. Paradoxically, of course, in articulating the impossibility of finding a voice, the poem precisely overcomes that difficulty.

This is an atomized world. The speaker is isolated from his family and unable to communicate with others. In stanza six, his "home" (which as a strategic juxtaposition in line 32 indicates is indistinguishable from other people's "houses") offers him no comfort and merely compounds his despair. Yet somehow the speaker seems able to pick a route through this apparent wasteland. He is able to drive home "*between*" (my emphasis) the "insane" houses that surround him, to distinguish between the material and affective conditions of suburban life, and to reach some kind of compromise or accommodation with his environment even if such a choice seems, at the end of stanza seven, like a kind of "failure" that reduces him, again, to silence.

"Lights I Have Seen Before," like "Blue Suburban" and many of the other poems discussed here, exhibits a deep self-consciousness—which is also a profound defensiveness—about the isolation and meaningless of everyday life in the suburbs. Yet one might also argue, particular with respect to Levine's subject's twilight return home in the closing stanzas, that aspects of the poem invite a more redemptive interpretation. The speaker's latent connection with and affection for this place, although ostensibly disavowed, is registered by such means as the possessive "my block" of the penultimate stanza, by the fond reference to the children's happiness (they do not hear him as he returns home, presumably because they are busy playing), and by a friendly wave from one of his neighbors—a sign in this otherwise noncommunicative world, of recognition and welcome. The suburban home that in the morning had seemed to repel the speaker appears now as a haven, and sends out a reassuring beacon. In the poem's final lines, "lights come on / where I have seen them before" in order to guide his safe return. The lights connect the speaker in space and in time (*where* he has seen them *before*) with his suburban home which seems no longer strange and alienating but, instead, familiar and inviting.

These poems trace the process by which the (male) suburbanite reaches a reconciliation with his environment. We might read this as a surrender to the inevitable. And in some respects, the poems induce us to read and to sympathize in this way (for example, in "Men at Forty" where the lilting rhythms and poignant disclosures compel our attention and make abrupt final reference to "the mortgaged houses" all the more resonant). Or we might understand these poets' eventual assimilation to suburbia—their embracing of their suburban subjectivity—as a willing, knowing, and as in "Lights I Have Seen Before," an affirmative act. Rob Shields argues of the kind of self-willed marginality or "liminality" demonstrated here that it "represents a liberation from the regimes of normative practices and performance codes of mundane life because of its interstitial nature" (84). I would add that in these liminal, twilight poems, the "performance codes" are not so much abandoned as replaced by new and equally coercive models. The role on offer is that of the half-hearted, subordinate, rueful-but-knowing participant observer (the alienated, melancholy male, in other words). Such a scenario, while apparently irksome, may finally prove to be deeply sustaining on physical, emotional, and poetic levels.

The seductions of this position are portrayed to great effect in James Lewis's startling poem, "A Poet of the Suburbs" (published in *College English* in 1973). Like Levine's "Lights I Have Seen Before," "A Poet of the Suburbs" reflects on the suburban man's twilight return home. Home is presented, at first, as a place of warm and familiar welcome, and then as something altogether more disturbing. The title of the poem alone signals the self-consciousness of the first-person speaker's position and his sense that—like the suburban flâneurs discussed earlier—he occupies a position "of the suburbs" but speaks also as "a Poet" or from a critical remove. This impression is affirmed by the bold self-reflexivity of the opening lines wherein the speaker announces:

It is early evening and
Now I, Richard Bentley am slipping gracefully
Into the clutch of homeward traffic
I am adjusting deftly
To the subtle rhythms of the expressway.

The "I" is both subject (speaker) and object ("Richard Bentley") of his own poem, first and third person. His self-revelation is informed and mediated by his consciousness of how others see him. The split or duplicitous voice—that of the alienated or self-alienating subject—replicates the wider sense of dislocation that was thought to be a particular feature of postwar American life. It is a guise that, as Jurca notes, has been assumed by male writers as a way of displaying their sense of dispossession and disappointment. Laura Quinney takes up the point in *The Poetics of Disappointment* and argues that the fact that "this disappointment is chronic reflects its depth; that it is cerebral produces its subtlety; . . . to experience this kind of existential disappointment is in a sense a luxury" (139).

In "A Poet of the Suburbs," the speaker's masculine pride derives both from his ability as a driver (we are reminded of a scene in Joyce Carol Oates's suburban novel *Expensive People* where the egotistical father figure flamboyantly drives his son home from the city) and from his level of adjustment. Both were regarded as necessary attributes for suburban living. The accretions—signaled by "And" at the beginning of eight of the poem's 57 lines—emphasize the coerciveness of the forces that sweep him along. The flow of the traffic (a metaphor for these wider pressures) is consolidated by images of water in lines 12 to 19. In a succession of unsettling reversals, the traffic is domesticated and thus rendered benign by being likened to a "rug" (in line 10) and a "stew" (line 14). For Richard Bentley, there is something familiar and therefore deeply reassuring about his suburban destination. His experience of it, like that of Levine's speaker in "Lights I Have Seen Before," is spatial and temporal, real and imagined, or to cite Anne Friedberg again, "physical and psychical" (13):

> And all along the length of my street
> In the football time of the evening in the
> Thump of a ball against a chest
> Is myself even before I am.

It is this place, and this connection with the past, that determines the commuter/wanderer's subjectivity, and directs his path. The speaker implicitly aggrandizes himself and this journey by allusion to Homer's Odysseus:

> It is after
> The ten years of the Trojan war that
> I return to what has waited like a ghost.

Louis Simpson's 1965 poem "Things" uses a similar metaphor in comparing a bald front tire to the figure of Odysseus and noting sympathetically "How much it must have suffered!" (*Selected* 135). Lewis's speaker's pride in having successfully negotiated the expressway is bathetic in relation to the myth that he invokes. The aim may be to imbue the suburban everyday with epic qualities and to ennoble the male commuter; however, the effect of the hyperbolic comparison between the heroism of *The Odyssey* and the frustrations of the suburban everyday is to expose the thinness of the latter.

As though in recognition of the insubstantiality of the comparison, Lewis's speaker shifts now to a less bombastic and more hesitant evocation of his position. Meditating on his return home, he depicts his environment in the liminal terms that are familiar among contemporary male poets of the suburbs, seeing himself as though "caught in the middle of a stride aching / To complete the step." The visible pause in the line emphasizes the hesitancy of his thoughts and movements, or his suspension in space and time. From the defiant "I, Richard Bentley" of the opening line, we have moved to a vision of Richard as merely a "Shape / . . . I will settle into" and as a "ghost in the chair in the den." The "den" or family or rumpus-room was, as we have seen, a much vaunted aspect of the new suburban architecture; on this occasion, it is but an empty signifier of family togetherness. On first leaving the city, Bentley had exuded confidence, authority, and a sense of direction, both literal and figurative. Now, as he approaches the suburbs, he has begun to fade from view. The resolution to Bentley's apparent decline comes in a startling reassertion of agency—a defiant gesture that allows him to defy the "red lights" of conformity and to transcend the trap of the suburban everyday:

> At this intersection I have never seen
> As the light winks red at my approach.
> I am looking ahead and behind
> And to both sides
> As I press the gas pedal and now
> I Richard Bentley
> Am triumphant into the November evening.

Elegy

"Richard Bentley's" astonishing poetic suicide note is of a kind with the work of a number of other postwar American poets who seek to commemorate the suburbs or, more properly, to signal their own troubled relationship with them in the form of the elegy. On one level, this is to be expected (according to John Vickery, the "elegiac temper" is one of the defining features of modern poetry (viii, 2)) even if the potential of a suburban elegiac mode has not hitherto been noticed. As we saw with critical studies of the pastoral, the possibility of a suburban inflection on these traditions has either been overlooked or disavowed. Jahan Ramazani cites "urbanization" but not suburbanization as a factor determining the shape of the elegy, and his only other acknowledgment of this social formation is dismissive. Speaking of one of the elegy's defining features he reassures his readers that "The rise of suburban America need not disable the pathetic fallacy" (15, 217). In other words, the elegy will persist in spite, not because, of the suburbs. I would counter that the elegy offers a ready-made set of conventions with which to evoke the alleged deathliness of the suburbs including, but not limited to, the use of the coda, apostrophe, pathetic fallacy, the "apotheosis of the dead" and the "procession of mourners" (Ramazani 4, 89). It provides a framework within which one might lament the passing of time and the inevitability of change, and it permits the speaker to bring intimate and abstract, social and natural worlds into productive proximity. More importantly, perhaps, it offers to the speaker/observer a stable, authoritative and finally judgmental perspective that permits them to present an "extended critique of a dubious present" (Vickery 3). These suburban elegies bear comparison with Amy Clampitt's recent poems on vacant lots, collected in *What the Light Was Like* (1985) and *Archaic Figure* (1988) wherein, as Bonnie Costello argues, she offers a "consistent critique of the elegiac sense of place." The vacant lot is "the opposite of a wilderness or garden, no virgin land or *terra incognita* but a commodified space filled and emptied out, to be eventually filled again" (Costello 136). Like the suburbs, these are troubling but ultimately ideal spaces for elegy, precisely because they seem to epitomize the emptiness and lack signified by death. For Ramazani, the contemplation of "death and mourning help[s] to deepen, enlarge, and intensify subjectivity in the face of an increasingly bureaucratic and dehumanizing economic life" (17). This is a promise that must have seemed particularly suggestive to poets of the postwar, suburban generation. The elegy, finally (as we will see in the discussion that follows and in the Conclusion) offers the opportunity to question the "nature and contemporary role, if any, of the poet" (Vickery 4).

William Stafford's 1962 poem "Elegy" (from *Traveling Through the Dark* (13)) commemorates the speaker's father, a suburbanized America, and a changed self. Stafford was born in Kansas; a conscientious objector, he served in various work camps across the West during World War II and then settled in Oregon to teach and write. "Elegy" uses seven seven-line stanzas, followed by a single final line. It deploys irregular, often assonantal rhyme in lines that tend to expand in length as the poem proceeds as though in an attempt to encompass the immensity of the life being commemorated.

The poem opens with a portrayal of suburbia closing in or down; this is a site of conformity, safety, and constraint (hence the "net" as a sign of security or of entrapment), and of suffocation (the rather clumsy metaphor of the refrigerator door):

The responsible sound of the lawnmower
puts a net under the afternoon;
closing the refrigerator door
I hear a voice in the other room
that starts up color in every cell:
　　　Presents like this, Father, I got from you,
　　　and there are hundreds more to tell.

The perspective moves from that of the inhibited, grieving suburban poet via the father to a narrative of the past that is full of evocative, sensual, even synaesthetic detail, condensing taste, sight, smell, and touch in one image (the "melonflower breath"):

One night, sound held in cornfield farms
drowned in August, and melonflower breath
creeping in stealth—we walked west [.]

The representation is interesting for two different reasons. It challenges typical readings (see Updike's "Superman" or Miles's "Increment") of postwar suburban affluence. And it prompts us to question the values ascribed by contemporary readers to different measures of success or wellbeing. The "lawnmower" and "refrigerator"—those icons of suburban comfort—are depicted as nothing compared to the richness of the speaker's memories of the past even if his past was, by material standards, relatively impoverished.

The past is remembered in terms of its silences (represented by a figure stealthily creeping through "cornfield farms" in stanza two, and by the long-passed train in stanza three). These memories in turn evoke the evident difficulties of communication between father and son. As stanza four exclaims: "If only once in all those years / the right goodby could have been said!" The son can "hear" the father receding into the distance, and can "hear" the closing of doors (lines three and seven of stanza four) but he cannot find a voice with which to make contact. In subsequent stanzas, even the aural connection is denied: "I can hear no sound." We recall the image of the closed refrigerator door in the opening stanza; thus the poem constructs and sustains a vision of suburbia as a stultifying, numbing place. The father's apparent death by drowning in the final stanza ("When you left our house that night and went falling / into that ocean, a message came: silence") in part explains the muted quality of the elegy. More than this, though, the emphatically suburban setting, which is established from the beginning and reinforced by references to "our house" and "our door" in the final stanza, because thought to be empty of meaning becomes unexpectedly receptive, attentive, and always ready to be inscribed by others:

> When you send messages they come spinning
> back into sound with just leaves rustling.
>
> Come battering. I listen, am the same, waiting.

For Peter Sacks, changing "attitudes towards death" and towards "traditional poetic goals and means" across the twentieth century produce elegies characterized by withdrawal and irony. Modern elegists, he argues, are "foreswearing traditional procedures of mourning, adopting deliberately unidealized settings, making smaller and more credible claims, if any, for the deceased and for themselves" (299). The point is illustrated by the modest setting, apologetic tone, and clipped idiom of Stafford's poem and by such means as the substitution of the "responsible sound of the lawnmower" for the pipes and horns of elegiac convention. A similar effect may be seen in Anne Sexton's 1958 elegy "Funnel." The poem opens expansively (like the mouth of the "Funnel" of her title): "The family story tells, and it was told true / of my great-grandfather who begat eight / genius children". The repetition of "telling" and "told," the exaggerated adjective "genius," and the Old Testament idiom give the poem a confidence and a narrative reach that is sustained across the long lines of the rest of the poem, ranged in two extended stanzas of seventeen and then twenty one lines, followed by a contemplative four-line coda. The rolling rhyme scheme enables the speaker successively to build on earlier sounds just as the description enumerates the grandfather's ever increasing wealth. As the middle section of the second stanza explains:

> I like best to think of that Bunyan man
> slapping his thighs and trading the yankee sale
> for one dozen grand pianos. It fits his plan
> of culture to do it big. On this same scale
> he built seven arking houses and they still stand.
> One five stories up, straight up like a square
> box, still dominates its coastal edge of land.

From the abundance of the elegized great-grandfather's Victorian past, the poem's closing quatrain return us to the "reduced circumstances" (Sacks 299) of the present:

> Back from that great-grandfather I have come
> to puzzle a bending gravestone for his sake,

> to question this diminishing and feed a minimum
> of children their careful slice of suburban cake. (Sexton, *Complete* 20)

The elegy here, then, is for the familial and spatial losses of an idealized past and for the perceived poverty of the present.

Similar elegiac motifs are evident in Howard Nemerov's 1962 poem "Blue Suburban," cited previously. Nemerov's pastoral elegy seeks to commemorate the postwar American suburbs and to use them as a motif or metaphor for a more generalized set of regrets. The poem's opening lines ("Out in the elegy country, summer evenings") posit an association between suburbia and death and are determined in their melancholic portrayal of a twilight scene of liminal, suspended animation where even the clocks seem to stop ("it used to be always six o'clock, or seven"). By line nine of the poem, the preposition "Out" has changed to "Down" ("Down in the elegy country") as though to suggest a diminishment or falling away of the kind seen in Sexton's "Funnel." In this elegiac scene, the lamenting river muses of poetic convention have been replaced by the more domesticated image of "the fountain of the willow."

For Nemerov, the suburbs have become a convenient place on which to project the disappointments of the age. They promise community and deliver only isolation; they promise hope for the future and deliver only the passing of time (the laughing party-goers of the first section of the poem are "taken by the darkness in surprise"), they promise an escape from the problems of modernity, but those problems ("industrial ruin or casual disaster") merely followed in their wake. The poem is one of profound disappointment, defined by Quinney as "the psychic state...which results in a complex condition of psychological deadlock" (x). For Quinney, disappointment is implicitly a temporal effect, representing "a break-down in one's relation to time, a falling out and away from the recognizable order" (1). I would add that it is also a markedly spatial effect; produced as a consequence of feeling oneself to be physically dissociated or out of place. Yet, even as the poem laments the loss of friendship and community, hence "the lonely house," it offers some form of consolation in a closing appeal to the security and proportion of "a handful of pale, permanent stars" (256).

One of the most notable examples of the suburban elegy is Richard Wilbur's well-known poem, "To an American Poet Just Dead," first published in *Poetry* magazine in December 1948 and reprinted in his 1950 collection *Ceremony and Other Poems* and subsequently in *New and Collected Poems*. Wilbur is widely regarded as one of the key figures in mid-century American poetry. He was born in New York City and educated at Amherst and Harvard. He served in the US Army during World War II and then returned to Harvard; his first volume, *The Beautiful Changes*, appeared in 1947, followed by *Ceremony*, *Things of this World* and numerous other collections in the decades that followed (Wai). For Mark Doty, he epitomizes 1950s formalism ("Forbidden" 136); for Donald Hall he, alongside Robert Lowell, represents the "real beginning of postwar American poetry" even if his influence on others was apparently to be regretted. As Hall proceeds to argue, "the typical *ghastly* poem of the fifties was a Wilbur poem not written by Wilbur, a poem with tired wit and obvious comparisons and nothing to keep the mind or the ear occupied" (*Contemporary* 20).[6] He takes pride of place in Edward Brunner's exemplary survey of *Cold War Poetry*. Although his interest in borderlands (Golffing 222) and in various forms of landscape (Thurley) has long been noted, his engagement with the suburbs has been overlooked.

"To an American Poet Just Dead" offers a suggestive, and at first deceptive, portrait of suburbia. The poem opens with an apparently inconsequential reference to an obituary in the "Boston Sunday Herald."

> In the *Boston Sunday Herald* just three lines
> Of no-point type for you who used to sing
> The praises of imaginary wines,
> And died, or so I'm told, of the real thing. (*New and Collected* 329)

The effect is to establish, from the outset, the difference between Boston (America's first or *ur* city) and the nameless, generic suburban locale from which the "I" of the poem speaks. The differentiation and implied hierarchization of the settings recalls Anne Sexton's emphatic and repeated distancing of her own suburban milieu from the Boston poetry "scene," for example in a 1959 letter to Carolyn Kizer where she describes her debt to her new (metropolitan) poetry friends and refers to herself self-deprecatingly as "kind of a secret beatnik hiding in the suburbs in my square house on a dull street" (*Self-Portrait* 71). There is a primary uncertainty in Wilbur's poem—one that the poem itself leaves unresolved—first about the identity of the elegized poet (in this respect, the poem subverts the convention by which the elegist more typically names or renames the dead (Sacks 302)), and second about whether the "American Poet Just Dead" of the title is himself a Boston poet or one who, like the speaker, made his home in the suburbs.[7] The poem refuses to differentiate further. In stanza three, the line "it is out in the comfy suburbs I read you are dead" might simultaneously be read as an indication that the *speaker* is in the suburbs, reading of the poet's death, or that the speaker is *somewhere else* reading of a death that took place in the suburbs. The indeterminacy of the line establishes and leaves open the dual possibility of difference and of similarity.

The poem's first two stanzas report the poet's sordid and ironic death (one-time figure of wine and song, he has apparently died of alcoholism) and his exponentially lackluster obituary which takes up "just three lines / Of no point type" in the newspaper and pales into insignificance against the accounts of the others whose deaths are marked on the same day:

> Also gone, but a lot less forgotten
> Are an eminent cut-rate druggist, a lover of Giving,
> A lender, and various brokers[.]

The choice of peers is suggestive. For John A. Myers, writing in the May 1963 *English Journal*, the prominence of these others symbolizes the distorted values of a "deadened" suburban society that fails to appreciate the poet in its midst (378). But one might counter that the attributes of these other souls are chosen precisely in order to suggest a latent identification between them; poetry, too, might be likened to an inexpensive ("cut-rate") substitute for the relief or stimulation of drugs, or might be seen as a gift, or a loan, or a way of reconciling (brokering) differences. Equally, one might argue that the poem throws into question the presumed prestige of the dead poet who is here represented in terms that connote his inadequacy or his failure to connect. In stanza one, his life is recalled in a sequence of approximations or near-misses (the "no point" type, the allusion to his propensity to praise "imaginary wines" and his death, "or so I am told, of the real thing") which cast doubt on his perspicacity as a poet.

From this point of view, the life and work of the dead poet are as nothing when compared to the substance and reality of present-day suburban life. This is a surprising because atypical reading of the signification of suburban space. As we have seen, the critical (and poetic) tendency has been to see the suburbs as a synthetic, insubstantial, inferior milieu. And although to an extent this is a reading that Wilbur's poem sustains (hence the allusion in stanza three to the "comfy suburbs" with their characteristic "yawns / of Sunday fathers loitering late in bed" and the evocation in seductively sibilant lines of the "sshhh of sprays on all the little lawns") and is one that Myers favors (of the speaker, he comments: "He lives in a Boston suburb (feeling, no doubt, a little trapped) but is obviously not a part of it spiritually. Although, like his neighbors, he reads the *Boston Sunday Herald*, he regards his neighbors with unmistakable contempt" (377–8)), it is an interpretation from which I wish to demur. "To An American Poet Just Dead," I suggest, proposes something rather different—and, indeed, defiant. For Wilbur's speaker, the suburbs are viable, substantial, and replete with meaning; against the odds they prove to be poetically fruitful, provocative, compelling spaces.

The crucial moment in this, as in other elegies, is when the speaker/subject first encounters the fact of death. Stanza three, as we have seen, locates this moment "out in the comfy suburbs." For many readers, "comfy" might carry contemptuous overtones; it might invite us to see, and agree, that the suburbs are not "comfy" at all, or that their comfort is no compensation for their cultural emptiness. And although this is a germane reading, I wish also to propose that one might read the word "comfy" without irony. For then we can see the transience and ineffectiveness of the first (elegized, suburban) poet as a foil for the substance, groundedness, and honesty of the second (the speaker himself). Just as it is a characteristic of the elegy to foreground the moment when death is confronted, so too it is common for the mode to refocus attention from the object (the dead man) to the subject—here, the living speaker seen struggling to reconcile himself to the loss and poised to take on the mantle from his predecessor.

In this the poem's central stanza, the speaker/subject immerses us in what is, to him, a familiar suburban world and exaggerates by the use of emphatic alliteration, sibilance, and clear rhymes ("yawns" and "lawns," for example, which associates the suburban landscape with tedium), his ability to bring this supposedly unpromising poetic landscape into vivid life. From one perspective (for example, that adopted by Myers), the poem regrets the suburban community's inability to comprehend their poet's death and, by extension, their ignorance of wider cultural value. And certainly the poem questions the ability of a modern consumer society to recognize its loss. Stanza four asks:

> Will the sprays weep wide for you their chaplet tears?
> For you will the deep-freeze units melt and mourn?
> For you will Studebakers shred their gears
> And sound from each garage a muted horn?

As Sacks argues, "the mourned subjects of recent elegies include not only the deceased but also the vanished rituals of grief and consolation itself" (299–300). Where Nemerov's "Blue Suburban" replaces the rivers of elegiac convention with fountains of willow, Wilbur goes further still and deploys lawn sprinklers in his mourning rituals. Similarly, the flutes and pipes of the pastoral elegy are replaced by the "Studebaker" horns. Both poets are thus in "constant renegotiation" (Sacks 328) with the traditions of the form, manipulating it into a shape commensurate with this place, time, and experience. The abrupt "They won't" that opens the next stanza answers the rhetorical questions quoted above. From another perspective, though, the poem sets up the possibility that the suburban community *will* recognize and value its dead—its own bard—when the moment comes. The emphatic “you” of the stanza quoted above invokes a silent “I.” This is to say; the suburbs may not value “you” (the dead poet of the title), but they may register and approve and, in due course, mourn the qualities that the implied “I” of the poet/speaker has demonstrated throughout.

Ramazani reads “To An American Poet Just Dead” as a parody or “mock-elegy” (217). I disagree. It subverts many of the received characteristics of the elegy, but it is not parodying or mocking the form. Instead, it is reshaping and, in so doing, reenergizing it. The conventions and languages of poetry shift and change over time and in different social, ideological, and spatial contexts. In effect, “To An American Poet Just Dead” asks whether it is possible to have a suburban elegy and, against the odds, proves that it is. Although rooted emphatically “out” in that most unpropitious of places (“the comfy suburbs”), the poem commemorates the poet’s passing, affirms the place of the suburbs as a viable locus for poetic representation, and posits—and indeed proves—the potential of a suburban poetics. Its own skepticism (and its readers’ doubts) about suburban society’s ability to rouse itself, to notice, and to care, is defeated in and by its own poetic process. Vickery proposes of the modern elegy that one of its primary concerns is to question the “nature and contemporary role, if any, of the poet” (4). Wilbur’s elegy fulfils this function, finding justification for the life of the poet whose loss is mourned, and in so doing establishing the continuing significance of this most ancient of poetic forms *and* of his own value as a poet. It forges a new poetry of mourning appropriate to the postwar American suburbs. These silent spaces (hence the “sshhh of sprays” in stanza three, the “muted horn” of stanza four, and the “sleep of death” in stanza five) may not toll the resounding bell expected of the elegy, but they do produce a new kind of threnody—one that is quiet, subtle, and deceptively effective. This suburbanite (the speaker) has recognized the poet’s death, and has commemorated it. The dead poet can “save [his] breath” in the final line of the poem in part because the surviving poet has taken up his song.

Conclusion: The Song of the Suburbs

Implicit in these suburban elegies—as indeed in many of the other poems discussed in *The Poetics of the American Suburbs*—is a profound self-reflexivity. Philip Nicholson's question with which this book opened, "Who sings the songs of suburbia? Where is its poet?" has clearly exercised the poets themselves, many of whom (like Nemerov, like Wilbur, even like McGinley) have assumed the role with some ambivalence and with a degree of self-consciousness about the implications of aligning themselves, and their work, with such a place. Many of the commentators and critics discussed earlier in this book regarded postwar suburbia as a "cultureless" place (Mumford 493) and, implicitly, as an unlikely home for poetry. The taint has persisted long beyond the moment which is the main focus of this study. Writing in 1985, Von Hallberg expresses some surprise at the fact that Robert Pinsky's *An Explanation of America* "proceeds from a suburban perspective." Pinsky, he notes, "constructs a compelling account of his nation with very little reference to the chief metropolis, and without a touch of embarrassment at being suburban" (238–9). He likewise, observes—in apparent awe at her daring—that Mona Van Duyn "makes no secret of being a suburban housewife" (229). Alan Filreis has recently proposed of Anne Sexton's poem "The Expatriates" that its setting is "merely a literal suburban locale for those trapped in a state-supported rapid retreat from heresy and difference" ("The End" 511). His reading of the poem itself may be persuasive, but his categorization of the suburban setting as "merely" literal begs several questions. Is it possible to have a "merely" literal suburbia? Do the suburbs not always signify in some figurative way—in poetry and in the critical discourse alike (exemplified, in Filreis's case by the deployment of the image of the "suburban" as a way of connoting or figuring dullness and mundanity)? Against such a background, it is little surprise that the poetry of the postwar American suburbs is persistently troubled by the apparent impossibility of its own project. How might one find and develop a meaningful poetic and a receptive readership in a context thought to be anathema to such an endeavor?

Song

The self-consciousness that necessarily emerges in the face of such a challenge is evident in a number of poems spanning the period of my study that implicitly compare their own utterances with those of the suburban song bird. There is, of course, a long tradition of such metaphorical associations; the lyric utterances of the poet and the sound of the bird have often been compared. What modern suburban poets do differently is that they use the image of the apparently out-of-place bird (the bird in the suburbs) in order to explore and ultimately to resolve their own sense of disconnection and unease.

Kenneth Rexroth's 1940 poem "Gic to Har" (*Collected Shorter* 108) is profoundly self-reflexive and deeply interrogative in its examination of the potential place of the poet in the suburbs. It uses the metaphor of the bird (specifically, the rose Grosbeak, a bird common to eastern states and suburban areas) whose song he hears during a moment of writerly frustration to explore the creative possibilities—and conversely, limitations—of this new, suburban context.[1] With the rose Grosbeak as model and inspiration, how might one develop a suburban poetic voice?

"GIC to HAR" opens with the poet/speaker depicted in the immediate present as he struggles to read and write against the distractions of suburban modernity, signified by the distant thumping sound of "freight cars and switch engines." He turns to the encyclopedia, specifically to the volume that covers "GIC to HAR," and serendipitously comes across the entry for the Grosbeak. This find inspires a detailed recollection of his first actual sighting of the bird, a memory that unites landscape, sunlight, trees ("a sycamore" adjacent to an old farmhouse), and bird in a thrilling, joyful, synaesthetic, and deeply symbolic pattern. This, he recalls, was "one of the great things / Of my life." Suburban change, and the demands of the present, cannot efface this experience—an experience that, as the poem evidences, has continued to inspire the poet's own song into the present day, even against the forces that are shown in the final lines of the poem to be stacked against him (proliferating "factories" with their attendant garbage, redundant farmland now made over to low-grade suburban development, depleted lawns, and the "aggressive" starlings that have displaced the native birds of the poet's recollection).

W. D. Snodgrass's sustained 30-stanza poem "A Cardinal" (from his first and acclaimed 1959 collection, *Heart's Needle*) similarly posits a speaker/poet self-consciously trying to reconcile and then to exploit the developed suburban landscape, and the vestiges of the natural world still apparent at its margins (*Selected* 21–6). Snodgrass was born in Pennsylvania in 1926; he served in the US Navy during World War II (an experience implicit in this poem) before taking up a succession of teaching posts at Universities including Iowa and Syracuse. The speaker of "A Cardinal" situates himself at the outset in wartime housing thrown up for the sake of expediency:

I wake late and leave
the refurbished Quonset
where they let me live.
I feel like their leftovers:
they keep me for the onset
of some new war or other.

In a sardonic and skeptical nod towards transcendentalism's promise, the speaker sets off for the woods in search of some kind of inspiration or succor. Armed with "half a ream of paper / and fountain pens," he finds himself trapped in a corrupted, postpastoral landscape that is caught between the golf links and a college campus and littered with trash. Searching for the muse, he detects only the rhythms and routines of postwar suburban life; of distant industry ("in town, across the way, / mill whistles squeal"); of transportation ("a freight car's wheels; / / out on the super turnpike," "cattle trucks and trailers," the "county airport"); and of a nascent military-industrial complex readying itself for action:

the college air cadets
are on their grinder, marching,
counting out their cadence,
one two three four, creating
for the school and market
the ground bass of our credo—

faith in free enterprise
and our unselfish forces
who chant to advertise
the ancient pulse of violence.

The relentless rhythms of the poem and the flat, descriptive idiom exemplify the extent to which the speaker is oppressed almost into silence by his environment. Unexpectedly, release comes in the form of the song of the red cardinal bird (kin to the rose Grosbeak of Rexroth's poem). From the red cardinal, the poet/speaker learns the value of resistance and the worth of his own lyric which, he realizes, can be deployed for more than merely giving marching orders, sloganeering, or advertising. Snodgrass's poem is thus a modern, suburban reworking of Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale." The red cardinal connects the speaker with the source of his creativity, or with his own voice. In spite of the encroachments of a modern consumerist society, in spite of the creeping development of the suburbs, and in spite of his own feeling of marginalization or displacement, the cardinal and, by extension the poet, continues to sing. As the poem defiantly concludes, even though "Each year the city leaves / less of trees or meadows," the birds persist, and thrive:

> All bugs, now, and the birds
> witness once more their voices
> though I'm still in their weeds
> tracking my specimen words,
> replenishing the verses
> of nobody else's world.

Silence

Other poems are less persuaded by the potential of this new environment to nurture their poetic voice. Indeed, in many of the poems discussed thus far, from McGinley's "Occupation: Housewife" to Wilbur's "To an American Poet Just Dead," the defining features are the duplicity, slipperiness, uncertainty, or even absence of voice. Philip Levine's long, contemplative poem, "Silent in America," (*Selected* 22–9) is implicitly set in a suburban retreat which is coded as such by the opening metaphor of a "pane // of clear glass," by the constant play of a lawn sprinkler, by the male speaker's disempowerment in "a house of / garrulous children," and, most importantly, by his sense of himself as alienated, out of place, and devoid of agency. For Levine, modern American (suburban) life is characterized by a profound and persistent aporia; the poem closes with the reiteration and thus confirmation of the "silent / in America" of the title. Yet the poignancy and subtlety of the poem's evocation of this failure of language, communication, and meaning precisely refutes its own premise. "Silent in America," in speaking of silence, dispels it. "Silent in America," like many of the other poems discussed in this book, displays a deep, and ultimately stimulating, uncertainty about what the suburbs might mean, about how they might speak, about what song they might sing. In every case, in addressing or engaging with a suburbia that is elsewhere roundly indicted for its stultifying, alienating, and disempowering propensities, the poet both risks and extends his or her own voice, simultaneously questioning and asserting the clarity and conviction of the song.

These risks are engaged in Carolyn Kizer's wonderful poem "The Suburbans," originally published in her first (1961) collection *The Cool Garden*, as it looks for evidence of a suburban muse and tests the possibilities of a distinctive suburban poetic voice. The poem opens with the absence or failure of communication, with forgetfulness and with silence, but this is immediately countermanded by an appeal to the "nightingale"—the iconic symbol of poetic inspiration—for some kind of spark or affirmation. "The Suburbans" does several subtle and strategic things at once. First, it replicates and thus confirms a reading of suburbia as a synthetic, insubstantial, and cultureless place; stanza one describes it as being "cardboard-sided," and topped by "fake weathervanes" and television "antennae." Second, and simultaneously, it establishes a tension between the free and infinite pleasures of poetry and the deathly restrictions of suburban space with its "wrought-iron" flourishes and "ironed land like cemeteries":

> Forgetting sounds that we no longer hear—
> Nightingale, silent for a century:
> How touch that bubbling throat, let it touch us
> In cardboard-sided suburbs, where the glades
> And birds give way to lawns, fake weathervanes
> Topping antennae, or a wrought-iron rooster
> Mutely residing over third-class mail?—
> We live on ironed land like cemeteries,
> Those famous levellers of human contours.

Third, it asserts and demonstrates—again, against the odds—the power of poetic utterance, even in this least expected of places, hence the subtly crafted performative in line three which, in effect, brings this place to life and to voice: "Let it touch us." Thus the opening stanza concedes the apparent limitations of suburban space, establishes a dialectic between the allegedly silent suburbs and poetic voice, and out of this encounter begins to forge a new suburban poetic.

Kizer's poem is not, though, solely a contemplation of how one might, as a poet, thwart the stultifying forces of suburbia and find one's poetic calling. More subtly, and more intriguingly, "The Suburbans" proposes a devastating critique of the banality and predictability of any such move. In other words, it is not so much a poem about the difficulty of writing poetry about the suburbs as it is a poem about other poems that pursue such a line, and about the predictability and finally the vanity of their preoccupations. It plays the part of disaffected suburban poet and in so doing exposes the performativity of that identity. The American home in this period has widely been described as theatricalized (Spigel and Mann 4) and as a stage set (Saegert 600); the suburban poet is arguably stepping into a similar role. This is a part that requires only the display of what Bennett Berger, writing in 1966, called the "visible symbols" of suburban life (picture windows, lamps, lawns, children, commuting) to appear convincing (98). Kizer's speaker carries off the role with considerable aplomb and to devastating effect.

Stanza three opens, "What common symbols dominate our work?" The possessive pronoun "Our" arguably stands for a generation of postwar poets and for the "suburbans" of the poem's title. The "common symbols," it transpires, are the images and metaphors seen earlier: the cardboard walls, the lawns, and the "ironed land," supplemented in this stanza by the "perpetual care" of the suburban householder and the environmental cost of the acquisitive suburbs (hence references to "garbage" and "industrial waste"). A domesticated natural world ("the passing of a cat" in stanza four is "All that remains of [William Blake's] tygers") corrupts literary and specifically poetic representation. The once volatile charge of the "tygers" (of poetry) is now trapped "in a cage / of tidy rhyme" and further untoothed by being collected in "anthologies! / A bridge between our Nature and our Time." The preoccupation with the fluid and mutable boundaries between the outside and the inside, seen in poets from Phyllis McGinley through Anne Sexton and John Ashbery to Richard Wilbur, is mocked in stanzas five and six where the insights ("goldfish gazes") afforded by the iconic picture window onto a banal and synthetic world seem barely worth a glance. The apparent narcissism of the suburban gaze is exposed as mediocre:

> Home is a picture window, and our globes
> Are mirrors too: we see ourselves outside.
> Afraid to become our neighbors, we revolt
> In verse: "This proves I am not the average man."
> Only the average poet, which is worse.

Kizer's speaker's scorn is precise and thus devastating, but in indicting the mannerisms of "the suburbans" she seems, finally, unable or unwilling to jettison them.

The nostalgia for an idealized and bucolic past that never was retains its hold on her imagination. This nostalgia, in Wendy Wheeler's terms, "turns us toward the idea of the individual as non-alienated, as knowing and being known by others in the commonality of the community which is identified as 'home'" (qtd. in Massey 51–2). In "The Suburbans" it is as if the presuburban past gives direct access to some kind of experiential truth untrammeled by the accouterments of modernity. The "nineteenth-century bard," stanza seven complains, "Might attitudinize, but his tears were free / And easy. He heard authentic birds."[2]

In the final stanza, though, we see that the grandeur and apparent authenticity of the past, although worlds apart from the compromises and deceptions of the present, are not necessarily any more viable a subject for poetry. In the suburban everyday, it transpires, might be found traces of narrative, some vestigial agency, and a poetic voice:

> We sprawl, although we neither pose nor pray,
> Compose our stanzas here, like that dead bard,
> But writing poems on poems. Gravely gay,
> Our limited salvation is the word. (*Cool, Calm* 23–5)

This magisterial poem encapsulates both the difficulties of achieving a suburban poetry, and the *perceived* difficulties of the same. And what it is particularly interested in are the gaps between the poetry and our perceptions of it. In the end, however, the question of whether the poem is saying that there is no obstacle to producing a poetics of the American suburbs (and that poets are self-seeking fools for pretending that there is), or that there is a barrier (and that poets are misguided in thinking that they can overcome it) is left tantalizingly unanswered.

Louis Simpson daringly, defensively, or cynically—depending on one's point of view—engages with a similar doubt about whether suburban living is commensurate with poetic creativity. His 1963 six-line poem "In the Suburbs" (appropriately enough, first published in *At the End of the Open Road*) asserts in its abrupt initial lines that:

> "In the Suburbs"
>
> There's no way out.
> You were born to waste your life. (*People* 70)

The run on between title and first line ("In the Suburbs // There's no way out") followed by the end-stopping of lines one and two, emphatic repetitions in the rest of the poem ("your life," "middle class life"), and the use of clanging monosyllables leave little room for interpretative maneuver. As

David Orr notes, in this collection in particular, Simpson has a tendency to deploy "a conspicuously flat surface and simple diction" (n. page). Suburbia here is akin to a prison, and suburban life a coercive ritual. Simpson's short, direct, exasperated poem reads as the final, frustrated outburst of an elite culture that feels itself to be under threat. Having said this, the poem is so obvious in its vilification of suburbia that we might step back just for a moment and ask whether, to an extent, it is a parody of the contemporary criticism of suburbia, which by this time was at its peak. Is Simpson's poem attacking suburbanites, or is it exposing the frenzy and the cynicism of contemporary cosmopolitan debate?

His 1971 poem "Sacred Objects" indicates the persistence of such arguments. The poem opens with a provocative declaration:

> I am taking part in a great experiment—
> whether writers can live peacefully in the suburbs
> and not be bored to death. (*People* 178–9)

As in Kizer's poem (and, indeed, his own earlier "In the Suburbs,") it is unclear whether Simpson is satirizing the suburbs, the suburban poet's obsession with his own marginality, or a critical orthodoxy that finds it difficult to credit the possibility of a suburban poetics. In the first section of this three-part poem, Simpson looks back to Whitman as a model for present-day vernacular speech, and to Eliot and Pound for contemporary poetry's interest in modernity. The second part of the poem finds comfort in a natural land-and-seascape, one that reconciles the speaker to himself and to some higher realm: "And the kingdom is within you," as the third stanza of the section declaims. The final section brings the action resoundingly down to earth and into the present day. The suburbs are emphatically marked by a drive-through restaurant (also featured in Kizer's "The Suburbans"), by the presence of automobiles (signaled by "the odor of gasoline and burning asphalt"), and, in the closing stanza, by a view of a picture window, representing constant surveillance:

> And at night when the passing headlights hurl
> shadows flitting across the wall,
> I sit in a window, combing my hair
> day in day out.

One might conclude from this that the suburban speaker/poet is trapped in a geographical and cultural limbo and that, to answer the poem's opening question, it is indeed impossible for a poet to live in the suburbs "and not be bored to death." On the other hand, the poem resists such a summation. "Sacred Objects" establishes through its own poetic processes, seemingly against the speaker's own better judgment, that it *is* possible to write a poetry of the suburbs. It transpires that the suburbs, as richly and synaesthetically evoked as they are in section three, are a more compelling stimulus and subject for poetry than the rather predictable literary allusions of section one and landscapes of section two. They are at once more vivid, more suggestive, and more present to the reader.

Postwar suburbia has been understood and depicted as a place where little of significance can be said, where there is a profound absence of meaning, where communication is stylized, superficial, muted almost into silence. Yet as the poems discussed in this study indicate, suburbia is replete with meaning. Its poetry is bold, innovative, and engaging—both formally and thematically—in its evocation of this space and time. Indeed, the suburbs we know are known to us, in part, because of the ways in which poetry has constituted and mediated them. In turn, this poetry shows the signs of its own discursive, spatial, and historical contexts. As Doreen Massey has argued, "Social space is not an empty arena within which we conduct our lives; rather it is something we construct and which others construct about us" (49). For Roger Silverstone, suburbia is a "geographical, an architectural and a social space," but it should also be understood as "an idea and ideology, as form and content of texts and images and as product of a multitude of social and cultural practices" (ix). Poetry, as this book has demonstrated, plays a vital—if until now overlooked—role in these processes. It offers a startling lens through which to view suburban landscape and architecture and to understand the nuances of the suburban everyday, and it demands of us that we read it with acuity and sensitivity. In its diversity and frequent ambiguity, poetry breaks the stranglehold of polarized thinking or, what Robert Beuka calls, "our continued cultural reliance on a restrictive binary system in defining the suburban milieu" (10). *The Poetics of the American Suburbs* has argued that the poetry of this time and place is critical, interrogative, evocative, expansive, and suggestive in turn. Most importantly, it is a poetry that is often skilful, occasionally luminous, always intriguing. The song it sings is sometimes familiar, sometimes subtle, sometimes discordant. As I hope this book has demonstrated, it deserves a hearing, and rewards attentive listening.

Notes

Introduction

1. See also Damon's interest in "poetry deemed aesthetically lacking or poetry that embraces a messy or unfinished aesthetic" (*Postliterary* 4–5).
2. Alan Read's edited collection *Architecturally Speaking: Practices of Art, Architecture and the Everyday* provide a useful overview of current debates: "For some time, the publishing of late modernism has been underpinned by geographical inquiry, while history has been superseded. Space, not time, has become the privileged domain. This volume recognizes this shift towards the spatial yet is critical of the valorization of space at the expense of the critical relations between temporality, built form and the performative dynamics of architecture within everyday life" (1).
3. Lefebvre illustrates his point with reference to the so-called Kitchen Debates of 1959 wherein Nixon and Khruschchev famously debated the pros and cons of the American versus Soviet way of life (Lefebvre 8–9, 45). He commends the work of American writers who have "been able to open their eyes to what is nearest to them—everyday life—and to find themes in it which amaze us by their violence and originality" (235).

1 Constructing the Suburbs

1. See Hayden, *Building*; Kelly; Gowans; Martinson; and Stilgoe for comprehensive accounts of suburban growth across the nineteenth century.
2. In place of heavy oak frames with complex carpentered joints, the "Balloon Frame," first used in Chicago in the early 1830s, needed only a framework of two-by-four posts joined by platform board floors, which helped to spread the structural stresses and thus ensure the integrity of the whole. See K. Jackson 125–7.
3. The increasing use of horse-drawn carts and streetcars from the mid-nineteenth century resulted in the daily depositing onto the streets of tons of manure. Jackson cites Joel Tarr's calculation that in 1907, Milwaukee's 12,500 horses might deposit up to 130 tons of manure per day (Jackson, *Crabgrass* 107).

4. For a critique of the rhetoric of separate spheres, see C. Davidson; Kerber; McHugh, and G. Matthews.
5. Automobile ownership also engendered novel forms of suburban development such as the "garage suburbs" that were prevalent around Detroit and Los Angeles in the 1920s. Settlers purchased land and then, when money allowed, erected a garage in which the family would reside while they took piecemeal paid work and began constructing their own more substantial homes. See Gowans 20; Nicolaides 12, 32.
6. Russell Lynes of *Harper's* wrote to McGinley in Feb. 1950 pitching an idea for an article: "There is good fun to be had in a piece on the servant problem these days, with special reference to the many families who are employing displaced persons (DPs) as a means of giving them a foothold in this country, at the same time that they cope with their domestic problems. This seems to be more of a suburban problem than an urban one. One of our editors tells us that the correspondence on this subject in the Scarsdale *Inquirer* is very good fun."
7. On de-centering as a consequence of the lessons learned during the war in Europe, see Stilgoe 301. For more on nuclear preparedness and civil defense see D. Nelson; Paul Williams; and Allan M. Winkler.
8. See K. Jackson 164ff for a history of road-construction materials.
9. Others included the Long Island Motor Parkway (1906–11); the Bronx River Parkway (1906–1923) and, in California, the "Arroyo Seco Parkway" (later the Passadena Parkway; conceived in 1911 but not completed until 1940) (K. Jackson 166–7).
10. The Merritt Parkway is only so named as it nears the Connecticut boundary; the section that goes through Scarsdale is the Hutchinson River Parkway.
11. In *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, Paul Kennedy observes that "'Rome fell; Babylon fell Scarsdale's turn will come'" (qtd. in Lawson-Peebles 33).
12. The lessons of wartime manufacturing processes, such as the use of economies of scale and mass-production techniques, were also instrumental to the emergence of the postwar suburbs (Miller and Nowak 44ff; Brennan; Phillips). It was in this context that Bill Levitt learned his trade; his company had held wartime contracts to supply the US military with semi-prefabricated housing for workers and had seen the commercial sense of dividing construction into multiple uniform and replicable stages, assembled by crews of noncraft, nonunion laborers ("Up from the Potato Fields").
13. See Packard, *The Waste Makers* for an account of some of the potential costs of such acquisitiveness. A. R. Ammons' *Garbage* (1993) explores similar territory. Costello reads *Garbage* as a "response to the awesome landscape of our discarded forms, and nature's own expenditure and waste" (17).
14. In fact, many women confounded the stereotype of suburban femininity by resuming paid employment outside the home, albeit usually at an inferior level. See Hayden, *Building* 147; Coontz 16; Miller and Nowak 162; Faludi 74.
15. See Jurca, *White Diaspora* for an extended reading of male self-pity in the fiction of the period.

16. Levitt installed Bendix washing machines, GE stoves and refrigerators, and Admiral Televisions as standard (Baxandall and Ewen 136). Levittown's ordinances prohibited hanging washing out to dry during the evenings or at weekends, that is, when men would be in residence.
17. See also Updike's poem "Wash" (*Telephone Poles* 44) and Wilbur's "Love Calls Us to the Things of This World" (*New and Collected* 233). The "Mixmaster" also appears in a number of poems including Louis Simpson's "Things" (*Selected* 135) and Josephine Miles's "Ride" (*Collected* 92).
18. See Dines for a reading of discourses of heteronormativity in contemporary suburban fiction.
19. Class was another important variable. Black periodicals such as *Ebony* deployed the same rhetoric and marketing strategies as did white periodicals in their attempt to sell to their readers the suburban dream (Wiese 99–119). See also Pattillo-McCoy.
20. As Wini Breines notes, black workers were present in the postwar suburbs as servants, nursemaids, gardeners, chauffeurs, and in other service jobs (49ff). See also Jurca, *White* 178 n. 21 and Gans, *Levittowners* 374.
21. Baldassare reiterates the point: "Suburban growth was driven by an 'invasion and succession' process in older, inner city neighborhoods. City areas became the destination points for recent, poor, immigrant workers…As a result of the 'invasion,' many of the long-term residents of these inner city areas moved to suburban areas further away from the central business district" (479–80, 482).
22. See O'Donnell for a useful reading of the "Suburban Eden" of Los Angeles.
23. The threat of violence met the first black residents of Levittown, Pennsylvania in 1958. For a first-person account of this incident, see Daisy D. Myers, "Reflections on Levittown."

2 Suburban Tastes

1. Harry Henderson notes of his Levittown and Park Forest interviewees: "Within the group, pressure to 'keep up with the Joneses' is felt most strongly…Many told me that they didn't want to 'get ahead, but we want to keep up with the others; we are all young and starting together and we don't want to fall behind'" ("Rugged" 80). Coontz suggests that because white-collar wages at this time were accelerating more slowly than those of blue-collar workers, some middle-class housewives entered paid employment "not so much to 'keep up with the Joneses' as to stay ahead of the O'Malleys" (162).
2. Denney has a poem "Since the Donkey-Tail Barometer: An Essay on American Weather-or-Noes" in the *Chicago Review* (Fall 1955). It draws on conventional images of suburbia (picture windows, parkways, elm trees, televisions) to suggest a distinction between authentic and synthetic experience of weather.
3. For James Gilbert, "the dispute over mass culture in the 1950s…was a struggle in which the participants were arguing over power—over who had the right and

responsibility to shape American culture" (7). See John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses* for a sustained account of the relationship between the two, albeit primarily in an English context.

4. See Lazere for an overview of the original *Partisan Review* debates and a fiftieth anniversary symposium on the same theme. For a useful summary of the context, see also Halliwell.
5. The decision to select two editors with such divergent views was an intentional one and reflects the disparity of contemporary opinions on these issues.
6. Abbott notes a similar schism in modernist poetry publishing between, for example, *Transition*'s motto "The plain reader be damned" and *Poetry*'s "To have great poets there must be great audiences too" (218–9).
7. From its inception in the late nineteenth century, the *Saturday Evening Post* aimed to be "the medium of an American consciousness . . . it was designed to reach audiences ignored by 'highbrow' magazines like *Harper's* and the *Atlantic*" (Cohn 9). With its sister periodical, the *Ladies' Home Journal* (founded in 1883), it "exemplified and conveyed to [its] readers a powerful and mutually reinforcing mix of gender and commerce that had come to characterize a significant segment of American popular culture by the turn of the century" (Damon-Moore 2). See Harrington, *Poetry* 31–49; Newcomb, "Out" 248ff; and Nye 119–22 for an account of poetry's circulation in magazines and newspapers in the late nineteenth-century and interwar years. See Scanlon and McCracken for an account of the declines of these periodicals later in the century.
8. Tebbel and Zuckerman report a fall in newsstand sales from 47 percent to 38 percent between 1947 and 1954 (245ff). The *Saturday Evening Post* folded in 1969. During the 1960s, television-advertising revenue rose more than two-fold, from $1.5 billion to $3.5 billion (Yagoda 364). In a 1954 profile of McGinley, Gerard Meyer notes the steadily declining market among these media: "Today the [newspaper] columns are gone, and of magazines hospitable to 'the worldly muse' only *The New Yorker* appears to make a point of it" (12).
9. Golding mentions an 1875 anthology that presented short poetry for the "'snatched leisure' of busy Americans" (*From Outlaw* 27). See also Rubin, *Making* on the Book of the Month Club and similar initiatives.
10. Hayden Carruth and Richard Wilbur are just two of the poets studied later who were educated under the GI Bill. See Wai n. page; Grimes n. page.
11. The role of Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren's 1938 study *Understanding Poetry* has widely been noted; guided by this manual to the New Critical practice, "great numbers of people could gain access to otherwise difficult works of literature" (Abbott 219). See also Allen and Tallman (x).
12. Ehrenreich and English; Grant; McHugh; and Leavitt have shown that motherhood was a particular object of scrutiny in this period with successive waves of childcare "experts" (sociologists, psychologists, doctors, educators) offering forceful and often contradictory advice.
13. In an April 1949 letter to Theodore Roethke, asking him for a contribution to the book, Ciardi explains that "the anthology is a highly selective one designed to represent the best poems of the better poets whose major work falls into the

forties, and to present, insofar as possible, the working principles of versification that hold sway" (*Selected Letters* 54). Sales of the book, unfortunately, did not live up to Ciardi's expectations. In a subsequent (January 1953) letter to Roethke he notes "*Mid-Century Poets* has more or less petered-out" (84).

14. See McGowan, *Anne Sexton and Middle Generation Poetry* for a more recent deployment of this label.
15. Updike dissents from Auden's definition in a 1982 review of Donald Davie's *The New Oxford Book of Christian Verse* (*Hugging* 647). Richard Eberhart's poem "Poetry and Games" finds fault with both "lightweight" and "heavyweight" poets, but reserves its strongest contempt for "middleweight poets" who, it alleges, lack "gall" (*Collected* 387–8).
16. Packard cites as the epigraph to chapter 10 of *The Status Seekers* the observation that: "The upper classes LIVE in a HOUSE . . . use the TOILET, THE PORCH, LIBRARY, or PLAYROOM. The middle classes RESIDE in a HOME . . . use the LAVATORY, the VERANDA, DEN, or RUMPUS ROOM" ([Packard's emphasis] 126). For evidence of the use and popularity of these spaces, see Katz 79 and Leavitt 181.

3 The "Poet Laureate" of Suburbia

1. With the exception of Linda Wagner's early (1971) study of McGinley in the Twayne United States Authors series, her work has appeared only as an aside, for example, in Beuka's *SuburbiaNation*, in Stephen Burt's *Forms of Youth: Twentieth-Century Poetry and Adolescence*, and in Nancy Walker's work on women's humour in American culture. There is insufficient space here to explore in full the reasons for McGinley's decline in reputation; in brief, though, factors include: her choice of genre (light verse); economic factors; her relationship as proud defender of the suburbs with a metropolitan literary elite; and her gender or, more accurately, her marginalization by male coteries and by a nascent feminist movement.
2. Unpublished material from the McGinley archive held in the Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Library, is referenced parenthetically by brief description; further details are given in the Works Cited.
3. The title is ironic given the lyrics of Malvina Reynold's well-known song "Little Boxes" (1963). "Little Boxes" gave rise to the term "ticky tacky," thereafter widely used as a dismissal of the design and culture of the suburbs. See Hine 44; Rubey xii.
4. McGinley's first *The New Yorker* poem was "To A Reckless Lady's Ghost" (23 January 1932: 32) and her last was "A Dream of Gifties" (9 July 1960: 30).
5. Joelle Bielle's recent edition, *Elizabeth Bishop and* The New Yorker*: The Complete Correspondence*, offers a wonderful insight into the magazine's editorial practices and relationship with its poets during this time.
6. Dorothy Parker claims to have made a similar decision: "my verse is terribly dated—as anything once fashionable is dreadful now. I gave it up, knowing it

wasn't getting any better, but nobody seemed to notice my magnificent gesture" (*Paris Review* 108).

7. McGinley was pragmatic about this motive. Parker claimed a similar defense. Asked in an interview about the "source of most of her work" she replied: "Need of money, dear" (*Paris Review* 109).
8. There are various ways of computing the current value of historic income. I have used the conservative "Consumer Bundle" tariff; an alternative method would be to calculate the value in terms of share of GDP per capita. This would give a figure of $163 today for a $2.50 fee in 1937. See http://www.measuringworth.com/uscompare/. Accessed 20 May 2010.
9. See also Meyerowitz for an interesting reading of Friedan's work in its contexts.
10. Friedan quotes a June 1960 article in the *New York Times* that observes of dissatisfied, college-educated housewives: '"Like a two-headed schizophrenic . . . once she wrote a paper on the Graveyard poets; now she writes notes to the milkman"' (*Feminine* 20).
11. See also Sexton's 1971 poem "The Taker" (*Complete* 490). For a detailed reading of Sexton's suburban poetics see Gill, *Anne Sexton's Confessional Poetics* 56–82.
12. In a 1955 letter to her mother, she describes advances in her own writing and vows "Some day Phyllis McGinley will hear from me. They can't shut me up" (*Letters* 156–7). By late March of 1958, though, Plath is attempting to throw off the influence: "I think I have written lines which qualify me to be The Poetess of America . . . Who rivals? Well, in history, Sappho, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Christina Rossetti, May Lowell, Emily Dickinson, Edna St. Vincent Millay—all dead. Now: Edith Sitwell & Marianne Moore, the aging giantesses & poetic godmothers. Phyllis McGinley is out—light verse: she's sold herself" (*Journals* 360).
13. John Coolidge was the son of President Calvin Coolidge, and, for a time, a railroad executive. See http://www.nytimes.com/2000/06/04/us/john-coolidge-guardian-of-president-s-legacy-dies-at-93.html?pagewanted=3&src=pm. Accessed 23 Dec. 2010.
14. The Northern State Parkway, for example, was designed with underpasses deliberately too low to permit public buses to travel under them, thereby restricting access to still-unspoilt land outside the city to the affluent few who could afford an automobile. See Berman 298–9. For a detailed account of Moses' life and times, see Caro.
15. In an undated [December 1963?] letter to her daughter Patsy Blake (née Hayden) about her unfounded worries about the sales of one of her books, McGinley writes: "I was born on Saturday and have always worked hard for a living and never expected easy money—it's not in my stars."
16. See Rotskoff for a compelling reading of alcohol abuse in postwar suburban culture.
17. Similar renderings of male acquiescence to female domination figured in contemporary cartoon representations in *The New Yorker*. See Corey 155; Yagoda 276ff.

18. The title "Occupation: Housewife" is taken up by Friedan (*Feminine* 39, 180). McGinley's poem was first published in *The New Yorker* of 13 July 1946 under this title. It was renamed "Executive's Wife" in *A Short Walk From the Station* (1951) and then reverts to its original title in *Times Three* (1960).
19. In *This Demi-Paradise: A Westchester Diary*, Margaret Halsey makes comic mileage from the visit to her suburban home of one opinion pollster and notes, in particular, the pollster's shock that the family didn't subscribe to any periodicals: "'Why-I-never-heard-of-such-a-thing!' she exclaimed, all in one breath […] 'In an American family'" (20).
20. Jean Kerr was a friend and Larchmont neighbor. See Kerr, "Our Gingerbread House" for an illustrated article about her home and lifestyle.
21. For a more detailed reading of McGinley's complex relationship vis-à-vis contemporary feminism and anti-feminism see Gill, "'Quite the opposite of a feminist'".
22. As a Roman Catholic herself, McGinley would likely have had personal experience of similar kinds of social exclusion. See Paul Giles, *American Catholic Arts and Fictions* for an account of the literary and cultural mediation of Roman Catholicism across the twentieth century.
23. See McGinley's contemporary, Robert Hillyer's *The Suburb by the Sea: New Poems* for similar evocations of this idyllic scene. McConnell argues of postwar American poetry in general that "the poet in America has really never gotten closer to the center of things" than the "Suburbs of Camelot." "If it is not an especially honorable position, at least it is not a particularly disgraceful one. It is rather, as country folk say, a middling spot" (80).
24. A contemporary poem, "The Ballade of Lost Objects" (first published in *The New Yorker* on 3 October 1953) also regrets the losses that accumulate, seemingly inevitably, with the passing of time. The poem suggests a model for Elizabeth Bishop's much better known "One Art" (*New Yorker* 26 April 1976). See Gill, "'Phyllis McGinley Needs No Puff'" for more on both poems.

4 Suburban Landscapes

1. For compelling first-person accounts of the growth of California see David Beers, *Blue Sky Dream* and Joan Didion, *Where I Was From*.
2. Becky Nicolaides' *My Blue Heaven* offers a detailed critique of the rise of the working-class suburbs of California. See also Sloane.
3. For examples of these photos and a note on their origins, see Waldie, *Holy Land*. The children's book *Our House: The Stories of Levittown* includes one child's memories of a photographer visiting the new development, as it was being built, and climbing a water tower in order to take a night photograph of the area from above (Conrad 12–21).
4. See also Mohr and Mossin. For an interview with Miles, see Pinsker.
5. Zofia Burr further argues that feminist criticism baulked at Miles's use of conventional poetic form which they regarded as ineffective in the struggle against

patriarchal hegemony and that Miles's disability (she lived with arthritis from childhood) prevented able-bodied women readers from identifying with her poetics (80, 91–2).

6. This version of "Exile" (from *Old and New Poems*) is not to be confused with the six-line poem "Exile," later collected as part of a loose sequence under the plural title "Exiles" in the 1969 book *The Alligator Bride* (6).
7. According to Packard, within a decade, 805 of the 1280 families who had settled in "one Long Island development" had moved on (*Status* 31). Robert Putnam calculates that 20 percent of the population moved each year during the 1950s (205). See Costello on the literary legacy of this "nomadic turn" (1).
8. On its first publication in the *Kenyon Review*, the poem was given the date 1955 and subtitled "to my father" (433).
9. See Baer and Gesler for a reading of therapeutic landscapes in *Catcher,* and Alex Beam, "The Mad Poets' Society" for an account of the history of Boston's suburban asylum of choice, McLean Hospital, which was built on land chosen by Frederick Law Olmsted, who also died there.
10. Booth was born in New Hampshire in 1925 and spent his childhood in Maine. He served in World War II in the US Air Force and, on his return, studied at Columbia. He later taught at Wellesley College and Syracuse University. His first and award-winning collection, *Letters from a Distant Land*, appeared in 1957.
11. Howard Nemerov's "Enthusiasm for Hats" and Lincoln Kirstein's "Western" (1967 and 1966 respectively) similarly portray acute mental breakdown within the context of a suffocating domesticity.

5 The Look of the Suburbs

1. See Archer "Colonial Suburbs in South Asia, 1700–1850" and King "Excavating the Multicultural Suburb" on the influence of South Asian architecture.
2. Suburban consumerism was facilitated by the building of malls on the peripheries of housing developments, a process helped by generous tax concessions (Hayden, *Building* 168–70).
3. See also John Frederick Nims' "Madrigal" in Ciardi, *Mid-Century* 128.
4. Hayden notes that Bentham's Panopticon was originally conceived as a solution to housing shortages (*Redesigning* 156).
5. Renowned as a poet and critic, Jarrell was born in Nashville but grew up in South California; he served in World War II, studied under John Crowe Ransom and then took up a succession of teaching posts including at Kenyon College, Sarah Lawrence, and Princeton (McGowan 284, 70). "Windows" was first collected in his seventh book, *The Woman at the Washington Zoo* (1960).
6. For an overview of "the suburban gothic" see Murphy.
7. Berger speculates that: "A good part of the peculiar susceptibility of suburbia to the manufacture of myth probably lies in the fact that a large supply of visible

symbols are ready at hand. Picture windows, patios and barbecues, power lawn mowers, the problems of commuting, and the armies of children manning their mechanized vehicles down the sidewalks, are not only secondarily facts; primarily they are symbols whose function is to evoke an image of a way of life for the nonsuburban public" (98).

8. For a cultural history of the American lawn, see Ted Steinberg, *American Green*.
9. This is not only a postwar phenomenon. Woodbury's 1930 essay "Retreat from Suburbia" roundly excoriates her suburban neighbors for their obeisance to the maintenance of their homes and gardens: "every man is a slave to his lawnmower and every housewife is a slave to white painted surfaces" (571).
10. See Raymond Williams *The Country and the City* for an extended account of such associations.
11. John Lennard's *Poetry Handbook*, interestingly, defines "Urban Pastoral" in terms that invoke suburbia—although he does not pursue the point: "a loose but suggestive generic label for modern poetry of suburban domesticity and streetscapes, industrial sociology, and civil recreation" (388).
12. See Allen, "Big Change" 26 for an account of the filmic ("Technicolor") appeal of the Californian suburban lifestyle.

6 On the Margins

1. Andrew Hoberek's *The Twilight of the Middle Class* offers an interesting cultural history of the period albeit one that focuses exclusively on fictional accounts.
2. Gail Cunningham regards the commute itself as a liminal space wherein the traveler is suspended in space and time (19). See Updike's poem "Pendulum" for a striking poetic rendering of the experience (*Carpentered* 79).
3. See also James Wright's "Miners," which similarly depicts death by drowning as an appropriately suburban fate (*Branch* 24).
4. For Bachelard, writing in *The Poetics of Space*, "the lamp in the window is the house's eye." It keeps watch, perpetually vigilant, signifying "a house that is looking out" (3).
5. Levine was born in Detroit, Michigan in 1928 (a city that thrived in the early years of the century, but declined with international competition in the automobile industry and experienced extreme civil unrest in the 1960s at the same time as a ring, or "noose" of suburbs began to tighten) (qtd. in O'Hagan 14). He lived for much of his adult life in Fresno, California. For more on Detroit see K. Jackson 165ff and Sugrue.
6. The point replicates Randall Jarrell's complaint about Wilbur's "safer, paler emulators" (qtd. in Rasula 191). See Jensen and Wilbur for a fuller overview of critical responses to Wilbur's work.
7. James Longenbach names the dead poet as Phelps Putnam (75).

Conclusion: The Song of the Suburbs

1. The cardinal or Grosbeak is prolific across the Eastern Seaboard of the United States, in part because it has adapted well to new suburban environments. It is notable for its clear and fluent song, for its striking color (in the case of the male of the species), and is unique in being the native bird of seven states (Illinois, Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky, Virginia, West Virginia, and North Carolina). For more, see www.whatbird.com and www.nationalgeographic.com. Accessed 29 October 2010.
2. Another poem from the same period, Kizer's "Plaint of the Poet in an Ignorant Age" similarly concedes and mocks its own nostalgia. The first stanza opens "I would I had a flower-boy! / I'd sit in the mid of an untamed wood / Away from tame suburbs beyond the trees" but the poem locates its energy, ultimately, in the words of today's "poetry-boy," the "bottle-cap king" of pop culture, voice of the no-place suburbs who calls "Thudding from the garden, 'What do you call / The no-bird that sings in the no-name tree?" (57–8).

Works Cited

Abbott, Craig S. "Modern American Poetry: Anthologies, Classrooms, and Canons." *College Literature* 17.2–3 (1990): 209–21. Print.

Adams, Franklin P., ed. *The Conning Tower Book*. New York: Macy-Masius, 1926. Print.

Albaugh, Dorothy P. "Lines to an Architect." *Saturday Evening Post* 2 Mar. 1946: 69. Print.

Allen, Donald M., ed. *The New American Poetry*. New York: Grove P, 1960. Print.

Allen, Donald M. and Warren Tallman, eds. *The Poetics of the New American Poetry*. New York: Grove P, 1973. Print.

Allen, Frederick Lewis. "At Home, Five to Seven-Thirty." *Harper's* June 1949: 99–100. Print.

———. "The Big Change in Suburbia, Part 1." *Harper's* June 1954: 21–8. Print.

Ammons, A. R. *Garbage: A Poem*. New York and London: Norton, 1993. Print.

Archer, John. "Colonial Suburbs in South Asia, 1700–1850, and the Spaces of Modernity." Silverstone 26–54. Print.

———. "Country and City in the American Romantic Suburb." *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 42.2 (1983): 139–56. Print.

———. "Suburbia and the American Dream Home." Rubey 9–24. Print.

Ashbery, John. *The Double Dream of Spring*. New York: Dutton, 1970. Print.

———. *Selected Poems*. New York: Penguin, 1986. Print.

Auden, W.H. ed. *The Oxford Book of Light Verse*. 1938. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1979. Print.

———. "Foreword." *Times Three: Selected Verse from Three Decades* by Phyllis McGinley. New York: Viking, 1960. ix–xvi. Print.

Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places*. 1958. Foreword John R. Stilgoe. Boston: Beacon P, 1994. Print.

Baer, Leonard D. and Wilbert M. Gesler. "Reconsidering the Concept of Therapeutic Landscapes in J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*." *Area* 36.4 (2004): 404–13. Print.

Balakian, Peter. *June-tree: New and Selected Poems 1974–2000*. New York: Harper Collins, 2001. Print.

Baldassare, Mark. "Suburban Communities." *Annual Review of Sociology* 18.1 (1992): 475–94. Print.

Baxandall, Rosalyn and Elizabeth Ewen. *Picture Windows: How the Suburbs Happened*. New York: Basic Books, 2001. Print.

Beam, Alex. "The Mad Poets' Society." *Atlantic Monthly* 288.1 (2001): 96–103. Print.

Bean, Heidi and Mike Chasar. *Poetry after Cultural Studies*. Iowa City: U Iowa P, 2011. Print.

Beautyrest Mattresses. Advertisement. *Ladies' Home Journal* Feb. 1945: 159. Print.

Beecher, Catharine E. and Harriet Beecher Stowe. *The American Woman's Home, Or, Principles of Domestic Science; Being a Guide to the Formation and Maintenance of Economical, Healthful, Beautiful, and Christian Homes*. New York: J.B. Ford and Co., 1869. Print.

Beers, David. *Blue Sky Dream: A Memoir of America's Fall from Grace*. New York: Doubleday, 1996. Print.

Bell Telephones. Advertisement. *Harper's Magazine* Jan. 1955: 1. Print.

Bellafante, Ginia. "Suburban Rapture." *New York Times* 28 Dec. 2008. New York Edn.: BR23. Online at http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/28/books/review/Bellafante-t.html. Accessed 29 July 2010. Web.

Benjamin, Walter. *The Arcades Project*. Trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin. Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap P, 1999. Print.

Berger, Bennett M. *Working-Class Suburb: A Study of Auto Workers in Suburbia*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: U California P, 1968. Print.

Berman, Marshall. *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*. London: Verso, 1983. Print.

Beuka, Robert. *SuburbiaNation: Reading Suburban Landscape in Twentieth-Century American Fiction and Film*. New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. Print.

Biele, Joelle, ed. *Elizabeth Bishop and* The New Yorker: *The Complete Correspondence*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011. Print.

Bishop, Elizabeth. "One Art." *The New Yorker* 26 Apr. 1976: 40. Print.

Bishop, Morris. "The Case for Light Verse." *Harper's Magazine* Mar. 1954: 32–4. Print.

Blair, Sara. "Cultural Geography and the Place of the Literary." *American Literary History* 10.3 (1998): 544–67. Print.

Bliven, Bruce. "The California Culture." *Harper's Magazine* Jan. 1953: 33–40. Print.

Bly, Robert. *The Light Around the Body*. London: Rapp and Whiting, 1968. Print.

Bogan, Louise. *Collected Poems*. London: Peter Owen, 1956. Print.

———. *A Poet's Prose: Selected Writings of Louise Bogan*. Ed. Mary Kinzie. Athens, Ohio: Swallow P / Ohio UP, 2005. Print.

Booth, Philip. "Red Brick." *The Sewanee Review* 64.4 (1956): 612. Print.

Bowden, James H. "Summer in the Suburbs." *College English* 29.8 (1968): 636. Print.

Bracken, Peg. “The Happy Householder Reconverts.” *Saturday Evening Post* 18 May 1946: 95. Print.

Brain, Tracy. *The Other Sylvia Plath*. Harlow: Longman, 2001. Print.

Breines, Wini. *Young, White, and Miserable: Growing Up Female in the Fifties*. Boston: Beacon P, 1992. Print.

Brennan, Annmarie. “Forecast.” Colomina et al 55–90. Print.

Bressler, Marvin. “To Suburbia, With Love.” *Public Interest* 10 (1968): 97–103. Print.

Brinnin, John Malcolm. “Dachau.” Field, *Geography* 370–2. Print.

Brooks, Cleanth and Robert Penn Warren. *Understanding Poetry: An Anthology for College Students*. Revd. Complete Edn. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1950.

Brooks, Gwendolyn. *Annie Allen*. 1949. Westport: Greenwood P, 1971.

———. “McGinley – Sing a Song to Suburbia.” *Chicago Sun-Times* 11 October 1959, sec. 3: 4. Print.

Brunner, Edward. *Cold War Poetry*. Urbana and Chicago: U Illinois P, 2001. Print.

Bryant, Marsha. “Ariel’s Kitchen: *Ladies’ Home Journal* and the Domestic Surreal.” *The Unraveling Archive: Essays on Sylvia Plath*. Ed. Anita Helle. Ann Arbor: U Michigan P, 2007. 211–35. Print.

———. *Women’s Poetry and Popular Culture*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. Print.

Burr, Zofia. *Of Women, Poetry and Power: Strategies of Address in Dickinson, Miles, Brooks, Lorde and Angelou*. Urbana and Chicago: U Illinois P, 2002. Print.

Burt, Stephen. *The Forms of Youth: Twentieth-Century Poetry and Adolescence*. New York: Columbia UP, 2007. Print.

———. “Sonic or Topographical Poetry”. Martiny 598–613. Print.

Buzzelle, Burge. “Heat ‘N’ Eat.” *Wall Street Journal* 2 May 1956: 12. Print.

Calhoun, Charles W., ed. *The Gilded Age: Essays on the Origins of Modern America*. Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1996. Print.

Campbell, Neil. *The Cultures of the American West*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2000. Print.

Carey, John. *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880–1939.* London: Faber and Faber, 1992. Print.

Caro, Robert A. *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York*. New York: Vintage, 1975. Print.

Carruth, Hayden. “The Asylum.” *Poetry* 91.4 (1958): 219–24. Print.

C.B. Letter to Phyllis McGinley. 27 October 1962. Syracuse. Box 26. TS.

Charters, Ann. “Beat Poetry and the San Francisco Poetry Renaissance.” *The Columbia History of American Poetry*. Ed. Jay Parini and Brett C. Millier. New York: MJF Books, 1993. 581–604. Print.

Chasar, Mike. “The Business of Rhyming: Burma-Shave Poetry and Popular Culture.” *PMLA* 125.1 (2010): 29–47. Print.

———. “Material Concerns: Incidental Poetry, Popular Culture, and Ordinary Readers in Modern America.” C. Nelson, *Oxford Handbook* 301–30. Print.

Cheever, John. *Collected Stories*. London: Vintage, 1990. Print.

Chin, Marilyn. "Translating Self: Stealing from Wang Wei, Kowtowing to Hughes, Hooking up with Keats, Undone by Donne." *After Confession: Poetry as Autobiography*. Ed. Kate Sontag and David Graham. Saint Paul, Minn: Graywolf P, 2001. 305–16. Print.

Christian, George. "John Updike Says a Novelist's Job is…Like Peeping." J. Plath 164–75. Print.

Ciardi, John. ed. *Mid-Century American Poets*. New York: Twayne, 1950. Print.

———. *The Collected Poems of John Ciardi*. Ed. Edward M. Cifelli. Fayetteville and London: U Arkansas P, 1997. Print.

———. *The Selected Letters of John Ciardi*. Ed. Edward M. Cifelli. Fayetteville and London: U Arkansas P, 1991. Print.

Clampitt, Amy. *Archaic Figure*. London: Faber and Faber, 1988. Print.

———. *What the Light Was Like*. New York: Knopf, 1985. Print.

Clark, Suzanne. *Sentimental Modernism: Women Writers and the Revolution of the Word*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1991. Print.

Cohn, Jan. *Creating America: George Horace Lorimer and the Saturday Evening Post*. Pittsburgh, PA: U Pittsburgh P, 1989. Print.

Collins, Billy. *Sailing Alone Around the Room: New and Selected Poems*. New York: Random House, 2001. Print.

Colomina, Beatriz. *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*. Cambridge, MA and London: MIT P, 1994. Print.

Colomina, Beatriz, Annmarie Brennan and Jeannie Kim, eds. *Cold War Hot Houses: Inventing Postwar Culture from Cockpit to Playboy*. NY: Princeton Architectural P, 2004. Print.

Conrad, Pamela. *Our House: The Stories of Levittown*. New York: Scholastic, Inc., 1995. Print.

Coontz, Stephanie. *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*. Revd. edn. New York: Basic Books, 2000. Print.

Cooper, Lee E. "Spurt in Building of Homes Due Here: Upsurge in Activity Expected Quickly After Order to End All Other Construction." *New York Times* 27 Mar. 1946: 18. Print.

Cordery, Stacy A. "Women in Industrializing America." Calhoun 111–35. Print.

Corey, Mary F. *The World Through a Monocle: The New Yorker at Midcentury*. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard UP, 1999. Print.

Costello, Bonnie. *Shifting Ground: Reinventing Landscape in Modern American Poetry*. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard UP, 2003. Print.

———. "John Ashbery's Landscapes." *The Tribe of John: Ashbery and Contemporary Poetry*. Ed. Susan M. Schultz. Tuscaloosa: U Alabama P, 1995. 60–80. Print.

Cowan, Ruth Schwartz. *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave*. New York: Basic Books, 1983. Print.

Creadick, Anna. *Perfectly Average: The Pursuit of Normality in Post-war America*. Amherst and Boston: U Massachusetts P, 2010. Print.

Cross, Gary. "The Suburban Weekend: Perspectives on a Vanishing Twentieth-Century Dream." Silverstone 108–31. Print.

Cunningham, Gail. "London Commuting: Suburb and City, the Quotidian Frontier." *London Eyes: Reflections in Text and Image*. Gail Cunningham and Stephen Barber, eds. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007. 7–25. Print.

Damon, Maria. *Postliterary America: From Bagel Shop Jazz to Micropoetries*. Iowa City: U Iowa P, 2011. Print.

Damon, Maria and Ira Livingston, eds. *Poetry and Cultural Studies: A Reader*. Urbana and Chicago: U Illinois P, 2009. Print.

Damon-Moore, Helen. *Magazines for Millions: Gender and Commerce in the Ladies' Home Journal and the Saturday Evening Post, 1880–1910*. Albany: State U of New York P, 1994. Print.

Davidson, Cathy. 'Preface: No More Separate Spheres!' *American Literature* 70.3 (1998): 443–63. Print.

Davidson, Ian. *Ideas of Space in Contemporary Poetry*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. Print.

Davidson, Michael. *Ghostlier Demarcations: Modern Poetry and the Material Word*. Berkeley: U California P, 1997. Print.

———. *Guys Like Us: Citing Masculinity in Cold War Poetics*. Chicago and London: U Chicago P, 2004. Print.

———. *The San Francisco Renaissance: Poetics and Community at Mid-Century*. Cambridge and NY: Cambridge UP, 1989.

De Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Trans. Steven Rendall. Berkeley: U California P, 1984. Print.

Deedy, John. "The Poet Laureate of Suburbia." *US Catholic-Jubilee* Dec. 1969: 22–7. Print.

De Witt, Henry and Geoffrey Clark. "An Interview with Richard Yates." *Ploughshares* 1.3 (1972): 65–78. Print.

Denney, Reuel. "Since the Donkey-Tail Barometer: An Essay on American Weather-or- Noes." *Chicago Review* 9.3 (1955): 10–12. Print.

Dickstein, Morris. *The Gates of Eden: American Culture in the Sixties*. New York: Basic Books, 1977. Print.

Didion, Joan. *Where I Was From*. London: Flamingo, 2003. Print.

Dines, Martin. *Gay Suburban Narratives in American and British Culture*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2009. Print.

Dobriner, William M. *Class in Suburbia*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1963. Print.

Doherty, Thomas. *Cold War, Cool Medium: TV, McCarthyism, and American Culture*. New York: Columbia UP, 2003. Print.

Donaldson, Scott. *The Suburban Myth*. New York and London: Columbia UP, 1969. Print.

Doty, Mark. "The 'Forbidden Planet of Character': The Revolutions of the 1950s." *A Profile of Twentieth-Century American Poetry*. Ed. Jack Myers and David Wojahn. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois UP, 1991. 131–57. Print.

Douglas, Kirk. Letter to Phyllis McGinley. 15 February 1964. Syracuse. Box 8. TS.

Downing, Andrew Jackson. *Cottage Residences, or, a Series of Designs for Rural Cottages and Cottage-Villas, and their Gardens and Grounds. Adapted to North America*. New York and London: Putnam, 1842. Print.

DuPlessis, Rachel Blau. "Social Texts and Poetic Texts: Poetry and Cultural Studies." Nelson, *Oxford Handbook* 53–70. Print.

———. "'Hoo, Hoo, Hoo': Some Episodes in the Construction of Modern Male Whiteness." Damon and Livingston 310–32. Print.

Duncan, Nancy G. and James S. "Deep Suburban Irony: The Perils of Democracy in Westchester County, New York." Silverstone 161–79. Print.

Eberhart, Richard. *Collected Poems: 1930–1986.* New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988. Print.

Ehrenreich, Barbara. *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight From Commitment*. Garden City, NY: Anchor P / Doubleday, 1983. Print.

Ehrenreich, Barbara and Deirdre English. *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts' Advice to Women*. Garden City, NY: Anchor P / Doubleday, 1978. Print.

Elliott, George P. *Fifteen Modern American Poets*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1956. Print.

Empson, William. *Some Versions of Pastoral*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1935. Print.

Ettin, Andew V. *Literature and the Pastoral*. New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1984. Print.

Ewen, Stuart and Elizabeth Ewan. *Channels of Desire: Mass Images and the Shaping of American Consciousness*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982. Print.

Faludi, Susan. *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1992. Print.

Feder, Lillian. "Poetry from the Asylum: Hayden Carruth's The Bloomingdale Papers." *Literature and Medicine* 4 (1985): 112–27. Print.

Fenton, James. *An Introduction to English Poetry*. London: Viking, 2002. Print.

Field, Edward, ed. *A Geography of Poets: An Anthology of the New Poetry*. New York: Bantam, 1979. Print.

Filreis, Alan. *Counter-Revolution of the Word: The Conservative Attack on Modern Poetry 1945–1960*. Chapel Hill: U North Carolina P, 2008. Print.

Fishman, Robert. *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia*. NY: Basic Books, 1987. Print.

Fleischman, F. W. Letter to Phyllis McGinley. 20 January 1937. Syracuse. Box 17. TS.

Fletcher, Angus. *A New Theory for American Poetry: Democracy, the Environment, and the Future of Imagination*. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard UP, 2004. Print.

Forbes, Deborah. *Sincerity's Shadow: Self-Consciousness in British Romantic and Mid-Twentieth-Century American Poetry*. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard UP, 2004. Print.

Ford Cars. Advertisement. *Ladies' Home Journal* April 1945. Print.

Ford, Edsel. "On a Warm Winter Day, on a Residential Street." *The Massachusetts Review* 3.3 (1962): 518–9. Print.

Ford, Mark, ed. *The New York Poets: An Anthology*. Manchester: Carcanet, 2004. Print.

Freud, Sigmund. *Civilization, Society and Religion: Group Psychology, Civilization and its Discontents and Other Works*. Penguin Freud Library 12. ed. Albert Dickson. Trans James Strachey. Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1985. Print.

Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. 1963. Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1982. Print.

———. *The Second Stage*. London: Michael Joseph, 1982. Print.

Friedberg, Anne. *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern*. Berkeley, CA: U California P, 1993. Print.

Friedman, Alice T. *Women and the Making of the Modern House: A Social and Architectural History*. New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2006. Print.

Fromm, Erich. *The Sane Society*. 1955. London: Routledge, 2002. Print.

Fussell, Paul. *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form*. 1965. Revd. edn. New York: Random House, 1979. Print.

Galbraith, John Kenneth. *The Affluent Society*. 1958. New edn. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987. Print.

Gallagher, James. "After Hours: That Lived In Look." *Harper's Magazine* Feb. 1958: 80–1. Print.

Gans, Herbert J. *The Levittowners: Ways of Life and Politics in a New Suburban Community*. London: Allen Lane, 1967. Print.

———. *Popular Culture and High Culture: An Analysis and Evaluation of Taste*. New York: Basic Books, 1974. Print.

Gersten, Irving. "Introduction and Summation." Lynch and Evans 3–16. Print.

Gibbs, Barbara. "California, An Ode." *Poetry* 91.3 (1957): 152–6. Print.

Giedion, Sigfried. *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition*. 5th edn. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1967. Print.

Gilbert, James. *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s*. New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986. Print.

Gilbert, Joseph. *Walks in the World: Representation and Experience in Modern American Poetry*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991. Print.

Giles, Judy. *The Parlor and the Suburb: Domestic Identities, Class, Femininity and Modernity*. New York: Berg, 2004. Print.

Giles, Paul. *American Catholic Arts and Fictions: Culture, Ideology, Aesthetics*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992. Print.

Gill, Jo. *Anne Sexton's Confessional Poetics*. Gainesville, FL: UP Florida, 2007. Print.

———. "'Phyllis McGinley Needs No Puff': Gender and Value in Mid-Century American Poetry." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*. Forthcoming. Print.

———. "'Quite the Opposite of a Feminist': Phyllis McGinley, Betty Friedan and Discourses of Gender in Mid-Century American Culture." *Women's History Review* 22.3 (2013): 422–39. Print.

Golding, Alan. *From Outlaw to Classic: Canons in American Poetry*. Madison, WI: U Wisconsin P, 1995. Print.

———. "'The New American Poetry' Revisited, Again." *Contemporary Literature* 39.2 (1998): 180–211. Print.

Goldman, Michael. "The Plane Coming In, Jerking to Land." *The Massachusetts Review* 9.3 (1968): 441. Print.

Golffing, F. C. "A Remarkable New Talent." *Poetry* 71.4 (1948): 221–3. Print.

Gordon, Richard E., Gordon, Katherine K. and Gunther, Max. 1960. *The Split-Level Trap*. New York: Bernard Geis, 1960. Print.

Gowans, Alan. *The Comfortable House: North American Suburban Architecture 1890–1930*. Cambridge, MA and London: MIT P, 1986. Print.

Grant, Julia. *Raising Baby by the Book: The Education of American Mothers*. New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1998.

Gries, John M. and James Ford, eds. *Negro Housing: Report of the Committee on Negro Housing*. Nannie H. Burroughs, Chairman. 1932. New York: Negro UP, 1969. Print.

Grimes, William. "Hayden Carruth, Poet and Critic, Dies at 87." *New York Times*, 1 October 2008. New York Edn.: C12. Online at http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/01/books/01carruth.html. Accessed 11 December 2010. Web.

Haar, Charles M. *The End of Innocence: A Suburban Reader*. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman & Co., 1972. Print.

Hall, Donald. *The Alligator Bride: Poems New and Selected*. New York: Harper and Row, 1969. Print.

———. *A Blue Wing Tilts at the Edge of the Sea: Selected Poems 1964–1974*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1975. Print.

———. "Christmas Eve in Whitneyville, 1955." *Kenyon Review* 20.3 (1958): 433–5. Print.

———. *The Dark Houses*. New York: Viking, 1958. Print.

———. "The New Poetry." *New World Writing* 7 (1954): 230–47. Print.

———. *Old and New Poems*. New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1990. Print.

Hall, Donald, ed. *Contemporary American Poetry*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962. Print.

Hall, Donald and Michael O'Siadhail. "Interview with Donald Hall." *The Poetry Ireland Review* 28 (1990): 6–15. Print.

Hall, Donald, Robert Pack and Louis Simpson, eds. *New Poets of England and America*. Intro. Robert Frost. New York: Meridian, 1957. Print.

Halliwell, Martin. *American Culture in the 1950s*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2007. Print.

Halsey, Margaret. *This Demi-Paradise: A Westchester Diary*. New York: Avon, 1960. Print.

Hammer, Philene. "The Lady's Not for Broiling." *Saturday Evening Post* 1 August 1959: 34. Print.

Hansberry, Lorraine. *Raisin in the Sun* and *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*. New York: Signet, 1966. Print.

Harmon, William, ed. *The Oxford Book of American Light Verse*. New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1979. Print.

Harrington, Joseph. *Poetry and the Public: The Social Form of Modern US Poetics*. Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 2002. Print.

———. "Poetry and the Public: The Social Form of Modern US Poetics." Damon and Livingston 266–84. Print.

Harris, Dianne, ed. *Second Suburb: Levittown, Pennsylvania*. Pittsburgh: U Pittsburgh P, 2010. Print.

Hartley, John. "The Sexualisation of Suburbia: The Diffusion of Knowledge in the Postmodern Public Sphere." Silverstone 180–216. Print.

Hayden, Dolores. *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820–2000*. New York: Vintage, 2003. Print.

———. *Redesigning the American Dream: The Future of Housing, Work, and Family Life*. Revd. and Expanded edn. New York: Norton, 2002. Print.

Henderson, Harry. "The Mass-Produced Suburbs: I. How People Live in America's Newest Towns." *Harper's Magazine* Nov. 1953: 25–32. Print.

———. "Rugged American Collectivism: The Mass-Produced Suburbs, Part II." *Harper's Magazine* Dec. 1953: 80–6. Print.

Herd, David. *John Ashbery and American Poetry*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2003. Print.

Hillyer, Robert. *The Suburb by the Sea*. New York: Knopf, 1952. Print.

Hine, Thomas. *Populuxe*. New York: Knopf, 1986. Print.

Hoberek, Andrew. *The Twilight of the Middle Class: Post-World War II American Fiction and White Collar Work*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2005. Print.

Hofstadter, Richard. *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*. 1963. New York: Knopf, 1970. Print.

Hollander, John. *Selected Poetry*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993. Print.

Horowitz, Daniel. *The Anxieties of Affluence: Critiques of American Consumer Culture,1939–1979*. Amherst and Boston: U Massachusetts P, 2004. Print.

———. *Vance Packard and American Social Criticism*. Chapel Hill and London: U North Carolina P, 1994. Print.

Howard, Jane. "Can a Nice Novelist Finish First?" J. Plath 9–17. Print.

Howells, William Dean. *Suburban Sketches*. 1871. Stroud, Glos: Nonsuch Publishing, 2005. Print.

Hughes, Langston. "Suburban Evening." *The Crisis* 74.3 (April 1967): 131. Print.

Igo, Sarah. *The Averaged American: Surveys, Citizens, and the Making of a Mass Public*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2007. Print.

Isenstadt, Sandy. *The Modern American House: Spaciousness and Middle Class Identity*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP, 2006. Print.

Jackson, Kenneth. *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985. Print.

Jackson, Shirley. *Life Among the Savages*. New York: Perma Books, 1955. Print.

Jacobs, Jane. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities: The Failure of Town Planning*. 1961. London: Pelican, 1965. Print.

Jacobson, Emile. Letter to Phyllis McGinley. 26 Jan. 1966. Syracuse. Box 5. TS.

———. Letter to Phyllis McGinley. 20 Mar. 1969. Syracuse. Box 5. TS.

Jacobson, Joanne. *Hunger Artist: A Suburban Childhood*. Huron, Ohio: Bottom Dog P, 2007. Print.

Jarrell, Randall. *Poetry and the Age*. 1955. London: Faber and Faber, 1973. Print.

———. "Windows." *Poetry* 84.6 (1954): 313–4. Print.

Jensen, Ejner. J. and Richard Wilbur. "Encounters with Experience: The Poems of Richard Wilbur." *The New England Review* 2.4 (1980): 594–613. Print.

Jurca, Catherine. *White Diaspora: The Suburb and the Twentieth-Century American Novel*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton UP, 2001. Print.

———. "Tales of the Suburb." Rubey 171–9. Print.

Justice, Donald. "On a Painting by Patient B of the Independence State Hospital for the Insane." *Poetry* 85.2 (1954): 90–1. Print.

Kaledin, Eugenia. *Mothers and More: American Women in the 1950s*. Boston: Twayne, 1984. Print.

Katz, Donald. *Home Fires: An Intimate Portrait of One Middle-Class Family in Postwar America*. New York: HarperCollins, 1992. Print.

Keats, John. *The Crack in the Picture Window.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1956. Print.

Keats, John. *The Poetical Works of John Keats*. Ed. H.W. Garrod. London: Oxford UP, 1956. Print.

Kelly, Barbara M. *Expanding the American Dream: Building and Rebuilding Levittown*. Foreword William R. Taylor. Albany: State U of NY P, 1993. Print.

———, ed. *Suburbia Re-Examined*. New York, Westport, Conn. and London: Greenwood P, 1989. Print.

Kerber, Linda. "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Women's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History." *The Journal of American History* 75.1 (June 1988): 9–39. Print.

Kerr, Jean. "Our Gingerbread House." *Ladies' Home Journal* Nov. 1955: 181–93. Print.

Kimmel, Michael. *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*. New York: Free P, 1996. Print.

King, Anthony D. "Excavating the Multicultural Suburb: Hidden Histories of the Bungalow." Silverstone 55–85. Print.

Kirstein, Lincoln. "Western." *The Hudson Review* 19.3 (1966): 391–2. Print.

Kizer, Carolyn. *Cool, Calm and Collected: Poems 1960–2000*. Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon P, 2001. Print.

Kozlovsky, Roy. "Beat Spaces." Colomina et al 190–215. Print.

Kruse, Kevin M. and Thomas J. Sugrue. "The New Suburban History." *The New Suburban History*. Chicago and London: U Chicago P, 2006. 1–10. Print.

Ktsanes, Thomas and Leonard Reissman. "Suburbia: New Homes for Old Values." *Social Problems* 7.3 (Winter 1959–60): 187–95. Print.

Kunstler, James Howard. *The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America's Man-Made Landscapes*. New York and London: Simon and Schuster, 1993. Print.

"The Lady in Larchmont." *Newsweek* 26 Sept. 1960: 120. Print.

Lamb, Charles M. *Housing Segregation in Suburban America since 1960*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005. Print.

Larrabee, Eric. "The Six Thousand Houses that Levitt Built." *Harper's Magazine* Sept. 1948: 79–88. Print.

Lawson-Peebles, Robert. "American Ideas of Landscape." *Modern American Landscapes*. Ed. Mick Gidley and Robert Lawson-Peebles. Amsterdam: VU UP, 1995. 17–29. Print.

Lazere, Donald. "'Partisan Review', Our Country and Our Culture." *College English* 67.3 (2005): 296–310. Print.

Leavitt, Sarah. *From Catharine Beecher to Martha Stewart: A Cultural History of Domestic Advice*. Chapel Hill and London: U North Carolina P, 2002. Print.

Lecklider, Aaron. "Inventing the Egghead: The Paradoxes of Brainpower in Cold War American Culture." *Journal of American Studies* 45.2 (2011): 245–65. Print.

Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of Everyday Life*. Vol 1. Trans. John Moore. Pref. Michael Trebitsch. London: Verso, 1991. Print.

Leslie, Andrew. Rev. of *Times Three*, by Phyllis McGinley. *The Guardian* 17 Nov. 1961: n.p.

Levertov, Denise. "Merritt Parkway." Allen, *New American* 61–2. Print.

Levine, Lawrence W. *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1988. Print.

Levine, Neil. *The Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright*. Princeton NJ, Princeton UP, 1996. Print.

Levine, Philip. *On the Edge*. Iowa City: Second P, 1964. Print.

———. *Selected Poems*. London: Secker and Warburg, 1984. Print.

Lewis, James. "A Poet of the Suburbs." *College English* 34.6 (1973): 864–5. Print.

Lewis, Sinclair. *Babbitt*. 1922. Charleston, SC: Bibliobazaar, 2006.

———. *The Man From Main Street: Selected Essays and Other Writings of Sinclair Lewis*. Ed. Harry E. Maule and Melville H. Cane. London: Heinemann, 1954. Print.

Lipsitz, George. *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture*. Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 1990. Print.

Long, Elizabeth-Ellen. "A Place in the Country." *Ladies' Home Journal* Nov. 1950: 206. Print.

Longenbach, James. *Modern Poetry After Modernism*. New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997. Print.

Lowell, Robert. *Life Studies*. 1959. London: Faber and Faber, 1985. Print.

Lundberg, Ferdinand and Marynia F. Farnham. *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex*. New York and London: Harper and Brothers, 1947. Print.

Lynch, James J. and Bertrand Evans. *High School English Textbooks: A Critical Examination*. Boston: The Council for Basic Education / Little Brown, 1963. Print.

Lynes, Russell. Letter to Phyllis McGinley. 23 February 1950. Syracuse. Box 10. TS.

McConnell, Frank D. "The Suburbs of Camelot." *The Wilson Quarterly* 7.3 (1983): 80–93. Print.

McCracken, Ellen. *Decoding Women's Magazines: From Mademoiselle to Ms.* Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993. Print.

Macdonald, Dwight. "A Theory of Mass Culture." Rosenberg and Manning White 59–73. Print.

McGann, Jerome. "Contemporary Poetry: Alternate Routes." *Critical Inquiry* 13.3 (1987): 624–47. Print.

McGinley, Phyllis. Atlanta Book Fair. Unpublished draft speech. 1948. Syracuse. Box 47. TS.

———. *Cosmopolitan* Book Club. Untitled transcript of talk. 2 Mar. 1954. Syracuse. Box 47. TS.

———. Draft introduction to an unidentified reading. n.d.; n.p. Syracuse. Box 47. TS.

———. Draft speech to an unidentified Larchmont Society. n.d.; n.p. Syracuse. Box 47. TS.

———. Journal entries. [?] 1949; 17 December 1949; 9 January 1950; [?] May 1950; [?] 9 Feb. 1951. Syracuse. Box 47. MS.

———. Kappa Kappa Gamma Convention. Transcript of speech. July 1952. Syracuse. Box 47. TS.

———. "Larchmont's Mrs Charles Hayden (Phyllis McGinley) Makes Lyric Capital out of Common Irritants." *County Life* June 1948: 15–17. Print.

———. Letters to Patsy and Richard Blake. 14 Oct. 1963; n.d. [Aug? 1963]; 6 Nov. 1963; n.d. [Dec. 1963?]; 18 Aug. 1964. Syracuse. Box. 1. MS.

———. Letter to Louis Untermeyer. 9 Dec. 1960. Syracuse. Box 22. TS.

———. Letter to Linda Wagner. 11 Mar. 1968. Syracuse. Box 23. TS.

———. Letter to Mr Whipple [*Life Magazine*]. 1 Feb. 1956. Syracuse. Box 13. TS.

———. *The Love Letters of Phyllis McGinley*. New York: Viking, 1954. Print.

———. "The New American Family." *Saturday Evening Post* 13 July 1968: 26–32. Print.

———. *On the Contrary*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1934. Print.

———. *One More Manhattan*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1937. Print.

———. *A Pocketful of Wry*. New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1940. Print.

———. *The Province of the Heart*. New York: Viking, 1959. Print.

———. *A Short Walk From the Station*. Illus. Roberta Macdonald. New York: Viking, 1951. Print.

———. *Sixpence in her Shoe*. New York: Macmillan, 1964. Print.

———. *Stones from a Glass House*. New York: Viking, 1946. Print.

———. "The Telltale Hearth." *Time*. 18 June 1965: 74–8. Print.

———. *Times Three: Selected Verse from Three Decades with Seventy New Poems*. Foreword W. H. Auden. New York: Viking, 1960. Print.

———. "Why We Teach." Undated ts draft. Syracuse. Box 42. TS.

McGowan, Philip. *Anne Sexton and Middle Generation Poetry: The Geography of Grief.* Westport, Conn. and London: Praeger, 2004. Print.

McHugh, Kathleen Anne. *American Domesticity: From How-to Manual to Hollywood Melodrama*. New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999. Print.

McNamara, Kevin, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of Los Angeles*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010. Print.

McWilliams, Carey. "Look What's Happened to California." *Harper's Magazine* Oct. 1949: 21–9. Print.

Mack, Rachel. "Song of the Suburbs." *Ladies' Home Journal* July 1955: 14. Print.

Marling, Karal Ann. *As Seen on TV: The Visual Culture of Everyday Life in the 1950s*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1994. Print.

Martinson, Tom. *American Dreamscape: The Pursuit of Happiness in Post-war Suburbia*. NY: Carroll and Graf, 2000. Print.

Martiny, Eric, ed. *A Companion to Poetic Genre*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012. Print.

Marx, Groucho. Letter to Phyllis McGinley. 11 Mar. 1965. Syracuse. Box 14. TS.

Marx, Leo. *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*. New York: Oxford UP, 1964. Print.

Massey, Doreen. "Space-time and the politics of location." Read 49–61. Print.

Matthews, Glenna. *"Just a Housewife": The Rise and Fall of Domesticity in America.* New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987. Print.

Matthews, Kristin L. "One Nation Over Coals: Cold War Nationalism and the Barbecue." *American Studies* 50.3–4 (2009): 5–34. Print.

Matthiessen, F.O. Ed. *The Oxford Book of American Verse*. New York: Oxford UP, 1950. Print.

May, Elaine Tyler. *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. Revd. edn. NY: Basic Books, 1999. Print.

Mercado, Carol L. "Large in Livability, Small in Size." *Ladies' Home Journal* Aug. 1955: 100. Print.

Meredith, William. "Trees in a Grove"; "Rus in Urbe." *The Hudson Review* 1.4 (1949): 500–1. Print.

Meyer, Gerard Previn. "Urbane Suburbanite." Rev. of *The Love Letters of Phyllis McGinley* by Phyllis McGinley. *Saturday Review* 18 Sept. 1954: 11–12. Print.

Meyerowitz, Joanne. "Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946–58." *Journal of American History* 79.4 (1993): 1455–82. Print.

Michailidou, Artemis. "Edna St Vincent Millay and Anne Sexton: The Disruption of Domestic Bliss." *Journal of American Studies* 38.1 (2004): 67–88. Print.

Michelson, Bruce. *Wilbur's Poetry: Music in a Scattering Time*. Amherst: U Massachusetts P, 1991. Print.

Mikkelsen, Ann Marie. *Pastoral, Pragmatism, and Twentieth-Century American Poetry*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. Print.

Miles, Josephine. *Collected Poems 1930–1983*. Urbana and Chicago: U Illinois P, 1983. Print.

———. "Panther." *Kenyon Review* 18.1 (1956): 21. Print.

———. *Prefabrications*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1955. Print.

———. *To All Appearances: Poems New and Selected*. Urbana and Chicago: U Illinois P, 1974. Print.

Miller, Nancy A. "The General Motors Technical Center: Material Innovation and Corporate Image in the Suburban Landscape." Rubey 55–62. Print.

Miller, Douglas T. and Marion Nowak, *The Fifties: The Way We Really Were.* Garden City, NY: 1975. Print.

Mitchell, Julian. "Sprinkler in the Suburbs." *The Sewanee Review* 69.2 (1961): 269–70. Print.

Mohr, Bill. "Scenes and Movements in Southern California Poetry." McNamara 157–66. Print.

Moss, Howard. *Selected Poems*. New York: Atheneum, 1971. Print.

Mossin, Andrew. "'In Thicket': Charles Olson, Frances Boldereff, Robert Creeley and the Crisis of Masculinity at Mid-Century." *Journal of Modern Literature* 28.4 (2005): 13–39. Print.

Mumford, Lewis. *The City in History: Its Origins, its Transformations, and its Prospects.* 1961. London: Pelican, 1966. Print.

Murphy, Bernice. *The Suburban Gothic in American Popular Culture*. Palgrave: Macmillan, 2009. Print.

Myers, Daisy D. "Reflections on Levittown." Harris 41–59. Print.

Myers, John A. "Death in the Suburbs." *English Journal* 52.5 (1963): 377–9. Print.

Nelson, Cary. *Our Last First Poets: Vision and History in Contemporary American Poetry*. Urbana and Chicago: U Illinois P, 1981. Print.

———. *Repression and Recovery: Modern American Poetry and the Politics of Cultural Memory 1910–1945*. Madison: U Wisconsin P, 1989. Print.

———. Ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Modern and Contemporary American Poetry.* Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012. Print.

Nelson, Deborah. *Pursuing Privacy in Cold War America*. NY: Columbia UP, 2002. Print.

Nemerov, Howard. *The Collected Poems of Howard Nemerov.* Chicago and London: U Chicago P, 1977. Print.

———. *Mirrors and Windows: Poems*. Chicago: U Chicago P, 1958. Print.

Newcomb, John Timberman. "Out with the Crowd: Modern American Poets Speaking to Mass Culture." C. Nelson, *Oxford Handbook* 248–67. Print.

———. *Would Poetry Disappear? American Verse and the Crisis of Modernity.* Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2004. Print.

Newman, William J. "Americans in Subtopia." *Dissent* (Summer 1957): 255–66. Print.

Nickles, Shelley. "More is Better: Mass Consumption, Gender, and Class Identity in Post-war America." *American Quarterly* 54.4 (2002): 581–622. Print.

Nicholson, Philip Y. "The Elusive Soul of the Suburbs: An Inquiry into Contemporary Political Culture." Kelly, *Suburbia Re-Examined* 207–13. Print.

Nicolaides, Becky M. *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920–1965*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 2002. Print.

Nye, Russell. *The Unembarrassed Muse: The Popular Arts in America*. New York: Dial, 1970. Print.

Oates, Joyce Carol. *Expensive People*. 1968. London: Virago, 1998. Print.

"The One-Room Apartment." *Ladies' Home Journal* Mar. 1955: 211. Print.

O'Donnell, Patrick. "Post-war Los Angeles: Suburban Eden and the Fall into History." McNamara 59–73. Print.

O'Hagan, Sean. "Ruins of the American Dream." *The Observer* 2 Jan. 2011. Review Section: 12–15. Print.

Orr, David. "Allegories in Suburbia." *New York Times*. 21 September 2003. Online at http://www.nytimes.com/2003/09/21/books/allegories-in-suburbia.html?ref=bookreview. Accessed 19 July 2010. Web.

Orr, Peter, ed. *The Poet Speaks*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967. Print.

Ostler, Stacey, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to John Updike*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006. Print.

Owen, Louise Goyol. "Gold Grows on Trees." *McCall's* Sept. 1961: 206. Print.

Packard, Vance, *The Status Seekers*. 1959. Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1961. Print.

———. *The Waste Makers*. New York: Pocket Books, 1969. Print.

Panetta, Roger. "The Rise of the Therapeutic Suburb: Child Care in Westchester County, New York, 1880–1920." Rubey 63–77. Print.

Parker, Dorothy. Interview with Marion Capron. *The Paris Review Interviews: Women Writers at Work*. Ed. George Plimpton. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1998. 101–16. Print.

Parsons, Deborah. *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000. Print.

Pattillo-McCoy, Mary. *Black Picket Fences: Privilege and Peril Among the Black Middle Class*. Chicago and London: U Chicago P, 1999. Print.

Peach, Arthur W. "Farmhouse Abandoned." *Saturday Evening Post* 23 Mar. 1946: 68. Print.

Perloff, Marjorie. *The Dance of the Intellect: Studies in the Poetry of the Pound Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985. Print.

"Personal and Otherwise." *Harper's Magazine* Sept. 1948: 10. Print.

Petry, Ann. *The Street*. 1946. London: Virago, 1986. Print.

Phillips, Siobhan. *The Poetics of the Everyday: Creative Repetition in Modern American Verse*. New York: Columbia UP, 2010. Print.

Phillips, Stephen. "Plastics." Colomina et al 91–123. Print.

Pickering, Sam. "American Light Verse and Original Seriousness." *The Sewanee Review* 88.4 (1980): xcvii–xcviii. Print.

Pinsker, Sanford. *Conversations with Contemporary American Writers*. Atlanta: Editions Rodopi, 1985. Print.

Plath, James, ed. *Conversations with John Updike*. Jackson: UP Mississippi, 1994. Print.

Plath, Sylvia. *Collected Poems of Sylvia Plath*. Ed. Ted Hughes. London: Faber and Faber, 1981. Print.

———. *The Journals of Sylvia Plath: 1950–1962*. Ed. Karen V. Kukil. London: Faber and Faber, 2000.

———. *Letters Home: Correspondence 1950–1963*. Ed. Aurelia Plath. London: Faber and Faber, 1976. Print.

Pollock, Griselda. *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and Histories of Art*. London and New York: Routledge, 1988. Print.

Pratt, Richard. "Easy to Live In." *Ladies' Home Journal* Jan.1945: 116. Print.

Pratt, William W. "We Must Have Homes." *Saturday Evening Post* 9 Mar. 1946: 100. Print.

Putnam, Robert D. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York and London: Simon and Schuster, 2000. Print.

Quinney, Laura. *The Poetics of Disappointment: Wordsworth to Ashbery*. Charlottesville and London: UP Virginia, 1999. Print.

Ramazani, Jahan. *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney*. Chicago and London: U Chicago P, 1994. Print.

Rasula, Jed. *The American Poetry Wax Museum: Reality Effects 1940–1990*. Urbana, Ill.: National Council for Teachers of English, 1996. Print.

Read, Alan, ed. *Architecturally Speaking: Practices of Art, Architecture and the Everyday*. London and New York: Routledge, 2000. Print.

Read, Elizabeth K. "No Place to Live." *Saturday Evening Post* 16 Feb. 1946: 20, 118–20. Print.

Reston, Sally. "John Updike Works Three Hours and Poses as a Vacationer." *Vineyard Gazette* 3 May 1968. Rpr. in J. Plath 18–21. Print.

Rexroth, Kenneth. *The Collected Shorter Poems*. New York: New Directions, 1966. Print.

———. *World Outside the Window: The Selected Essays of Kenneth Rexroth*. New York: New Directions, 1987. Print.

Riesman, David. "The Suburban Dislocation." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 314 (1957): 123–46. Print.

Riesman, David, Reuel Denney and Nathan Glazer. *The Lonely Crowd*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1950. Print.

Rose, Tricia. "Black Texts / Black Contexts." Damon and Livingston 195–8. Print.

Rosenberg, Bernard. "Mass Culture in America." Rosenberg and Manning White 3–12. Print.

Rosenberg, Bernard and David Manning White, eds. *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America*. New York: The Free P, 1957.

Ross, Kristin. "Rimbaud and the Transformation of Social Space." Damon and Livingston 248–65. Print.

Rotskoff, Lori. *Love on the Rocks: Men, Women and Alcohol in Post-World War Two America*. Chapel Hill and London: U North Carolina P, 2002. Print.

Rubey, Daniel, ed. *Redefining Suburban Studies: Searching for New Paradigms*. Hofstra: National Center for Suburban Studies, 2009. Print.

Rubin, Joan Shelley. *The Making of Middlebrow Culture*. Chapel Hill and London: U North Carolina P, 1992. Print.

———. *Songs of Ourselves: The Uses of Poetry in America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2007. Print.

Sacks, Peter. *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1985. Print.

Saegert, Susan. “Masculine Cities and Feminine Suburbs: Polarized Ideas, Contradictory Realities.” *Women and the American City*. Ed. Catharine R. Stimpson, Elsa Dixler, Martha J. Nelson and Kathryn B. Yatrakis. Chicago and London: U Chicago P., 1981. 93–108. Print.

Salinger, J. D. *The Catcher in the Rye*. 1945–6. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994. Print.

Salzman, Jack. Ed. *The Cambridge Handbook of American Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986. Print.

Scanlon, Jennifer. *Inarticulate Longings: The Ladies' Home Journal, Gender and the Promises of Consumer Culture*. New York and London: Routledge, 1995. Print.

Schwartz, Delmore. *The Selected Essays of Delmore Schwartz*. Ed. Donald A. Dike and David H. Zucker. Foreword Dwight Macdonald. Chicago and London: U Chicago P, 1970. Print.

———. *What is to be Given: Selected Poems*. Intro. Douglas Dunn. Manchester: Carcanet, 1976. Print.

Seager, Ralph W. “Owed to the Country Road.” *Saturday Evening Post* 12 Sept. 1959: 55. Print.

Sexton, Anne. *Anne Sexton: A Self-Portrait in Letters*. Eds. Linda Gray Sexton and Lois Ames. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979. Print.

———. *The Complete Poems*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981. Print.

———. “The Last Believer.” *No Evil Star: Selected Essays, Interviews and Prose*. Ed. Steven E. Colburn. Ann Arbor: U Michigan P, 1985. 18–22. Print.

———. Letter to Phyllis McGinley. 2 Apr. 1966. Syracuse. Box 20. TS

Shapiro, Karl. “Aubade.” Field, *Geography* 103. Print.

Shapiro, Laura. *Something from the Oven: Reinventing Dinner in 1950s America*. New York: Penguin, 2004. Print.

Shields, Rob. *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity*. London and New York: Routledge, 1991. Print.

Silverstone, Roger. ed. *Visions of Suburbia*. London: Routledge, 1997. Print.

Simpson, Louis. *At the End of the Open Road*. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan UP, 1967. Print.

———. *The Owner of the House: New Collected Poems, 1940–2001*. Rochester, NY: BOA Editions, 2003. Print.

———. *People Live Here: Selected Poems 1949–83*. London: Secker and Warburg, 1985. Print.

———. *Selected Poems*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1966. Print.

———. *Studies of Dylan Thomas, Allen Ginsberg, Sylvia Plath and Robert Lowell*. London: Macmillan, 1978. Print.

Sloane, David Charles. “Selling Eternity in 1920s Los Angeles.” *Metropolis in the Making: Los Angeles in the 1920s*. Ed. Tom Sitton and William Deverell. Berkeley: U California P, 2001. 341–60. Print.

Snodgrass, W.D. *Selected Poems: 1957–1987*. New York: Soho P, 1987. Print.

Soja, Edward. *Third Space: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996. Print.

Sontag, Kate and David Graham, eds. *After Confession: Poetry as Autobiography*. Saint Paul, Minnesota: Graywolf P, 2001. Print.

Southworth, Mrs W. H. Letter. *Ladies' Home Journal* Apr. 1945: 13. Print.

Spectorsky, A.C. *The Exurbanites*. NY: J.B. Lippincott, 1955. Print.

Spigel, Lynn. "Installing the Television Set: Popular Discourses on Television and Domestic Space, 1948–1955." Spigel and Mann 3–38. Print.

———. *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Post-war Suburbs*. Durham and London: Duke UP, 2001. Print.

Spigel, Lynn and Denise Mann, eds. *Private Screenings: Television and the Female Consumer*. Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 1992.

Stafford, William. "Suburban." *Ladies' Home Journal* July 1950: 74. Print.

———. *Traveling Through the Dark*. New York: Harper and Row, 1962. Print.

Steinberg, Ted. *American Green: The Obsessive Quest for the Perfect Lawn*. New York: Norton, 2007. Print.

Stilgoe, John R. *Borderland: Origins of the American Suburb, 1820–1939*. New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1988. Print.

Summers, Hollis. "The Lawnmower." *Poetry* 83.6 (1954): 319. Print.

Tebbel, John and Mary Ellen Zuckerman. *The Magazine in America 1741–1990*. New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991. Print.

Thurley, Geoffrey. *The American Moment: American Poetry in the Mid-Century*. London: Edward Arnold, 1977. Print.

Thurston, Michael. "The Tranquillized Fifties: Forms of Dissent in Postwar American Poetry." C. Nelson, *Oxford Handbook* 487–506. Print.

Tobin, James Edward. "April Aridity." Review of *The Love Letters of Phyllis McGinley*. *Renascence* 8.1 (Fall 1955): 49–51. Print.

Tomes, Nancy. *The Gospel of Germs: Men, Women and the Microbe in American Life*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998. Print.

Trachtenberg, Alan. *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2007. Print.

Treet Canned Meat. Advertisement. *Ladies' Home Journal* Mar. 1945: 55. Print.

Untermeyer, Louis. Letter to Phyllis McGinley. 7 Dec. 1960. Syracuse. Box 22. TS.

———., ed. *Modern American Poetry*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1921.

"Up from the Potato Fields." *Time* 3 Jul. 1950: 67–9, 72. Online at:http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,812779,00.html. Accessed 19 Feb. 2010. Web.

Updike, John. "The Art of Fiction No. 43." Interview with Charles Thomas Samuels. *The Paris Review* 45 (1968). Online at: http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/4219/the-art-of-fiction-no-43-john-updike. Accessed 1 October 2010. Web.

———. *Assorted Prose*. 1965. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968. Print.

———. *The Carpentered Hen and Other Tame Creatures*. 1954. New York: Knopf, 1982. Print.

———. *Collected Poems: 1953–1993*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995. Print.

———. *Hugging the Shore: Essays and Criticism*. London: Deutsch, 1984. Print.

———. *Midpoint and Other Poems*. London: Andre Deutsch, 1969. Print.

———. *Telephone Poles*. 1963. London: Andre Deutsch, 1964. Print.

———. *Tossing and Turning*. London: Deutsch, 1977. Print.

Van Duyn, Mona. *Selected Poems*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003.

Vickery, John B. *The Modern Elegiac Temper*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana UP, 2006. Print.

Vidler, Anthony. *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely*. Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 1992. Print.

Viereck, Peter. "My Kind of Poetry." Ciardi, *Mid-Century* 16–30. Print.

Von Hallberg, Robert. *American Poetry and Culture, 1945–1980*. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard UP, 1985. Print.

Von Rohde, Carl. "The Suburban Mind." *Harper's Magazine* Apr. 1946: 289–99. Print.

Wagner, Linda. *Phyllis McGinley*. New York: Twayne, 1971. Print.

Wai, Isabella. "Richard Wilbur." *The Literary Encyclopedia*. First published 08 Mar. 2009. Online at http://www.litencyc.com/php/speople.php?rec=true&UID=4715. Accessed 6 October 2010. Web.

Waldie, D.J. *Holy Land: A Suburban Memoir*. New York and London: Norton, 2005. Print.

Walker, Nancy. "Humor and Gender Roles: The 'Funny' Feminism of the Post-World War II Suburbs." *American Quarterly* 37.1 (1985): 98–113. Print.

Warner, Sam Bass, Jr. *Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth in Boston, 1870–1900.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP and MIT P, 1962. Print.

Watten, Barrett. "The Bride of the Assembly Line: Radical Poetics in Construction." Damon and Livingston 163–76. Print.

Weigold, Marilyn E., ed. *Westchester County: The Past Hundred Years*. Valhalla, NY: Westchester County Historical Society, 1984. Print.

Wheeler, Wendy. "Nostalgia Isn't Nasty: The Postmodernizing of Parliamentary Democracy." *Altered States: Postmodernism, Politics, Culture*. Ed. Mark Perryman. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1994. Print.

White, David Manning. "Mass Culture in America – Another Point of View." Rosenberg and Manning White 13–21. Print.

White, Katharine (K.S.). Letters to Phyllis McGinley. 28 Feb.1934; 18 Jan. 1935. Syracuse. Box 17. TS.

Whitfield, Stephen J. *The Culture of the Cold War*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1991. Print.

Whittemore, Reed. "Hester Prynne." *Kenyon Review* 7.3 (1945): 449. Print.

———. "The Two Rooms: Humor in Modern American Verse." *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature* 5.3 (1964): 186–91. Print.

Whyte, William H. *The Organization Man*. 1956. London: Pelican, 1963. Print.

Wiese, Andrew. "'The House I Live In': Race, Class, and African American Suburban Dreams in the Post-war United States." Kruse and Sugrue 99–119. Print.

Wilbur, Richard. "Marginalia." *Poetry* 83.5 (1954): 265. Print.

———. *New and Collected Poems*. London: Faber and Faber, 1989. Print.

———. *Things of this World: Poems by Richard Wilbur*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1956. Print.

Wiley, Franklin B. Letter to Phyllis McGinley. 21 Dec. 1925. Syracuse. Box 12. TS.

Williams, Paul. *The White Man's Weapon: Race, Nation and Civilisation in Nuclear Representations*. Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2013. Print.

Williams, Raymond. *The Country and the City*. London: Hogarth P, 1993. Print.

Williamson, Karina. "'From Arcadia to Bunyah': Mutation and Diversity in the Pastoral Mode." Martiny 568–83. Print.

Wilson, Christopher. "Looking at/in/from the *Maison de Verre*." *Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial Productions of Gender in Modern Architecture*. Ed. Hilda Heynen and Gülsüm Bayder. London and New York: Routledge, 2005. 234–51. Print.

Wilson, Rob. *American Sublime: The Genealogy of a Poetic Genre*. Madison: U Wisconsin P, 1991. Print.

Wilson, Sloane. *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*. 1955. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2005. Print.

Windex Advertisement. *Ladies' Home Journal* Nov. 1945: 51. Print.

Winkler, Allan M. *Life Under a Cloud: American Anxiety about the Atom*. New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993. Print.

"Woman Poet's Pen is a Barb." *New York World Telegram* 21 Dec. 1946: 9. Print.

Woodbury, Margaret Lee. "Retreat from Suburbia." *The North American Review* 229.5 (May 1930): 566–71. Print.

Wordsworth, William. "It is a Beautiful Evening." *The New Oxford Book of Romantic Period Verse*. Ed. Jerome McGann. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994. 264. Print.

Wright, Frank Lloyd. *The Natural House*. 1954. London: Pitman, 1971. Print.

Wright, Gwendolyn. *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America*. New York: Pantheon, 1981. Print.

Wright, James. *Above the River: The Complete Poems*. Intro. Donald Hall. 1990. Newcastle: Bloodaxe Books, 1992. Print.

———. *The Branch Will Not Break*. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1963. Print.

Wunsch, James L. "The Suburban Cliché." *Journal of Social History* 28.3 (1995): 643–58. Print.

Wylie, Philip. *Generation of Vipers*. 1943. New York: Dalkey Archive P, 1996. Print.

———. "The Abdicating Male and How the Gray Flannel Mind Exploits him through his Women." *Playboy* 3.11 (1956): 23–4, 50. Print.

Yagoda, Ben. *About Town: The New Yorker and the World it Made*. London: Duckworth, 2000. Print.

Yates, Richard. *Eleven Kinds of Loneliness*. London: Methuen, 2006. Print.

———. *Revolutionary Road*. 1961. London: Methuen, 2001. Print.

Zeul, Carolyn R. and Craig R. Humphrey. "The Integration of Black Residents in Suburban Neighborhoods: A Re-examination of the Contact Hypothesis." *Social Problems* 18.4 (1971): 462–74. Print.

Ziesing, Richard, Jr. Letter to Phyllis McGinley. 23 Oct. 1959. Syracuse. Box 12. TS.

Index