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Editing America: Nationalism and the New Poetry

Erin Kappeler

In the May 1920 issue of *Poetry* magazine, Alfred Kreymborg noted, “Touring America is very easy now-a-days. All you have to do is to hitch Pegasus to the locomotive. Poetry will carry you and yours anywhere you care to go.”¹ Kreymborg’s vision of contemporary poetry as passenger car was meant as a joke about the poet’s lack of material ties to any one place; the impoverished poet, having no steady work, was free to get up and go whenever he pleased. But Kreymborg’s joke also offers a metaphor for the so-called new poetry, which *Poetry*’s founding editor Harriet Monroe had worked to define since her magazine’s inception in 1912. Monroe repeatedly argued that the new poetry was not characterized by any coherent theory or identifiable form; instead, it was the unprecedented range of forms, genres, and subject matter encompassed by the new poetry that made it remarkable. This formal diversity, Monroe wrote, was a reflection of the heterogeneity of modern American life. *Poetry* printed free verse poems about skyscrapers and cityscapes that offered readers a glimpse of metropolitan living; translations of Native American songs by Mary Austin and Lew Sarett that allowed readers to tour the southwest; poems by Edgar Lee Masters and Robert Frost that guided readers through the small towns of the Midwest and the Northeast, respectively, in both “traditional” and modern metrical forms.² If contemporary poetry could move the vagabond poet across the country, it also offered stationary readers a way to see America without leaving their homes.

Recent studies of the new poetry have restored this poetic diversity to view, contributing to the growing sense that the divide between “experimental” and “traditional” poetry, like so

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900 many of the binaries that structured twentieth-century studies of modernism, was a polemical construct rather than a reality.³ In what follows, however, I argue that the desire to prove that modernist poetry was socially and ethically engaged has led literary historians to employ certain conceptions of culture anachronistically, leading to a fundamental misrecognition of the nature of the new poetry. Current accounts posit that the new poetry was an identifiable, if heterogeneous, body of work that reflected a commitment to multiculturalism, making it an ethical counterweight to the troubling imperialist poetics of figures such as T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. But the new poetry was not a collection of texts; rather, it was a polemical discourse about American identity that was shaped by social scientists, literary scholars, and cultural critics.⁴ The idea of the new poetry emerged at a time when the concept of multiculturalism as we understand it had not yet crystallized, meaning that a celebration of poetic diversity could as easily be used to champion racist logic and American exceptionalism as to promote cross-cultural understanding. The ethical dimensions of the discourse known as the new poetry are complicated at best, a fact that highlights the need to interrogate the historiography and research methodologies that inform current historicist approaches to modernist poetry.

The mischaracterization of the new poetry is symptomatic of the failure of much of the most suggestive and creative historicist work on American poetry in the 1910s and 1920s to question the narrative structure that has governed literary histories of the twentieth century. Though a great deal of attention has been paid to the polemical and promotional aspects of modernist claims to have made art new by breaking with an outmoded genteel culture, the idea that modernism constituted a real cultural break is remarkably persistent in studies of American poetry. The desire to preserve “modernist” as an honorific rather than a descriptive term—a holdover from triumphalist accounts of poetic modernism as a literary revival—has produced an under-historicized emphasis on modernist poetry’s diversity and cosmopolitanism, which have been understood as early forms of contemporary pluralism. As Len Platt has argued, the need to create distance between the horrific consequences of racist thinking as they were manifested in the twentieth century “fundamentally distorted our perceptions of modernism and modern literature,” which was all too often implicated in scientific racism.⁵ In order to retain modernism’s reputation as a salutary break with a conservative past, in other words, critics had to downplay the era’s own complicity in a violently conservative epistemological order.

This distancing continues to affect contemporary understandings of literary history. Take, for example, two of the most comprehensive historical accounts of American modernist poetry to have been published in recent years, John Timberman Newcomb’s and Michael Golston’s.⁶ Newcomb’s study provides an in-depth account of the new poetry as “a broad-based response, occurring across many styles and political positions, to the experience of living in the industrialized metropolis” (Newcomb, 4). His history nuances our understanding of American poetry, continuing the revisionist project initiated by scholars such as Cary Nelson and Joseph Harrington, among others, by foregrounding the ways in which “traditional” poetic forms such as sonnets could be

turned to socially progressive ends, and vice-versa.⁷ But his account also problematically positions the new poetry as an expansive, pluralist endeavor shepherded by critics and poets “commit[ted] to cultural reciprocity” (Newcomb, 52). Golston similarly oversimplifies historical context. He notes that the idea that rhythm “originate[d] in the blood” was fundamental to the poetics of the most influential poets of the 1910s and 1920s, and he argues “poetry’s rhythms most forcefully carry its politics,” meaning that the poetry of the modernist era, written when racial rhythms were held to be a scientific fact, is necessarily imbricated with authoritarian modes of thinking. Yet Golston’s narrative ultimately offers a false redemption, positing that William Carlos Williams moved poetry away from such fascist ideologies of rhythm by embracing the relativity of poetic measures based on the heterogeneity of American spoken language.⁸ This account lifts Williams’s poetics out of the complications of its social context in order to preserve a conceptual rupture between the poetics of the past and the desired progressive poetics of the future, for debates about American speech dialects were necessarily debates about racialized American bodies. Williams may have celebrated miscegenation as America’s “pure products” went “crazy,” but his poetics were not as far removed from ideologies of embodied rhythm as we may want them to be.⁹

The key elision in Golston’s history is also the key elision in Newcomb’s: both accounts assume that cultural relativity is a historically stable concept. Any move toward a relativistic understanding of culture is seen as a progressive step away from suspect poetic ideologies. Just as Golston points to Williams as the ethical alternative to Ezra Pound and W. B. Yeats, Newcomb looks to *Poetry* magazine’s engagements with foreign poets and cultures as a “bracing antidote to the ethnocentric, elitist, and often quite simply mean-spirited Poundian high modernism we have inherited,” arguing that similar engagements in other little magazines of the era helped to turn poetry into a way of “sharing . . . self and other, familiar and new, native and foreign, across a world understood as irrevocably modern and inextricably interdependent” (Newcomb, 52). But as Susan Hegeman, Brad Evans, and Marc Manganaro have shown, the concept of culture was in flux in the 1910s and 1920s; it was not until the 1930s that the modern idea of culture as “a set of patterns, values, and beliefs,” as opposed to the romantic idea of culture as the spirit of racialized national groups, became widespread in American academic and public discourses.¹⁰ When the new poetry was being theorized most vigorously in the mid-1910s, the interlocked fields of literary scholarship, ethnology, and philology were still dominated to a surprising degree by romantic theories of cultural products as evidence of national and folk spirit. As Manganaro shows, even Franz Boas, who according to Carl N. Degler “almost single-handedly . . . developed in America [a] concept of culture” that “would in time expunge race from the literature of social science,” had not yet repudiated the idea of *Volksgeist* in the 1910s.¹¹ It was against this intellectual background, in which “relativism . . . coexisted uncontradictorily with foundational theories of value” and with belief in “the commonality of humankind,” that modernist poets and critics explored the diversity of the new poetry (Hegeman, 7). The international outlook evinced by the little magazines of the era did not necessarily entail relativism as we understand it, and more often than not it in fact involved

902 an orthogenetic view of cultures in which American culture was understood to be the place where the national cultures of the world had gathered to be consolidated and perfected in what was frequently named the coming American “race.”

My account of the new poetry sheds new light on four widely circulated and publicized collections and studies that helped to shape its discourse: Harriet Monroe and Alice Corbin Henderson’s *The New Poetry: An Anthology* (1917), Amy Lowell’s *Tendencies in Modern American Poetry* (1917), Louis Untermeyer’s *Modern American Poetry: An Introduction*, and Untermeyer’s *The New Era in American Poetry* (1919). These works are particularly representative because of their broad reach and sustained engagement with contemporaneous ideas of cultural development as they were elaborated in academic and popular criticism. Monroe and Henderson’s anthology went through four printings in 1917 and continued to be printed in new runs through 1922 (a revised edition was issued in 1923 and was reprinted and updated through the 1930s). Untermeyer’s anthology was also issued in a second edition and remained in print throughout the 1930s (Newcomb, 21–22). Lowell’s book began as a series of well-attended lectures and sold well enough to be reprinted multiple times in the 1920s.¹² As I will show, all of these texts, in distinct but related ways, constructed a fictional generic coherence for the new poetry based on the idea that it was an organic product of the American people. These critics abstracted social relations into verse traits, drawing on anthropological and ethnological discourses to argue that what made the new poetry new was its ability to organize communities around a shared set of national and racial concerns. Far from championing a modern version of cultural relativism, these anthologies supported romantic ideals of national growth.

Harriet Monroe and Alice Corbin Henderson’s New Poetry: Form versus Spirit

Those ideas were evident when Monroe pitched an anthology of the new poetry to Edward C. Marsh of the Macmillan Company in 1915, which she presented in explicitly pedagogical terms. She wrote that *Poetry* magazine had “aroused great interest among colleges,” intimating that students were in need of a guide to experimental modern poetry.¹³ But as Craig Abbott points out, the anthology failed in its role as study guide, since it “did little to dispel . . . confusion” about what precisely the new poetry was: Abbott points to the anthology’s “alphabetical arrangement and rather general introduction” as key reasons why critics were still erroneously using the monikers “new poetry and Imagism synonymously” or dividing “the new movement into two elements, Imagism and free verse.”¹⁴ This explanation, however, glosses over the definition of the new poetry that Monroe and Henderson offered in their “rather general” introduction, which turned away from a reliance on formal traits or generic markers. Monroe and Henderson posited that the new poetry was recognizable by virtue of its difference from “over-appareled” Victorian verse, but that this difference was found

not in mere details of form, for much poetry infused with the new spirit conforms to the old measures and rhyme-schemes. It is not merely in diction. . . . These things are important, but the difference goes deeper than details of form, strikes through them to fundamental integrities. . . . The new poetry strives for a concrete and immediate realization of life; it would discard the theory, the abstraction, the remoteness, found in all classics not of the first order. . . . In presenting the concrete object or the concrete environment, whether these be beautiful or ugly, it seeks to give more precisely the emotion arising from them, and thus widens immeasurably the scope of the art.¹⁵

In many ways, this passage rhymes with the imagist manifesto, which called for “a poetry that is hard and clear, never blurred nor indefinite,” one that “render[s] particulars exactly.”¹⁶ But unlike the manifesto, which claimed that “the individuality of a poet may often be better expressed in free verse than in conventional forms,” Monroe and Henderson’s introduction eschewed formal traits as markers of the new poetry.¹⁷ According to their logic, “mere details of form” were unimportant because they could not make a genre. Instead, the “concrete” presentation of objects would allow for a greater expression of modern life, even if that expression happened to fall into perfect iambic pentameter. The new poetry could be recognized, then, not by metrical characteristics, but rather by the fact that it expressed “fundamental integrities” that were indicative of a new, modern spirit. By abstracting poetry in this way, Monroe and Henderson believed, they could open the art form to unknown innovations.

For generations of critics, this expansion of form has been the sign of a successful break with the poetic past. But the concept of “spirit” has a particular historical valence, and it is a clue to the theoretical context in which Monroe and Henderson formed their poetics as well as an indication that the vagueness of their definition of the new poetry was not accidental. Their idea of the fundamentals of modern poetry arose from their engagement with nineteenth-century ballad discourse, contemporary ethnology, and philological debates about the nature of the English language. Brad Evans has described the confluence of these discourses as “the ethnographic imagination, the experimentation . . . with new ways of perceiving, representing, and producing structures of affiliation and difference” that “developed within the context of institutional shifts in fields such as philology, geography, folklore, anthropology, and literature.”¹⁸ In the 1910s and 1920s, the literary ethnographic imagination was focused on ballad discourse as it was disseminated by the Harvard school of theorists, who found a vocal proponent in Francis Barton Gummere (1855–1919).

Gummere was a prominent and well-respected scholar of Anglo-Saxon poetry from the 1880s until his death in 1919. He published widely in philological and literary journals, completed ten book-length studies of Anglo-Saxon and Old English poetry, and served as the fifteenth president of the Modern Language Association in 1905. His scholarship drew on his own studies of Old English ballads and on contemporary ethnological and anthropological studies to argue that regular rhythm was the most important characteristic of poetry because poetry was originally the product of a primitive “throng” that sang and danced in unison. In his view, racial traits were preserved in the rhythms of this primitive poetry, and so modern poets who tapped into their

904 Anglo heritage would help to bring Anglo-Saxon traits like “vigor and freshness and efficiency” into modern poetry, thereby “making it more spontaneous” and “bringing poetry closer . . . to the people and to the beginnings and unspoiled early phases of life.”¹⁹ Such a revitalization was important to Gummere because of his commitment to racial Anglo-Saxonism; he believed that the basis of modern American society could be found in the communal life of early Anglo-Saxon tribes and that Americans needed to learn about their racial heritage in order to create a healthy society. He posited that print capitalism had taken poetry away from its “vital” function of organizing racial groups through shared rhythms, and that modern man needed to relearn Anglo-Saxon rhythms in order to access an important form of social cohesion that had been lost.

Gummere drew this idea from his mentor, Francis James Child, whom Michael Cohen describes as “the preeminent 19th-century ballad theorist”; Cohen writes that according to Child Old English ballads could be seen as “a people’s earliest mode of expression, an oral form that arose naturally at a point in time prior to the introduction of ‘book-culture.’ . . . In Child’s ballad discourse, popular ballads and preliterate folk were origin points in developmental narratives about cultures and nations.”²⁰ Gummere used this ballad discourse to claim that Anglo-Saxon rhythms could concretize what he called, one hundred years before Benedict Anderson, “imagined communities,” claiming that Anglo-Saxon rhythms encoded the “vitality of a national consciousness.”²¹

The extent to which Gummere’s theory of the development of poetry saturated discussions of English and American poetry cannot be overstated. It was taught in high schools.²² It was frequently debated in *PMLA* and other mouthpieces of the newly professionalized discipline of English literature.²³ It spilled over into more popular magazines, as well: the theory of ballad origins was frequently mentioned in *Poetry*, and the racialized ballad logic exemplified in Gummere’s work can clearly be seen in Monroe and Henderson’s description of the renewed vitality of the new poetry.²⁴ They posited that the poetry in their anthology was “a vital force no longer to be ignored” because it was “coming nearer than either the novel or the drama to the actual life of to-day,” just as Anglo-Saxon verse and other “primitive” poetries had emerged from the daily lives of their authors and readers (*NP*, v). Henderson and Monroe positioned the renewed attention to daily life in the new poetry as a return to ancient poetic practices rather than as a new invention. As Monroe wrote in an article about Columbia University professor William Morrison Patterson, who carried out a series of experiments investigating poetic rhythms in the 1910s, “We rejoice that [Patterson] agrees with us in linking up the present free-verse experiments with the ancient Anglo-Saxon rhythms, an authentic but long-neglected tradition to which the present editor has paid tribute in her introduction to *The New Poetry—an Anthology*.”²⁵ (Patterson had traced a direct line between Anglo-Saxon verse and some of the rhythms found in the new poetry, claiming that in the “newest songs, we hear, quite suddenly, the harp of our ancestors.”)²⁶ The return to the simple, premodern rhythms of Anglo-Saxon poetry that Patterson had “discovered” in his lab seemed to Henderson and Monroe to promise a return to a state of affairs in which poetry was not separate from or superfluous to “actual” life (*NP*, v). For Henderson and Monroe, as for Gummere, poets who were

immersed in Anglo-Saxon verse had access to a purer type of expressive poetry that was not distanced from the world.

Unlike Gummere and other Anglo-Saxonists, however, Monroe and Henderson did not stop with the hypothesis that Anglo-Saxon rhythms were *the* root of modern English poetry. For them, the ancient poetry of *all* languages was important in creating poetry that could express the spirit of an age. Whereas Gummere and likeminded theorists sought to organize a community of Anglo-Saxon Americans around the rhythms of primitive poetry, Monroe and Henderson argued that Anglo-Saxon poetry could help to ground a cosmopolitan community of readers. Their approach is usefully compared with George Saintsbury's theory of the linguistic basis of English prosody, with which it resonates. Saintsbury, who had established himself as a leading scholar of poetics with his monumental *History of English Prosody*, published in three volumes between 1906 and 1910, argued that a pure Anglo-Saxon linguistic core was impossible to isolate. He posited that English prosody was a tangle of competing linguistic conventions that could only be sorted out by resorting to a system of scansion based on a flexible foot. While Gummere and other strict Anglo-Saxonists believed that an Anglo-Saxon "root-stock" defined the English language, Saintsbury argued that English was more like a chemical compound than a plant.²⁷ He believed in "the gradual formation of the blend called the English language, and the concomitant determining of a new blend of prosody—not French, not Latin, not Old English, not a mere mechanical jumble of all three, but a new chemical compound."²⁸ For Saintsbury, "the extraordinary compositeness of English" meant that the rhythms of English poetry were necessarily plastic and variable and inherently open to foreign linguistic influences.²⁹

By assessing prosodic history in a similar manner, Henderson and Monroe crucially changed their understanding of the role that generic tradition played in molding imagined communities, producing a poetics seemingly more cosmopolitan than Gummere's.³⁰ Gummere had argued that Anglo-Saxon rhythms were regularly patterned and generically marked and that those characteristics helped to organize social groups. Monroe and Henderson, on the other hand, argued that Anglo-Saxon rhythms were irregular and without pattern. In their view, the history of English prosody was a history of conflict between the vital but uneven rhythms of the Anglo-Saxon language and the highly codified and formalized rhythms of French. As they explained,

Chaucer may have had it in his power to turn the whole stream of English poetry into either the French or the Anglo-Saxon channel. . . . He naturally chose the French channel, and he was so great and so beloved that his world followed him. . . . But it was possibly a toss-up. . . . [If Langland] had had Chaucer's authority and universal sympathy, English poetry might have followed his example instead of Chaucer's; and Shakespeare, Milton and the rest might have been impelled by common practice to use—or modify—the curious, heavy, alliterative measure of *Piers Ploughman*, which now sounds so strange to our ears. . . . Langland reminds us that poetry—even English poetry—is older than rhyme, older than iambic measure, older than all the metrical patterns which now seem so much a part of it. (*NP*, viii)

906 Monroe and Henderson argued that to look into the prehistory of English poetry was to find not regular rhythms, but rather a free, improvisatory mode of composition—a mode more in line with the linguistic elasticity that Saintsbury had posited.³¹ This history proved to Henderson and Monroe that it was only “an instinctive prejudice” that made people believe that “English poetry, to be poetry, must conform to prescribed metres,” for prescribed meters were actually a French legacy (*NP*, viii). Monroe and Henderson did not see regular meters as inherently negative, but they argued that as metrical conventions were repeated throughout the centuries, they became more rigid, so that by the 1890s poetry had lost its relevance to everyday life. They claimed that generic and metrical conventions, rather than bringing an audience together, were in fact “obstacles that have hampered the poet and separated him from his audience” (*NP*, x). To recover both a vital connection to life and to the audience that saw its life reflected in verse, Henderson and Monroe argued, modern poets needed to return to the freer, speech-based rhythms of Anglo-Saxon poetry and of other premodern poetic traditions.

Even as they argued against metrical rules, however, they continued to veer away from using form as a way to define the new poetry. In their modified balladic vision, poetry would retain its ability to organize imagined communities by becoming its own abstract realm with its own non-metrical rules. They explained that the new poets were “trying to make the modern manifestations of poetry less a matter of rules and formulae, and more a thing of the spirit” (*NP*, x). For them, the important aspect of the new poetry was that it was drawing on a variety of ancient poetic traditions, including Hebrew, Greek, Anglo-Saxon, Japanese, and Chinese, and that this melding of tradition created an abstract realm ruled by spirit rather than by metrical law. As they explained it, “All these influences, which tend to make the art of poetry, especially poetry in English, less provincial, more cosmopolitan, are by no means a defiance of the classic tradition. On the contrary, they are an endeavor to return to it at its great original sources, and to sweep away artificial laws—the *obiter dicta* of secondary minds—which have encumbered it” (*NP*, xii). They believed that both the “spirit and form” of poetry were moving toward a “great[er] freedom,” but that the important aspect of this freedom was not any lasting formal innovations that it would introduce (*NP*, xii). Instead, they argued that the defining characteristic of modern poetry was the type of readerly community it could bring into existence.³² This vision seems pluralistic in the modern sense, but for Monroe and Henderson, there was always a nationalistic flavor to poetic cosmopolitanism. If they acknowledged the existence of discrete world cultures, they were yet able to support a vision of the progressive evolution of the civilization of mankind. Discrete cultures were to them the part that indicated the state of health of the whole civilization. Such a viewpoint was common in this period, and indeed it was supported by one of Franz Boas’s students, Edward Sapir, with whom Monroe and Henderson were well acquainted, having published his verse in *Poetry* and kept up with the articles he published in *The Dial*. Sapir would eventually help to develop ideas related to cultural relativity as we understand it today, but in 1919 he still believed that individual cultures took part in the evolution of civilization as a

whole. He argued in *The Dial* that although there were discrete world cultures that needed to be understood on their own terms, there were “genuine” and “spurious” cultures that were more and less evolved. A genuine culture, according to Sapir, was one in which individual subjects did not feel alienated; it was “not of necessity either ‘high’ or ‘low’; it is merely inherently harmonious, balanced, self-satisfactory. . . . It is, ideally, speaking, a culture in which nothing is spiritually meaningless.”³³ A spurious culture, on the other hand, was one in which work was spiritually unfulfilling rather than integrated into cultural life. For Sapir, Native American tribes offered the best examples of “genuine” culture, while industrial society was “spurious.” If American society was to become spiritually integrated, Sapir argued, it would need to find ways to solve the problem of alienated labor. If it did not, “civilization, as a whole, [would move] on” without it, since “culture [could] com[e] and go.”³⁴

To Monroe and Henderson, poetry offered the means of that spiritual reintegration, since it could blend the best parts of “genuine” cultures in order to rejuvenate American literary life. In a 1924 retrospective of the new poetry, Monroe explained that “aboriginal motives and rhythms” had been “a gold-mine of song await[ing] full development” and that the new poets had honed and perfected this raw material in order to tell “the tale of the tribe,” to picture a healthier version of American society in which poetry was not unimportant to daily life.³⁵ This was a view Monroe had been espousing for years. In a 1913 issue of *Poetry*, for example, Monroe had argued that modern poets needed to “restore . . . the great universal laws of rhythm” in order to return to the fundamental basis of the art form—a basis that was the same for “all music and the poetry of all languages.”³⁶ In this view, individual cultures were important insofar as they contributed to the progress of civilization as a whole. Indeed, in reviewing Amy Lowell’s take on the new poetry, Monroe criticized Lowell for not recognizing the necessity of integrating the songs of “genuine” folk cultures into contemporary American poetry. She argued that Lowell had erred in overlooking Vachel Lindsay, who “represents a tendency much richer and more indigenous than that personified by the imagists, for example, however fine and high theirs may be,” and that “all the wild lore that is in our western blood— . . . the folk-sense of magic in nature and life, the instinct of sympathy with all kinds and races of men—all this is in Vachel Lindsay’s tendency, and he carries a good share of the new movement on his shoulders.”³⁷ Henderson likewise argued that the new poetry was characterized by its “essentially native folk-spirit,” which was “a necessary sub-soil for any fine national poetic flowering.”³⁸ For Monroe and Henderson, the shift in anthropology towards exploring individual cultures helped to support the romantic idea of a literary tradition as an expression of a people rather than to instantiate a cosmopolitan poetics as we understand it today. Writing in 1922, Monroe explained that if her magazine had helped to “make a vital people aware of its imaginative and creative power,” then she had accomplished the poetic revolution that she set out to effect ten years earlier.³⁹ It was not formal innovation or “newness,” but national self-awareness, that Monroe and Henderson championed in the new poetry.

908 **New Poetry, New Americans: Amy Lowell's *Tendencies in Modern American Poetry***

In the same year that Monroe and Henderson published their account of the new poetry as evidence of the progress of civilization, Amy Lowell put forth a competing theory of the relationship between new genres and new communities. Lowell's *Tendencies in Modern American Poetry* also abstracted poetry into an idealized realm in which contemporary culture could become more "genuine," but perhaps because Lowell's book was published six months after the United States had entered the First World War—whereas Henderson and Monroe wrote their introduction while the United States was still pursuing a policy of non-intervention—Lowell imagined an even more nationally specific role for the new poetry in America.⁴⁰ Lowell believed that the freer spirit of the new poetry was an indication of the triumph of American civilization and evidence of the country's new role as the defender of global democracy.

Lowell's argument resonates with the particular line of Anglo-Saxonist thought that informed Gummere's poetics. Nineteenth-century historians of Anglo-Saxon England had helped to popularize the idea that Anglo-Saxons were a fundamentally freedom-loving, community-minded people, characterized by their nation-creating energy and vigor. Works such as Sharon Turner's four-volume *History of the Anglo-Saxons* (published between 1799 and 1805), John Mitchell Kemble's *The Saxons in England* (1846), and Thomas Babington Macaulay's *The History of England* (1848) argued that Anglo-Saxons were, in Turner's words, "superior to others in energy, strength, and warlike fortitude" and that these traits helped them to found strong governments and powerful nations.⁴¹ As Hugh MacDougall argues, racial Anglo-Saxonism played a key role in romantic historiography, as exemplified by Hegel, who came to "identif[y] the progress of universal history with Germanic political thought and culture"; Hegel and other romantic historians "asserted that the final stage of history was reached with the development of Christian Europe and specifically with the full manifestation in [their] own time of the Germanic Spirit."⁴² In its circulation from Germany to England to America and back again, this notion of historical progress took on very specific cultural meanings. In America, scholars such as Gummere took Hegel's claim that "the German Spirit is the Spirit of the New World" quite literally; they posited that there was a distinctly American "race" that was founded primarily on Anglo-Saxon stock. As Reginald Horsman argues, white Americans in the mid- to late nineteenth century began to "conceive of themselves as the most vital and energetic of those Aryan peoples who had spilled westward, 'revitalized' the Roman Empire, spread throughout Europe to England, and crossed the Atlantic in their relentless westward drive."⁴³ In this popular view of the world-conquering Germanic peoples, America came to be seen by many Anglo-Saxonists as the place where history and civilization could reach their apogee (Horsman, 37–38).

Lowell's work endorsed the idea that America provided a unique site for Anglo-Saxons to push mankind to a higher stage of civilization. As Lowell argued, "Some day, America will be a nation; some day, we shall have a national character. Now, our

population is a crazy quilt of racial samples. But how strong is that Anglo-Saxon groundwork which holds them all firmly together to its shape, if no longer to its colour!" In Lowell's view, the imagined Anglo-Saxon past of America would hold together the potentially chaotic heterogeneity of a nation of immigrants, and in turn, that Anglo-Saxon "root-stock" would be improved by intermingling with other groups, resulting in a new and distinctive American "race."⁴⁴ Lowell conflated artistic and social structures and argued that the evolution of the new poetry could provide an index to the growth of the new race that was producing it. She argued that the new poets were "ceding more and more to the influence of other, alien peoples, and fusing exotic modes of thought with their Anglo-Saxon inheritance," concluding, "This is indeed the melting pot" (*T*, 4). In Lowell's view, art and the social body were mutually reinforcing spheres of life; as the one became united and homogenized, so too did the other. The existence of a homegrown national poetic tradition, whatever forms it took, would prove that Americans were "no more colonies of this or that other land, but ourselves, different from all other peoples whatsoever" (*T*, v). To Lowell, then, the new poetry was the organic expression of the newly formed American race. Her logic paralleled the logic of Gumme's ballad discourse, which had posited that the popular ballad was an organic expression of the Anglo-Saxon race.

Lowell believed that 1917 was an especially important year in the flowering of American literature and culture because the war effort had sped up the process of racial assimilation that was helping to create a more advanced society. Lowell explained, "The welding together of the whole country which the war has brought about, the mobilizing of the whole population into a single, strenuous endeavour, has produced a more poignant sense of nationality than has recently been the case in this country of enormous spaces and heterogeneous population" (*T*, v). The new poetry of 1917 was thus not only expressing the spirit of the new American race; it was also articulating America's emerging role as a world leader. In Lowell's view, the advanced state of American poetry reflected the advanced state of American civilization:

The change which marks American poetry has been going on in the literature of other countries also. But not quite in the same way. Each country approaches an evolutionary step from its own racial angle, and they move alternately, first one leads and then another. . . . At the moment of writing, it is America who has taken the last, most advanced step. (*T*, vi).

According to Lowell's thinking, America's "racial angle" was Anglo-Saxon at its root, which meant that Americans were the vanguard of world civilization (Anglo-Saxons being, according to contemporaneous historians, an unparalleled civilizing force). Woodrow Wilson declared in April 1917 that the American army was fighting for "the ultimate peace of the world and for the liberation of its peoples."⁴⁵ Lowell wrote in July 1917 that American poets, "the advance guard of literature," were likewise fighting to lead the world into a new stage of poetic development, which according to Lowell would be an "era of accomplishment" (*T*, xi, 142). The military overtones of Lowell's phrase "advance guard" do not seem accidental; just as America's military force was, according

910 to President Wilson, “making the world safe for democracy,” the poetic advance guard was making space for a new type of cultural accomplishment.⁴⁶

In part because Lowell saw the new poetry as an index of the progress of civilization, she believed that its spirit was more important than its form. Like Monroe and Henderson, she remained skeptical of formal traits as definitive characteristics of emerging genres. As she explained,

When people speak of the “New Poetry,” they generally mean that poetry which is written in the newer, freer forms. But such a distinction is misleading in the extreme, for, after all, forms are merely forms, of no particular value unless they are the necessary and adequate clothing to some particular manner of thought. There is a “New Poetry” to-day, and the new forms are a part of its attire, but the body is more important than the clothing and existed before it. (*T*, 3)

In other words, the new poetry could only be reliably classified according to its spirit or attitude. For Lowell, formal innovation was simply a happy consequence of the new American spirit, not its cause. As she put it, “modern subjects, modern habits of mind, seem to find more satisfactory expression in *vers libre* and ‘polyphonic prose’ than in metrical verse,” not because a “cadence engenders the idea,” but because “the idea clothes itself naturally in an appropriate novelty of rhythm” (*T*, 243). Like Henderson and Monroe, Lowell did not value new poetry’s formal innovations as such. The new poetry was important in Lowell’s estimation because it displayed “a fusion of much knowledge, all melted and absorbed in the blood of a young and growing race” (*T*, 280). The key contribution of the new poetry was that it proved that a unified American “race-soul” was coming into existence (*T*, 333).

Lowell believed that the new poetry could only be defined as a type of national expression rather than as a genre with identifiable formal traits. Form could not be a definitive factor in poetry, she believed, because it had to be continually changeable and adaptable if it were to remain the organic expression of the evolving American people. For Lowell, abstracting the new poetry in this way provided a solution to the problematic at the heart of nineteenth-century ballad discourse. According to the logic of ballad discourse, modern poets could not return to an oral poetic culture; they could only access its spirit and translate that spirit into the written word. But this act of translation would necessarily lose a great deal of the vigor of premodern oral culture. Modern “bookish” poets were thus involved in a game of diminishing returns. They could only counter the necessary loss of premodern vitality by continually experimenting in an attempt to get closer to the “race-soul” of their nation. Lowell argued that these experiments would eventually crystallize into lifeless convention, as she believed all poetry must, but that new modes of expression would continue to grow from the vigorous blood and the racial feeling of the American people. The goal of the critic thus became recognizing when poetry was a genuine expression of a nation, regardless of the forms that expression might take. As long as poetry expressed the spirit of the people producing it, it would be recognizable as modern poetry. In Lowell’s words, “art becomes artificial only when the forms take precedence over the emotion” (*T*, 7).

For Lowell, the formal innovations that made up a small part of the new poetry were simply incidental, of little lasting consequence next to the larger issue of the emerging American “race-soul.” Any formal experimentation was the sign, not the cause, of modernity. According to Lowell’s narrative, then, the new poetry was necessarily only one stage in the endless progress of civilization. It was an important stage, however, because it was the first truly authentic expression of a newly emerging people, and it deserved to be marked and recognized as such. For Lowell, the best way to mark this moment was to contrast it with a caricature of nineteenth-century literary cultures. If Lowell recognized the irony of using the logic of nineteenth-century ballad discourse to declare a break with the nineteenth-century, she did not remark upon it. Instead, she argued that the new poetry, as an organic expression of the American race, was a straightforward victory over the derivative literary culture of nineteenth-century America. She followed the Whitmanian line that poets had not known how to use the raw materials of the American countryside and the American people, claiming that America in the nineteenth century had been “a great country practically dumb” and that the “virile [American] race, capable of subduing a vast continent in an incredibly short time,” had “no tongue to vent its emotion” (*T*, 7). In helping to create this fictional division between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, Lowell promoted the idea that the emergence of a new genre was an indicator of the success and health of an emerging race. Like Monroe and Henderson, Lowell simultaneously helped to solidify the idea that the new poetry was one such expression of a modern spirit and to cover over the nineteenth-century roots of this paradigm.

Poetic Democracy: Louis Untermeyer’s New Era

If Monroe, Henderson, and Lowell show us how racial and national concerns were abstracted into a genre, Louis Untermeyer’s work demonstrates how openness of form came to be equated with democratic opportunity. This connection turned on a particular understanding of the relationship between poetry, its modes of circulation, and its readers—an understanding derived from ballad discourse. In this view, which was advocated by Gummere and Sapir, among others, the advent of print capitalism broke up homogenous preliterate communities into competing factions.⁴⁷ In his 1901 book *The Beginnings of Poetry*, Gummere romanticized medieval European feudalism as a system that encouraged “homogeneous and unlettered communities” who sang together as unified groups.⁴⁸ Print capitalism, on the other hand, encouraged a proliferation of genres and individual authors, which divided “lay society into lettered and unlettered” (*BP*, 176–77). He explained that premodern bards composed “as members of a class or guild, and any member might use the common stock of expressions and ideas,” while the modern author was freed “from the clogs of his mediaeval guild” and so was able to take up the “distinctly modern idea of fame, of glory, as a personal achievement apart from community or state” (*BP*, 141–42). The notions of private property and of the author as owner of his work reinforced each other, and together erased the idea of a communal oral tradition. Sapir likewise posited that the art of “genuine,” non-industrial

912 cultures was more integrated into daily life than the art of industrial societies, which merely offered symbolic consolation for the loss of a spiritually fulfilling mode of life.⁴⁹

Untermeyer held a similar view of the role that oral tradition played in shaping unified audiences. While Gummere believed that the uneven rhythms of the new poetry were further dividing the reading public, however, and while Sapir doubted that art could unify a culture, Untermeyer argued that the new poetry was translating the best aspects of premodern oral cultures into literary works, thereby bringing into existence the communal audience that had been broken apart by the rise of mass print. In his anthology *Modern American Poetry: An Introduction* and in his critical work *The New Era in American Poetry*, Untermeyer used terms imported directly from ballad discourse to argue that American poetry had gone through a fallow period in the print-mediated nineteenth century.⁵⁰ Poetry of that period was seen as imitative, carrying “the dull aroma of the textbook; [it was] desiccated and musty with learning,” while the autochthonous American productions of the twentieth century supposedly carried “a whiff of the soil . . . [and] an accent of the people” (*NE*, 4). In Untermeyer’s view, the new poetry was throwing off the weight of print culture to return to the “human, racy and vigorous” qualities of oral poetry. The new poetry was thus “not only closer to the soil but nearer to the soul” of the American people (*NE*, 9).

Untermeyer argued that this renewed vitality was due to the fact that the new poets were using “actual speech instead of ornate literary phrasing,” so that the poetic language “that used to be borrowed almost exclusively from literature comes now almost entirely out of life” (*MAP*, ix). This return to the speech of everyday life helped to bring bookish modern poetry back to the inaccessible realms of pre-literate oral culture. Modern poetry was still written, but Untermeyer claimed that in works like the “fully-flavored blank verse of Robert Frost, . . . the words are so chosen and arranged that the speaker is almost heard on the printed page”; similarly, he argued that reading Vachel Lindsay’s poetry aloud would give readers access to a scene of primitive prayer and dance—a scene that would not be out of place in Gummere’s works on Anglo-Saxon communal dances (*MAP*, ix).

Behind Untermeyer’s synaesthetic fantasy of an orality that could be experienced through writing was an ideal of open access to culture. Untermeyer too lamented the division of “lay society into lettered and unlettered,” to borrow Gummere’s phrase, and he believed that the new poets were healing this fracture by using American speech rhythms and American folklore as their raw materials. He argued that the new poets were finally recognizing that they had their own native traditions on which they could found a national literature. As he explained, “Young as this nation is compared to her transatlantic cousins, she is already being supplied with the stuff of legends, ballads, and even epics. The modern singer, discarding imported myths, has turned to celebrate his own folk-tales” (*MAP*, xi). As Americans realized what distinguished them as a group, Untermeyer argued, they were finally bringing their country out of its culturally colonized state and were beginning to cohere as a unified people. And in turning from Greek myths and English folk-tales, the new poets were helping to make poetry relevant to daily life once again. Because the new poetry drew on this

“racy” material rather than on legends drawn from books, he argued, readers were “no longer . . . frustrated because of a lack of knowledge of recondite legends, because of an ignorance of the minor *amours* of the major Greek deities, or the absence of a dictionary of rare and archaic words” (*NE*, 10–11). For Untermeyer, a poem’s literary or tropological qualities could only make a work inaccessible to the majority of readers; the specialized cultural knowledge required to access “traditional” poetry would maintain class divisions and antagonisms. The way to create a truly democratic poetry, accessible to all Americans, was to do away with the literariness of nineteenth-century poetry. By parting with the “self-imposed strictures” of the old poetry, Untermeyer argued, the new poetry was “expressing itself once more in the terms of democracy” (*NE*, 10–11). The new poetry, by allowing its readers to hear and see what was actually only written, would help modern citizens to access a vital form of democratic sociality that had been lost with the rise of modern literacy. Like Henderson and Monroe, Untermeyer found in the abstraction of the new poetry a key to organizing imagined communities out of an increasingly diffuse and heterogeneous print public.

Untermeyer’s conception of the new poetry cast it as the transparent, hyper-legible speech of a unified people, as capable of being read by anyone regardless of their educational background. He too viewed poetry as a non-formal realm of “spirit” that transcended the need for formal classification. Like Henderson, Monroe, and Lowell, Untermeyer believed that the new poetry’s return to colloquial speech *could* affect the forms of modern poetry, but he was not particularly interested in formal innovation for its own sake. In a manner that chimes with ideas put forth by Monroe and Henderson, he argued that a poem did not have to be formally experimental in order to be recognized as part of the new poetry. He posited that Edwin Arlington Robinson, for instance, “uses the strictest rhymes and most conventional metres,” yet still “makes them more ‘modern’ than the freest free-verse” (*MAP*, x). Likewise, he argued, readers could see the new spirit in the metrically traditional poetry of “Richard Hovey, Bliss Carman, James Whitcomb Riley, H. H. Knibbs, the two Benéts, and a half a dozen others,” which was yet “full of the tang of native sounds and scenes” (*MAP*, x). Untermeyer believed that what was new in the new poetry was not form but spirit, and consequently he argued that modern poetry had been set free not from metrical tradition, but from the nineteenth century more generally. He argued that the new poetry was freed from “a vague eloquence, from a preoccupation with a poetic past,” and that the new poet had “been transferred to a moving world from a lifeless and literary storehouse” (*NE*, 13). This new freedom allowed the new poets and their readers to “look at the world [they lived] in; to study and synthesize the startling fusion of race and ideas, the limitless miracles of science and its limitless curiosity, the growth of liberal thought, the groping and stumbling toward a genuine social democracy” (*NE*, 13). For Untermeyer, then, the real difference between the new poetry and the old was the type of imagined communities they could organize. The dusty literariness of nineteenth-century poetry would keep people divided and unequal; the “racy” vitality of the new poetry would bring Americans together so that they could fulfill the nation’s destiny as bringer of world democracy.

914 **Conclusion**

Oren Izenberg recently proposed that we reimagine the poetry of the first half of the twentieth-century not as a literary or aesthetic endeavor but rather as an “ontological project” of “reestablishing or revealing the most basic unit of social life”; for Izenberg, modernist poetry “articulat[es] a new humanism” by “seek[ing] a reconstructive response to the great crises of social agreement and recognition in the twentieth century.”⁵¹ What the discourse of the new poetry shows, however, is that such an ontological project is not necessarily “reconstructive” or productive of the social good. The new poetry, as much as the leftist, objectivist poetry that Izenberg focuses on, sought to reground social life in the folk traditions of “genuine” cultures, thereby providing an aesthetic solution to the problem of alienated labor through a problematic appeal to racial and national identities perceived to be authentic. The continuing critical desire to reshape modernist poetry as an ethically sound political endeavor risks both misrepresenting the historical record and further separating the study of American poetry and American prose.⁵² The complex social desires encoded in regionalist fiction, which arose out of the same ideas and critical discourses as did the new poetry, have been explored in depth by critics such as Brad Evans and Walter Benn Michaels, who have resisted reducing such fiction to its “good” social uses, but studies of the new poetry frequently avoid connecting it with regionalist fiction.⁵³ To continue to insist that modernist poetry be defined by its progressive aspects is only to keep it separated from the larger discourses and publications in which it circulated and developed. This separation, it seems, would be all the more regrettable at a time when new databases such as the Modernist Journals Project and evolving data visualization tools offer exciting new possibilities for the historical study of modernist texts.

What my study suggests is a renewed attention to particular critical moves in the face of an ever-expanding archive, one that guards against remaking the evidence in that archive in the image of a desirable present or future. There is indeed an ethical dimension to a historical approach to poetics, but it does not amount to a search for a politically tenable modernist poetry; rather, it involves an openness to the alterity of history, especially when historical actors do not imagine social relations in recognizable or politically acceptable forms. A truly historical approach to modernist poetry—one that could more fundamentally challenge the idea that this poetry offered uniquely ethical ways to encounter and cope with industrial modernity—involves an acceptance that there is a fantasmatic element to contemporary visions of poetry as a means of organizing the social world, just as there is a fantasmatic and often politically problematic element to past attempts to imagine a better future through poetry. Closer attention to the ways in which such a project has manifested itself in the literary historical record, both negatively and positively, can offer a deeper understanding of the continuing critical desire to envision poetry as a unique sphere of political and social action, a sphere separate from other literary forms and historical discourses.

Notes

1. Alfred Kreymborg, "Touring America on Pegasus," *Poetry* 16, no. 2 (1920): 90.
2. Essays in and themed issues of *Poetry* frequently emphasized the role of the American landscape in the development of the new poetry. See, for instance, Harriet Monroe, "A Nation-Wide Art," *Poetry* 7, no. 2 (1915): 84–88, which argues for the greater use of American materials and themes in modern poetry. See also the February 1917 issue of *Poetry* devoted to "aboriginal poetry."
3. Much of this revisionist work is a response to Marjorie Perloff, who helped to popularize the idea that there were two major traditions in American poetry—one genteel, one avant-garde. As Cole Swensen writes, "The notion of a fundamental division in American poetry has become so ingrained that we take it for granted" even though "the model of binary opposition is no longer the most accurate one." The past two years alone have seen a number of notable attempts to rethink the "two traditions" narrative of modern poetry, which pits supposedly hegemonic "nineteenth-century poetic convention" against twentieth-century formal innovation and anti-sentimentality. Cole Swensen, introduction to *American Hybrid*, eds. Cole Swensen and David St. John, (New York: Norton, 2009), xvii–xviii. For attempts to rethink the "two traditions" narrative, see Oren Izenberg, *Being Numerous* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), and Srikanth Reddy, *Changing Subjects* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).
4. The ever-changing lists of poets allied with the new poetry should give pause to anyone looking to positively define a canon of new poetry, however inclusive. As Craig Abbott notes, confusion about the identity of the new poetry was characteristic of the movement; John Erskine conflated the new poetry and imagism, while Mary Hall Leonard conflated imagism, free verse, the Georgian Poets, and the new poets. See Craig Abbott, "Publishing *The New Poetry*," *Journal of Modern Literature* 11, no. 1 (1984): 99. The presence of genteel and Georgian poets in anthologies of the new poetry is especially notable, since later studies take the new poets and the genteel and Georgian poets to be diametrically opposed. See Meredith Martin and Erin Kappeler, "The Georgian Poets and the Genteel Tradition," in *A Companion to Modernist Poetry*, eds. David E. Chinitz and Gail McDonald (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 197–208.
5. Len Platt, introduction to *Modernism and Race*, ed. Len Platt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 15.
6. John Timberman Newcomb, *How Did Poetry Survive? The Making of Modern American Verse* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012); hereafter cited in the text as "Newcomb." Michael Golston, *Rhythm and Race in Modernist Poetry and Science* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).
7. See Nelson, *Repression and Recovery: Modern American Poetry and the Politics of Cultural Memory, 1910–1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989). See also Harrington, *Poetry and the Public: The Social Form of Modern U.S. Poetics* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002).
8. Golston, *Rhythm and Race in Modernist Poetry and Science*, 209–10.
9. Golston is by no means the first to propose that Williams's poetry offers a version of modern pluralism. James Clifford reads *Spring and All* as a moment of relativist ethnographic inquiry. More recently, Joshua Schuster has linked Williams to Franz Boas, arguing that "Boas's stress on everyday activity, environmental factors, and racial and cultural migration as constitutive of the human condition connects to Williams's claim for a poetry in contact with local geography and 'the dynamic mob.'" Schuster's account of *Spring and All* is provocative, but he admits that it fails to prove that Williams read Boas or was directly responding to his work. On the opposite end of the critical spectrum (as Schuster notes), Michael North and Walter Benn Michaels have offered definitive discussions of Williams's complicity in racist and nationalist thinking. Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988). Joshua Schuster, "William Carlos Williams, *Spring and All*, and the Anthropological Imaginary," *Journal of Modern Literature* 30, no. 3 (Spring 2007): 117, 120. North, *The Dialect of Modernism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). Benn Michaels, *Our America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995).
10. Susan Hegeman, *Patterns for America: Modernism and the Concept of Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 4; hereafter cited in the text as "Hegeman."

11. Manganaro, *Culture, 1922: The Emergence of a Concept* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 26. Degler, *In Search of Human Nature: The Decline and Revival of Darwinism in American Social Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 71. Boas's insight that cultures were local, historically situated formations, an insight often credited with instantiating a new pluralism in anthropology, took some time to develop. Boas famously argued against Otis T. Mason and other curators of the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History that artifacts should be displayed according to their place of origin rather than according to their use (under Mason, artifacts were grouped by kind to demonstrate the evolution of mankind as a species), but as Hegeman notes, "It was not for a number of years that the implications of his challenge to the Smithsonian curators were realized in Boas's own work. . . . There was nothing necessarily egalitarian, or antihierarchical, about the gesture of imagining the other as spatially separate from oneself" (Hegeman, 38). Clive Bush has also argued for a more nuanced understanding of Boas's early work, explaining that Boas dismissed the "potentially racist implications" of natural selection as it was expounded by social evolutionists, while at the same time "accepting developmental and 'primitive-civilised' assumptions which were also an integral part of the same theory." Clive Bush, "Cultural Reflections on American Linguists from Whitney to Sapir," *Journal of American Studies* 22, no. 2 (August 1988): 189–90.

12. Melissa Bradshaw, *Amy Lowell, Diva Poet* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 84.

13. Harriet Monroe, letter to Edward C. Marsh, 23 April 1915, Harriet Monroe Papers, Box 18, Folder 1, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

14. Abbott, "Publishing *The New Poetry*," 91, 99.

15. Harriet Monroe and Alice Corbin Henderson, eds., *The New Poetry: An Anthology* (New York: Macmillan, 1917), v–vi; hereafter cited in the text as *NP*.

16. Amy Lowell, *Some Imagist Poets: An Anthology* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1915), vi–vii.

17. Lowell, *Some Imagist Poets*, vi–vii.

18. Brad Evans, *Before Cultures: The Ethnographic Imagination in American Literature, 1865–1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 7–8.

19. Francis Barton Gummere, *Democracy and Poetry* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1911), 100.

20. Michael Cohen, "Paul Laurence Dunbar and the Genres of Dialect," *African American Review* 41, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 249.

21. Francis Barton Gummere, *Germanic Origins: A Study in Primitive Culture* (New York: Scribner, 1892), 9–10.

22. See Augusta F. Ditty, "Ballad-Writing in the High School," *The English Journal* 3, no. 6 (1914): 382–86. Ditty notes that she focused on the "communal theory" of ballad making in her high school English class.

23. See Arthur Beatty, "Ballad, Tale, and Tradition: A Study in Popular Literary Origins," *PMLA* 29, no. 4 (1914): 473–98. Beatty notes that it was common knowledge to anyone who had studied English poetry that there were "two main theories in the field" of ballad study, "the communal [Gummere's version]; and the individualistic, literary, or anti-communal theory." Beatty believed that Gummere's theory had won the day, arguing, "It would be a waste of time to show how completely in the main Professor Gummere and the late Andrew Lang have met the objections of those who oppose the communal theory." In spite of Beatty's confidence, the validity of the communal origins hypothesis was debated for years to come and was challenged most vocally by Louise Pound in the 1920s and 1930s. Beatty, "Ballad, Tale, and Tradition," 473–75.

24. See, for instance, Nelson Antrim Crawford, "Translating Old English," *Poetry* 21, no. 1 (1922): 53–55; Alice Corbin Henderson, "The Folk Poetry of These States," *Poetry* 16, no. 5 (1920): 264–73; Harriet Monroe, Alice Corbin Henderson, and Carl Sandburg, "Aboriginal Poetry," *Poetry* 9, no. 5 (1917): 251–56. Monroe narrated a very Gummerian account of the development of poetry in later years, as well:

Music and poetry seem to have been among the earliest and most direct human manifestations of the universal rhythmic impulse. At first they were united—lyric rapture instinctively fitted words to melody, as it does still in certain forms of spontaneous folk-song like keening over the dead or other primitive rhapsodies of prayer and praise. But as life became more complex,

the two arts separated, developed each its own imaginative and technical expression of the rhythmic instinct. Literature began in the creation of poems too beautiful to be left to chance memories and tongues, and therefore committed to writing.

In the same article, Monroe highlights her debt to “philologists, chiefly German, on the subject of speech-rhythms.” This is not to say that Monroe and Henderson were strict Gummerians, but rather that their understanding of poetic rhythm and poetic form was influenced by popular ideas about the origins of poetry that were shaped in large part by Gummere’s work. Monroe, “Prosody,” *Poetry* 20, no. 3 (1922): 149–51.

25. Monroe, “A Later Word from Dr. Patterson,” *Poetry* 12, no. 3 (1918): 171–72.

26. Patterson, “New Verse and New Prose,” *The North American Review* 207, no. 747 (1918): 267. For more on Patterson’s work and the scientific study of prosody in the early twentieth century, see Golston, *Rhythm and Race in Modernist Poetry and Science*.

27. Saintsbury was nonetheless committed to an ideal of Englishness that he believed could be manifested metrically. For a more detailed analysis of his work, see Meredith Martin, *The Rise and Fall of Meter: Poetry and English National Culture, 1860–1930* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 79–108.

28. George Saintsbury, *A History of English Prosody from the Twelfth Century to the Present Day*, vol. 3, *From Blake to Mr. Swinburne* (London: Macmillan, 1910), 510.

29. Saintsbury, *A History of English Prosody*, 499–500.

30. Monroe and Henderson did not agree with Saintsbury’s work wholesale. Monroe took Saintsbury to task for “refus[ing] to take sides ‘in the battle of Accent versus Quantity,’” which she claimed was analogous to “prefac[ing] a treatise on astronomy with a refusal to decide whether the earth goes around the sun or the sun around the earth.” Though Monroe clearly disagreed with the conclusions Saintsbury drew from the insight that English was a hybrid language, she agreed with the premise that English had been influenced by its contact with French and German (among other languages), as her comments about Langland and Chaucer show (these are cited below). Saintsbury was the most prominent prosodic theorist espousing the view that English was an amalgamation of linguistic sources, and I take his work to be representative of common ideas rather than indicative of Monroe’s positions. Monroe’s ideas about the ontological status of anglophone prosody were often contradictory; though she argued that English poetic rhythms were inherently flexible and less easily codified than those of other languages, she nevertheless insisted that there must be a single way to scan properly and annotate all of the possible poetic rhythms that could be created in English. Harriet Monroe, “Editorial Comment: Rhythms of English Verse,” *Poetry* 3, no. 2 (1913): 61.

31. Monroe had touched on this subject in earlier editorials in *Poetry*. See Harriet Monroe, “Editorial Comment: Rhythms of English Verse,” *Poetry* 3, no. 2 (1913): 61–68; see also her “Editorial Comment: Rhythms of English Verse, II,” *Poetry* 3, no. 3 (1913): 100–111.

32. As historians of *Poetry* magazine have shown, Monroe was highly attuned to the composition of the actual audience for her publications; she canvassed potential backers in person, and she made special notes in her editorial files when notable figures revealed themselves to be readers of or subscribers to *Poetry*. See Ellen Williams, *Harriet Monroe and the Poetry Renaissance: The First Ten Years of Poetry, 1912–22* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977). Yet the rhetoric in Monroe’s introduction to her new poetry anthology suggests that she was also interested in audience as an abstract concept. In focusing on the “spirit” of modern poetry as an indicator of the tenor of contemporary life, the introduction implicitly posits a theoretical connection between literature, its audience, and the type of world that audience creates and inhabits.

33. Edward Sapir, “Civilization and Culture,” *The Dial* 67 (1919): 233–35.

34. Sapir, “Civilization and Culture,” 233–35.

35. Monroe, “The Free-Verse Movement in America,” *The English Journal* 13, no. 10 (1924): 704–5. The phrase “the tale of the tribe” is Ezra Pound’s.

36. Monroe, “Rhythms of English Verse II,” *Poetry* 3, no. 3 (1913): 111.

37. Monroe, “Miss Lowell on Tendencies,” *Poetry* 11, no. 3 (1917): 153–54.

38. Henderson, “The Folk Poetry of These States,” *Poetry* 16, no. 5 (1920): 269–71.

- 918 39. Monroe, "Ten Years Old," *Poetry* 21, no. 1 (1922): 36.
40. For more on Lowell's ideas about America's role in the international scene, see Bradshaw, *Amy Lowell, Diva Poet*.
41. Quoted in Hugh MacDougall, *Racial Myth in English History* (Montreal: Harvest House, 1982), 93.
42. MacDougall, *Racial Myth in English History*, 90.
43. Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 5; hereafter cited in the text as "Horsman."
44. Lowell, *Tendencies in Modern American Poetry* (New York: Macmillan, 1919), 201; hereafter cited in the text as *T*. Lowell's opinion was common in the 1910s. As Horsman explains, beginning in the middle of the nineteenth century, many racial theorists argued that Americans were "a superior blend of all that was best in the white races of Europe. . . . The 'American race' was [believed to be] simply the greatest of the white races" (Horsman, 251–52). The Anglo-Saxon core of this blended race remained of paramount importance. As John Higham argues, Anglo-Saxonist thinkers believed that "the Anglo-Saxon [had] a marvelous capacity for assimilating kindred races, absorbing their valuable qualities, yet remaining essentially unchanged." Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism 1860–1925* (New York: Atheneum, 1965), 33.
45. Woodrow Wilson, "Address to Congress, 2 April 1917," in *War Addresses of Woodrow Wilson*, ed. Arthur Roy Leonard (Boston, MA: Ginn, 1918), 42.
46. Wilson, "Address to Congress," 42.
47. For more on the origins of this critique of alienation, see Adam Kuper, *The Invention of Primitive Society: Transformations of an Illusion* (London: Routledge, 1988), 4–5.
48. Gummere, *The Beginnings of Poetry* (New York: Macmillan, 1901), 177; hereafter cited in the text as *BP*. Here Gummere goes so far as to posit that "in medieval civilization, the same roof often covered the knight and his humblest retainer, the same food fed them, and both were marked by the same standards of action, the same habit of thought, the same sentiments, the same lack of letters, of introspection, of diversified mental employment" (*BP*, 177).
49. See Sapir, "Civilization and Culture."
50. Untermeyer, *The New Era in American Poetry* (New York: Holt, 1919); hereafter cited in the text as *NE*. Untermeyer, *Modern American Poetry: An Introduction* (New York: Harcourt, Bruce and Howe, 1919); hereafter cited in the text as *MAP*.
51. Oren Izenberg, *Being Numerous*, 1–4.
52. For a useful account of the disciplinary separation between poetry and prose in the contemporary academy, see Joseph Harrington, "Why American Poetry Is Not American Literature," *American Literary History* 8, no. 3 (1996): 496–515.
53. See note 9 above.