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Doctorate of Philosophy in Creative Writing

The South is Following Me Again

And

**Runaway Rhythm
1900-2011**

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Doctorate of Philosophy
University of Edinburgh
2011

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and effort and that it has not been submitted anywhere for any other degree or professional qualification. Where other sources of information have been used, they have been acknowledged.

Signed: _____

Dated: _____

Abstract

The South Is Following Me Again is a collection of poetry composed over a three-year period, which focuses on my interest in my roots as an ex-patriot from the American South and the growing occurrences of runaway rhythm within my own work as I researched and defined the term. There is a strong theme of 'Southernism' that permeates the collection and is evident in the nostalgically atmospheric poems such as "A Haunting", "Greenhouse Effect", and "Textually Active" as they present an interesting and somewhat foreboding sense of the South. The collection then moves into a series of four southern dialect poems, which explore phonetically written poetry of a southern family, as it evolves away from the Southern epicentre of the collection.

Delicate issues such as Mexican/American immigration in the poem "Immigration Policy", and deaths and illnesses of friends and lovers in "Poem for a Murdered Friend", "Radio Therapy", and "Audience Participation" are dealt with strategically by refusing to sentimentalise or moralise the subject. There are a few poems that deal with love and sex in engaging and playful forms, as can be seen in "Answering God's Call" and the "Torture Garden" series, which leads characters through a memorable visit to a hardcore fetish night, and marks the point in the collection where the reader is furthest removed from the South. Some of the poems hinge on more intellectually surreal concepts such as "Esoteric", "The Guards", "Timeless", and "Café Tutu Tango" and challenge the reader to disentangle the rhythm from the content of the lines. Moving on from the esoterically obscure, the poems "Travelling Horses", "Bottoms Up", and "Bombilation: a cousin of Howl" echo my growing understanding of runaway rhythm as it pushes against the elements that bind together the sense and movement of the lines. Finally, the collection ends with the long, elegiac poem "A Natural Beauty", which brings together aspects of the American South and the United Kingdom, and in which the rhythms are intertwined with memory to provide an extended release for the reader.

The critical element, entitled "Runaway Rhythm 1900-2011", defines the term "runaway rhythm" as a rhythm that is formed by various nuances of grammar, syntax, and poetic mechanisms to create minute separations between the movement and sense of the lines. In utilising this form of rhythm, the poet encourages the reader to engage with the poem by drawing their attention to the content and theme while simultaneously linking it to the structure. I will be focusing on runaway rhythm in selected works by Marianne Moore, Denise Levertov, Robert Creeley and discussing how it is still used by contemporary poets Adam York and Gerald Stern, and within my own collection.

Contents

Declaration	i
Abstract	ii
<i>The South Is Following Me Again</i> A Poetry Collection	1
Runaway Rhythm 1900-2011	78
Introduction	79
Chapter 1 Marianne Moore: Runaway Rhythm in Four Poems from 1918-1961	89
Chapter 2 Denise Levertov: Runaway Rhythm in Three Poems from 1961-1998	105
Chapter 3 Robert Creeley: Runaway Rhythm in Five Poems from 1945-2005	117
Chapter 4: Modern Poets and Their Use of Runaway Rhythm from 1995-2011	134
Bibliography	
Poetry	154
Critical	158

The South Is Following Me Again

A Poetry Collection

Contents

Immigration policy	4
Life in my body	6
A haunting	7
Welcome to Dixie Series:	
Walmart parking lots	8
Grandmother's house	9
A hunter's life	10
Ex-pat	13
Greenhouse effect	14
A-town	16
Textually active	17
The bars close at three	20
Bottoms up	21
Café Tutu Tango	22
Handy	25
Clarence	26
This is poetry if we do not write it	27
Answering god's call	28
Chanel No. 5	29
Two nights in Berlin	30
Eight months in Edinburgh	32
Broken	33
Every three seconds a child dies as a result of extreme poverty	34
Where I like it	35
Poem for a murdered friend	36
Radio therapy	37
Audience participation	38
Finding religion, or at least something to write about	39
A prayer at the David Mach exhibit	40
Torture Garden Series:	
The invitation	41
The Duchess	42
The Gardener	43
The Little Lady	44
The Venetian	45

The Countess	46
The Baroness	47
The Turk	48
Absinthe	49
Middlesex	50
Ashley	51
Things fall	52
The nicest guy I'll ever date	53
The sensation of floating	55
Poetic license	56
No reply	57
Travelling horses	58
Esoteric	59
Guards	60
Bombilation, a cousin of Howl	61
How to end the world in just six words	62
Are we not all self-contained disasters?	63
Timeless	64
Verbose	65
In beauty it is finished	66
A natural beauty	67
Notes	77

Immigration policy

The hole was just where he said it would be. Ten paces left of the leaning tree hidden by sun-burnt brush. She holds her baby to her chest and pulls at the chain link wall, top-lined with razors. Pulls harder: the bottom of the fence relinquishes an inch. She sits her baby down next to a brown lizard on a rock the color of bleached custard.

Using both hands, she jerks; it gives with a screech. She falls back; the lizard wheezes but stays his perch. She rolls to her knees, crawls, maneuvering herself under the needlelike edges. She reaches back through for her cargo, ignoring new grooves along her arms where the metal feelers leave their marks.

A vehicle roars and she steels herself, her blood gathers at her elbow and drops down to the boiling sand. The truck passes, she inches forward. The lizard scurries under her – where red dots the ground – and presses his belly onto it, enjoying the temporary cool.

Fully through, she takes a deep breath as she squats by the lizard, the fence. Freedom smells like sweat, fear, baby shit and evaporating iron.

She gallops ahead, bending low, behind mirrors of rocks and shrubs. The sun kisses her head with harsh indifference. She looks up, stumbles on the edge of a dirt road, falls, blocking the baby with her own vulnerable bones. The baby cries, she sits under a dying tree and opens her shirt.

She walks. Hours drain the last bit of liquid from her pores. The baby is crying again. She has nothing to offer but dust. She rocks the child to an exhausted sleep and curls herself around her precious freight. Night evolves into a landscape of haunted pastels; she does not sleep.

The baby is hoarse now. The sun is low in the East. Keep moving to El Paso, her sister waits with the promise of work. She stands, legs wobbly. She steps onto the road and moves moves moves.

She hears the hum of motors that don't appear, is no longer aware
of the snakes watching from the shade of cactus fruits,
doesn't hear the whimpers from the bundle in her arms.
When black jeeps roll to a stop beside her kneeling form
she crosses herself.

They pick her up, revive her in the frosty interior.
They pry her baby from her arms, fill its belly with milk.
They drive her to a clinic, clean her wounds,
oil her scars, give her sustenance and new clothes.

Two days later she is driven South, through the razored,
bullet-barred border, given a packed lunch, bottle of water
and dropped a mile from the hole in the fence –
thirty four miles to El Paso.

Life in my body

It felt all sticky, as if I never belonged; I pushed and pushed from the inside out.

In my childhood kitchen I see the stove with its boiling water and black-eyed
peas.

I hated the building that was no longer my home.

The girl I was had it all; she was pretty, smart enough, talented, wealthy.

Time alters us.

I sit on a paisley chair watching Venice chase
my iron horse along its tracks.

I catch my reflection watching me.

I ask it, "What did you do?"

Out of the tunnel the sun scatters my image
and answers, "When the time comes, we will know, you and I
together will know."

Slowly the traveling giant is reined in.

I grab my bag, move through the station.

"Here I am. Finally I can begin my life, anew."

Outside the sun mocks me, "That time has come and gone my dear."

I ignore him.

I am in Rome wearing a white toga with my hair upswept.

A man walks by and out of his briefcase falls a

cat of nine tails and a signed copy of

Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil.

I would clam up if I felt uncomfortable, but I always say

believe in yourself and pursue your controversies.

A haunting

There are ghosts living in my ear.

I picked them up when I went home for Christmas
and wandered through the pock-marked fields
of harvested cotton and waited for the pecans to fall.

I siphoned them from decomposing stills
that dot the woods next to tin and timber
lean to's and heard them beside the beaver
dam as the wind lifted the pine needles
and tendrils cupped an ear.

They whispered in honeyed tones
of boiling summers, black-eyed peas
and fish traps made from empty buckets
because rods were necessary only for the rich.

One rasped his words against my neck,
“these branches have held more than crows”,
and ushered me back to my family's home
propped up by columns in a white-dusted field.

Over the ocean I wove them into spectral dolls
that dangle from holes pierced as a child:
glittery reminders that machines can't pick up everything.

Welcome to Dixie

I. Wal-Mart parking lots

Whare yew frohm boi?
Kin tell yew aint frohm roun' these hare pahrts.

If we's sees yew outsides tha Walmarts
oar comin inta tha Waffle Hoarse, yew gonna git looked
at rite funny like.

It ain't that we's ain't gonna like yew.
We's jus' knowd betta than'ta trust that thare accent.
Uh las time my pappy trusted wonna yew
coons runned off witha hole lot.

Damnded coons.

Drivin' 'em Caddeelacks
Warin' 'em fancee ties
an black goggles.
 -ain't wortha sheeit.

Whatchew needs uh 12 pointa
wedged upaginst tha tailgate like,
an uh gun rack like 'is un hare.

But wee'll givya chance an be tickled pahnk if yew read 'is hare pome!:

'AB
CD puppies
MRNT puppies
SMR
CDEDBD feet
LIB
MR puppies'

An if yew pass 'is hare test
then wee'll take yew home
fur biscuits n gravy
an black eyed peas
an some good
ol' fashioned
Deliverance.

II. Grandmother's house

Why hunnee, youh come ohn en heeya owt ov thuh cold;
whaht evah's worrin' youhar purttee little hahyud cahn waiht
teal way git youh a nahce cuhp ov hawt choclit.
I'll only bay a secon'. Youh wont sumptin' to et?

Youh neehd some mate ohn youhar bones;
heeya's a smok'd hahm and 'mater samwich. 'Maters git rail sweet
when youh let'm ripen ohn thuh windah seal. Et up chil'!

an old youhar horses, way'll tawk 'bouht thahat latah,
right now youh eat to git some strength.
Goodniss mae! Whaya aruh my mannuhs?
my momma'd bay 'shamed ov mae: youh've been heeya a coons age
an I haven't evan stirruhd thuh fie-uh up yit. Thehya youh aruh.

Youh dohn't et enough to cape a caht alive.
Hawt chochlate Sweat Peah? Oh, lit mae jus git youh a cup.
So tale mae awl about it. Youh comfy enough?
Look at youhar fate—thehya aruhn't goin' to dryh owt en thozе.
Scootch closuh to thuh fi-uh an lit mae git youh sum slippuhs.

.....

Bless youhar heart chil'! but dohn't youh worry none;
I know jayust whaht youh neehd: a baeg
slice ov Peacan Pi. I'll bay bahck en
two shakes ov a lamb's taihl an it'll bay rite as raihn.

III. A hunter's life

I never ate venison. Dad hated the stuff,
never let mom bring it in the house,
never let anyone hunt in the fields or orchards.

One afternoon a poacher was in the horse pasture,
towards the barns and woodland where my brother and I
dressed in camouflage and ran willy-nilly through the underbrush,
hiding under leaves and in the tops of the trees we could wiggle up.

While dad and I were walking toward the intruder,
both of us wearing day-glow orange,
I asked him why he didn't eat deer.

He said, "Wun day, whaen I wuz 'bout yewer brother's age,
I hunt'd; up houwers 'fore thuh sun roze
Bundl'd into three payers of ovaralls.
I walk'd a good mile ta thuh orch'rd
where I wedg'd some ol' plywood into uh tree.
I 'ad uh rope made frum bailin' twine that hung frum uh branch
n I'd tie ma rifle ta it
shimmy upta thuh wobbly platform
pull up ma gun n wait."

"Did ya shoot n e thing?"

He nodded.

He went silent as we turned,
shooed the horses and donkeys
back toward the barn.

"N ya didn't like thuh way thuh deer tast'd?"

"I neva ate that deer. It was uh doe. She was big n pretty, just lost'er spots.
She wuz thuh first deer that came cloze 'nough
for me ta hit. I shot'er alright,
but she didn't drop dead like I thought she would.

Yew see, rifles 'ave buckshot in thuh bullits.
Buckshot spreadz out like lots o' tiny bullits.
Which is good, if ya git cloze 'nuff.
n I wasn't near cloze 'nuff."

Dad stopped talking as we walked directly under the ancient oak ruling the back of the pasture. We looked up.

There was a man in the tree 15 feet above, crouched, looking down through a bark colored mask.

"Evenin' folks," he said.

"Evenin'; yew realize that 'is here is private propty."

"Naw sur. Thuh propty lines is right ovuh yondah. Imma en ma uncle's tray."

"No sir. Thuh propty line is back ovuh there, where yew left yore bag n thermos." Dad spoke evenly.

"Riite, ma uncle owens 'is lann."

"I own this land," my dad said.

"Wayell he owens thayat yonder ovuh thuh faynce. Cloze 'nuff, donya thank?" the man breathed out heavily through a printed leaf.

"No Sir, not nearly. I own that side a thuh fence too. Infact, yore smack-dab in thuh middle a my 300 acres n if ya don' clime down n leave right now, I'll call thuh game ward'n for huntin' n the sheriff for trespassin'."

The man cursed; climbed down. The brown donkey, Jenny, cautiously sniffed his coat.

"I want thuh buckshot." Dad held out his hand.

"Gawd daaammnniiiiittt! Yew think Imma gonna shoot caws yew tol' mae ta git lawst?"

"I thank that there're uh lot'o temptin' deer 'tween here

n thuh closest place yew could park
n 'is my children's playground."

"Awlrite." The man pulled up his mask,
huffed out breathes of cold air,
unloaded his rifle.

"Spares too."

"Sheeit."

We watched the man walk away
dragging his rifle in one hand.

Jack came up and nuzzled my arm.
I rubbed his soft, spiky mane and asked,
"So what happen'd ta thuh deer yew shot?"

"She ran, n I chas'd'r;
followed bits uh blood that hit thuh trees.
Once, I saw uh big smear whare she ran inta one
but I don't know whare she went."
He pushed Jack away and we continued to the barn,

"next weekend ah went huntin'
n thuh dogs were outside runnin' 'round
tryin' ta pull somethin' from each other.
It was long n movin'.
I called them n as they got clozer
thuh smell of rot got stronger n
I realized they were fightin' ovuh a deer leg
flappin' at the knee like uh flag."

We were almost to the barn when we heard a rifle blast
followed by a wild, "Yeeeeeehooooooooo,"
from the woods past the oak tree.

"Sheeit. Whar thuh hail's that donkey?"

IV. Ex-pat

Yesterday I spoke to a Cambridge man
on the District Line.
He asked me if I knew what a redneck was.

I may have reached a milestone in my life.

Greenhouse effect

There is a bubble of cellophane
sitting neatly over the frozen South.
I can see it glow in the setting sun
through my tiny window's crystal-coated glass;
beneath it sprouts the germs
of fig-rooted faith that reaches out like kudzu.

There is a thinner layer above Atlanta
that stretches across the sky and pops
like chewing gum giving birth
to tiny tin cans with paper wings
that shoot out and away as quickly
as ours is drawn in to land
beside the CNN centre.

From that epicenter of towering trellises
radiates Dixie Land delights,
which are a treasure to tour
as they multiply and the tarmacs shrink
as we head south on 85.

In Newnan,
we stop at an exit
planted with Smoky Pigs
and Biscuit Houses in alternating tiers
growing thick with parking lots
dotted with cars, pouring forth life
and breathing deeply of the air
that seeps down from the popping holes
above the northern city.

We blessed our food and went
away, past the narrowing mindless roads
into the red-socket sun that dipped
below the interstate signs over Alabama
declaring

 "Go to church or the devil will get you!"
until we wove onto the back roads
past the big town just over the state line.

Here, the church's seeds
have fallen on fertile grounds
and grew tall and thick in the red clay
where the hot breaths of believers
 "blessing people's hearts"
and the light emanating
from glowing posts declare
 "God has an app for that"
and
 "God will forgive you.
Yes you.
Even for that".

The past hazes the air like royal icing
dripping from the magnolia blossoms
that line the fields of half-picked cotton
and cuddle around plantation houses
built with a ready made history.

Nearer home,
the black-built wall glows
under the lights
from our expensive German car
as we turn onto the dirt road
that winds between the pecan orchards,
down to the lake that is so deeply dark
the sky cannot find its own reflection.

The dogs do not announce our arrival,
but gasp in the solid lumps of air
that smolder and crack against each other,
gently rippling the oak leaves as they bounce past.
It sticks in my throat, my lungs constrict
and sweat pushes itself out through all my pores
as I tremble and roll my suitcase through the columns
and grab my keys before nausea sets in.

A-Town

The sky is ashamed—burnt
sienna reflections—a megalopolis built
on a town on a hamlet
that is the capital
of the South.

SoSo Def afros wink down at you
looking 10 p.m. fresh
in black fuck-me boots.

Gladys Knight's Chicken and Waffles
glows neon orange: still open
but with colossal linebackers with busted knees
standing sentinel at the doors, sporting Glaswegian smiles.

Club One-Tweezy is closed:
rappers had a word play
turned sword play turned
lyrics to life last month.

Keep moving towards
the crowning achievement of the Underground:
the Aquarium's silver bowls glow blue-yellow,
lit so the turtles won't head butt the Braves.

Left at Mitchell's:
the streets incensed with damp ash of Autumn leaves
that undulate like a swamp before the taxi
that sidles up and offers a ride you decline.
He slides around the corner

—rumbles in the sky barely concede
a chance to contemplate chasing
the stale cigarette trail of the cab.
No matter,
you can't sprint in heels
and the sun is on its way.
Perhaps it will pick you up.

Textually active

11 p.m. Prompt as always.
She sashays in to Scruffy Murphy's downtown
Columbus, Georgia, tapping out a text.
Rock and Republics patched
from when she sidestepped into a bonfire
"your leg's on fire! walk it out bitch,
walk it out."

The womenfolk smell her, abhor her,
part like her grandfather's hair: oily and vindictive.
Men are dumbstruck by her lips, tits, hips.

Her top is violaceous, critically cut
elevating cinch in red Balenciaga,
charcoal hair climbs cautiously
to the middle of her back.
No wedding band.

She orders Miller Lite,
opens a tab she knows she won't pay,
peels the label as Pistol Town totters
to the slapdash stage for their second set.
A stout soldier sidles up to her stool;
the chronic blather:
"Can I buy you a drink?
Want to dance?
Want to see a photo of my kid?"

Crisp Coors on the counter, silver slider in hand,
portfolio unsealed: Kid, kid in arms,
kid with dad, kid on lap,
penis.
"So, you want to fuck in a cab?"

In a second she's escaping across the dueling lanes of Broadway,
brimming with switched-on Camrys jack hammering the asphalt,
jacked up trucks with retractable ladders, rebel flags,
military groupies, pissed up wetbacks.

A silver Ford draws close. She clammers in,
her pop rolls down the windows. Her fingers
seize in her dreadlocked mass,
she tries not to be sick in the bends.

Safely west of the Chattahoochee she keys her reply:
"I'm worth more than a fucking beer.
I'm worth at least two
and a shot."

"Tomorrow then?"

The bars close at three

We sat at Waffle House, 3:30 AM.
Wendy, Lindsay, Ashleigh, Amy and I,
ever sober, had coffee.

Others had food matching their various states:
inebriation.

Wendy ignored the salt with hash browns,
instead keyed messages on her sleek cell.

Ashleigh managed to cut and fork a waffle with ease,
considering her five Fuck Me Blues.

Amy, poor dear, slurred and weaved feeding her lap.
No matter, cold grits are good from the table or bench.

Lindsay announced, "I have to pee!"
Fifteen minutes later she fished her phone from the toilet.

Amy saw the juke box, fell three times.
I lit a cigarette, Ashleigh reached the window,
burned her shirt, never noticed.
Lindsay dried her phone, then dropped it in juice.

Amy yelled words that didn't match the song.
Cecil, the cook, sang with her, not the music.

I re-lit,
Ashleigh drew hearts,
Lindsay dumped her juice,
Betty slipped on bacon bringing a mop,
Amy danced with homeless Jeb,
Cecil crooned while flipping burgers,
Betty mumbled,
I ashed in someone's oatmeal,
Lindsay licked her phone,
Ashleigh giggled,
Jeb grabbed Amy,
Amy squealed,
Wendy slammed her cell and said,
"I think I just had text message sex."

Bottoms up

A good cup is hard to find here
in this land of pints,
 half pints,
 mulled and pulled pints,
 pussy bottles of sticky liquor-like pops

pulling you to their lollipop tastes and lightening colours
berry flavoured on a layer of creamed liquor
in a cocktail glass passed from a guy
at the end of the bar eyeing you up,
 sizing you up for a sludgy sluice
of a butternut rum-filled, candy-rimmed goodnight
that costs double if you drink it with a straw.

Café Tutu Tango

During the third tapas
the lights go dim
in strut three
ladies in dress.

They strike a pose,
Jackson style,
waiting for their cue.

Off to the right,
on the tiger rug
beside the jewellery maker
was a smallish boy
with a tall dark hat,
pretty eyes,
thin lips
and a very imposing
moustache.

He sets up a bongo,
hits it once,
twice.
Shania kicks in,
“Man, I feel like a woman.”

The three women dance
shaking their tassels,
asses,
strategically
between the gypsy palm reader
and Johnny Depp.

Silver bras
with tiny straps,
bright orange heels,
matching hair
magically staying put.

The boy with the bongo bangs
every sixth

or ninth
beat.
But the girls in the line
dance flawlessly
as one.

Well built arms,
red heart tatt,
move to the beat;
jerking with choreographed
precision.

The bongo banged.
The dancers danced.
Johnny Depp tipped over.

The song ended.
So did my drink.
The lights returned
to our plates.

The dancers move together,
still.
Only now, they must.

The middle one sweaty,
paint rolling away,
catching on his
five o'clock shadow.

His chest hair wages
a losing war
with the delicate
silver straps.

The orange
plastic wig
veers sharply
skyward.

All three wipe their faces
with the back of their arms.

Their flanks now reveal their seams.

The sweet little tattoo:

not
"I 'heart' mom,"
but "fuck it,
then you die."

He makes it to the kitchen,
on hooker's heels
made for dancing,
not walking,
in style.

He deflates his
dancers, slips them off
while the cook rolls a joint,
and plates the fourth dish.

The boy with the bongo
now flirting
with a man:
his moustache
and one chop
in his pocket.

Handy

I spend a lot of time looking at my hands
feel that I know them
though I'm not sure I should.

I'm not a small person, but my hands seem to belong
to someone shrunken with age
and express their life in wrinkles and scars.

They tell a story that explains why I wear rings
but not on the proper fingers;
why my knuckles are rough and hairless
from fits of frustrated punching.

I know the scar on my left thumb
where I stapled myself to an art project
when I was ten. I have perfect whorls
on 4 fingertips and a prominently awkward bend
at the little joint on the 4th finger of my right hand
because I never learned to hold my pen correctly.

There's a dimple on my index finger
where I sliced it with my bagel
my first nervous morning in Edinburgh
and another on the back of my hand
where my horse bit me when we disagreed.

My left hand shows long life
my right hand predicts short.
I'll die somewhere in between —
closer to the unusual red dot near my pinky
where the skin grows in a peak
annoys in its existence but does no harm —

I know all the marks and scars,
wrinkles and bends.
Feel them with my fingertips
live their stories over and over again,
but if I close my eyes the canvas disappears
and I'm left with bits of lines and imperfections.

Clarence

For the third time this hour the clock is ticking.
A beetle saunters by, bypassing Thursday's milk receipt.

The nondescript glass door leads to a labyrinth with gilded spines
and weeping pages stacked up, arching every passage.

The stairs point down, with Russian dictionary railings.
No one has fallen, but the bar next door starts serving at noon.

A solitary figure comes in, pulling off frosted gloves,
asking for Dan Brown —
the frozen air has sealed the thick aroma of use from his nose.

As it thaws, he knows he will not find what he wants.
He leaves the shop, not bothering to re-cover his bare fingers.

All is quiet as the water buffalo watches from across the room.

This is poetry if we do not write it

The sun setting among the hills catches prisms in the air
as she sits down on a bar stool with a Bible in her lap.

Basketball blares on the TV, interrupting her thoughts.
She orders a beer, retreats to a booth with vinyl green seats
and a sticky, round table with stacks of stained napkins
from the mini-mart next door shoved under one leg.

She squirts the surface with sanitizing gel, drying it
with her sleeve before plopping the Bible left.
To the right she places a green pack of loose tobacco.

She sips Guinness and opens to the third chapter of Genesis,
runs her finger over the page, closes her eyes for a moment,
folds the page twice and again, tearing two pieces.

Deft fingers pinch the leathery piles to which she adds a taste
from the bag hidden in the lining of her corduroy coat.

She rolls; the story of Creation arches on the table
as she flips the pages to Leviticus and drinks,
steeling herself for the frigid walk home.

Answering god's call

As she walked up the Metro stairs she knew they knew she was out of place. Despite her sable complexion she felt ashen in comparison to the mix of heritages hawking stolen goods in front of the Porte de Clignancourt.

"Go back to your boat," a gypsy woman screeched when she couldn't get a hand on her bag. But she could not refuse to answer the call: his single reply to her frustrated emails written to god.

He wrote to her from high in his Parisian loft, "Come to me," and signed off with an address. She could not but obey and now she strode through the market with plastic confidence slathered on to deflect the heavy rationality from seeping in.

It was too dark to retrace her steps to the Metro, too costly to return to London and she had not booked a place to sleep. Rue Soubise, door six. She buzzed and waited, the ring echoing in the hallway as the traffic passed by indifferently.

Chanel No. 5

Up at 3:37 a.m.
I guess he gets a cigarette
but when the door clicks
I notice the Camels
in the clock's blue glow.

Going for a walk, I
think, flipping the sheets
on his side where
chill air is crawling in.

Just before 6
the door sticks again.
He walks in unbuttoning a shirt
I never saw him in.

He kicks off his shoes
and curls into me.
"Where've you been?"

"I needed some air..."
he breathes into my neck.

The sun peaks around the wharf
while Chanel No. 5 drifts,
lulling me back to sleep.

Two nights in Berlin

I

The city of Berlin is rioting art
and eating up the walls with spray paint
and chewing gum in colours as varied
as the prostitutes' boots.

Well-heeled, well-hung beauties
with their white corsets,
platinum hair, bum-bags dangling,
standing fair-ways down,
each one has a corner
 or a strip
 or a hydrant
and a simmering sneer
and a tightly drawn eyeliner smear
of self respect

hiding well-bred intellect
they use to hustle the boys
and suss the pigs,
gauge the customer's girls,
figure out if he's willing to buy,
or if his girlfriend is willing to try
something different tonight,
cause she can make change for ten.

II

The night is young
and filled with absinthe
and an acrid blend
of filtered weed
 and melting sugar
 and diluted piss
and without breaking into a trot
you move through the streets
and when a man in the arching
igloo entrance of a bombed out factory
offers you speed, you enter,

accosted by another
who offers you fucking
and doesn't mention cost.
You turn left towards the bar,
which is little more than a barred-
up slab of wood with a metallic box
of cash and a curly blonde haired customer
hovering over a cement chess board, waiting his move.

While rowdy retorts rebound around
you huddle next to a welded ant
that is seventy-four times the normal size
you see in nature and consider
asking the fucker next to you
if he's got change for a twenty.

Eight months in Edinburgh

This morning clumped in like stale grits,
swelling despite the light rain
that would neither fall nor stop
and hung in the air like strings of bad, white cheddar.

Traffic builds up later and will drain away earlier
in the shorter days. While the weeks skulk by
beneath the growing shadow of Arthur's seat,
slinking around boulders and climbers and cider cans.

Shifted days linger for weeks;
eerily quiet in the mornings,
 when only tourists and sweepers brave the streets
and lackeys hand out fliers as fast as printers print.

Then a sudden exodus. The printers stop.
The tourists leave. The hotels are hollow
 and the streets are strewn with colourful leaflets
that fall from billboards as Edinburgh breathes again
in the silvery-blue September wind.

Broken

I lull myself to sleep with the sound of repeating images.
Doesn't matter what is said,
it matters that it is said again
and again
and again.

Eating corn flakes with week old milk is
finding release in familiarity,
and keeping the matters fresh
as they spin in my head.

As they spin in my head,
and keeping the matters fresh,
finding release in familiarity
is eating corn flakes with week old milk
again and
again and
it matters that it is said again;
doesn't matter what is said.
I lull myself to sleep with the sound of repeating images.

Every 3 seconds a child dies as a result of extreme poverty

When you order tea
at the Roebuck Café
on Tuesday sitting
on the flowery
iron settee
in down town
Savannah,

the heat wraps you
like a bandage.
The mossy shrouds hang down
from once proud oaks
like wilted bouffants
about their childlike faces.

The children in
the square play
tag and hop-scotch.

Your granddaughter
is nine this year.
Blonde haired,
brown eyes that
should have been
blue. She is
growing up so fast.

They get old
so quickly
these days.
Who's to say
where the seconds
go or why
the tea tastes
lemony after
the steam has abated.

Where I like it

I like it on the chair in the kitchen,
 while I'm cooking dinner;
on the living room table;
on the floor, on the couch
and the bathroom counter;
on the backseat of my car;
in the classroom so teacher can see;
on my bed or on a hotel sofa, rented for the afternoon;
in the lab, next to the test tubes and autoclave;
at the show hanging off the saddle horn;
on the floor of a hostel laundry room;
or free-falling from a plane at 30,000 feet;

I like it wherever is most convenient at the time,
 by the door or on my lap.
It doesn't matter where,
as long as I can get it with no delay.

Poem for a murdered friend

For a fraction of a second, nothing altered.

The neighbour heard a car back-fire
and stepped outside in flip flops and a Georgia hat.
She saw a man sprinting, pulling off his shirt to wipe
away the sweat while his dreadlocks danced behind him
and she watered her petunias and went to pick up her daughter.

A childhood friend went into labour while teaching
the definition of Pi to an indifferent class
of public school teens and the Christian radio station
had record numbers of people tuning in online to listen
to the last of the 6-10 morning show.

A dealer in Atlanta sold a brick to a musician
and made enough cash to pay his rent for a year
and the Falcons loaded into a bus for their first away game
and Delta made all but one of its transcontinental flights
on time and without a spare seat to be found.

In London it rained and Blair cancelled a book signing
and Cameron managed to avoid his questioners,
while trains travelled up the tracks, ribboning nearer the coastal cliffs
and the Scottish sky was a sheer turquoise sheet and the green spaces
were marked with the tar spots of sprawled humanity.

For a fraction of a second, nothing was the same.

Radio therapy

The descent into madness
is tumours named Molli and Randal,
devouring a lover's mind.
And it's hard to tell where Randal ends
and Molli begins.

All they do is shag
and multiply and grow and move next door
 and shag and multiply and grow
 and move next door and shag and multiply
 and grow and move next door...

Till the sprawl has taken over
and they squeeze together
like pickles in a Vlasic jar.
Since they began their lives
in prime real-estate
and no one is willing
to emigrate south.

Audience participation

There's fuck all you can do
about the hole in your brain
cradling a rock that won't
stop growing

so let's buy brightly coloured prom dresses
and take a train to London
and fill our bags with exotic fruits
from a sketchy East End shop
that sells mysterious pills
and fire detectors

before stealing skates in Hyde Park
and riding them to Victoria
where there's this place I know
where they fuck on stage
and encourage audience partici-
pation.

We'll leave with the hookers
who couldn't score and cruise
down the back alleys daring any fucker
to fuck with us as we kick bottles
with our bare feet

and make it to the station
for the first train back to Brighton
where we can collapse
below the new pier and skip rocks
that are so smooth
I can't tell if it's a pebble
or your hand I hold in mine

as the sun peaks its way up
from below the burnt out pier
and explodes,
my crinoline lights up
like the Ferris wheel above
in celebration of winning some great prize.

Finding religion, or at least something to write about

I am waiting for it to catch light
or float away
or write Absolute truths
or open to expel years of pent up poetry,
but it won't.

After all,
it's only a pen in a bottle.
And writing poetry is like trying
to pull your shoulder blade out
through a tiny cut in your thumb.

I never know what to say,
so I sculpted Jesus
out of neon yellow putty
and twisted his torso for good measure.

I found him this morning
next to a blue, dreadlocked Buddha.
His pallor is a sickly green.
It's worrying really, not that he looks ill,
but that I found him in my shower.

A prayer at the David Mach exhibit

As I walk
through the shadows
of collages and clerks,
I will not fear the vendor.

Prick me with pencils and I will bleed;
push me from a treetop and I will fall;
smother me with images and I will expire;
but fling me in a bowl of fire
and I will not burn.

For thy rod and thy staff
they comfort me,
and hell is a place of waiting:
just a cover of skin.

Deliver me from ruin;
seal it with a sear.
Fucked doesn't even begin
to cover how holy I am.

Forever and ever,

Amen.

Torture Garden

The Invitation

We were having tea with friends.
I poured the Earl Grey and casually mentioned
a certain fetish night quickly approaching.

Her ears pricked up; her eyes sharpened.
She asked for sugar and let the brown lump
slide into her cup along with the fact
that she already had a ticket.

She gently sipped and I asked,
“You’ll be there in time for the fashion show?”
A look of terror from a mutual friend chilled the air
as the candle danced, “Why? Are you in it.”

“I open the show.”
She reached for the pudding
with forcibly steadied hands.

“We’ll be there with corsets and whips,”
I said. And I passed her the strawberries and cream.

The Duchess

She stalks across the stones as if looking for her mount.
Her hair is harshly windblown and her lips are burnt deep burgundy.

She pushes the Venetian aside with her crop
and pulls a watch from a pocket flanked with tweed.

She pauses half way up the stairs, frozen in the last ray
of light pushing its way into the darkened den.

Regal in riding boots, breeches, vest and tie
that crossed both oceans and time,
to pause between the dungeon
and dance floor, she surveys the room.

She steps out of the light and through to the crypt,
smacking a pony with her crop as she sidles up to the bar,
and orders the expensive whisky she'll need to survive.

The Gardener

Her doubts were written on her face in clear cursive lines
that scrolled across her forehead, multiplying her years
as she added fake nails to execute her look:
not quite a tart, nor a whore.

She teased her hair to cover her nerves
and boldly followed the Duchess down a dark street
into the Caves of underground Edinburgh.

She felt herself relax when she saw the frosty Duchess
neck two shots of liquor and order whiskey to slow herself down.
She ordered a gin and tonic, allowed herself to enjoy

the binding comfort of the corset while she bobbed her head
to a metal remix of 'Bad Romance' and felt more at ease
when a lady with dirty feet strolled past on her way to the racks,
wearing nothing but an apple between her teeth.

The Little Lady

She is a slut, a whore, my 'wife'.
Tonight she is all three.

She drapes herself over me,
taller than usual in five inch heels,
a dangerously low basque
and carefully stained lips.

We leave the Gardener at the bar and pause
when she sees a painfully thin woman
being drawn and quartered with a apple gag in her mouth
and drumnable xylophone ribs.

She giggles and pokes my side between vest and bra.
I manoeuvre us past the table of nipple tassels and assels
and shove through to the copper topped bar
beside the angry looking latex policeman and remind her,
'It will never work; you're scared of pain.'

The Venetian

He came up from London, riding second-class along the coast.
His duffle bag was filled with a sumptuous velvet overcoat
—missing two buttons—

With rented vestments
he becomes a Venetian during Carnevale,
opening doors, buying rounds; barely able
to stop his fingers from caressing the lace and latex

that swirl around him like dark, squeaky storm clouds,
while warding off unseemly advances
by telling the Little Lady to “Stop being such a girl.
Deal with it!” in his thick Parisian accent,
refusing to acknowledge the cage
filled with little people being
lowered down over the bar.

The Countess

She walks past the racks on stilts five inches high;
waist cinched in steel bones and lace;
her chest pours over the top
and her pants were left in London.
But tonight she is nothing unusual.

Hidden in the throng pulsing to death metal,
in her bowler hat and vintage briefs,
black colours blend and she can only be known
by her lack of latex sheen in the dim red lights.

A man in a gas mask and tiny army thong pushes past the Baroness
and asks if she would be interested in flogging his wife.
She smiles sweetly and shakes her head in a slow, casual way.
The man nods and follows a gimp to the dungeon.

The Baroness

She descends the stairs into darkness
and moves aside for the gas mask and gimp.
Her white corset matches her skirt,
matches her stockings, matches her heels.

She glows against the backdrop of damp walls,
her hair coiled in a fiery forty's up-do
she chose at random from a book of styles.

She slides through the crowd
sidestepping those getting off
on getting painted with thick black drops
of wax hitting their chest, ears and lips.

Gasps of pleasure chase her
towards the burlesque where the fetishists-lite
sway to the offbeat songs of a bearded-bellied man
in a gold leotard, with legs that would put Giselle to shame.

The Turk

She came with The Duchess,
with trepidation,
a Clockwork Orange clown
with diamond tears and mesh bodysuit
that melted into the crowd
as she waited impatiently at the bar
between The Venetian and a latex gimp.

Armed with an ultra-gin,
she leans against the stones
watching resplendent gay angels,
tied to stocks, flog one another,
punctuated
by passionate embraces
with a hooked leather pole

before she wanders outside
to a uncivilised street
where drunks dance amok
and there are only rickshaws
as she strolls barefooted
back to the house
where The Duchess dressed her up.

Absinthe

If you were injected into my veins
my blood would course in green-dyed bliss.

Malachite fairy; liquid cocaine,
mixed with water and strained through sugared peat.

You draw yourself into the painter's portrait,
guide the poets; teaching children to fly.

You laced my arms with emerald ecstasy
and gave me a world beyond my dreams.

Middlesex

Between him and her
you float back and forth on the
hormones of convenience.

If she attracts you
you can turn out
the most dashing smile,
chiselled jaw,
manly stubble.

In the moment
your eyes meet hers
you flatten your breasts,
arrange your muscles,
lose your liquid edges
and
she's yours.

Or if it's him
who sidles up beside,
your curves swell,
overflowing
stony features erode
lips moisten
and
he's yours.

But if each
looks lust-filled and
night is all you have
inhale them;
for you are
soft, solid
smouldering, aloof
curved, angled
man, woman
both and neither.

Ashley

By seventy, Captain Archibald Kirk had done almost everything.
At 20 he flew a bomber into and out of Bavaria twenty-seven times.
On the twenty-eighth round a rocket clipped his wing
and he spent a year getting a makeover in a POW camp.

In Minnesota, he stepped away from the uniform
and stood facing a chalkboard. The cris-crosses on his back
shielded him from the sneers at the way he held his pen.

He married twice, divorced once and lent his genes to three boys
and a girl. In his sixties, he was voted in as mayor of a small town
outside of Boston where he cracked down on heroin and truancy.

Shortly after his seventy-fifth he made good with Wall Street,
buried Archie alive in South Carolina, moved to San Francisco
and ordered heels off the internet in a woman's fourteen.

Things fall

My insides have exploded.
Encircling us
like heron's wings
of dark night sky filling
with stars—some lustrous,
some muffled and scarcely there
—but all with a whiteness
that cannot slide into yellow.

The mushroom cloud,
a continual omega,
the snake that eats its tail;
stuck in iron whisks of rust flakes
brushing off, falling onto linen
from under this envelope
like soft pieces of hair: ebony
and ivory and chartreuse and auburn
and mundane and staggering, all.

The nicest guy I'll ever date

He was paper-perfect
with his long words
and grammatically correct texting.

A friend introduced us at a bar
and we carried over into the next day
where we solved the world's issues
with a few well-placed biologists
and a continual loop of Disney films
in all forms of public transportation.

He wore a kilt with an Italian flair
and told me that he had given up meat
in a collegiate bid to save the planet.
I slid my leather purse under the chair
and listened to him praise my choice
of studies and irrational tenderness for tweed.

When it was my turn to talk,
I threw fetish clubs,
gimps on stilts
and casual racism
out like I was planting seeds
in a grassy field and he sat back,
 silent for a bit,
before crossing his hands and asking
if a group of gimps is a gaggle.

I invited him into my home
where he was a 'gentleman suitor';
I let him leave after midnight,
cleaned up the empty wine glasses
and straightened the pillows on the sofa.

My mates met him for drinks
and he slotted right in.
Later he kissed me
under the glass canopy
beside Marks and Spencer

before crossing the road
and leaving me with a friend.

“He’s perfect,” she said
as we watched him disappear behind the museum.

“I know,” I told her, “That’s why I’ve got to break his heart.”

The sensation of floating

There is a sensation that comes
after spending time in the ocean:

that floating feeling of riding waves
long after you've left the beach
and are tucked safely in your bed

where, with each breath you are lifted,
enveloped and flicked
by the salty waters again.

For days, every moment of stillness
is wrapped in this rolling.

And all you can do
is be grateful for the sea,
and wonder if the undulations will return
when you find yourself again
adorning her shores.

Poetic license

I

My mom keeps telling me
I need to think about settling down
so she can see the grandchildren
I don't want to have.

II

I'm not getting any younger.
Time is a plastic rosary
in the pocket of an Amish child.

III

But you will never want me like I want you to,
or not want me like I need you to.

No reply

When you ask me to write for you, I do.
I don't ask why.
I don't need to know.

I judge your mood in keystrokes
and rejoin:

“You are ridiculous.”

“You are a crack whore.”

“You rock my world like a bowl full of ferrets.”

“I would have jumped you that day
after Christmas when we sat by the water
if I had been able to read your mind.”

Job done.
I send my ramble into space,
hoping it grabs and lifts you
as sentences pass, going
to where they dissolve among the clouds,
where you lose the facility to reply.

Travelling horses

Even amidst the cobbled streets
where Lyra runs to Eliot's beat,
there's something really quite magical
about the way that horses pull around
my heart's tight wound strings;
I rise and find that if I close my eyes
my mind takes me far away:

to Texas back some years behind,
I'm on my horse surrounded by
the stands are filling with a roar,
I did my pattern; am growing more
and more
impatient still. I'm tensing now,
ten more until, five judges have had their fill
of us in custom clothes; custom spurs.

Fifth and fourth and third, here goes:
I'm not second, my senses rose
up to hear my number being said
shuffling around inside my head,
"Hey Miriam,
we have to go."

I come back down to falling snow,
the outfits, crowds and horses gone,
back in Oxford, folks are moving on to pubs
with their specials glowing, after class we all are going,
but I can only think of showing them
a world I have since left behind: Did I give up
my love to educate my mind?

Esoteric

It's late, but she is here.
She was dressed for dreaming
when she got the call;

took a moment to put on
lipstick and eyeliner
before she ran out the door

and didn't stop till she reached
the imposing white-columned building
with the shiny, black door and brass buzzer.

A crushed snail oozed on the tiled step.
She spoke out loud, "I believe
in the crunched shell of a snail
on checkerboard tiles that don't belong to me."

She stood over the snail,
its entrails glistening eggwash.
She knocked, the sound echoed down
the well preserved hallway.

The wind blew from the water's edge
and brought with it salty sea air
that caressed the snail
and melted what was left of him.

Footsteps inside pinged hollowly
towards the door; she picked up a fragment
of the curling shell and tossed it to a pigeon.

Everything matters or nothing does.

Guards

I rather like them: the women.

I found them in a posh part of London,
dressed in sparkly harem pants and oversized jewellery,
huddled in the back of a shop that was closing.

For a little while they floated eight feet off the ground
and scared the hell out of people entering our warehouse flat.
They were natural Halloween decorations
so we let them celebrate for an extra month.

I insisted they come with me when I moved north
and for a while they crowded into a closet in the spare room
and we could always tell when our guests chanced upon them.

Their faces relaxed when I told them I'm a poet.

I've moved.

There are fewer of them now.

One has returned to live in London
while another languishes in the Devon countryside
covered in buttons and grout.

But the seven that remain have their own charms
with dresses and ties and a Mardi Gras mask.

They hang out against the walls,
by the fireplace, the ironing board,
the kitchen table, even by my bed,
showing their shapes in the windows
and in the shadows by the closet
and Eleanor is almost complete.

Bombilation, a cousin of Howl

Like those deranged hippies, I too saw the minds of my generation fall prey to
the immediacy of desire where technology expands the mind and directly
shrinks the attention sp...

when bright lights come through the sky at night we don't think of falling stars
we think of bombs in Afghanistan or Yemin or waking up in a posh house
in Istanbul and having tea on the Bosophorus while the hum of bullets
creates a buzzing refrain that keeps the city ticking over and over and
over

while here in the cities of Scotland the two days of summer come in October and
eclipse fall as the next morning you slip on an icy patch of vomit outside
the university and there is no rain to wash it away because you have your
umbrella tucked under your left arm

where people leave their bedroom flats knowing that if they want the sun to
make an appearance they must leave their sunglasses on a bookshelf and
pretend it was accidentally done and curse the gods who drink Irn Bru
and allow movies to have those twenty minutes of previews selling
tampons and decking

when tv tells us that people are dying for lack of water or too much water or
dirty water and smelly water and with all this water I just have to piss
& wonder why it's raining when I know it's because I came out with my
knock-off Ray Bans hoping for the best but still too boss to give damn,
much less change

if only we could have someway to tune out or tune in or tune up ourselves so
that we can look away from the i-popping pods and pads and let go of
our face/book for the single moment it takes to make eye contact with
someone random over a street crossing

while the street crossers cross dress and the normal people walk by and don't
notice the nose-bleeding students down the road getting high on the lie
of intellectualism

when all we really want are days to buy and read stuff and write shit like those
other poets who I obviously steal from to make this line too long for my
own breath and not nearly fucking long enough for my own good

but no one's to blame but Ginsberg.

How to end the world in just six words

I

Mom offered me wisdom once,
over sickly sweet, southern tea,
at a seaside diner off I-95,
“Marry someone who will love you
more than you ever love them.”

II

Onomatopoeic sex noises
from the street kept me up at night.
“I love you like a jellyfish,” I told him
and promptly fell asleep.

Are we not all self-contained disasters?

At least I admit it
and let it flop on the wooden table top
like a Veiltail fish
plucked from its safe little bowl.

And there it lies; a part of me,
convulsing piteously
until I can stand it no longer
and grasp it between my palms
and swallow it, once more

down

down

feeling every scale as it passes.

Timeless

A silicon red ball bounces off the fireplace
in a round room with a blue sofa
jutting brusquely across the smoothly arched stucco.

Its electric blue fabric glows purple
between the fire's yellow flicks
and the sunless sky's grey halo.

Staleness indents the air
and beckons leaves to roll in
through the open door,
settling near the gothic window,
low on the dome above.

The fire eats its last log,
cedar popping in protest,
as stillness fills the shoebox
 behind the sofa

and tall shadows slink towards the door,
posing next to a sputtering metronome
calling "tomorrow, tomorrow, and tomorrow."

Verbose

My whole life has been spent in fruitless attempts
to thwart articulate deposits
from damming me.

If I die mysteriously one day,
with a feather in my hand or a verb on my tongue,
this is the cause: my veins were brimming
with mangled sentences
that, through seasons, grew glutinous.

If I die suddenly do not wonder
about my wordy disease.
Bury me without embalming me;
make me St Bernadette's apprentice
—and watch my skin stay fresh with verbs,
plump and golden with adjectives—
in glass.

But if my demise is a conundrum and
science declines believing that
I was strangled from within, then let them
orchestrate an autopsy
—scare up some disciples—
rubber neck as the red wire incision oozes
black baked tallow: cholesterolic
plaque.

And finally I will end up in print.

In beauty it is finished

He opens his eyes against khaki canvas
where moments before — nothing.
Swirls of azure abs, crimson arms and orchid thighs
entangle under my paint laden fingers
as I sculpt cinnamon skin
granting subtle shadows of yellow ochre.

I watercolour his feet in rust
and attach his ankles
like sturdy bolts used in washing barrels,
whisking burnt umber wisps
up to knees of stone with charcoal scars.
The apricot thighs dive
under eggshell cloth of sheer cotton
and bound into a mahogany navel.

His ribs I colour code to trace
my return across ridged collar bones
with tinges of violet running red into his face.
My fingers brush his neck with emerald
and dip into grey eyes like fans with opal clasps
before splashing sorrel strings of hair
to crown my stolen art.

A natural beauty

I

"I was holy once," she said
and looked out the grease-smearred
window of the single-decked 76
as it pulled away from the frosty corner
in Melton Mowbray where she shuffled in.

I said nothing but watched the nest
of brightly clad carolers puffing
out tinny twinging twangs
outside of a small, Anglican church
as we slid to a halt at a light.
"We Three Kings" slipped in
between the growl of the engine
like a paper knife in my ear.

Red,
 amber,
 green.

The lights reflected off the elaborate hearing aid
and haloed upwards on her short greying hair
that grew as clumps of grass around spots
of paper-thin translucent skin,
smoothed over hard-tack bone.

We lurched forward,
past the Lidl, left on the High Street
and along the longest leg back to Loughborough.
At the first sign of a Lincoln Red
 she repeated, "I was holy once."

I said nothing and in my silence assented;
she slid her sleeve on the window
and spoke with a gentle lilt of Steel Magnolias
rubbed to an aluminium sheen from years abroad:

II

"I'm not from here.
Here's where I landed when I took flight
from the Julia Tutwiler Penitentiary fifty years ago.

When I was twenty-one they let me go.
Two brothers picked me up
in the '48 pickup, black and low we rumbled
to a home that was white the last time,
but the six columns were capped
with blackened crust that Lillie was scrubbing
for the twentieth time in ten years past.

I was twenty-one when I jumped out
of the '48 Ford and Lillie looked at me
and threw her two scouring pads
into a plastic pickle tub and said,
"I guess you could use a sweet ice tea."

Over two bowls of black-eyed peas
and collared greens they told me
that ten years changes more
than seasons and crops.
Little Lillie married George
when momma died from diabetes
and John-Dean was a double for dad,
down to his love for ten-gallon hats
and taste for corn-made hooch
from a hidden still on the hillside
beside the house.

They didn't ask how I spent my time
in Wetumpka's finest, how we were allowed
to piss four times per day
and didn't want to know that the tags
on the '48 were likely made by women's hands:

the hands of Josephine who took me
under her wings, became my mate
and taught me to lie low and sing
when I'd rather fling the handsy guard

off the rails into the yard below
than hammer out another number plate.”

III

At this she paused and stared ahead;
I said nothing but looked instead:
the wrinkles on her face formed canyons
that came to peaks in the corner of her eyes.

The lines in her cheeks hung down,
bending only to twist
towards her delicately creased ears
as she smiled, which she frequently did
but did not care to share the cause.

IV

“For a few days I was able
to re-gain the youth I had given
to sewing Departmental jumpsuits
for which I was paid in four shaved years.

For days I ambled through wooded scenes,
retreating further with every leaf I crushed
until I was again a piddling girl
playing with my brothers and sisters and neighbours
at a tree stand my granddad built.

The youngest girl,
I was the prettiest too
with roaning hair and eyes
that jumped
like blue kangaroos in matching fishbowls.

We met under the fresh champagne sun
in May, eight enthralled
with stories of kings and queens

and I threw a fit when the roles were cast
and none were left for me.
They shifted their bare feet nervously
and my brother-king laid a decree
that I was the guardian angel
for his Dogwood kingdom.”

V

Her eyes were a pallid green;
they might have once been blue
in another life and now they glinted
as they leapt from cow to me

and the skin on her neck formed a wattle,
at a soft angle from her chin, wobbling
to chest under a moth-touched festive sweater
diving deftly below a cross etched in iron.

VI

“We played that summer every day
and kept our kingdom out of the way
of the grown ups who tended acres
and sliced and raked and piled the hay.

The king and queen had their court
filled with knights and ladies
and the kingdom’s priest was my brother Barratt
who took each of us to the shallow creek
and dipped us under
just as the pastor did
twice a year
 on Wednesdays.
And since I was holy,
I stood by and helped,
my hand on their heads
as they drowned and rose again,

wet rats in the muddy waters,
while moccasins cursed us from the rocks.

Then, in the doggiest days
when I was ten we had new neighbours move
into the farmhouse down the dirt road
and introduce their daughter, Camilla,
who was younger than me and twice as shy.”

VII

Here she paused and smiled
and fingered the hem on her red harem pants
then coughed until she doubled over
and pushed her pork pie dinner box
into the miniscule space between us.

Upright again, she shoved her hearing aid
back into an almost translucent elfin ear,
with spider-web veined folds and drooping lobes
which still held the pearls of her youth,
and drew a circle on the chair in front
with a bony, green-chipped finger tip.

VIII

“Camilla’s legs were so small
that the first thing I did
was borrow my puppy’s collar
with a tiny, almost oxidized bell,
and snap it around her upper arm
so I could hear if she got left behind.

I told her to ‘follow me’,
and I led her down around
the fields of hay, through rows
and rows of cotton and corn
and doubled back again

through deepest copse
where the forest floor
was so caked
with Spoonwood blossoms
that I could kick and kick
and never reach real soil,
just sticky layers
piled up like bread
with wormy jam between.

We shimmied up an oak tree
to a rickety stand that chipped and
dropped away with every stir
of her tiny feet
and the bell jingled rapidly.

She built a nest of leaves
as I told her how we filled our days:
how the woods were run by royalty
and everyone had an appointed place
and I was the guardian angel;
and had no other role.”

IX

Above the caves where her eyes peeked out
her brows were burdened
by five canyons that stacked
her age across indiscernible hairs.

She wore no makeup, or,
if she did, all traces were lost in the folds
as they pleated towards the lips
she licked to keep her story flowing.

X

“She finished with her tiny nest
and I tucked it between two branching arms

and took her to the choicest position
behind the stalls to dig for the fattest worms.

We plopped them in a stolen feed bucket
and wandered to the creek,
to the rocky bit a hundred yards downstream
from the watermill which used to churn
and grind the oats but now swirled nothing
but rust and sand and was home
to our growing collection
of beaver sticks and arrowheads.

At the spot where Barrett dipped us under
we stuck the worms through their hearts
with hooks and tossed them into the bubbling bath.
Camilla caught a tiny bass and asked
if I would throw it back for her
and I unhooked its gaping mouth
and tried to steal back the worm
he tried to swallow before tossing him easily
into the shallow and following him in.”

XI

The lights of Loughborough glittered ahead.
She paused, and touched her cheek
as the bus went round a bend,
the horizon went dark and I was left

to look at her modest lips
reflecting in the greasy glass
forming a permanent pucker,
gently pruned around the edges
and so very pale.

XII

“I stood ankle deep in the soft,

mussel-filled sand and dug my toes
in as far as they could go.

Camilla looked worried when
I went further towards the rock
where a snapping turtle basked in the sun,
harmless unless you poked him in the mouth.
I promptly tripped over a limb
 hidden by the muddy water
and fell face first, completely underneath.

I came back up and saw Camille
on the edge of the bank
about to charge in
and I smiled at her
and pretended I had meant to dive
and that she should try it too.
But she was scared of the browning flow
and wondered where the turtle went.

'Never mind him,' I said to her,
'you might as well get some practice in,
Barratt's going to dip you straight away.'

She walked out nearer
and stood beside.
I took her hand and sat her down
and gently pushed her under
while she held her nose.
The whites of her eyes
echoed under the surface.
She instantly pushed back up.
Spewing water, she tried to go.
But I grabbed her hand again and said
get used to it if she planned
to be one of us.
If not, then she'd be lonesome
for days and days until the summer came
to an end; a new school was hard
without any old friends,
and she came back over and squatted at will;
'This time,' I said, 'you hold real still.'"

XIII

Her hands were framed with lines
which I saw, along with aging spots,
as she lifted them to touch the corner
of her eye then clasp the collar of her shirt.

She had a single white hair
protruding from her chin
which waved in time to the rhythm
she tapped out on her plastic purse.

XIV

“When she didn’t come back up
I ran to the oak tree
and hid among it’s indifferent arms
until night fell and I made my way home.

I didn’t mention anything
but when they found her
stuck to a limb with my puppy’s collar
holding her in place
they quickly shut the book on me,
and though my mother cried throughout
the church made her strong
and in less than three weeks
I was gone.”

XV

I was blown away as the bus slowed
to its first stop beside a drooping
green bench near the city centre.
The yellow glow of the street lights
reflected reddish on the wet bricks.

As she gathered up her pie and bags
she exhaled a breath that fogged the glass
and her pale heavy eyes twinkled
and she hurriedly completed her tale.

XVI

“It only took days
for the neighbours to know
that I was free
and they came with papers
signed by all those that lived near
who wanted me gone
for fear that it would happen again;
that awful thing when I was ten.
And then I went to Atlanta
and bought a ticket
for the last flight I’d ever make.”

XVII

She ended her story, patted my leg gently
and walked away and I couldn’t help but stare.
She had a simple beauty that I’ll never possess
and I wanted to photograph her

and keep it as a reminder
of how the lines, the age and the years
in her face made me feel inadequate,
inexperienced and, maybe, a touch jealous.

Notes

1. "Welcome to Dixie, Walmart Parking Lots", pp. 8. Phonetically: 'Hey B, / see the puppies? / Them aren't puppies. / Yes they are. / See the itty bitty feet? / Well, I'll be / Them are puppies."

2. "Where I like it", pp. 35. Written in answer to the 2011 Breast Cancer Awareness Month's question: Where do you like to keep your purse?

Runaway Rhythm
1900-2011

Introduction

As English language poetry has evolved over time, it has employed a variety of verse forms and styles including the villanelles, sestinas, sonnets, elegies, open verse, and spoken word. Though the styles and uses of language alter as the literary periods progress through into contemporary times, many rhythms remain the same. I will be looking at a particular form of rhythm that has crossed literary periods and poetic structures with relative ease, popping up here and there in many poets' works; yet its presence has not hitherto been thoroughly analysed.

In various forms of rhythmic poetry, poets write a line, or lines, that can propel the reader forwards past line ends without immediately allowing a place for them to pause and absorb the meaning. These lines tend to rush until they encounter a concrete pause, usually indicated by hard, grammatical markers or syntactical means, where the reader then feels the need to pause and reconsider the significance of the lines, and often reread them for sense. It can be a localised rhythm, formed by nuances of grammar and syntax and used by the poet to create a minute separation within the movement and sense of the poem. This rhythm can be perpetuated by a variety of poetic mechanisms including enjambment, indentation, progressive verbs, and rhyming schemes. There are other, more particular stimuli relating to metrical scansion that lend themselves to generating this rhythm, such as: the use of trisyllabic feet, pryhics, trochees, dactyls, and the reading of the poem itself. The aforementioned elements can work together to create a rhythm that moves forwards, taking the reader with it, often only allowing the reader to get the general sense of the tone before the rhythm ushers them¹ to

1. I use 'the reader' to indicate a singular person reading the work, since the way a reader perceives the work and hears the rhythm is, to some degree, a singular thing. But, when referring back to 'the reader' instead of saying 'his/her', 'he/she/it', or choosing pronouns which assume the sex of 'the reader' I have chosen to write 'they/their' as a gender neutral pronoun.

the next line. Upon reaching a concrete pause, the reader can stop and re-read the previous lines for their contents and the sense that the rhythm divorces from the movement. I will be referring to the aforementioned rhythm as 'runaway rhythm.'

The term 'runaway rhythm' came about due to my interest in rap music and the relationship between written rap lyrics and the way those written lyrics influence the reader's pace, and consequently their understanding of the content of the lines. This rhythmic mode first became apparent to me in hearing and reading rapper Eminem's song "Lose Yourself", which features heavy enjambment and complicated rhyme schemes that propel the reader onwards in a flow that "emphasize[s] the speed of the track, making the beat seem faster than it actually is" (Bradley 45). By rhythmically encouraging me to rush from line to line, I was able to garner a sense of emotion and urgency in the lyrics, but was left feeling out of breath, uncertain about the content and significance of the lines, and needing to re-read them in order to understand the content.

Poets often use runaway rhythm to pull the reader into the experience of the poem itself and draw attention to the content by embodying it within the rhythm, as in Adam York's "Hush", where the wind in the poem and the runaway rhythm play off one another to create a swift, blowing sensation within the lines. In *Book of Rhymes: The Poetics of Hip-Hop*, Adam Bradley states that "Poetic rhythm [...] is the natural pattern of speech in relation to a given meter" (8). Runaway rhythm is a means of altering standard poetic (speech) rhythms to a rhythm in which the poet can exercise influence over the reader's understanding of the poem through playing with the divide between the lines' movement and sense. This is not to say that all poets and all poetry make use of runaway rhythm. In fact, very few poets write it into every poem and far fewer poems consist entirely of runaway rhythm, but most poets do utilise certain elements of this rhythm occasionally within their body of their work. I will be touching on the poetic devices utilised to perpetuate runaway rhythm and looking at specific examples of poets and poems

that use this rhythm to its full advantage. I have limited the scope of interest to a selection of English language poets from the modern and postmodern periods.

Though I am limiting my scope of study, it is important to realise that runaway rhythm can be found throughout the history of poetry and can work within a variety of poetic forms. An example of this can be seen in E.E. Cummings' fourteen line, Shakespearean sonnet "LXI: Life Is More True Than Reason Will Deceive" from his 1925 collection *1 x 1 [One Times One]*, which reads:

life is more true than reason will deceive
(more secret or than madness did reveal)
deeper is life than lose:higher than have
—but beauty is more each than living's all

multiplied with infinity sans if
the mightiest meditations of mankind
cancelled are by one merely opening leaf
(beyond whose nearness there is no beyond)

or does some littler bird than eyes can learn
look up to silence and completely sing?
futures are obsolete;pasts are unborn
(here less than nothing's more than everything)

death,as men call him,ends what they call men
—but beauty is more now than dying's when (1. 1-14)

The runaway rhythm in this poem begins with line four and carries over the stanza break through to the end of line eight, including the parenthesis, which are not intended to slow the reader, but as an informative aside. The enjambment of the lines, coupled with the alliteration, pushes the reader from line to line, allowing a hard stop only after the question mark at the end of line ten, where they can pause and re-read lines four through eight to establish an understanding of content.

In seeking to define and highlight runaway rhythm, I have chosen to look more closely at poets whose works are not saturated with critical analysis; but who are still considered part of the literary canon. I will mainly be focusing on selected works from three poets: Marianne Moore (1887-1972), Denise Levertov (1923-1997), and Robert Creeley (1926-2005). The final chapter will look at three contemporary poets published after 1995 and my own poetry. Through a close analysis of a selection of these poets' works, as well as two of my own poems, "Travelling Horses" and "Immigration Policy", I will show how runaway rhythm functions within the poems to disconnect slightly movement and sense, and thereby focus the reader's attention as well as analyse how my own poems have evolved as my understanding of this rhythm has deepened.

There are poets, such as William Carlos Williams, whose works, in theory, seem open to runaway rhythm, but where it rarely shows up in practice. Williams is known for his use of speech rhythms and said that "The rhythmic pace was the pace of speech" (qtd in Gates 515). However, Williams is also known for writing his poems with multiple hard grammatical markers and a pronounced pause following each line. Thus, even though his work seems to embody runaway rhythm, with use of speech rhythms and overt indentation, it often jerks and sputters down the page, encumbered by grammatical markers which call for pauses and allow the reader to maintain symmetry between the movement and the sense of the poems.

Other poets, such as Black Mountain poet Charles Olson, who explored the idea of Projective Verse and coined the term 'breath-line' wherein "each line of a poem represent[s] a unit of breath to be spoken or sung" (Kelleher), can be associated with The Beat Generation poets' works, and often utilise runaway rhythm. True Beat Generation poets made extensive use of this rhythm to influence the pace of their readers, examples of which can be seen in the works of

Jack Kerouac, Patti Smith, and Allen Ginsberg.

Though there are a number of mid-20th century poets, across a variety of schools, including the Beat Generation poets and those associated with the Black Mountain school, that play an important role in the emergence of runaway rhythm as a recognisable rhythmic tool, I have chosen to briefly focus solely on Ginsberg due to his influence in the rise of runaway rhythm in contemporary times and its link with popular culture. In particular, Ginsberg is known for his use of long lines, which causes the reader to continue onwards until they reach a pausing place, often initiated by a hard grammatical marker.

Though Ginsberg used long breath lines in much of his poetry, he often placed grammatical markers within the long lines to give the reader a moment's respite to realign their perception. However, in Ginsberg's iconic poem *Howl*, we can see his use of runaway rhythm take hold in several lines which move forwards in a single, drawn out breath. Louis Simpson addresses Ginsberg's use of long lines by saying that "The meaning of the poem was identical with its form, the rhythm was identical with arrangement of the words on the page, and the words on the page were what the poet wanted to say and how he wanted to say it" (60). Ginsberg borrowed this form of long line from his contemporary Jack Kerouac, as he explains in an interview with Thomas Clark in the *Paris Review*:

But anyway, what it boils down to is this, it's my *movement*, my feeling is for a big long clanky statement² partly that²s something that I share, or maybe that I even got from Kerouac²s long prose line; which is really, like he once remarked, an extended poem. Like one long sentence page of his in *Doctor Sax* or *The Railroad Earth* or occasionally *On the Road*— if you examine them phrase by phrase they usually have the density of poetry, and the beauty of poetry, *but most of all the single elastic rhythm running from beginning to end of the line*². (22-23)

2 . My italics, except for 'movement'.

Howl was first published in *Howl and Other Poems* in 1956. It consists of three sections with a total of one hundred and thirty lines. Many of these lines are exceptionally long and are often printed as continued, indented lines below the first line. Ginsberg “wrote in a Romantic tradition that honors William Blake and Walt Whitman as its distinguished pioneers” (Ramazani, Ellmann, and O’Clair 334), and has been considered to have been “working with a kind of classical unit” (Clark 15) within *Howl*. In his interview with Clark, Ginsberg addresses this by saying of *Howl* that “Nobody’s got any objection to even iambic pentameter if it comes from a source deeper than the mind, that is to say if it comes from the breathing and the belly and the lungs” (16). In his biography of Ginsberg, Barry Miles quotes him as saying, “Look at what I have done with the long line [...] In some of these poems it seems to answer your demand for a relatively absolute line with a fixed base, whatever it is [...] all held together with the classic of the breath, though of varying lengths” (199). Ginsberg goes on to say that “The key is in the jazz choruses to some extent; also to reliance on spontaneity & expressiveness which long line encourages; also to attention to interior unchecked logical mental stream. With a long line comes a return, (caused by) [sic] expressive human feeling, it’s generally lacking in poetry now, which is inhuman.” Ginsberg adds: “The release of emotion is one with the rhythmical buildup of long line” (199).

In *Howl*, Ginsberg uses the long, rushing breath lines to engender a runaway rhythm that can, as Simpson notes, “overwhelm the listener [reader] and make him share the poet’s emotion” (65). One of the first instances where we see the movement of the rhythm begin to disconnect from the sense of the line is in line fourteen which reads:

Who chained themselves to subways for the endless ride from Battery to
holy Bronx on benzedrine until the noise of wheels and children
brought them down shuddering mouth-wracked and battered
bleak of brain all drained of brilliance in the drear light of Zoo,

In an ideal published format, the lines of *Howl* would stretch straight across the page and not have to be formatted into multiple lines with indentation to indicate their intended lack of line breaks. Taking into account his lines' naturally unbroken form, Ginsberg manages to create a runaway rhythm without the use of enjambment. Instead, to help push the line onwards, he utilises alliteration, which is what Beum and Shapiro note in *The Prosody Handbook* when they write that "the lines will move faster [...] if it does show such characteristics as alliteration" (85). We can see this in the repetition of the "b" and "d" sounds in "Battery", "Bronx", "benzedrine", "brought", "battered bleak", "brain", and "brilliance"; and "down", "drained", and "drear". Ginsberg also repeats syllables in "Battery" and "battered" and echoes it with the double consonants in the second syllables of "shuddered" and "brilliance" which plays more on the reader's eye than ear for linking the words, but is not technically eye rhyme.

Ginsberg uses these syntactical mechanisms to engender a runaway rhythm that coerces the reader to rush through this long line. By the time the reader has reached the comma after the last word, "Zoo", the "displacement of meaning" (David Kedlac 44) created by the runaway rhythm has disrupted the sense of movement from the understanding of content. This in turn causes the reader to pause after the hard comma and try to realign the two.

In *Howl*, Ginsberg is speaking of the familiar faces of his generation that were a part of his immediate awareness. The first line of the poem, "I saw the best minds of my generation [...]" both exalts Solomon and extends the dedication to the other poets, authors, and hipsters that Ginsberg considered great, contemporary minds, and also to himself. After the first three lines, Ginsberg launches into a refrain of "who" which he will then go on to use at the start of fifty-eight of the lines in the first section of *Howl*. In his essay "Notes Written on Finally Recording

Howl”, he explains his reasoning by saying that he “depended on the word ‘who’ to keep the beat, a base to keep measure, return to and take off from again onto another streak of invention” (Ginsberg 229).

By the time the reader reaches the runaway rhythm in line fourteen, they are already familiar with the characters, the location, and the overall breath lines of the poem. They accept the longer line, with its lack of grammatical markers and heavy alliteration. However, it is exactly this lack of grammatical markers and his use of alliteration that keep the rhythm from pausing for the entirety of the line’s forty-three word stretch. In doing so, Ginsberg uses the rhythm to echo the content of the line.

In the line itself, those “best minds” are those who have “chained themselves” to the subway on a line that goes from “Battery”, or Battery Park, near where the Museum of Jewish Heritage is located, all the way back to the “holy Bronx”, which contains one of the continually poorest congressional districts in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau). Having the subjects of the poem chain themselves to the subway implies a physical tearing away from the associations of Ginsberg’s own Jewish heritage and those stereotypes it embodies, and highlights the never-ending ride into poverty that the subjects of the poem must take. That the subject of the line is taking this journey “on benzedrine”, which is an amphetamine that produces feelings of euphoria, allows the reader to accept the almost trance-like state that the rhythm induces. The second segment of the line describes the comedown from the euphoric state instigated by Benzedrine. The harsh “noise of wheels and children” that harangue the poem’s subject can be seen as a mimetic effect in the cacophonous written language within the lines and the ever-waning breath of the reader, signalled by the comedown. This comedown carries the subject and reader back into the real world where, outside of the frantic effect of the drug and jarring effect of the language within the line. The subject feels “drained of brilliance in the drear light of the Zoo” and the reader feels the slight

discontinuity between the rhythm and the sense of the line. The final word in the line is “Zoo” and could be the literal Bronx Zoo, or a metaphor for the inhabitants at either end of the Battery/Bronx subway line; but for the reader, it could be seen to represent the menagerie of characters, scenes, and intense imagery that inhabits the poem itself.

Later in Part I of *Howl*, Ginsberg wrote a line that is longer than line fourteen, above, but uses slightly different mechanisms to engender the runaway rhythm. Line fifty-six consists of fifty-five words in a continual flow that is only stilted by the single comma after “editors”, towards the end of the line. It reads:

who were burned alive in their innocent flannel suits on Madison Avenue
amid blasts of leaden verse & the tanked-up clatter of the iron
regiments of fashion & the nitroglycerine shrieks of the fairies of
advertising & the mustard gas of sinister intelligent editors, or
were run down by the drunken taxicabs of Absolute Reality,

(l. 56)

In this line, the reader is once again confronted with the refrain of “who” at the beginning. The next thing a reader will notice about this line is the use of the ampersand as a conjunction. In doing this, Ginsberg accomplishes two things, to create a flowing image in the reader’s eye and mind as they recognise the rounded shape of the ampersand, which visually loops towards the word to the left and points the reader’s eye onwards to the right. Secondly, Ginsberg brings to mind the concrete and visual poetry of his contemporaries in the fifties and sixties, where visual poetry is used “to engage and sustain reader attention by creating interest and texture” and to “heighten the reader’s awareness of the reading process; and [...] to draw attention to particular features of the text” (Berry 1365).

The ampersands in line fifty-six connect words that have vast arrays of cultural connotations which pointedly direct the reader’s understanding, as in “verse & the tanked-up clatter”, “fashion & the nitroglycerine shrieks”, and “advertising &

the mustard gas". The three words to the left of the ampersand, "verse", "fashion", and "advertising" are three nouns that can be considered good, if you read/write certain forms of verse, dress well, or harness the power of advertising, but when Ginsberg pairs each term with the negative phrase that follows the ampersand, he is indicating that the words on each side of the logogram should be considered as being interlinked with one another. Visually, using the ampersand to connect the two draws attention to the dichotomy without adding an element of hesitation in the rhythm.

What Ginsberg is literally describing within this line are the poets and authors, or Ginsberg himself, who are often forced by circumstance to live in the less affluent and crime-ridden parts of New York City, "Madison Avenue". He goes on to say that it is the "leaden verse", "iron regiments of fashion", "fairies of advertising", and the "sinister intelligent editors", which alludes to the fickle nature of the publishing industry's need to turn a profit, who are to blame for the poet/author's condition. By linking all these things by the ampersand, Ginsberg allows for the rhythm to run away and build through the line until the comma after "editors", where the reader is allowed to pause momentarily and allow the flow of the rhythm to pool, while they re-align their understanding of the meaning of the line with its movement.

The last unit of sense in line fifty-six reads "or were run down by the drunken taxicabs of Absolute Reality" and presents the other option for the poets and authors of which Ginsberg speaks: becoming a casualty of "Absolute Reality". Tony Trigilio says in *Allen Ginsberg's Buddhist Poetics* that "the breath as a unit of the poetic line—dramatizes in miniature the structural impetus of the poem to combine immanent and transcendent representation so that the secular art of poetry might also represent sacred experience" (x). "Absolute Reality" is a link to Ginsberg's own growing interest in and knowledge of Buddhism. Here he is referring to the interconnectedness of all things, and making an ironic comment

on the way that the “who” of the line is being hit by the drunken driver of a taxicab, which is the actual conveyer of the “Absolute Reality”, or Nirvana, which a Buddhist, or the “who” of the line, is supposed to seek.

In conjunction with the use of the logogram “&” Ginsberg employs assonance to create aural recognition within the line. According to Percy Adams, assonance is “the repetition of the sound of a vowel or diphthong in nonrhyming stressed syllables near enough to each other for the echo to be discernible” (103). The recognition of repeated sounds and phrases “delight the ear” (Bradley 66) and allows the reader to assimilate the word quickly and move onwards. Within line fifty-six, Ginsberg uses assonance in “in / innocent / amid / nitroglycerine / sinister / intelligent / editors”, “Avenue amid / clatter / advertising / gas / Absolute”, and “on Madison / of / iron / fashion”. In addition to this, he uses consonance in “innocent flannel”, “iron regiments”, and “fashion / shrieks”. In utilising these prosodic mechanisms, Ginsberg creates a rhythm that simultaneously draws the reader in, with their recognition of the aural and visual elements of repetition within the words in the line, and slightly upsets the connection these elements engender by using that same recognition to move the reader through the line more quickly than they might otherwise read it.

The distance created can often highlight the activity within the poem’s content and the physical action of reading the poem by drawing attention to the movement of the lines and how it relates to a reader’s understanding of it. Ginsberg used long breath lines to push the rhythm onward, while contemporary spoken word poets are building on the elements of the breath line and making it their own by including intensive rhyme schemes and sampling other artists’ works to tell a story. As such, spoken word poetry depends on the “sonic qualities of rhythm and rhyme” (Bradley and Dubois xxx) to create a flow that moves down the page, often without stopping, simultaneously rushing past and highlighting the densely packed content until they reach the end of the stanza where the

reader can pause and reflect on the content and meaning of the lines.

In focusing closely on a cross section of poetry from 1900 to 2011, including a selection of my own work, I will explore the poetic mechanisms involved in the creation of runaway rhythm. By looking at the nuances of grammar and syntax, it will become clear that this is an elastic concept with a range of psychological and emotional effects that can destabilise the movement and sense of the lines and add emphasis to their meaning, which results in the reader pausing and returning to the lines of runaway rhythm to reconsider their content and significance.

Chapter 1:

Marianne Moore: Runaway Rhythm in Four Poems from 1918-1961

Marianne Moore has been defined as “a master of surface perfections whose poems are difficult, intelligent, scrupulously accurate and charmingly whimsical” (Hall 11-12). She is known for her use of almost unapproachable intellectualism, syllabic line structure, and ‘light rhyme’, which is rhyme that is subtle enough for both the eye and ear to miss if it is not sought out in the reading. Early on, she was influenced by the works of her contemporaries including William Carlos Williams, Ezra Pound, Wallace Stevens, and H.D, and like them she “[sought] to pare away superfluities in diction and punctuation” (Ramazami 431). From there she developed her own form, which John Slatin said was “rhyming syllabic verse in conjunction with a diction more usually associated with prose” (95). This in turn led to a style of writing that was often gridded and used carefully broken lines and numerically ordered syllabic structures to create a rhythm that works through the form of the poems to create a forward momentum, which uses runaway rhythm to draw attention to the poem’s content by displacing the reader’s understanding of the lines.

Slatin noted that Marianne Moore is known for substituting “conventional English meters [... with] an elaborate syllabic-count” (94), but in 1967 she admitted to Grace Schulman, editor of *The Poems of Marianne Moore*, that “the sound of the verse was more important to her than its visual pattern [...] it ought to be continuous” (xxvii). It is in this “indispensable flowing continuity” (Nemerov 2) that Moore utilises runaway rhythm. As early as 1915 Schulman notes that, to help the flow of her poems, “we find her dropping capital letters at the beginning

of lines” (xxvi), giving “all syllables the same formal value” (Slatin 98), running sentences “through several eja mb ed lines, even crossing stanza breaks” (Slatin 98) and using ‘light rhyme’. All of these elements cohere in sections of the following poems: “Nine Nectarines”¹, “Callot-Drecol-Cheruit-Jenny-Doucet-Aviotte-Lady”², “An Octopus”³, and “The Steeple-Jack”⁴.

Moore’s style, especially in these poems, is notable for her use of pause and caesura. The terms ‘pause’ and ‘caesura’ are important in understanding the nuances of rhythm in Moore’s poetry and it is necessary to define them clearly within the context of runaway rhythm. In *The New Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics* they are defined as separate terms by Thomas Cable and T. V. F. Brogan, respectively, and are compared by Brogan under the entry for ‘Caesura’ in a segment headed ‘Caesura vs. Pause’. Brogan says “In every sentence of any length there will be a syntactic juncture or pause between phrases or clauses, usually signalled by punctuation [...] but sometimes not. C[aesura] is the metrical phenomenon which corresponds to this break in the syntax of the line”. The difference between the terms can be clarified further by explaining how “critics often use ‘pause’, ‘rest’, and ‘caesura’ interchangeably. But in most meters caesura is subject to metrical rule”. Furthermore, Brogan states that “The only relation assumed [between ‘pause’ and ‘caesura’] is that a c[aesura] will be realized in performance by a pause” and that “Other paralinguistic or performative (‘rhetorical’) pauses, including breath-points, pauses for rhetorical emphasis, and

1. “‘The Buffalo’ and ‘Nine Nectarines and Other Porcelain’ comprise the sequence called ‘Imperious Ox, Imperial Dish,’ first seen in *Poetry* 45 (November 1934): 61-67” (Schulman 420).

2. This poem remained unpublished until its inclusion in *The Poems of Marianne Moore*, edited by Grace Schulman, in 2003. “‘Callot-Drecol-Cheruit-Jenny-Doucet-Aviotte-Lady’ RML, Series I, 1:01. Dated November 26, 1918. Unpublished” (Schulman 407).

3. “‘An Octopus.’ This, from COMP, pp 71-76. First publication, *Dial* 77 (December 1924):475-81. O, SP, CP, COMP” (Schulman 412).

4. “The sequence originally appeared this way, as ‘Part of a Novel, Part of a Poem, Part of a Play,’ in *Poetry* 40, 3 (June 1932): 119-28” (Schulman 415).

the slight pauses subject to variance of speech tempo have nothing to do with metrical design" (159).

It is also worth mentioning the views expressed by Seymour Chatman in his paper "Comparing Metrical Styles"⁵, in which he discusses the distinction between the style of a poem and its interpretation by a reader, in saying, "These adjustments [traditional end-stops versus run-on or enjambment] of metrical continuity within and between lines are not orthographic facts; they only exist in performance" (166). He goes on to say that "As such they reflect the reader's interpretation, which is based not only on the meter but on the punctuation, the grammar, and the lexical message" (166). But Chatman makes a distinction between "punctuation, grammar, and message" by showing that they are the "causes of caesura and enjambment, not their manifestation or mode of existence" (166). He refines this position by adding that "caesura and enjambment are phonological, not grammatical or lexical entities" (169) and suggests to critics that it "might be more proper to speak of a line as 'suggesting' or 'signalling' caesura and enjambment than 'having' it" (166).

According to Chatman, lines can be divided into three types with three distinct forms of punctuation and grammar: 1. 'Run-on' lines where punctuation marks rarely occur and where there are no stops within the line or at the line end. 2. 'Alternative' lines which usually have no punctuation, or the poet makes use of 'soft' punctuation marks, which are those marks that do not signal a hard or full stop, e.g. periods, em dashes, exclamation points, question marks, etc. In alternative lines either enjambment or end-stopping seems possible and shifts according to the context of the poem. 3. 'End-stopped' lines often have line-end punctuation stronger than a comma, or other 'soft' punctuation marks, and is where a terminal juncture seems obligatory and therefore may be considered 'hard' (167-68).

5. Given at the Conference on Style held at Indiana University, April 17-18, 1958.

When discussing stopping or resting points in the works of Moore, and other poets, the term ‘caesura’ will be referring to the stops that are implied by the grammatical markers and will not be used interchangeably with pause. By aligning myself with the group of theorists who “scan by syllables and stresses rather than by measuring timing” (Brogan 159), I will be using the term ‘pause’ in reference to rhetorical, **or as Chatman says, “performative” pauses.** To clarify further, the term ‘pause’ will be used as a means of identifying the stopping points that are either performed or inherent within the lines and poems as a whole. These can occasionally glance over the implementation of certain forms of punctuations, such as the hyphen and conjunctive, adjectival commas, stanza, and line breaks. This isn’t to say that all pauses will be ignored, but they will be read in conjunction with the grammatical markers and context of the poem.

In “Nine Nectarines and Other Porcelain”⁶ the syllabic structure adheres to a set grid that reads: 8, 8, 9, 8, 5, 7, 6, 8, 8, 5, 8, and repeats itself with few substitutions. This rigid syllabic arrangement lends itself to the runaway effect found within two sections of the poem. The first begins in the first stanza and runs midway into the second, and reads:

both, in the Chinese style, the four

pairs’ half-moon leaf-mosaic turns
out to the sun the sprinkled blush
of puce-American-Beauty pink
applied to bees-wax gray by the
uninquiring brush
of mercantile bookbinding. (ll. 11-17)

As noted by John Slatin in his essay “The Forms of Resistance: Syllabics and Quotations”, “enjambment [is] her characteristic procedure [...] even crossing stanza breaks” (98). It can be argued that despite the stanza break between lines

6. Later shortened to “Nine Nectarines” by Moore.

eleven and twelve, the comma following “style” is the last breathing point for the next six lines. Beginning with the words “the four”, the rest of the lines can be read as running together, using enjambment, and leaping over the stanza break without giving the reader an obvious, comfortable place to pause. By the time the reader has come to the full stop after “bookbinding” they need to take a moment to refill their lungs and allow their minds to catch up with their eye and ear before continuing. Additionally, the subtle use of rhyme in “sprinkled / pink” and “blush / brush” contributes to the forward momentum, enhancing the noticeable lack of pausing points.

Within “Nine Nectarines” Moore is using subtle fluctuations in rhythm and syllabic count to enhance the reader’s understanding of the poem. Moore says that “Words cluster like chromosomes, determining the procedure” (54), which highlights how runaway rhythm appears within certain line groupings. David Kedlac also notes in his article “Marianne Moore, Immigration, and Eugenics” that her “genetic metaphor is certainly an important one” (23) and goes on to explain that “Moore used an image of nine nectarines on a peach tree as a metaphor for the generative displacement of meaning that distinguishes her poetry for contemporary readers” (44). This “displacement of meaning” is the disjointed effect that Moore’s runaway rhythm fosters between the reader’s ear, eye, and understanding of the poem. This effect is created within the first lines of runaway rhythm in “Nine Nectarines” by affecting the continuity between the reader’s reading and understanding of the lines by generating a continual, measured flow that does not allow them to pause until they reach the end of line seventeen. In doing so, Moore alters how the reader understands that there have been “mutated nectarine clusters on peach-tree limbs” (Kedlac 42) and that the “nectarine has every appearance of an artificial tree” (Moore qtd in Kedlac 43). Which in turn replicates in content what her strict syllabic grid does in form.

In “Nine Nectarines” the lack of grammatical markers, in conjunction with

a deficit of obvious pausing points, drives the reader on. Roy Fuller, in his review of Moore's *Complete Poems*, says that Moore herself "paid no attention to line endings in stanzaic poems (even when they rhyme), and [...] the syllables that have been counted out with (more or less) painstaking accuracy are often slurred over" (228), as can be seen in the third stanza:

of nine, with leaf window
unquilted by *curculio*
which someone once depicted on
this much-mended plate
or in the also accurate
unaltered moose or Iceland horse
or ass asleep against the old
thick, low-leaning nectarine that is the
color of the scrub-tree's brownish flower. (ll. 29-38)

These lines showcase the same style of runaway rhythm as the first example from "Nine Nectarines" in that they do not allow the reader the option of pausing to breathe in between the lines "this much-mended plate / or in the also accurate" and "unaltered moose of Iceland horse / or ass asleep against the old". Moore's use of the conjunctive "or" is an indication that if this were prose writing there might be a comma before it, or a full stop and the start of a new sentence. By utilising the connective properties of the word "or" in place of using more disjunctive commas within the lines, Moore prevents the rhythm from being disrupted by also creating a visual 'rolling over' and connectivity of the lines.

Moore uses the word "*curculio*" at the end of line thirty, which is the name for a species of weevil that feeds on plum and peach-like fruits, to set up the second section of runaway rhythm. Her choice of the "*curculio*" not only identifies a specific species and indicates the intertextuality between art and science in "Nine Nectarines", but the word itself conjures onomatopoeic qualities of the

rolls and curls that the rhythm of the following lines embody. The next six lines move along quickly, using “or” as hinges between the images, which is indicative of the pins that are often used in repairing damaged ceramics. Line thirty-one begins with Moore placing the image of the “*curculio*” on a “much mended plate” (l. 32) and moves to depictions of the “unaltered moose or Iceland horse / or ass asleep ...” (ll. 34-35) which were animals often rendered on Chinese porcelains in stylised and flowing patterns. Finally, Moore draws the lines to a close by curling everything back to the nectarine, which is essentially an imperfect peach. Moore uses the rhythm to take the reader quickly from the “unquilted” leaves of the nine nectarines through a quick description of the weevil who feeds on them, and links these to “much-mended” porcelains and ceramics, which have their origins in ancient China and is where the nectarine’s “cultivation dates from the remotest antiquity” (de Candolle 221). By the time the reader has read through this section of runaway rhythm, they have travelled through history, biology, art, and geography, and the end stop in line thirty-seven finally allows their eyes to pause and their minds to make order out of the “displacement of meaning” the runaway rhythm has fostered.

Beum and Shapiro state in their book *The Prosody Handbook: A Guide to Poetic Form* that “The line [...] was of fundamental importance in keeping the pattern of rhythm from running amuck. Each line break set the typical rhythm going again, regardless of whether the sentence was completed or not” (46). In her poem “Callot-Drecol-Cheruit-Jenny-Doucet-Aviotte-Lady”⁷, Moore implements a runaway rhythm that again jumps over stanza breaks but does not set the “typical rhythm going again” in the way Beum and Shapiro claim it should.

One of the most interesting facets of Moore’s poetry is the role the title plays in both the form and meaning of the poem. In “Callot-Drecol-Cheruit-Jenny-Doucet-Aviotte-Lady”, the seemingly abstract title uses hyphens to flow continually

7. Abbreviated as “Callot-” when not referring to the connectivity of the title itself.

into the first line of the poem. In her academic blog on Marianne Moore, Pat Willis points out that each of the title words, with the exception of “Aviotte”, which can be a derivative of Vionnette, are names of Parisian haute couture fashion houses (Oct. 2010). As a conjunct, adjectival description of the “lady” to which it refers, the title as a whole becomes a condensed, visual representation of runaway rhythm. In an essay entitled “Answers to Some Questions Posed by Howard Nemerov”, Moore says that she writes “expecting the reader to maintain the line unbroken (disregarding the hyphen) [sic]” (1). This is not the only time that Moore uses grammatical markers in her titles to indicate a connectivity and flow, but it is the most extensive example of the visually connective element of the hyphen. The visual flow in “Callot-Drecol-Cheruit-Jenny-Doucet-Aviotte-Lady” can be best exemplified in juxtaposition to other titles of her poetry that incorporate em dashes as pausing points, as seen in “You Are Very Pensive — Hammering Out in Darkness What Will Not Bear the Light of Day” and “To a Cantankerous Poet Ignoring His Compeers — Thomas Hardy, Bernard Shaw, Joseph Conrad, Henry James”.

In “Callot-”, Moore sticks to a pre-set syllabic grid of 9, 8, 14 in each three-line stanza, but instead of this causing a pause, breath, and re-start of a repeating rhythm, she uses the structure to generate a runaway rhythm that flows over and pushes the reader along to the next line and stanza. Moore admitted that she “likes to see symmetry on the page” (Schulman, 2003), but that she “Never plan[s] a stanza” and that she “may influence an arrangement or thin it, then try to have successive stanzas identical with the first” (Hall 54). This brief description of her writing process helps to explain her use of three line stanzas as a visual tool in “Callot-”. This also serves to elucidate the aural roll-over, or enjambment, that occurs between the stanzas, creating a runaway rhythm in stanzas six, seven and eight.

to the flowing rhythm that was interrupted by the colon. Stanza eight rhymes “On / Upon / on / crimson”. The repetition of the “on” sound uses visual and aural indicators to recreate quickly the rhythms and speed generated by the runaway lines in the above stanzas. Moore not only uses rhyme schemes within selections that constitute runaway rhythm, but uses it throughout “Callot-” as a way to create the “original rhythm that was [... her] prime objective” (Moore I).

As previously mentioned, “Callot-” has a syllabic structure of 9, 8, 14 that repeats itself with a single exception in line thirty-one, which has eight syllables instead of nine. Moore explains her actions in a letter to Ezra Pound saying that, “Any verse that I have written, has been an arrangement of stanzas, each stanza being an exact duplicate of every other stanza” (122). In his review of Moore’s *Complete Poems*, Roy Fuller points out that “It is curious that Miss Moore [...] does not avoid writing in lines of an even number of syllables. Even numbers tend to be iambic” (229). Moore is trying to create an original rhythm, but “because stress is unregulated we tend to pay less attention to her structures of sound” (Slatin 99). The iambic rhythms that can be imposed on the lines of “Callot-” with even numbers of syllables such as “Philosophy succeeding band (8) / Concert repeats is not philosophy but I shall go (14)”, can be scanned as an iambic tetrameter and an iambic heptameter.

It can be argued that at the end of a line of regular, iambic verse, the reader should naturally pause before moving on to the next line, but Moore generally ignores this tendency and “does not worry [...] about where the stresses will fall [... and] For the purposes of her patterns, [...] all syllables have the same formal value: there is no fixed ration of stressed to unstressed syllables within the line” (Slatin 98). Moore propagates “reading for sense” (Fuller 229) which, in turn, insists that the reader continues to move onwards until they reach a definitive pausing place in order to realign their thoughts with what they have read.

Both “Nine Nectarines” and “Callot-” exemplify the runaway rhythm Moore

creates by utilising stanza breaks, rhyme schemes, syllabic grids and hyphenation, but she uses it outwith these mechanisms as well. This can be seen in her longer poem “An Octopus”, where her use of longer lines and left side justification without line-start capitals lend the poem a visually, almost physically imposing presence that necessitates multiple pausing points. In contrast to the many pausing places within the poem, at two points in the two hundred and twenty-seven line work she implements short stints of runaway rhythm to bolster the flow.

In “An Octopus”, Moore runs the lines one after another in a twenty-six sentence poem that has only one stanza break after line one hundred twenty-eight. For the first one hundred lines, Moore uses normative grammatical markers, such as commas, full stops, and em dashes to give the reader adequate opportunities to pause, breathe and absorb the landscape, culture, and animal she is describing. For example, the lines that lead up to her first implementation of runaway rhythm, read, “which forms the groove around a snail-shell, / doubling back and forth until where snow begins, it ends.” (101-02). In these two lines, there are two commas, neither of which is used in place of a conjunctive word, but as indications of a syntactical shift where the reader should pause.

Not discounting Charles Olson’s view on the use of commas as “an interruption of meaning rather than the sounding of the line” (9), it can be said that there are two groups of commas used in poetry which both fall into what Chatman called ‘alternative’ forms, and which can be either hard or soft: the clausal/adjectival comma and the conjunctive comma. I read the clausal/adjectival comma as a ‘soft’ comma that is often found with coordinate adjectives, setting off certain clauses, in dates and place names, and to separate words in lists. The conjunctive comma is normally ‘hard’ and is used to connect two complete clauses or set off a phrase at the end of the sentence or line that refers back to a previous part. Furthermore, the first group of clausal/adjectival commas are likely the ones to which Olson referred when he said it is an “interruption of

meaning instead of the sound.”

In lines 101-102 (quoted above) of Moore’s “An Octopus”, the comma following ‘shell’ reads as a clausal/adjectival comma, which can be glossed over during reading, while the comma after “begins” sets off the phrase “it ends” and indicates that the phrase refers back to the description of the shell, and calls for a pause.

The poem’s first use of runaway rhythm follows the caesura filled lines quoted above and reads:

No ‘deliberate wide-eyed wistfulness’ is here
among the boulders sunk in ripples and white water
where ‘when you hear the best wild music of the forest
it is sure to be a marmot’ (ll. 103-06)

The only grammatical indicators in these four lines are the hyphen in “wide-eyed”, and the single quotation marks Moore places around the two phrases where she is quoting another, unlisted, source. Neither of these grammatical markers allow the reader the opportunity for pausing. However, Moore is conscious of the need for lulls in the rhythm and it is evident in the way she follows up these four, runaway lines with five lines ending with hard, grammatically terminal caesura, each one indicating what can be read as a defined pause.

Moore’s second use of runaway rhythm in “An Octopus” is found in the five lines that lead up to the only stanza break in the poem. These lines read:

the cavalcade of calico competing
with the original American menagerie of styles
among the white flowers of the rhododendron surmounting rigid
leaves
upon which moisture works its alchemy,
transmuting verdure into onyx (ll. 124-28)

According to Beum and Shapiro's aforementioned statement, "The lines will move faster [...] if it does show such characteristics as alliteration [...] and a predominance of words of more than one syllable" (83-5). In these lines, Moore capitalises on light rhyme in her use of alliteration with "cavalcade / calico / competing" in line one hundred and twenty-four, "American menagerie" in one hundred and twenty-five, and the repetition of "o" and "on" in "among / flowers / of / rhododendron / upon / moisture / works / into / onyx". Her continued use of multi-syllabic words in succession, as in "cavalcade of calico competing" and "original American menagerie" works to increase the momentum of the lines adding to the runaway effect, which in turn highlights the substance of the verse itself.

In the above quoted lines (ll. 124-28) of "An Octopus" Moore is describing a competition between the "cavalcade of calico" and the "original American menagerie of styles" situated among the typically white flowers of the rhododendrons, which themselves are fighting to rise above the moisture that turns their leaves from green to brown. The competition Moore engenders between the "cavalcade of calico" and "American menagerie of styles" is one that is rushed, as if in a race. She creates this effect by using runaway rhythm in conjunction with diction that propagates a forward momentum. By choosing the words "cavalcade", "surmounting", "works", and "transmuting", Moore allows the runaway rhythm of the lines to be echoed in the movement indicated by the words themselves. This combined effect coalesces in a rushing, runaway rhythm that ends after the transmutation from green to black is complete, with the full stop after "onyx".

Moore's penchant for editing and revising her poetry is well known. "Moore's 'Sun,' for example, was printed in at least seven distinct versions from 1916 to 1966. More famously, she published 'Poetry' in multiple versions ranging from 3 to 30 lines, over a period of fifty years" (Miller 232-248). Her poem "The

Steeple-Jack” was first published in *Poetry* 40, 3 in June of 1932 and was revised in 1935, 1951, and 1961; but what is interesting in “The Steeple-Jack” is how she kept its six line segment of runaway rhythm throughout all the revisions.

The poem is divided into eight stanzas of six lines, excepting the fourth stanza, which has four lines with a truncated, four-syllable last line. The rest of the poem adheres to an 11, 10, 14, 8, 8, 3 syllabic line structure, where the lines with evenly numbered syllables “tend to be iambic” (Fuller 229), but though there is a naturally iambic flow that is often seen in lines with even syllables, in Moore’s “The Steeple-Jack”, between “flock” and “grey” there are no performative pauses in the lines that read:

quiver of the body—or flock
mewing where

a sea the purple of the peacock’s neck is
paled to greenish azure as Dürer changed
the pine green of the Tyrol to peacock blue and guinea
grey. You can see a twenty five- (ll. 11-16)

On a metrical level, Moore writes in syllabic verse where she “counts the number of syllables [...] and neither counts the stresses nor distributes them determinately” (Beum & Shapiro 54), and begins this section of runaway rhythm with a line that I read as:

/ / /
quiver | of the body | — or flock

a trochee, anapaest, and finally an iamb. This is an unusual metrical form for a line of eight syllables that, according to Fuller, should be iambic.

With several anapaests and spondees distributed within the patterns, Moore makes the reader move quickly from stressed syllable to stressed syllable

by interspersing several unstressed syllables in succession. This, according to Beum and Shapiro, makes the reader “race over the non-stresses” (33). In turn, this helps to create the flow of the runaway rhythm that allows for slowing down, as found in the consecutive stressed syllables such as “peacock blue” and “guinea / grey”, but does not allow for a pausing point. In fact, it can be argued that the stressed syllables that slow the tempo down enhance the effects of the runaway rhythm by drawing the lines out, making the reader use the same breath longer before reaching the pausing point after “grey”.

In addition to her use of syllabic structure to enhance the runaway rhythm in the above selection, Moore also employs repetition of whole words, such as “peacock” and “green”, and light rhyme. Slatin claims that her use of light rhymes:

[...] are singularly unobtrusive, not only because they are usually arrhythmic and depend upon such odd collocations [...] but because they are usually buried deep within a syntactic structure which does not and cannot pause for them, and so neither displays them nor is itself displayed by them. (94)

However, the rhymes becomes apparent in her use of alliteration in “purple / peacock’s / paled / pine / peacock”, and “guinea / grey”. The slant rhyme of “azure / Dürer” help move the line along and the slight end rhyme of “peacock’s / neck / peacock” again draws the reader’s eye in a continually forward motion, reinforcing the notion that the reader must not stop.

While the runaway rhythm formed in lines eleven through sixteen of “The Steeple-Jack” does not seem to pick up speed as the lines move forward in tempo, they can be read as a force to keep the motion of the poem flowing in a continual rhythm that does not give the reader pausing points in which to align their comprehension with their visual reading of the poem. Much like “Nine Nectarines”, “Callot-”, and “An Octopus”, “The Steeple-Jack” uses many of the same methods,

such as light rhyme, repetition, non-patterned syllabic stresses, hyphenation, and enjambment to create sections of runaway rhythms. In Marianne Moore's poetry, there are no poems that consist entirely of runaway rhythm as I have defined it. However, this form of rhythm seems useful to her in its ability to draw the reader into the poem by removing their standard, and most likely expected, pausing points, and forcing them to move onward in a continual flow which, in turn, creates a "displacement of meaning" (Kedlac 44). This "displacement" then encourages the reader to return to the lines of runaway rhythm to try to realign their understanding of the lines with their sense of movement by focusing on the content of the poem itself.

Chapter 2:

Denise Levertov: Runaway Rhythm in Three Poems from 1961-1998

Moore and Levertov were contemporaries, until Moore's death in 1972, but they had very different approaches to, and ideologies of, poetic form. Moore's elaborate syllabic grids were too structured for Levertov, who preferred to work in what she termed 'organic form'. Though Levertov and Moore did not use the same base forms for their poetry, they both utilise various poetic mechanisms to generate runaway rhythms to influence their readers' experiences, leaving them feeling somewhat rushed by the time they reach the accepted pausing point, with a slight feeling of disconnection between what they have just read and what their mind understands.

In her essay entitled "Some Notes on Organic Form", Levertov differentiates between 'organic form' and 'free verse' by saying, "The difference is this: that free verse isolates the 'rightness' of each line or cadence — if it seems expressive, then never mind the relation of it to the next; while in organic poetry the peculiar rhythms of the parts are in some degree modified, if necessary, in order to discover the rhythm of the whole" (pg. 2). Levertov also recognises the sometimes disjointed effect of organic form by saying that "the apparent distortion of experience in such a poem [an organically formed one] for the sake of verbal effects is actually a precise adherence to truth" (pg. 3). Her definition of organic form, therefore, is based on a method of perceiving the subject, while acknowledging the clear temporal gap between writing and experience. This permitted Levertov to embrace the best parts of William Carlos Williams' idiomatic, American speech rhythms and Charles Olson's theory of projective verse while experimenting

with content, line length, and the visual representation of the poem on the page, resulting in a poetic language that fluctuated as she matured as a poet.

To explore more fully the way Levertov uses runaway rhythm I will be looking at a cross section of three poems from different published collections from 1961 through to her last volume, published posthumously in 1998. None of the poems examined in this chapter exhibit clear patterns of metrical or syllabic forms.

In a 1965 interview with Walter Sutton, Levertov speaks candidly of the use of the breath in poetry, saying, “There are a lot of poems where you actually have to draw a big breath to read the phrase as it’s written. But so what? Why shouldn’t one, if one is capable of drawing a deep breath?” (19). This may seem to overly simplify her use of runaway rhythm as a way of playing with the organic form, but her use of breath is an integral part of how she influences the pace of the reader. In speaking with Packard Williams, Levertov echoes Chatman’s ideas of the variation of performance in reading poetry and expounds on the idea of a poet using syntactical, grammatical, and rhythmic devices to control the reader:

I had an argument with some students who were objecting to that much direction by the poet. I defend it, absolutely, because I feel that it’s exactly like the writing down of music. When music is written, it allows a considerable amount of interpretation to the performer, and yet, it is always definitely that piece of music and no other [...] I see no reason why the poet shouldn’t have the same privilege. (Packard 45)

This is not to say that Levertov employs runaway rhythm with the sole intention of manipulating the pace of her readers; her use of runaway rhythm tends to correspond with a specific function within the poem itself, which Levertov draws out with her use of rhythm in order to enhance the meaning of the poem as a whole.

Levertov defines rhythm as “The interplay of both beats and silences” (Crouch 155), which relates to earlier documented discussions of rhythm and flow where she compares writing poetry to dancing:

The process [of writing a poem] does not go on at a steady walking pace (*walking*). It doesn't constantly dance around, either, but it may kind of hurry forward (*little fast steps*), and then it will stop (*stops*), and then it will walk more slowly, and it has definitely an almost dance-like movement to it, not constantly skipping and jumping and running, but a varied motion. (Packard 43)

This fluid, dance-like quality summarises Levertov's view of the overall rhythm of her poetry, where there are parts that hurry forward, often ignoring line and stanza breaks and commas, and constitute runaway rhythm that can leave the reader feeling like they have been following a dance they didn't quite understand, until they have seen the whole thing and reflect on it.

In her fifth book of poetry, *Jacob's Ladder*, published in 1961, the poem “A Map of the Western Part of the County of Essex in England”¹ is an example of the aforementioned dance-like movement. The lines of the poem are densely packed and sit heavily on the page with no stanza breaks, giving “A Map” the effigy of a prose poem and visually setting the reader up for forty-two lines that will pace itself like non-rhythmic literature. The first five lines of the poem illustrate the tight control the poet exercises over the rhythm as it ebbs and flows, which lends itself to her use of runaway rhythm later in this same poem with:

Something forgotten for twenty years: though my fathers
and mothers came from Cordova and Vitepsk and Caernarvon,
and though I am a citizen of the United States and less a
stranger here than anywhere else, perhaps,
_____ I am Essex-born: (ll. 1-5)

1. Shortened to “A Map”.

In addition to the grammatical caesuras, such as the colons and end stop commas that slow down these lines, Levertov stated she could slow the speed of a line by, “Not the number of syllables [as Moore has done] so much as the kind of syllables, and whether the consonants are sufficiently harder to enunciate so that they help slow things down” (Packard 44). Here, Levertov is speaking of using cacophony, which is “The use of harsh-sounding words [...] which may result from [...] frequent jumps, in short succession, from front to back vowels or from open to close vowels, such jumps requiring more muscular effort than a succession of cognate sounds” (Bishop 158). This leads to the fact that “vowels have a much higher sonority [...] than consonants” and that “to form a consonant requires obstruction of the airstream” (Bishop 389-90), which makes the harsh, heavy consonant sounds harder for a reader to articulate and are, therefore, read more slowly. The first lines of “A Map” showcases Levertov’s meaning. The words “Cordova”, “Vitepsk”, “Caernarvon”, and “citizen” demand more of the reader’s concentration in articulation and therefore require more time to pronounce and assimilate, than lighter, monosyllabic words such as: “for”, “though”, “my”, “from”, “less”, “else”, and “am”.

The above quoted lines represent the slow, walking, pausing, turning portion of Levertov’s rhythm, while the rhythm of lines thirty-four through thirty-seven indicates how she plays with the speed at which the reader reads and subsequently does or does not comprehend the meaning immediately. The lines read:

image with image, now I know how it was with you, an old map

made long before I was born shows ancient
rights of way where I walked when I was ten burning with desire
for the world’s great splendors, a child who traced voyages
(ll. 34-7)

It may be thought that runaway rhythms cannot be unequivocally achieved in only two full and two partial lines of poetry, but line length is only one element of the rhythm that coincides with other elements such as rhyme schemes, enjambment, repetition, and ease of articulation, to create a fractionally disjointed effect for the reader, which makes them want to pause and re-read the lines again to align their visual sense of them with their understanding of the content.

Levertov was interested in the sonic effect of words within a line (Packard 44) and it shows in her choice of words through the repeating letters, clusters, and sounds throughout the poem. In the above four lines from “A Map”, she rushes the rhythm along by employing alliteration, beginning on line thirty-four and leaping past the line break with “map / made”. Other alliterative groupings are “before / born / burning”, “way / walked / was”, and “where / when / with”. In addition to alliteration, Levertov uses end, slant, and internal rhyme schemes to push the rhythm onwards. Examples of these rhyme schemes are: “born / burn”, “before / for”, and “when / ten / splendors”.

Harvey Gross states in his book *Sound and Form in Modern Poetry* that “The experience is rendered in the movement of the lines, and part of what the poem ‘means’ is the movement itself” (15). Levertov creates meaning in “A Map” by implementing mechanisms of runaway poetry to create a sense of the poem’s voice. Specifically, Levertov repeats the pronoun “I”, in lines thirty-four through thirty-six, four times; she does this a total of nine times in the entire forty-two line poem. In doing so, Levertov stresses a first person point of view, creating a unity with the reader that could otherwise be forgotten in the dense poem, which is populated with place names that would likely be foreign to her audience. However, as mentioned in the third line, the “I” character is a “citizen of the United States” and though her heritage is varied, Levertov gently reminds the reader that she too is a stranger to the places of which she speaks. Furthermore,

it can be said that Levertov capitalises on the cacophonous place names such as, “Cordova”, “Clavering”, “Wanstead”, and the word “Thaxed” earlier in the poem, to give a feeling of displacement to the “I” voice of the poem; which hits a turning point in line thirty-four when the “I” discovers a link between the image of the map and her current situation and says, “now I know how it was with you, an old map”. This discovery of familiarity elicits excitement which corresponds to the commencing runaway rhythm that follows.

In “The Prayer” the character goes to Delphi to pray to Apollo “that he maintain in me / the flame of the poem” (ll. 3-4) and drinks from the Pierian Spring. This, in Greek mythology, is the spring from which the wisdom of the muses flows. The eight lines that follow this action push onwards in a tumbling, overtly physical description of the illness engendered by the waters of the spring. It does this with a runaway rhythm that mimics the violent sickness described. Levertov finally allows the reader to pause alongside the character, once she reaches a point where she confronts her faith in the god she prayed to, Apollo; the prayer which she offers to the god, “that he maintain in me / the flame of poetry”; and the validity of the Pierian Springs, famously mentioned by Pope in his “Essay On Criticism” (ll. 215-232), as the fountain of knowledge. By creating a runaway effect within the lines depicting images of purging and causing the caesura to fall immediately after the crucial word “faith”, Levertov allows the reader to take a moment to piece together the information. She then gives the reader a brief respite from the onslaught of unfamiliar and mythological imagery during which she focuses their attention on the underlying themes of religion and faith and questions how much a poet can rely on the whims of the gods to provide their muse. In doing so she exemplifies Charles Hartman’s definition of free verse as “Poems [or parts of poems] written in verse so that the rhythms of language can contribute to the whole meaning of the poem” (Hartman 27).

As mentioned previously, Levertov writes in a free verse form she calls

'organic'. There is no identifiable syllabic line grid as found in Moore's writing and if one were to impose one for the lines from "The Prayer" it would read as, 6 // 4, 7, 5, 9 // 4, 7, 3, 6, and continue on at random. Furthermore, there are no set numbers of feet per line or strict pattern of stress laid upon those syllables as seen in the lines:

and soon after
Vomited my moussaka
and then my guts writhed
for some hours with diarrhea

until at dusk
along the stones of the goatpaths
breathing dust
I questioned my faith, or (ll. 13-20)

What is worth noting in the accentual scansion of "The Prayer" is Levertov's stressed syllables or masculine line ends. In their work on prosody and poetic form, Beum and Shapiro state that "A line that terminates on an unstressed syllable normally drops in pitch; there is thus quite a falling off of energy" (26). This leads to the understanding that those lines, which end on a stressed syllable, maintain or accelerate the rhythm of the line. Seven of the above lines contain masculine line endings; line thirteen does not. Used in conjunction with the rhythmically slowing spondaic feet in "guts writhed" and "goatpaths", Levertov promotes the continuity of flow in the runaway rhythm which can speed up or slow down but does not allow the reader to stop until they reach the comma towards the end of line twenty.

While Levertov's use of metrical elements to pace these lines is enough to generate the runaway rhythm, she also takes advantage of alliteration and rhyme in "soon / some", "guts / goats", "dusk / dust", "my moussaka", and "for / faith". She

goes on to repeat “my” three times within the eight quoted lines. Not only does the repetition of a personal pronoun work to involve the reader in the poem, as seen in the use of “I” in “A Map”, inviting them to step into the place of the character to whom the “my” refers, it also generates speed with its unstressed familiarity that the eye and ear recognise and rush past. This relates to forming expectations in reading whereas “in reading a text, the mind makes a rapid series of predictions each second about what it ought to see next based on what it has just previously seen, [...] and if the expected signal is delayed or missing, the mind often supplies it anyway” (Brogan 1067).

In an interview with Sybil Estess, Levertov stated that “when writing in open forms, enjambment is irrelevant” (93), but she cannot mean that all lines should be end-stopped. It can be said that Levertov understood what Whitman realised when he wrote that “English readers [...] had in large measure ceased to observe line-ends or terminal caesurae in verse unless they represented logical pauses” (Bradley 443), which led Levertov to consider line breaks as “sequences of perceptions²” (Estess 93) and say that they are “roughly equivalent to half a comma” (Packard 43), which she later quantifies as “a tiny hiatus in one’s train of perception” (Couch 154). Terrell Crouch asked Levertov if this hiatus would lead the reader to think and pause, she replies “No, it has a more subliminal effect” (154-55). Therefore, the lines should be read straight through, adhering to the “sense of pulse behind the words” (Sutton 18) that indicates the rhythm, which, in lines thirteen through twenty of “The Prayer”, is one that runs away with the reader and disjoints the meaning from the movement enough that the reader is compelled to reconsider the lines.

In 1970, Levertov wrote a series of poems under the title, “Relearning the Alphabet”, where each poem was named for a letter. The poem entitled “M” is made up of a single sentence, chopped into short sequences and stretched

2. Used interchangeably with “unit of sense”.

over four stanzas and twenty-six lines, over half of which are indented. The first fourteen lines read as follows:

Honest man, I wanted
the moon and went
out to sea to touch
the moon and

down a lane of bright
broken vanishing
curled pyramids of
moonwater
moving
towards the moon
and touched
the luminous dissolving
half moon
cold (ll. 1-14)

Through the clever use of a heavily indented form, Levertov engenders runaway rhythm in the first fourteen lines of "M". Though she has been known to say of form, "to hell with what it looks like", she also admits that "The written poem is the written notation of a sonic effect". Levertov explained her reasoning behind her use of indented lines in an interview with William Packard when she said that her "reason for indentation is that if the eye is going from the end of one line all the way back to the margin, it takes infinitesimally longer than if one goes only to the beginning of an indented line" (45). She continues on to clarify further by saying that "it is in some way intimately connected with that line in a manner which makes one desire to have that little extra speed for the eye, which transmits itself to the ear and the voice" (45).

Levertov believed that the written poem should serve as a form of performative guidance for the reader's experience; she explains this further by

saying “I regard the way the poem is written on the page as a notation, and one should be able to follow the score and come out with a pretty close approximation of the way it is intended to be read” (Estess 95). Specifically, this can be interpreted to mean that when she indents lines two through fourteen in “M”, it has been done with the intention of actualising a runaway rhythm that causes the reader to continue, often on a single breath, over fourteen lines.

This is not to say that the different levels of indentation all share the same relevance to the runaway rhythm of these lines. Levertov’s aforementioned view that the more indentation a line has the quicker it should be read in succession to the previous line can be exemplified by looking more closely at the differing indentation between lines one/two and lines ten/eleven. Line one begins with a left justified line position that then moves from “wanted” into eight of the most heavily indented lines in the poem:

Honest man, I wanted
the moon and went (ll. 1-2)

The intense indentation that begins with “the moon and went” shows that Levertov wants the reader’s eye to move very quickly from “wanted” to “the moon”. The next eight lines are indented equally with “the moon and went” and, though they do not insist on more speed, as would be evidenced within this stylistic framework, by inclusion of even greater indentation, they do require the ceaseless flow of runaway rhythm from one line to the next.

One of the ways Levertov ensures that the reader will maintain the speed of the indented lines through her line breaks is through enjambment. If each line were read as a unit within itself, the poem would make little syntactical sense and at best would fall under one of the more obscure categories of poetry, which is not what Levertov intends. Therefore, she forgoes punctuation and enjambes the indented lines one after another. Furthermore, Levertov facilitates the runaway

rhythm by breaking between the first and second stanza after “and”, so it reads: “the moon and // down a lane of bright” (ll. 4-5). In doing so, she is compelling the reader’s eye to leap past the stanza break, ignoring the possibility of a pause in order to complete the unit of sense, thereby leading directly into the next line.

The next time Levertov adjusts the indentation in “M” is between lines ten and eleven which read:

towards the moon
and touched

By moving the indentation slightly towards the left margin, Levertov is forcing the reader to take that “infinitesimal” (Levertov 45) amount of time to slow back down, but she is careful not to disrupt the continuity of the rhythm by refusing to allow the reader an obvious pausing point.

The use of indentation and enjambment are not the only ways Levertov implements runaway rhythm in these lines; she also avails of her usual tactical variants of alliteration in “to / touch / towards / touched”, “moon / moving” and “vanishing / moving / dissolving”, and repetition. In “M”, over the course of the fourteen lines quoted above, Levertov repeats “moon” five times and “touch” twice. Her repetition of the words “moon” and “touch” has implications that work to balance one another. Repetition is often used as a means of accelerating the pace of the reader; this happens when the reader visually recognises a repeated word or phrase and their mind instantly categorises it as ‘previously seen’ and moves on to something less familiar. This is not to say that repetition forces the reader past the repeated words or phrases without absorbing them; it can also draw attention to the importance of the repeated word or phrase as it stands in relation to the poem as a whole.

That being said, the third, and arguably the most important, use of repetition in “M” is the counterbalance between the speed generated by the repetition and

the control it gives the poet. Levertov said that repetition is “the impulse to tie things together. If one feels them to be at all tied together, one wants to get that into the structure, instead of things flowing along to the point where they slip out of your fingers” (Packard 46-47). By repeating the words “moon” and “touch” so often in the highly enjambed, indented, and overall speedy lines, Levertov is creating another means for her, as a poet, to control the runaway rhythm by dictating the pace of the reader through a few specific syntactical and visual tools.

This chapter illustrates Levertov’s use of this rhythm in a cross section of her poetry from 1961-1998. The poems were chosen for their usage of runaway rhythm in unique contexts within the poems, such as the long lines in “A Map”, the four line stanzas and line/stanza breaks in “The Prayer”, and the indentations of “M”. This is by no means a definitive list of the use of runaway rhythms in Levertov’s works. It has been meant to serve as an illustration of how Levertov frequently adapted but continually used runaway rhythms throughout her poetic career to subtly disengage the meaning of the lines from their movement, in localised segments, which serves to focus the reader’s attention on the content of the poem.

Chapter 3:

Robert Creeley: Runaway Rhythm in Five Poems from 1945-2005

Robert Creeley was born in 1926 and his first collection, *Le Fou*, was published in 1952 by the Golden Goose Press. Over sixty books of poetry, collections of critical writings, interviews, and prose followed. He was a contemporary and friend of Denise Levertov, whom he considered a “chosen hero” (Creeley 571) along with William Carlos Williams, Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, Ezra Pound, and Louis Zukofsky. Each of these poets wielded an influence that appears within Creeley’s poetry. His use of a common language, like Williams’ idiomatic speech, the concept of recurrence from Duncan, emotion as the outcome of structure from Pound, and the dancing rhythms discussed by Levertov, all contribute to his interpretation of runaway rhythm and its relation to the reader’s experience of the poem.

We have seen that Moore uses a strict syllabic grid to construct her poems and Levertov relates each line to the next and to its placement on the page in a free-flowing configuration that she called ‘organic form’, which encompasses a process that clearly separates the temporal gap between writing and experience (Kern 215); whereas Creeley composes poetry as “an act of creativity [that is a] breaking away from the old familiar ego” (Faas 181), wherein he writes what he does not know. This provides lines that “appear most natural [...] when they appear most spontaneous” (Raymond 136-37), effectively eliminating the interval between poesis and mimesis. He famously discusses this in his analogy of driving, where he explains:

The road, as it were, is creating itself momentarily [sic] in one's attention to it, there, visibly, in front of the car. There is no reason it should go on forever, and if one does assume it, it very often disappears all too actually. (493-94)

Creeley's preference for "not anticipating any content before it occurs" (530) prompts further consideration of another notable facet of his poetic style: his confessed "inability to rewrite" (173). Kern surmises that:

if the act of writing is not a generalized experience for him [Creeley], but always a unique and specific one, conditioned by its own circumstances, then one cannot, so to speak, enter the same poem twice. If each act of composition, that is to say, is unique, then revision is impossible; one cannot go back and rewrite a poem so as to improve it. At least the result of such an effort, from Creeley's perspective, will not be a better or improved poem, but simply a different one. (214)

Furthermore, each poem Creeley wrote, which was usually on a typewriter and typed "as fast as I can talk" (Creeley 257), remained as it was originally written and links the often tumbling, rushing nature of writing as the poem came to him, to his use of runaway rhythm and this rhythm's ability to affect the reader's experience of the poem by minutely separating their perception of the movement and sense of the lines.

Before looking at individual poems, it is necessary briefly to revisit the ways of reading poems for rhythm. In his paper entitled "The Literal Activity of Robert Creeley", Diehl suggests that readers approach Creeley's poetry as if "performing 'a distinct pause [...] at the end of each line'" (339). Although it works well for poems with hard, caesural punctuation at each line end, to extend this reading of pausal line ends to every line in every poem stifles the inherent rhythm, and,

in effect, denigrates the integrity of the line or lines. Similarly to Chatman and Levertov, who believed that the words on the page can only guide the reader in their performance of the poem, whether read aloud or silently, Creeley wrote that he “feel[s] poetry as a complex of sounds and rhythms, which move in parallel to music” (491) and “cohere to inform the reader (whether he listen aloud or in silence) with a recognition of their order” (489).

Within his own poetry, one of the first instances of Creeley’s use of runaway rhythm is the poem “There Is” which was published in his 1967 collection *Words*. “There Is” is written as one long, heavily enjambed sentence stretching over twenty-one lines and reads as follows:

There is
as we go we
see there
is a hairy
hole there is
a darkness ex-
panded by
there is a
sense of some
imminence imman-
ence there is
a subject placed
by the verb a
conjunction coord-
inate lines
a graph of indeterminate
feelings there is
sorry for itself
lonely generally
unhappy in its
circumstances. (ll. 1-21)

When first read, “Creeley’s lines, ending over and over again inside phrases, help create this stumbling, hesitant, searching self” (Diehl 344). The rhythm of “There Is” vacillates and does not, initially, make the reader rush from one line to the next, as we will see in Creeley’s later poem “SNAKE FISH BIRD”. However, the rhythm runs away by removing the seemingly inherent pausing places within the poem and including heavily enjambed line ends. In doing so, the rhythm created minutely separates the temporal effects between a reader’s visual and cognitive comprehension of the poem.

One of the ways Creeley uses enjambment to establish runaway rhythm is to vary his use of anticipatory and retrospective enjambments. In “The Free Verse Spectrum”, Eleanor Berry defines anticipatory enjambments as ones that “leave us hanging, expecting something more to fulfil syntactical expectation” (890). She goes on to say that retrospective enjambments “leave us without any unfulfilled syntactical expectations [such as full phrases or units of thought] (only the absence of punctuation signals continuation of the clause), so it is only retrospectively that we perceive the lines in question as enjambed” (890). This is a useful distinction in the creation of a poem’s rhythmic form. Below, Creeley’s “There Is” has been marked up to indicate his different uses of enjambment. The **anticipatory enjambments** are written in bold while the *retrospective enjambments* are marked in italics.

There is
as we go we
see there
is a hairy
hole there is
a darkness ex-
panded by
there is a
sense of some
imminence imman-

ence there is
a subject placed
by the verb a
conjunction coord-
inate lines
a graph of indeterminate
feelings there is
sorry for itself
lonely generally
unhappy in its
circumstances. (ll.1-21)

By using this mix of anticipatory and retrospective enjambments, Creeley creates a rhythm that runs away from line to line in a steady flow that does not allow the reader to pause until they reach the full stop at the end of line twenty-one.

Another contribution to this poem's runaway rhythm is Creeley's "use of recurrence" (Entwistle 268). In her article "Robert Creeley and Robert Duncan: A World of Contradiction" Alice Entwistle briefly outlines their interaction and notes that their "Mutual respect quickly deepened into close friendship" (268) and that Creeley had "a sense of repetitions" (267) in Duncan's work. Entwistle goes further to say that, "In due course, Duncan's habitual 'use of recurrence' began to appear in Creeley's work" (268) and mentions the first examples such as Creeley's "Goodbye", which was published in *For Love* in 1962. Another example of Duncan's influence can be seen in the above poem, "There Is", in the repetition of the phrase "there is", which he uses in the poem six times, not including the title. Since "There Is" is not a poem that rushes in its runaway rhythm, Creeley repeats this phrase most heavily in the beginning to provide a movement that hinges on the phrase and uses it as a swing to launch the motion of the poem forwards.

The first ten lines of the poem repeats "there is" four times. Creeley employs this specific repetition to provide the reader with a recognisable phrase

that works much like alliteration, repetition, and certain forms of rhyme. Each time “There Is” drops momentum Creeley repeats the phrase to give the reader a jolt of recognition that their eye and ear connects to the title and rushes past, creating the runaway rhythm. In the last eleven lines of the poem “there is” is only used twice: the last time in line seventeen, which leaves the energy dwindling in the final four lines, allowing Creeley to close the poem “when the energy drops” (Faas 196).

“There Is” is structured as a single stanza, which is a form that we see Creeley utilising throughout his career. However, in his poem “What”, from his 1990 collection *Windows*, he divides the twelve lines into four, three-line stanzas. “What” consists of one sentence and has a single grammatical marker in the form of a question mark at the end of the poem. It reads:

What would it be
like walking off
by oneself down

that path in the
classic woods the light
lift of breeze softness

of this early evening and
you want some time
to yourself to think

of it all again
and again an
empty ending? (ll. 1-12)

Creeley wrote that “What device, means, rhythm, or form the poem can gain for its coherence are a precise issue of its occasion” (45). In his article “Composition as Recognition: Robert Creeley and Postmodern Poetics” Robert Kern picks up

on this and notes that this “rejection of conventional, pre-established literary forms in Creeley’s poetics (as well as in Olson’s) is based in large part on the conviction that such forms preclude the achievement of continuity between writing and experience” (216). In “What”, the form and rhythm work together to allow the reader to “feel their way through the poem, [in] the active re-creation of experience” (Wagner/MacAdams 22). When presented as prose, the literal situation of the poem becomes easily apparent:

What would it be like? Walking off by oneself down
that path in the classic woods, the light lift of breeze
softness of this early evening; and you want some time
to yourself to think of it all again and again. An empty
ending?

The poet, or speaker, is wondering what it would feel like and how different from his current situation it would be if he could simply walk away, down the idyllic, wooded paths where he could be alone to ruminate on some event or thought. Yet at the end, he questions whether or not this imagined experience would give him enlightenment or simply thrust the cyclic patterns of nature onto him, wherein he finds no ending or solution.

Creeley writes “What” as a four stanza, short-lined poem in order to breach the divide between the reading of the poem and the experience of the lines themselves. By presenting “What” as a columnar, stanzaic poem, Creeley enables the eye to journey with the words, down the page and into the woods as the poem itself moves down the page visually. The repetition of the three-line stanza form enhances the unending, cyclical feeling, which is manifest in the words of the final stanza of the poem, which read, “of it all again / and again an / empty ending?”.

The use of enjambment throughout “What” is the lynchpin for its runaway rhythm. Though some lines such as: “What would it be”, “you want some time”, and “empty ending?” are retrospectively enjambed and all but the final line lacks any

grammatical markers to indicate a pause, the lines “like walking off”, “that path in the”, “classic woods the light”, “of this early evening and”, “to yourself to think”, “of it all again”, and “and again an” are anticipatorily enjambed, spurring the reader on. The specific use of anticipatory enjambment in the third line of each stanza propels the reader forward past the stanza break and creates a runaway rhythm by having the reader’s eye and ear seek the next line in order to complete the unit of sense. Creeley’s runaway rhythm in “What” also serves as a physical reminder of the course of the poem’s content. The poet is considering walking off through the woods, down a continual path where not every step will be evenly paced but where he must continue onwards until he reaches a suitable resting place.

The only suitable pausing place in “What” coincides with the question mark at the end of the poem, which draws the reader’s attention to the fact that something was asked within the lines and therefore must be answered. By halting the runaway rhythm with a question mark, Creeley is taking advantage of the way the rhythm seems to disengage the motion of the lines from the sense of the content and therefore leaves the reader with a question of comprehension. This is then visualised and highlighted by the punctuation mark at the end of the poem, which points the reader back towards the previous lines for an answer to the question, which will lead to greater clarity within their understanding of the lines.

Another stanzaic poem wherein Creeley adopts runaway rhythm is “Night Light”, which is part of the “Famous Last Words” series also found in *Windows*. “Night Light” is comprised of five couplets, which is a form Creeley uses for several of the poems in this series. However, “Night Light” stands out due to its densely repetitive use of language and heavily enjambed lines:

Look at the light
between the lights

at night with the lights
on in the room you're sitting

in alone again with
the light on trying still

to sleep but bored and
tired of waiting up late

at night thinking of some
stupid simple sunlight. (ll. 1-10)

As seen above, much like Creeley's previously discussed poems, "Night Light"'s lines turn on enjambment, which helps form part of its runaway rhythm. Without any grammatical markers until the final, full stop at the end of line ten, every line in the poem is enjambed, some more heavily than others. It could be said that the first couplet, "Look at the night / between the lights" calls for a pause after "lights" where the stanza breaks. However, this has little bearing on the runaway rhythm that follows in lines three through ten, which cannot, in keeping with the syntactical structure of the poem as Creeley lays it out, have line-end punctuation and still be comprised of feasible units of sense. Therefore, the enjambments lead the reader's eye and ear from one line to another. The use of enjambment to foster a runaway rhythm, which, in this poem, slightly disjoints the reader's sense of understanding of the lines, increases the reader's urgency in moving forwards until they reach a pausing place where they can regroup their thoughts. This results in the reader's eye and ear ignoring the stanza breaks altogether.

Though Creeley relies on heavy enjambments to create runaway rhythm in "Night Light", he also employs a sense of musicality in the form of repetition. His use of repetition or "use of recurrence" in "Night Light" is most vividly seen in the duplication of the words "light" and "night", which are used in all but the

fourth stanza. “Light” appears five times in the forty-five word poem, whereas “night” appears in the first and last stanza, book-ending the poem. George Lansing Raymond mentions in his book *Rhythm and Harmony in Poetry and Music Together With Music as a Representative Art*, that a factor in the repetition of words, or the grouping of like sounds, is that “giving, as it does, a like tone or colour to different words, causes them not only to be associated in mind, but, because so, to be retained in memory as otherwise would not be the case” (141). Raymond explains how “successive utterances, in the degree in which they are alike, require less effort not only of the physical powers but of the mental by which the physical are controlled and interpreted” (140). He continues on to clarify by saying that “As a rule, men like to avoid difficulties” (139) and “prefers to have words so arranged that they can be uttered easily and rapidly [...] therefore, the ease of utterance obtained through a repetition of sounds has a tendency to cause the mind to think that what is being said is of the same general character as that which has been said” (139-40).

In “Night Light” the recurrence of “night” and “light” not only serves to speed the poem along as the reader’s eye and ear recognises the repetition, and therefore moves quickly past, it also drives home the dichotomous experience of the poem itself. Kenneth Cox writes that “Words of very similar sound may have very different meanings but in course of time [sic], if the meanings are within range, they attract and contaminate each other, producing equations capable of solution” (240). The narrator of “Night Light” is commenting on the poem’s character¹ and is continually pointing out the juxtaposition of the two words “night” and “light”, while simultaneously mingling them into a single frame of reference where the “light” is within the “night”. Furthermore, Creeley is questioning if the character even needs “some / stupid simple sunlight” when he can have both the “night”

1. We can surmise this character is based on artist John Chamberlain, to whom the series is dedicated. “Creeley met Chamberlain in the 50’s at Black Mountain, and maintained contact, writing about Chamberlain’s work on several occasions. (Elizabeth Licata)

and the “light” combined into one experience.

An example of Creeley’s execution of runaway rhythm in “Night Light” is found within the three main points of alliteration within the poem. The first instance of alliteration is located in the first line: “Look at the light” where the “L” sounds are linked to one another by the closely placed “T”s in the phrase “at the”, which visually and aurally blend together euphonicly. The second is an example of runaway rhythm placed in the centre of the poem in line five, which reads: “in alone again with” where the alliteration of “alone again” and the rhyme of “in” and “again” serves as an extra impulse in the centre to push the reader past any slowing that might occur. The final section of runaway rhythm-creating alliteration is in the last stanza where “at night thinking of some / stupid simple sunlight.” rolls off the tongue in a quick hiss caused by the consonance. The full stop that follows “sunlight” is a juxtaposition that simultaneously highlights and halts the runaway rhythm at the close of the poem.

Creeley uses rhyme schemes in a variety of ways throughout his body of work. In an introduction to Penguin’s *Selected Whitman* Creeley takes a moment to give purpose and definition to the processes of rhyming by saying:

that what we call ‘rhyming’ is the recurrence of a sound sufficiently similar to one preceding it to catch in the ear and mind as being the ‘same’ and that such sounds can be modified in a great diversity of ways [...] one can then play upon that sound as long as one’s energy *and* the initial word’s own ability to stay in the ear as ‘residue’ can survive. In verse the weaving and play of such sound is far more complex than any observation of the rhymes at the ends of lines can tabulate. This kind of rhyming is instance of what one can call *parallelism*, and the parallelism which similarity of sounds can effect is only one of the many alternate sources of ‘rhyming’ [sic]. (8-9)

An excellent example of his use of rhyme schemes can be found in his 1994

collection, *Echoes*, where Creeley wrote a series of poems² for Susan Rothenberg called “Parts” that consists of nine, single-stanza poems all featuring heavy enjambment with varying speeds. In the second poem of the series, “SNAKE FISH BIRD”, he takes advantage of intense rhyme schemes within the runaway rhythm to enhance the “near alternative of sense” (Cox 244) of the rhyming phrases. It reads:

Archaic evolving thing
in all surface all beginning
not hair or any seeming simple
extension bring to mind pattern
of woven wetnesses waste a streak
of wonder of evil tokens the underneath
beside ground’s depths spoken
low in sight soundless in height
look past reflection see the light
flash of finned ripple wing
this ancient Fellow follow
to weather, to water, to earth. (ll. 1-12)

It can be said that one of the most traditionally obvious ways to recognise a poem is the use of terminal rhyme³; this can be seen in longstanding forms such as the villanelle (aba), the pantoum (abab), the Shakespearean sonnet (abab cdcd efef gg), and the ballad (abab or abcb), among others. Creeley acknowledges this in his essay “Was That a Real Poem or Did You Just Make It Up Yourself?” and incorporates terminal rhyme in “SNAKE FISH BIRD”. The rhyme scheme of the poem reads, A / B / C / D / E / F / G / G / A / H / I. Some of the lines rhyme, but the rhymes

2. “This project, finally entitled *Parts*, happened mainly when Creeley was living in Maine and Buffalo and Rothenberg was in New Mexico. At first, Rothenberg had intended to make drawings based on Creeley’s writing, but the rooftop series he was working on at the time did not strike a chord. Instead, she sent Creeley drawings of the human and animal imagery she was engaged with, and Creeley wrote to the drawings”. (Licata)

3. Used interchangeably with ‘end rhyme’.

do not conform to any recognisable pattern and are therefore classified as 'free' or 'open' verse.

A possible hindrance for runaway rhythm, which arises with terminally rhymed lines, is the propensity for the reader to pause after reaching the second end rhyme, a phenomenon which is related to the rise and fall of the iambic meters traditionally associated with this rhyme scheme. The way Creeley combats this pause in "SNAKE FISH BIRD" is through a combination of heavily enjambed lines and the variegated dispersal of rhyming words. Within the first four lines of the poem we see a series of rhymes that integrate the internal rhymes, "evolving", "seeming", and "bring", with the terminal rhymes of lines one and two, which end in "thing" and "beginning", respectively. We see this pattern repeated towards the end of the poem in the trance-like recurrence in lines eight and nine which read, "low in sight soundless in height / look past reflection see the light". Here Creeley uses the "ight" sound in "sight", "height", and "light" in a mix of masculine internal and terminal rhymes. What keeps this "ight" rhyme scheme from becoming pausal after the second terminal rhyme is the enjambment which breaks up the adjectival phrase "the light / flash" and encourages the reader to move on past the line breaks. In addition to the perfect rhymes mentioned above, Creeley also rhymes "tokens / spoken", "ground / soundless", and "Fellow / follow" in order to create a sense of movement and speed in the lines.

His use of initial alliteration in "seeming / simple / sight / soundless", "woven / wetnesses / waste / wonder / weather / water", "low / look", and "flash / finned / Fellow / follow"; internal alliteration and assonance in "Archaic / hair" and "evolving / evil"; and the repetition of whole words, which are small but not articles, such as: "in", "all", "of", and "to", work together to create an echo within the lines, linking them together with one another to create a flow that moves smoothly and quickly and, in doing so, pulls apart the motion and sense of the lines so that the reader feels compelled to take time to re-evaluate the segments

of runaway rhythm once they have been given a pausing place to do so.

In writing on Creeley's use of rhymed words, Kenneth Cox states that "Another method Creeley uses to lighten a word and limit its acceptance is that of the rhymeword introduced not to pattern sound but to provide a near alternative to the sense" (243-4). He goes on to say that "The technique as used in poetry maybe said temporarily to speed up the process of linguistic change" (244). This is most evident in two places in "SNAKE FISH BIRD". Firstly, it can be seen in the phrases "wonder of evil tokens" and "ground's depths spoken" which coalesce to approximate the single meaning of *something seemingly harmful that emerges from the ground*. The second place in this poem where rhymewords provide "a near alternative to the sense" is in "Fellow / follow" in line eleven. These two "equating rhymewords" (Cox 240) merge to form the meaning *a person or thing that follows*. Furthermore, the evolution of these phrases highlights the advancing nature of the runaway rhythm within the dense rhymes in "SNAKE FISH BIRD" by encouraging the reader to form a post-reading sense out of the heavily enjambed lines, by looking at the segments again.

Creeley uses runaway rhythm to a variety of different ends. In his poem "Ever Since Hitler...", published in *Windows* in 1990, he uses runaway rhythm to push the reader onwards from line to line while speaking of Hitler and the violence that humans can inflict upon one another. The poem itself consists of one sentence spread over fifteen lines. The single stanza, columnar structure contributes to the runaway rhythm as embodying a single, flowing entity on the page, as seen below:

Ever since Hitler
or well before that
fact of human appetite
addressed with brutal
indifferences others
killed or tortured or ate

the same bodies they
themselves had we ourselves
had plunged into density
of selves all seeming stinking
one no possible way
out of it smiled or cried
or tore at it and died
apparently dead at last
just no other way out. (ll. 1-15)

The first thing a reader notices about “Ever Since Hitler...” is the anticipatory enjambment of lines. This insists that the reader continue moving past the line breaks and seek out the end of the phrase, which is not completed until they reach the single grammatical marker at the close of line fifteen.

Creeley also uses terminal rhyme, some perfect and some slant, to enhance the runaway rhythm in the poem. He rhymes “they”, “density”, and “way” at the ends of lines seven, nine, and eleven and provides the couplet “out if it smiled or cried / or tore at it and died” in lines twelve and thirteen. In addition to the terminal rhymes, the repeated use of “in” as a word, sound, and visual stimulus in “since / indifference / into / density / seeming / stinking” ushers the reader down the poem as do the similar repetitions of “the” in “the / they / themselves”, “ore” in “before / tortured / tore”, and the recurrence of the entire words “selves”, “out”, “it”, and “no”. One of the more interesting choices of repeated words in “Ever Since Hitler...” is the reappearance of the conjunctive “or” throughout the poem. We first see it in line two, then twice in line six, and again in lines twelve and thirteen. In specifically choosing to repeat “or”, as opposed to using a conjunctive comma, Creeley is visually eliminating the option for an alternative, grammatical caesura in the rhythm that a conjunctive comma would require.

The repetition and rhyme schemes within the lines, combined with the enjambment, coaxes the reader’s eye and ear onwards until they get to the end

of the poem and can then reflect on what has been read, which, in itself, is a statement on the way humanity often acts: speeding through and retrospectively understanding what's been said or done. In "Ever Since Hitler..." Creeley comments on the violence of human nature, generalising "Hitler" as both a chronological event in history and a phenomenon within humanity. He goes on to say that humanity has developed a "brutal indifference" to the suffering of others and that when we, as human beings, finally understand that those who suffer are the same as us, we "had plunged into destiny / of selves all seeming stinking". The realisation of this "destiny of selves", from which there is no escape, causes anguish so great that there is "just no other way out" but death.

Creeley was a man of dichotomies, one of which was his belief that the significance of a poem is often found in its emotional context (Creeley 22-23), paralleling with his view that "Only craft determines the morality of a poem" (Creeley 477). In regards to the emotional context of a poem, Creeley said that "Two further statements of Pound's long ago attracted me: 'Only emotion endures...' and 'Nothing counts save the quality of the emotion...'. I have used that sense with respect to all instances of writing, but I would feel, as he, that poetry is that most fully charged with meaning" (490-491).

In 1996, Creeley remarked that "Ever Since Hitler..." was a "painful poem" (Bonvicino 10 May), but said no more. Instead, he chose to let the structure of the poem speak for itself, exemplified when he said, "I think the poem's morality is contained as a term of its structure, and is there to be determined and nowhere else" (Creeley 477). "Ever Since Hitler..." revolves around the topic of humanity's ability to ignore its own suffering. The runaway rhythm Creeley uses in the poem mimics society's desire to rush past the atrocities that are happening both to and around it, and is filled with repetitions indicating that the content, meaning, structure, and rhythm will also be replicated within the world outside the poem.

In this and the preceding chapters, I have introduced the poetical

device of runaway rhythm and shown, in detail, how it occurs by discussing various components such as: rhyme scheme, alliteration, line breaks, hyphens, enjambment, use of hard and soft grammatical caesura, and structure. These components create different effects within the runaway rhythm that, in turn, encourage the reader to reconsider the poem's content and its meaning once they have reached a pausing point. Furthermore, I have focused on why the poets may want to employ runaway rhythm by looking at the semantics of individual poems. Though Moore, Levertov, and Creeley are considered modern poets, and in fact were published right up until their deaths in 1972, 1997, and 2005, respectively, it will be useful to consider the place of runaway rhythm within the contemporary literary scene, including poets and poetry published since 1995, and my own works.

Chapter 4:

Contemporary Poets and Their Use of Runaway Rhythm from 1995-2011

Contemporary poetry seems to be in transition from a predominately free verse and 'organic form' poetic style and structure to one that tends to rely more on word play, rhyme schemes, rhythms, and performance. Dana Gioia addresses this in *Disappearing Ink*, where he says "Any serious attempt to assess poetry's current position will need to proceed in unorthodox ways—not out of intellectual perversity but from sheer necessity—because the orthodox views of contemporary poetry are no longer either useful or accurate in portraying the rapidly changing shape of the art" (5-6). The result of this progression might be more evidently manifest in the coming years, but one can already see how runaway rhythm is finding its place in this evolving poetic scene, as it has throughout history. By examining works by two poets who are currently writing and publishing and two of my own poems, I will highlight the existence and effect of this rhythm, and hopefully show that in the future of poetry it will continue to thrive and become more easily recognised as a rhythmic poetical device.

Adam York is a contemporary poet whose poem "Hush" uses runaway rhythm to create a mimetic effect between the form, sound, and content of the poem. "Hush" focuses on the wind and the noises it conjures as it blows around the southern American house where the poem is set. It is laid out on the page in a thirty-two line, relatively narrow, single sentence structure, with occasional longer lines that jut out past the main column of the poem and mimic the sporadic gusts of wind.

It is within the description of the images embodied in the wind's sound

that the runaway rhythm of “Hush” becomes evident within the continual flow that moves from line one to thirty-two. “Hush” is included in its entirety to show the juxtaposition between the standard rhythm in the first thirteen lines and the runaway rhythm in lines fourteen to the comma after “hands” in line twenty and again in lines twenty-one to the end of line thirty:

It's just the wind, she says, (1)
and not the cigarette pull
of a stranger in the roadside weeds,
the wind, and not the ember burrowing
like a mite in a dead bird's wing (5)
or your fear that the weeds will catch
and it won't be wind any more,
the wind, and not the shadow
blazing brush toward the few
still-lit windows that glow (10)
like cigarette tips through the leaves,
but the wind, the wind
through his hair, his lungs,
his easeful steps quiet
as the wind or the wisteria (15)
gripping the screen or the small boy
running through the moonlit woods
from the man who entered
like the wind in his ears
as the trellis bends (20)
to those open, hungry hands,
or the maple shuddering at the screen
where no one's home
but the wind
that watches itself fall (25)
to the man whose suit of flame
crackles like the wind
that comes through the screen
like a mother saying
hush it's just the wind, (30)

or a mother saying
hush it's just the wind.

(32)

The first twelve lines of "Hush" introduce the topic of the poem with "It's just the wind, she says, / and not [...]" and uses hard, clausal commas to separate "the wind" from the images it conjures. However, the use of commas to break up the flow of the lines is not continued within the sections of runaway rhythm, with the single exception of the clause "hungry hands" in line twenty-one. York uses clausal commas throughout the poem as a way to pause the rhythm and allow the movement and sense of the poem to realign in the reader's mind. Since the runaway rhythm encompasses over half the lines in the poem, I will be looking at lines fourteen through thirty as a single section of runaway rhythm, which contain a marked amount of repetition, alliteration, and the use of similes and progressive verbs to push the reader onwards.

In *Free Verse: An Essay On Prosody*, Hartman defines rhythm in poetry as "the temporal distribution of the elements of language" (14); in "Hush", York has strategically distributed the repetition of "wind" six times over seventeen lines. In doing so, he has created recognition in the reader informing them that the image of the wind is important to the meaning of the poem and encouraging the eye to pass quickly over the familiar word and move on to the next. In addition to the repetition of single words, York makes copious use of alliteration in "wind / wisteria / woods / watches", "man / maple / man / mother", and "hungry / hands".

York's use of similes within "Hush" are notable due to their intrinsic ability to evoke connections between the images "man who entered", "suit of flame", and "a mother saying" with the oft repeated "wind". In doing so, not only does York draw the reader's attention to the, sometimes unusual, imagery, he links these images with the repetitive phrase "the wind". By engendering this association, York links the shorter, sped-past "wind" with the longer similes and thereby

instructs the reader's eye and ear to accept the simile and pass by with more speed than they would normally read into the simile if it stood alone.

York makes use of progressive verbs to further increase the runaway rhythm. "In English, the progressive is indicated with a form of *be* plus the suffix *-ing* on the main verb, as in *Bill is jogging*. Roughly speaking, as its name implies, the progressive signals that an event was, is, or will be in progress" (Wulf 205). In the sections of runaway rhythm within the poem, there are four progressive verbs: "gripping", "running", "shuddering", and "saying", whose semiotics indicate a forward momentum or action in progress. In a practical sense, the use of these progressive verbs signals an action to the reader and thus mentally encourages the words' inherent momentum to speed up the lines. The placement of these progressive verbs is indicative of the structure of the runaway rhythm. The first two verbs, "gripping" and "running", are placed at the commencement of the section of runaway rhythm, at the start of the lines which read "gripping the screen or the small boy / running through the moonlit woods". Their proximity to one another further increases the speed that the use of a progressive verb suggests.

The initial burst of speed demonstrated by the placement of "gripping" and "running" is strong enough in conjunction with the aforementioned alliteration, repetition, and similes, to propel the reader forwards until they reach the clausal commas in line twenty-one; after which, the rhythm would again slow without the use of "shuddering" (22) and "saying" (30). These last two progressive verbs are placed in strategic points to reaffirm the forward movement of the rhythm by sustaining the runaway flow initially created. "shuddering" revamps the slowed momentum after the pause, while "saying" comes immediately prior to the word "hush", which is compiled of consonants that "are difficult to pronounce" (Raymond 115). Furthermore, when "The poet wishes to represent something that moves slowly, [...] he uses words that cannot be well read [...] except by uttering them slowly" (Raymond 119). The juxtaposition between the progressive verb "saying"

with the articulately difficult “hush” highlights York’s use of runaway rhythm by first ramping up the speed, then slowing it down again directly prior to the caesural comma in line thirty, and keeps the rhythm from jolting to a halt, echoing the diminishment of force after a sudden gust of wind.

The combination of York’s use of runaway rhythm, the structure of the poem and its content work together in a mimetic effect of the subject of the poem: the wind. The short lines and the columnar shape of the poem that stretches from the top to the bottom of the page conjure images of a funnel cloud which reaches from the sky to the ground. The continual reference to the “wind” in the poem ensures that the reader remains aware of the subject while the runaway rhythm speeds and slows in turns and mimics the gusts and stillness of the winds within an airstream. As the rhythm’s movement shifts and turns with the lines, the reader’s perception of the content becomes slightly disjointed. This creates a mimetic effect of the unsettled aftermath of a windstorm, and encourages the reader to re-examine the lines and create a new sense of the poem.

One of the most extensive examples of runaway rhythm found among contemporary poetry is in “Lilacs for Ginsberg” by Gerald Stern, which was published in his 2008 National Book Award winning collection *This Time: New and Selected Poems*. “Lilacs for Ginsberg” is a single sentence poem with only six commas, which set off the three clausal phrases: “the / white and the purple” (ll. 22-23), “then for a moment / he almost did” (ll. 27-28), and “for a moment” (l. 31). The structure on the page is rather dense, and the abounding use of the conjunctions “and”, “but”, and “or”, incorporated with the almost continual enjambment, ensures that the rhythm of the lines flows in a continual howl, reminiscent of Ginsberg’s most well known works.

In an interview in 1995, Stern mentions both Creeley and Levertov as two of the “major senior poets” (Pacernick). We can see their influence in Stern’s own works. In fact, it is this converging influence of major poets that we see in Stern’s

“Lilacs for Ginsberg”. Shortly after Ginsberg’s death, Stern wrote this ode as a tribute; it takes into account and expands on Ginsberg’s use of the long breath line. “Lilacs for Ginsberg” consists of thirty-one long lines with only six internal punctuation marks and extensive enjambment that enhances the “single elastic rhythm” (Ginsberg 23) that flows throughout the poem, as seen below:

I was most interested in what they looked like dead
and I could learn to love them so I waited
for three or four days until the brown set in
and there was a certain reverse curl to the leaf by
which in putting my finger on the main artery (5)
beside the throat I knew the blood had passed on
to someplace else and he was talking to two
demons from the afterlife although it was
just like the mountains in New York State since there was
smoke in the sky and they were yelping and he was (10)
speaking in his telltale New Jersey English
and saying the same thing over and over the way he
did when he was on stage and his white shirt was
perfect and the lack of air and of light
aged the lilacs but he was sitting on a lily (15)
in one or two seconds and he forgot about Eighth Street
and fame and cancer and bent down to pick a loose
diamond but more important than that he talked
to the demons in French and sang with his tinny voice
nor did he go on about his yellowing sickness (20)
but counted the clusters and said they were only stars
and there were two universes intertwined, the
white and the purple, or they were just crumbs or specks
that he could sprinkle on his pie nor could he
exactly remember his sorrow except when he pressed (25)
the lilacs to his face or when he stooped
to bury himself in the bush, then for a moment
he almost did, for lilacs clear the mind
and all the elaborations are possible in their

dear smell and even his death which was so (30)
good and thoughtful became, for a moment, sorrowful.

The first three lines of “Lilacs for Ginsberg” use retrospective enjambment to make the lines flow from one to the other. Each line contains a full unit of sense. By not placing caesural grammatical markers at the terminus of these lines, Stern is showing awareness of the rhythm he is generating and the way it will build and spill over into the section of anticipatory enjambment in the lines that follow. As it is, the reader is only aware of the logical flow from line to line once they have read past the conjunctive “and” at the beginning of the second line and “for” at the start of the third. Once the reader has begun to expect this pattern of enjambment, Stern shifts to anticipatory enjambment that does not allow the reader to consider pausing at the end of the line. The units of sense are now stretched over the line breaks as seen in lines four through eleven.

and there was a certain reverse curl to the leaf by
which in putting my finger on the main artery
beside the throat I knew the blood had passed on
to someplace else and he was talking to two
demons from the afterlife although it was
just like the mountains in New York State since there was
smoke in the sky and they were yelping and he was
speaking in his telltale New Jersey English (ll. 4-11)

The end of the unit of sense in line eleven could be said to allow the reader a place to pause briefly to consider the content as it relates to the motion of the lines, but the lack of a caesural grammatical marker, such as a comma or semicolon, after “English” drives the rhythm past the unit of sense that ends with “English” to begin anew with “and” at the start of line twelve.

Just as Ginsberg ends each long line of *Howl* with a hard grammatical

marker and provides a place for the reader to pause and allow the sense and movement of the line to realign, it would have been simple for Stern also to provide pauses for the reader in "Lilacs for Ginsberg". However, his conscious choice of using the conjunctions "and", "or", and "but", without the grammatical markers that parataxis often utilises, indicates his intention of using runaway rhythm to mimic, but strategically differ from, Ginsberg's own.

Stern continues to use enjambment and a calculated lack of grammatical markers throughout "Lilacs of Ginsberg" to maintain an unbroken runaway rhythm until the reader reaches the parenthetical phrases in lines twenty-one / twenty-two, twenty-seven / twenty-eight, and thirty-one. These three segments represent obvious pauses in the flow of the previous twenty lines of unbroken rhythm. "[T]he / white and the purple" (ll. 21-22) and "then for a moment / he almost did" (ll. 27-28) incorporate line breaks and enjambment into the segments which serve as a reminder that the overall flow of the poem is continuing within the grammatical boundaries, while at the same time giving the reader a moment's respite with the parenthetical commas. The final phrase "for a moment" serves as a slowing down for the end of the poem. Much in the same way a runner sees a wall ahead and checks their stride, Stern includes this small phrase to relax the runaway rhythm slightly, allowing the reader to pause momentarily before the final full stop. However, at the same time, the phrase itself is a repetition of the previous parenthetical phrase "then for a moment" in line twenty-seven, which the reader will recognise and want to rush past. By placing this final, repetitious, phrase within commas and at the end of the poem, Stern is using the words to rush the reader on and the grammatical markers to slow them down, causing the movement and sense of the lines to separate, and allowing the reader to pause just enough to prepare for the final end stop a few words away.

The influence of Ginsberg can also be seen in the popular contemporary forms of spoken word poetry, which can be divided into slam and rap poetry,

the latter of which straddles the line between musical genre and written poetry. These genres have expanded in recent years and in his introduction to his book *Can Poetry Matter*, Dana Gioia sums up this expansion by saying:

Poetry has become an increasingly public and performative art. Readings incorporating music and even dance have become common [...] Meanwhile the internet has fostered an immense amount of activity [...] Not all of these trends are entirely new, but their rapid growth and public acceptance over the past ten years has been astonishing. The sort of urban literary activity that previously existed only in exceptional places like Manhattan or Berkeley is now found in hundreds of cities [...] (xiv-xv).

Though slam and rap poetry have their opponents, mostly traditionalists, it is generally recognised for taking poetry out of the classroom and bringing it to the masses. Slam and rap poets use poetic mechanisms such as rhyme schemes, structure, and repetition to create a runaway rhythm in their poetry that serves to destabilise and add emphasis to the meaning of the poem's content, which is often gritty and linked to the poet's 'street' life.

In trying to define the nuances of runaway rhythm and in highlighting its use in modern and contemporary poetry, I have become more aware of its presence within my own body of work and the ways in which the rhythm interacts with the form and content of the poetry by inserting a slight divide between the reader's understanding of the movement and sense within the lines. As my research expanded, my own poetry progressed to incorporate my growing awareness of runaway rhythm. Two of the best examples of this are found in the poems "Travelling Horses" and "Immigration Policy". Though "Travelling Horses" has taken on many shapes and forms during the four year editing process, which has been underway since the poem was first penned in 2008, I will be narrowing my discussion to include only the first and final drafts for comparison purposes, which

are entitled “Original Travelling Horses” and “Travelling Horses”, respectively, while “Immigration Policy” is a work that has the lingering effects of long breath-lines that work with the rhythm to draw attention to the meaning conveyed throughout the poem.

“Original Travelling Horses” is a thirty-nine line, free-verse poem with most of its lines written as tetrameters or pentameters with no consistent stress patterns. The syllabic count follows no discernible sequence, with lines ranging from two syllables (ll. 12-13) up to twelve (l. 36). The poem itself reads as follows:

Learning here amidst still cobbled streets (1)
where Lyra runs to Eliot’s beat,
there’s something really quite magical
about the way that horses pull
at my heart’s tight wound strings, I (5)
know the sound of beating wings in
piazzas of Paris and Milan are
to me just horses running on the sandy
coastal shores, I find, that if I
close my eyes my mind takes me (10)
far away from school
and work
and friends.
And plays back scenes that made me
who I am: (15)

on my horse surrounded by the
Stands
are filled up with my peers –
final culmination of my year that
we have sweated for – (20)
I did my pattern; am growing more
and more
impatient still; I’m tensing now.
Ten more until five judges have had their fill

of us in custom clothes; custom spurs. (25)

Fifth and fourth and third here goes:

I'm not second my senses rose
up to hear my number being said
pinging around inside my head

“Hey Miriam,
we have to go.” (30)

I come back down to falling snow
the outfits and crowds and horses gone back
in Oxford crowds are moving on to pubs
their specials glowing, pulling students with their (35)

knowing after class we all are going
but I can only think of showing
a world I left behind: I gave up my love
to educate my mind. (39)

This poem relies on the heavy use of enjambment, rhyme schemes, and progressive verbs to foster the runaway rhythm, which in turn, follows the ebb and flow of the poem's content. The poem begins in Oxford and then moves into a daydream where the narrator finds herself drawn back to an exciting time where she is awaiting the results of an equestrian competition. The rush of the event coupled with the counting down of the results stimulates an enthusiasm that is manifest in the poem's rhythm, which pauses abruptly at the end of line thirty, when she is brought out of her daydream by an innocuous comment from an unknown party. The rhythm in the final stanza then quickly regenerates itself, using a heavy spattering of progressive verbs, as the narrator finds herself back in Oxford and moving on to a pub.

Most of the lines within the poem are enjambed in an indiscernible pattern. The enjambment in lines five through eleven are anticipatory, as are lines sixteen/seventeen and thirty-five; whereas the majority of the remaining lines

are either end-stopped or retrospectively enjambed. The full units of sense in the retrospectively enjambed lines appear to flow over only after reading the lines that follow, such as “knowing after class we all are going / but I can only think of showing / a world I left behind: I gave up my love / to educate my mind” (ll. 36-39), where each one is a full unit of sense, but is found to be part of a larger unit of sense when read through to the following line or lines. The seemingly unusual line breaks after “I” and “in” in the lines that read “at my heart’s tight wound strings, I / know the sound of beating wings in” (ll. 5-6) insist that the reader keep moving forwards past the line breaks.

One of the ways that the poem creates a runaway rhythm is through its rhyme schemes. Within the poem there is elaborate use of perfect rhyme, as in “streets / beat”, “strings / wings”, “for / more”, “still / until / fill”, “goes / rose”, “peers / year / hear”, “here / hear”, “said / head”, “go / snow”, “gone / on”, “glowing / knowing / going / showing”, and “behind / mind”; slant rhymes in “magical / pull” and “Milan / on”; alliteration in “piazzas / Paris”, “tensing / Ten”, and “outfits / Oxford”; and repetition in “me”, “more”, “custom”, and “crowds”. The use of internal and end rhymes generates a rollicking rhythm that rushes past the rhyming words, which the reader’s eye and ear recognise.

The runaway rhythm in the first half of the poem rolls and flows with the syntactical mechanisms that generate a rhythmic feeling within the lines, which allows the reader to be transported to the surreal, and most likely unfamiliar, event of which the narrator is daydreaming. As the reader is pulled into the daydream of the poem, the rhythm pushes them onwards to enhance the effects of the dream-like qualities and displacement of meaning. The sudden stop at the end of the daydream (l. 30) allows the reader to pause and reconsider it and its implications with an objective outsider’s view, since they are no longer caught up with it in the rhythm of the lines.

In addition to these mechanisms, “Original Travelling Horses” uses

progressive verbs as a means of enhancing the rhythm’s forward motion. These verbs represent actions that are underway and are motive in both definition and form; as such, they restart and enhance the rhythm of the lines. Every stanza has at least one progressive verb, with the highest profusion of them being found in the final stanza. After the end stop in line thirty-one, the rhythm halts as the reader is jolted out of the narrator’s daydream and brought back to the present. In order to increase the rhythm quickly, there are six progressive verbs within this final stanza: “falling”, “moving”, “glowing, pulling”, “knowing”, and “showing”. The pairing of the verbs “glowing / pulling”, separated only by a soft comma, works doubly to increase the rhythm by intensifying the progressive effects of the ‘ing’ verbs.

Over the course of editing, “Original Travelling Horses” has been subjected to cutting, grammatical tinkering, and general restructuring, alongside the evolving definition of runaway rhythm. The original poem was too long and scattered to sustain a reader’s interest. By cutting the lines that read:

know the sound of beating wings in
 piazzas of Paris and Milan are
 to me just horses running on the sandy
 coastal shores, I find, that if I
 close my eyes my mind takes me (10)
 far away from school

and work
 and friends.
 And plays back scenes that made me
 who I am: (15)

I have taken away the elements of the poem that focus on various locations that do not significantly add to the understanding of the content. Removing “Paris and Milan” allows the poem to be located only in Texas and Oxford and sharpens the

imagery around those two locales.

Much like the original, the final version of the poem still relies on enjambment, the use of rhyme schemes, and progressive verbs to foster a runaway rhythm that causes a slight disjunction within the readers understanding of the poem and the movement of the lines. The final poem has been cut to twenty-eight lines with a predominately tetrameter, free verse structure, with no prevailing syllabic patterns. It reads as follows:

Even amidst the cobbled streets (1)
where Lyra runs to Eliot's beat,
there's something really quite magical
about the way that horses pull around
my heart's tight wound strings; (5)
I rise and find that if I close my eyes
my mind takes me far away:

to Texas back some years behind,
I'm on my horse surrounded by
the stands are filling with a roar, (10)
I did my pattern; am growing more
and more
impatient still. I'm tensing now,
ten more until, five judges have had their fill
of us in custom clothes; custom spurs. (15)

Fifth and fourth and third, here goes:
I'm not second, my senses rose
up to hear my number being said
shuffling around inside my head,
"Hey Miriam, (20)
we have to go."

I come back down to falling snow,
the outfits, crowds and horses gone,

back in Oxford, folks are moving on to pubs
 with their specials glowing, after class we all are going, (25)
 but I can only think of showing them
 a world I have since left behind: Did I give up
 my love to educate my mind? (28)

One of the dominant factors responsible for creating the rhythm of the poem is the use of enjambment, which is slightly altered from the original version. This is due to the way that the enjambment, both anticipatorily and retrospectively, lends itself to having the reader move swiftly from one line to the next, to complete, or enhance, the unit of sense. The second proponent of the runaway rhythm within the poem is the use of rhyme schemes. In addition to cutting eleven lines and sharpening the focus, I played with the grammar and began to understand that forcing end rhymes does not necessarily result in runaway rhythm. Instead, I chose to work with more eclectic rhymes schemes that come at unexpected points and create varied interest in the sound and rhythm.

In "Travelling Horses" there is a variety in the rhyme schemes that includes the perfect rhymes of "streets / beat", "where / there's", "rise / eyes", "mind / behind", "fill / still / until / fill", "roar / more / more", "goes / rose", "said / head", "go / snow", "gone / on", "glowing / going / showing", and "behind / mind"; slant rhymes such as "magical / pill" and "I / eyes"; alliteration with "my mind / me", "tensing / ten", "custom clothes; custom", and "fifth / fourth"; and book-ending lines with rhyming words as in "I rise and find that if I close my eyes" (l. 6). In addition to these forms of rhymes, the poem also uses repetition in line fifteen, which reads: "of us in custom clothes; custom spurs." In reiterating the term "custom", the poem relates the meaning of the word to the singularity involved in the individual competition (the stanza's context) and uniqueness of the non-standard rhythm which surrounds it.

The use of numerical terms that begins with "ten more until, five judges

have had their fill” (l. 14) and continues with “Fifth and fourth and third, here goes: / I’m not second, my senses rose” (ll. 16-17) adds a sense of impatience that mimics the anxiety the narrator feels while waiting to hear the results of the event in the daydream. The use of a numerical countdown to bolster the runaway rhythm in the poem is further enhanced by coupling it with progressive verbs.

Though the first stanza no longer has any progressive verbs, the countdown that straddles stanzas two and three is littered with the progressive verbs “filling”, “growing”, “tensing”, “being”, and “shuffling”, which work in tandem with the falling numbers to create an intensity within the poem. This is not only due to the motion of the verbs, or the recognition of the numbers and expectation of what will follow, but because the energy created by these poetic devices draws the reader into the daydream with the narrator, where they too are hanging on the moment, waiting to hear the results of the event, often skipping words ahead to hear the final outcome, as the narrator wishes she could also do. The use of progressive verbs continues in the final stanza with the five verbs “falling”, “moving”, “glowing”, “going”, and “showing”. Some commentators such as Adam Bradley point out that such rhyme schemes’ close proximity to one another and their slant and perfect rhymes within a chain creates “bursts of sound, a quickened pace, and an aggressive assertion of pattern” (76) that can encourage the reader to move from one line, or rhyme, to the next with as few pauses as possible.

One thing that is worth noting is the use of grammatical markers throughout the final version of “Travelling Horses”. Though this poem utilises several grammatical caesura to regulate the reader’s pace, the majority are classed as alternative, soft commas; which, depending on the words and lines in which they are found, may or may not be used as pausing places. In addition to these soft, alternative markers, there are colons and semi-colons in lines five, seven, fifteen, sixteen, and twenty-seven. These, much like the periods in lines thirteen, fifteen, and twenty-one and the final question mark at the end of the poem, insist that the

reader pause before moving on. These hard, grammatical caesuras act as stepping stones for the reader to maintain a handle on the content of the poem itself. They mimic the pauses that come between the numbers in the countdown and allow the reader to have a moment to re-link the sense of the lines with their motion. Without these pauses, the eye and ear would hit on the enjambment, rhymes, and progressive verbs and rush forward at such a pace that the reader would feel overwhelmed by the growing divide between what their eyes have read and what their minds have taken in. As such, the form and content of the poem necessitates the hard grammatical caesuras that can act loosely as dams to slow the flood of the runaway rhythm.

Where “Travelling Horses” relies on syntactical mechanisms to form its runaway rhythm, “Immigration Policy” takes into account the long breath-lines that are used to great effect by poets such as Ginsberg and Stern. “Immigration Policy” is a forty-seven line poem, broken into ten stanzas which vary in length from three to six lines. Its runaway rhythm is most apparent within the first stanza, which reads:

The hole was just where he said it would be, ten paces left of the leaning
tree
hidden by sun-burnt brush. She holds her baby to her chest and
pulls at the chain link wall, top-lined with razors. Pulls harder:
the bottom of the fence relinquishes an inch and she sits her baby down
next to a brown lizard on a rock the color of bleached custard. (ll. 1-5)

This stanza uses the repetition of syllables and sounds to create various rhyme schemes such as the perfect rhyme of “be / by / tree” and “down / brown”; alliteration in “hole / hidden / holds / her”, “chest / chain”, “burnt brush / baby / bottom / brown / bleached”, and “left / leaning / link / lined / lizard”; and repetition of the word “pulls” book-ending line three.

Within this first stanza, the first four lines are enjambed. The first

and fourth lines are retrospectively enjambed, while lines two and three are anticipatorily enjambed and end in the middle of a unit of sense. By mixing the forms of enjambment in this stanza, I create a rhythm that keeps the reader progressing, but does not speed through to the full stop at the end of line five.

As the rhythm rolls onwards, it begins to disassociate itself slightly from the sense of the lines. The poem speaks of a Mexican woman who tries to cross the border into the United States with her infant, but gets caught and returned to Mexico, where she will likely be tempted to try again. Within this first stanza the Mexican woman has been told of a place where there is a hole in the fence that the US government has built as a border between the two nations, and she has gone there to pass through. She finds the hole and lays her baby down in the scorching sun beside a rock and a desert lizard, while she pulls at the chain links. The top is laced with razor wire, so she pulls the bottom, to enlarge the hole.

The first sentence in the poem is long and rolls over the first line break and ends in the middle of line two. With only a comma in the middle of the first line and the rhyme in the middle and end of the same line, the reader is encouraged to read it straight through to the end of the sentence in the middle of line two. Here, the reader is allowed to pause momentarily while they become accustomed to the scene the poem is describing. The next sentence is enjambed over line two and three and ends with the visually and aurally harsh “razors”, which is meant to unsettle the reader. The final sentence in stanza one is twenty-nine words in length and is enjambed over lines two to five. These lines describe the woman as she sits her baby aside on the rock next to where a lizard is sunning itself. That the rock is the “colour of bleached custard” (l. 5) brings to the reader’s mind the image of a landscape that is dry and inhospitable, and the image of the baby next to the lizard’s scales draws another parallel between the individual people involved in such border crossings and the governments who are installing such barriers to a life that must, to the Mexican woman, seem better on the other, American, side.

By having the stanza begin on a long breath line and end with an even longer one, the poem creates a rhythm that runs away by adding to the sense of disassociation that the reader feels with the subject of the poem. The continual flow of these lines allows the reader to gloss over the presumably unfamiliar scene of the Mexican woman and her baby braving horrible conditions and considerable danger by hinging on the rhyme schemes and enjambment in a long exhalation that leaves the reader feeling slightly drained and disoriented by the full stop at the end of line five. This end stop, which coincides with the stanza end, allows the reader to pause and take a moment to let their understanding of the content of the lines to catch up once the movement has stopped.

By creating a runaway rhythm within the first stanza, the reader is coerced into reading more on a subject which might be disagreeable at first, but the rhythm of the lines pulls them into the poem. The minor displacement of meaning within the movement of these lines makes sure that they do not stop until they are at the end of the stanza, whereby they have inadvertently begun to take part in the woman's experience and will want to continue to do so as the poem progresses into the next stanza.

As evidenced in this and previous chapters, runaway rhythm is an elastic concept that has a range of psychological and/or emotional effects that serve to destabilise and add emphasis to the meaning of the lines. It came about as a means of identifying the prosodic phenomenon wherein lines seem to move forwards at a pace that minutely divorces the movement of the lines from its sense. It does this by making use of the nuances of grammar, meter, and syntax through a variety of poetic mechanisms that cause a slight rift between the movement and sense of the lines by encouraging the reader to move onwards until they reach a hard stop, where they often pause to reconsider the contents and meaning of the lines they have read.

It was first recognised in the works of contemporary rap poets and rap artists' lyrics, and as my research has expanded, runaway rhythm has been found to be a rhythmic instrument that spans a variety of poetic forms, as seen in E.E. Cummings' Shakespearean sonnet, the structured syllabic verse of Marianne Moore, the 'dancing' lines of Denise Levertov, and the free verse of Robert Creeley. Other poets, such as the Beat Generation poets and those associated with the Black Mountain school, take into account the breath to foster a runaway rhythm that serves to pack semantically dense contents into swiftly moving lines. The most obvious example of this is found in the works of Alan Ginsberg.

As my understanding of runaway rhythm has grown over the course of my research, I have become more aware of its presence within my own poetry. By using some of the poetic mechanisms previously identified, I have been able to write poetry that utilises this rhythm to engender the breach between the lines' movement and sense that I have identified as 'runaway rhythm'. This is not to say that all poets use this rhythm in all of their works, nor is it exclusively reserved for the poets discussed herein. Instead, it is found wherever poets want to use rhythm slightly to disrupt the reader's perception of content by playing with the motion of the lines.

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