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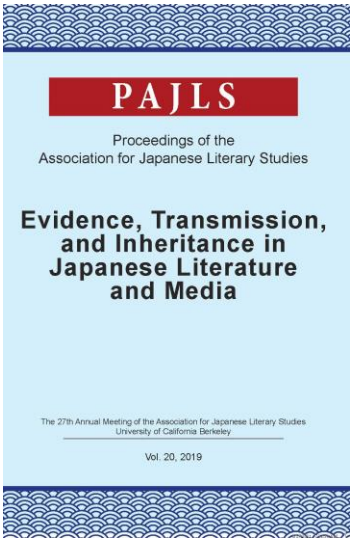
Matthew Mewhinney

Proceedings of the Association for Japanese Literary Studies 20 (2019): 157–167.



PAJLS 20:
Evidence, Transmission, and Inheritance in Japanese Literature and Media.
Editor: Matthew Mewhinney
Managing Editor: Matthew Fraleigh

EVINCING EXPERIENCE: LYRIC IN NATSUME SŌSEKI'S *RECOLLECTING AND SUCH*

Matthew Mewhinney[1]
Florida State University

This paper examines the function and utility of lyric as a means to evince human experience, more particularly, the memory of feelings and sensations. I argue that Natsume Sōseki's (1867–1916) memoir *Recollecting and Such* (1910; Omoidasu koto nado) displays lyric poems as objects of "warmth and intimacy" that constitute William James's idea of the "personal self," which he argues is essential to the human subject's awareness of his own consciousness—in other words, evidence of the self's ownership of thought. I also contend that lyric's promise goes unfulfilled, that the very warmth and intimacy of its constitution meets with the failure of transmission, suggesting that the truth of lyric experience is not one of gain, but of loss.

Ishizaki Hitoshi describes *Recollecting and Such* as a "contemplative essay" (*shisakuteki na zuihitsu*), and, like many Sōseki scholars, reads it as autobiography or memoir that recounts the events of Sōseki's "Severe Illness at Shuzenji" (*Shuzenji no taikan*).[2] Not long after completing his novel *The Gate* (1910; Mon), Sōseki came down with severe abdominal pain, admitted himself to the hospital and was diagnosed with a serious case of stomach ulcers. After receiving treatment, in August of that year Sōseki vacationed at Shuzenji on the Izu Peninsula. He suffered a relapse of the ulcer, which hemorrhaged, resulting in blood loss and a coma. He survived and convalesced at Shuzenji until he was well enough to return to the hospital in October. It was at the hospital where he began writing *Recollecting and Such*, which was serialized in thirty-two installments in both the Tokyo and Osaka Asahi Newspapers.[3]

Following Ishizaki's description of the work as a *zuihitsu*, which traditionally contains the personal musings and meditations of the author, I would like to draw attention to how the personal self is expressed. One way is to examine how "lyric," the poetry of personal feeling, manifests in

[1] https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3610-5157
[2] Komori Yōichi, et al., eds., *Sōseki jiten* (Tokyo: Kanrin shobō, 2017), 585–589.
[3] *Omoidasu koto nado* was serialized in the *Tokyo Asahi Shinbun* from October 29, 1910 to February 20, 1911, and in the *Osaka Asahi Shinbun* from October 29, 1910 to March 5, 1911. The day of the first installment was the same for both the Tokyo and Osaka newspapers, but from the second installment the publications differed by days or even weeks.

the work as a mode of reading. This mode is initially suggested furtively in the work's title: "Omoidasu koto **nado**." In English the title has been translated as *Recollections* (Flutsch 1997; Marcus 2009) and *Remembrances* (Flutsch, 2003). A more literal interpretation retains the title's ambiguity: in *omoidasu koto* the verb *omoidasu*, "to recollect," is nominalized, giving us "recollecting"; and the *nado* is a suffix attached to nouns, meaning "etcetera," "and the like." John Nathan retains these elements in his recent rendering of the title: *Recollecting and Other Matters* (Nathan, 2018).[4] Like Nathan's, my rendering "Recollecting and such" suggests that it is a work about the act of recollecting and something else. That something else is not other to the act of recollecting, but very much a part of, or inextricable from, the very process of recollecting, as "such" would suggest. When we consider the thirty-six poems contained within the work, that something else, I argue, is the function of poetry, "what poetry can do."

Recollecting and Such is a retrospective narrative about memory loss and restoration. The narrator restores his memory, or at least tries to, through the composition of thirty-six poems. For the narrator, memory entails a dynamic process, involving the composition of two lyric forms: haiku, a poetic form of seventeen-syllables, and *kanshi*, a genre of traditional Japanese poetry in classical Chinese, or Sinitic verse. Haiku and *kanshi* are the poetic genres practiced for centuries by Japanese literati (*bunjin*), and by incorporating them into his modern prose narrative, they become lyric addresses to readers of a tradition that had come to be viewed as outmoded by the twentieth century. As such, they are already signifiers of loss.

While convalescing and questioning the limits of his own form (his body), the narrator finds solace in composing in metered forms—haiku and *kanshi*—through which he engages in a lyrical process of self-healing. The practice of placing prose and poetry side by side, or *versiprosa*, is not new to the tradition, and was not uncommon in *zuihitsu*, should *Recollecting and Such* fall under this generic umbrella.[5] The fact that the

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[4] See Natsume Sōseki, Maria Flutsch, trans., *Recollections* (London: Sōseki Museum in London, 1997); Maria Flutsch, "Time, Death and the Empire: Natsume Sōseki's *Omoidasu koto nado* (*Remembrances*)," *Japanese Studies* 23:3 (December 2003): 239–250; Marvin Marcus, *Reflections in a Glass Door: Memory and Melancholy in the Personal Writings of Natsume Sōseki* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009); John Nathan, *Sōseki: Modern Japan's Greatest Novelist* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

[5] This dissonance in register (classical versus modern vernacular) is what distinguishes *Recollecting and Such* from *zuihitsu* (essay), *nikki* (diary), and other

narrator has placed traditional forms alongside modern vernacular prose, however, distinguishes *Recollecting and Such* from its literary antecedents. As a formal gesture, the alternation between prose and poetry represents the temporal shifts in the act of remembering, which manifests in the way the narrative moves back and forth between the past and the present.[6]

Nearly all of the installments in *Recollecting and Such* contain, or conclude with, a haiku or *kanshi* that anchors the narrator temporarily in past thoughts and sensations; meanwhile other parts of the text return to descriptions of his enfeebled state and the fallibility of memory. As such, *Recollecting and Such* as a whole represents the anxiety of memory and sensual experience, which often raises a central epistemological question that the narrator returns to again and again: how do we know we are the same person we thought we were a second ago? In Installment 15 of *Recollecting and Such*, the narrator learns from his wife that he has fallen unconscious for thirty minutes, whereupon he begins to doubt the continuity of consciousness and experience:

> I had believed that a solid continuity existed between the self that tried to turn over to the right, and the self that saw the raw blood at the bottom of the spittoon near my pillow. I was certain that I had been fully functional for every split second of that interval. When I learned from my wife shortly thereafter that such had not been the case, and that I had lost consciousness for a whole thirty minutes, I was shocked.[7]

Here the narrator highlights a discontinuity between two selves—the self before falling unconscious and the self after. Although this account appears in the middle of the work, the thirty-two installments that comprise

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genres of "versiprosa" from premodern literature. As H. Mack Horton observes, prose and poetry are part and parcel to the structure of premodern Japanese diaries: "The juxtaposition of genres within the diary format is itself a classical tradition. Most notable, of course, is the mix of poetry and prose, 'versiprosa,' which is a characteristic of most if not all diaries in the Japanese language since Tsurayuki's *Tosa Nikki*." See H. Mack Horton, *Song in an Age of Discord: The Journal of Sōchō and Poetic Life in Late Medieval Japan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 95.

[6] Similarly, Takemori Ten'yū has described *Recollecting and Such* as "circuitous" (*ukaiteki*). See the *kaisetsu* by Takemori Ten'yū in Natsume Sōseki, *Omoidasu koto nado: hoka shichihen* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1986), 181.

[7] Natsume Sōseki, *Sōseki zenshū* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2003), 12: 401. From here on *SZ*.

Recollecting and Such are not organized chronologically, and so as a whole the text can be read as a response to this moment when the narrator loses consciousness and begins to doubt the continuity of experience.

The narrator's concern for the continuity of experience evokes the work of psychologist and philosopher William James (1842–1910). Early in *Recollecting and Such*, the narrator laments the loss of James, who coincidently died on August 26, 1910, a month before Sōseki began writing. In addition to James, the work references many other illustrious figures in eastern and western literature and philosophy.[8] In one installment the narrator describes the moment of Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky's near-execution. The idea of death looms in *Recollecting and Such*, which tempts the reader to interpret the work as an epitaph for those who have died and a prayer for him who may "die" again: the narrator.

As Tom Lamarre (2008) has argued, Sōseki's literary criticism, most notably *Theory of Literature* (1907; Bungakuron), displays James's influence on Sōseki's theories of fiction. Lamarre argues that Sōseki, in concert with James, "expands the field of empirical analysis to include the emotional accompaniments to perception as well as the event that generated them."[9] *Recollecting and Such* can be read as a work of empirical analysis that narrates events in prose while supplying their "emotional accompaniment" in poetry, namely haiku and *kanshi*.

But it would be naïve for the reader to assume that all the poems in *Recollecting and Such* successfully provide the narrator with an empirical foundation of knowledge from which he can reconstruct his memory. One difficulty lies in the process of transmission. Early in the text, the narrator explains his reasons for composing haiku and *kanshi*:

> I would be content should I be able to communicate to the hearts of my readers, at the speed of a glance, the message [*shōsoku*] that I was living under the sway of such moods [*jōchō*] while ill.

Recollecting and Such is self-consciously aware of its poetry as a means of transmission and as evidence of feeling. In this way, the work presents a theory of lyric that in part argues for poetry as a means to restore

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[8] *Recollecting and Such* is replete with literary and philosophical references: the narrator mentions Henry and William James, Henri Bergson, Ivan Turgenev, Herbert Spencer, Henrik Ibsen, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Thomas de Quincey, and Friedrich Nietzsche, as well as Hakuin, Ogyū Sorai, and also poets from the Qing Dynasty.

[9] Thomas Lamarre, "Expanded Empiricism: Natsume Sōseki with William James," *Japan Forum* 20:1 (February 2008), 47–77.

continuity. It is tempting to take the narrator at his word, that his poems will transmit his "mood" (*jōchō*) at the "speed of a glance" (*ichibetsu no toki uchi ni*), but the actual poems upon reading suggest that the transmission of feeling is prone to tarrying in confusion, disruption, and uncertainty.

An example of disruption can be found in the question as to which sense the poet is trying to communicate. The earlier association the narrator makes between the communication of feelings and the reader's glance (*ichibetsu*) suggests that the poems are meant to be absorbed visually as images. As images, the poems evoke James's chapter on memory in *Psychology: Briefer Course* (1892–1910) in which he discusses how the mind revives the experience of earlier events:

> Memory . . . is the knowledge of a former state of mind after it has already once dropped from consciousness, or rather *it is knowledge of an event, or fact,* of which meantime we have not been thinking, *with the additional consciousness that we have thought or experienced it before.* The first element which such a knowledge involves would seem to be the revival in the mind of an image or copy of the original event.[10]

As a work about memory, *Recollecting and Such* uses poetry as an "image or copy of the original event." For example, in Installment 5 the narrator composes a series of haiku, including the one below, that evokes sensations of a past event:

> On the autumn river
> Pounding posts into the water
> Makes a boom.
>
> *aki no e ni /uchikomu kui no / hibiki kana*
> 秋の江に打ち込む杭の響かな[11]

The haiku evokes sensations of sight and sound. The first image, "autumn river" (*aki no e*), is homophonous with an "autumn painting" (*aki no e*) and evokes a cold and placid landscape. The following image is not visual:

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[10] William James, *William James: Writings 1878–1899* (New York: Library of America, 1992), 272.
[11] *SZ*, 12: 371.

the poet hears wooden posts being pounded into the riverbed, and that sound makes a reverberating boom.

As a poetic form comprising three measures (5–7–5), the haiku form is a sound; and its content evokes not only sight but sound as well, one that reverberates in the poetic imagination. This complicates the narrator's initial wish for his feelings to be communicated at the speed of a glance, and also challenges the claim that the mind revives the past through an image or a copy. The image in the haiku is disrupted by the sound of wooden posts being pounded into the riverbed. The poem ends with a sad exclamation, "makes a boom" (*hibiki kana*), transforming the image of calm water into an image of undulating ripples with an affective resonance. The visual image of ripples on the water surface and the sound of the boom come together as one feeling of disruption mediated through both sight *and* sound.

In the same Installment, the narrator composes another haiku that evokes an autumn scene, blended with the subtle suggestion of sound:

> The autumn sky
> Clear as light blue-green;
> A cedar and an ax.
>
> *aki no sora* / *asagi ni sumeri* / *sugi ni ono*
> 秋の空浅黄に澄めり杉に斧[12]

Whether the poet is looking up at the sky or at its reflection on the river is unclear. He sees a pale mixture between blue and green, and he is certain that the color is "clear" (*sumeri*). The verb *sumeri* indicates that the sky "has cleared," a clarity that is, or akin to, "light blue-green" (*asagi*).[13] The continuing state of pure clearness (*sumeri*) can refer to sight and sound, which suggests that the final measure of the haiku "A cedar and an ax" may be the visual pairing of the two objects, or may be the sound that their contact produces: the crack of an ax chopping down the cedar. With this possibility in mind, the poem refigures the clarity of the static light blue-green sky with the clarity of resonant disruption.

By composing two haiku that evoke dissonance between images of placidity and noise, the narrator complicates the idea of poems as static

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[12] *SZ*, 12: 371.

[13] The function of *ni* in the second measure of the haiku is ambiguous: it either makes the *asagi* (pale blue-green) the indirect object of the verb *sumeri* (clear; lit. has become clear), or it makes *asagi* the object of metaphor: "clear like pale blue-green."

images. The fact that they are traditional poems—forms in which meter matters—highlights their utility as mediators of sight and sound. The sound afforded by lyric gives *Recollecting and Such* a rhythm through which the narrator can resonate, literally and figuratively, with the past. This resonance evokes the "warmth and intimacy" that William James describes as characteristic of experiences that the mind can appropriate as its own, as felt memories. In *Psychology: Briefer Course* James writes: "Remembrance is like direct feeling; its object is suffused with warmth and intimacy to which no object of mere conception ever attains."[14] Remembrances are special in this way because we have a warm and intimate attachment to them.

But lyric can also push back against the warmth and intimacy it promises to communicate. This failure comes at the realization that lyric, like memory, is fugitive as a cloud in the sky. In his chapter "The Stream of Consciousness" James describes what he calls "substantive" and "transitive" states of mind, the former understood as "resting places" and the latter the moving "stream of thought." Let us think of the prose in *Recollecting and Such* as the "stream of thought," and lyric as "resting places," which James describes as "occupied by sensorial imaginations of some sort, whose peculiarity is they can be *held before the mind* for an indefinite time, and contemplated without changing."[15] This idea would suggest that the thirty-six haiku and *kanshi* scattered throughout *Recollecting and Such* are all static images, like eternal beacons on the dark roiling sea of consciousness.

The poems in *Recollecting and Such* are far from static, and as the haiku demonstrate, are not just images. Like haiku, the narrator's *kanshi* evince past feelings and sensations by figuring them in the lyric present, thereby granting him the warmth and intimacy of personal remembrance. The *kanshi*, which we may think of as longer extensions of haiku, also challenge the idea that lyric can establish an empirical foundation of knowledge. As Wittgenstein once warned, "Do not forget that a poem, although it is composed in the language of information, is not used in the language-game of giving information."[16] What Wittgenstein suggests here, and the poet in *Recollecting and Such* would agree, is that poems are not in the business of transmitting information, but are perhaps "resting

[14] James, 158.
[15] James, 159–160.
[16] See Ludwig Wittgenstein, trans. G.E.M Anscombe, *Zettel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970).

places," not in the Jamesian sense as moments where thought tarries, but moments where thoughts exist in a dynamic state of becoming.

Here's an example. In Installment 22 the narrator describes himself as bedridden, immobile and at the mercy of his caretakers. He composes a five-character quatrain (*gogon zekku*) that refigures his paralysis as sensual embodiment by displaying keen awareness of sight, sound, and touch. Through metaphor the poem exemplifies the Jamesian idea that the workings of the mind are invariably rooted in physicality, that mind and body are one:

> The autumn wind moans in the forest,
> Mountain rain rattles the tall building.
> These frail bones are jagged like a blade;
> In the gloom of a green light, verging on grief.[17]

shūfū banboku o narashi	秋風鳴萬木
san'u kōrō o yurugasu	山雨撼高樓
byōkotsu ryō toshite ken no gotoku	病骨稜如劍
ittō aoku shite ure'en to hossu	一燈青欲愁

Contrary to the images of numbness and immobility that precede it in the prose, the poem can be read as a lyric cry that the poet can still feel, and that contrary to how the installment ends, he has not relinquished complete control of his mind and body to the nurses. The couplet formed by Lines 1 and 2 evoke turbulent images of wind and rain wreaking havoc on the natural autumn landscape. In his poetic imagination, the sound of the wind can be heard in the sea of trees, while rain rattles the tall building where the poet lodges and looks out at the dismal autumn landscape.

The latter half of the poem shifts the poet's focus from the turbulence of nature to the frailty of his ill body. He describes his frail body with a metaphor: "jagged like a blade" (*ryō toshite ken no gotoku*). If Lines 1 and 2 figure the poet's mind in the form of natural imagery, then Line 3 figures his body as a mountain range: the poet's body has become so emaciated that he can feel his bones, rugged like crags, pressing against a thin layer of skin. The comparison between bones and a blade also evokes coldness, and the jagged edge of the blade reinforces the sharpness of that coldness.

The final line concludes the poem with a feeling of "penultimate-ness" akin to James's idea of "fringe," the indistinct edge of consciousness, "a sense of the direction from which an impression is about to come, although

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[17] *SZ*, 12: 423.

no positive impression is yet there."[18] The lamp is a figure for the lyric mind in Romanticism and in classical Chinese poetry, and in Sōseki's line evokes an image of a mind on the brink of emotional abandonment, "green, verging on grief" (*aoku shite ureen to hossu*). "Green lamps" appear in classical Chinese poems set in the early morning twilight. The line refigures this liminal moment between night and day as the threshold of the mind falling into the throes of grief, but not quite there yet.[19] Like other poems in *Recollecting and Such*, the quatrain suspends sensual awareness—a crescendo moment in which the poet restores his awareness of sight, sound, and touch—but couched in a penultimate moment that defers the grief about to overtake him to a later time in the future.[20]

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[18] James, 162.

[19] The curious image of "green" in Sōseki's *kanshi* evokes the "green" that appears in a famous stanza from Andrew Marvell's "The Garden" (1681):

> Meanwhile the Mind, from pleasure less,
> Withdraws into its happiness;
> The Mind, that Ocean where each kind
> Does straight its own resemblance find;
> Yet it creates, transcending these,
> Far other Worlds, and other Seas;
> Annihilating all that's made
> To a green thought in a green shade.

William Empson argued that the point of Marvell's poem is "to contrast and reconcile conscious and unconscious states, intuitive and intellectual modes of apprehension; and yet that distinction is never made, perhaps could not have been made; his thought is implied by his metaphors." See William Empson, "Marvell's 'Garden,'" *Scrutiny* 1: 3 (December 1932), 236. Empson seems to be suggesting that Marvell's metaphors are key to understanding how his poem "thinks," and the type of thought that he wants his readers to discern. Angus Fletcher echoes this observation in his reading of the word "green" in Marvell's poem. He argues that such terms show a "hidden system of thought. We are called to seek out an occluded system or method of binding lyrical expressiveness into a private, constrained, and highly controlled manner of poetic arrangement. . . . It appears that color-terms such as the 'green' of 'The Garden' . . . may not in themselves have an absolutely clear and distinct meaning, but serve nonetheless to order larger combinations of ideas within a given poem." See Angus Fletcher, *Colors of the Mind: Conjectures on Thinking in Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 101. I would argue that "Green" in Sōseki's poem reveals a hidden system of thought in *Recollecting and Such*, one that places objects in liminal states, verging on grief, and eventually annihilation.

[20] The conclusion of the poem evokes Rebecca Comay's discussion of how fetishism defers loss to the future. She describes Lessing's explanation of Laocoön: "the sculptor has captured the pregnant moment just before the full horror strikes—the father's mouth open but not yet screaming, the serpent's venom not quite

The other poems in *Recollecting and Such* also betray doubts about the efficacy of their ability to promise sensual renewal, and thereby complicate the idea that lyric can evince experience insofar as establishing an empirical foundation of knowledge. One explanation for why Sōseki would make such a claim in 1910 would be that *Recollecting and Such* is an allegory about the scission between knowledge and experience, the fracture of the modern subject in an age of loss.[21] Under this interpretation, the narrator's close encounter with death becomes a convenient way to allegorize a larger epistemic crisis faced by the modern subject.

But why resort to lyric? If we remember the narrator's claim earlier, he said that the poems are meant to be transmitted as *shōsoku* 消息, which I have translated as "messages." The etymology of the word means "rise and fall" or "life and death"; both of which speak to the theme of *Recollecting and Such*. But perhaps Sōseki was being clever and ironic, and using it to mean, quite literally, "extinguishing breath," opening a gap waiting to be filled again, hopefully with new breath.

As Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben writes, "The poet is he who, in the word, produces life."[22] Agamben argues that life and poetry come together in language. It is through such language that *Recollecting and Such* reformulates the possibility of meaning as one that comes poetically. Perhaps the work suggests that the warmth and intimacy afforded by lyric requires the reader to reach the possibility of meaning. The narrator's wish to impart an affect to his visible and invisible listeners couches his poems in the intimacy of lyric address.[23]

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completely penetrated, the agony not quite yet at its climax: the gaze fixes on the penultimate moment so as to block the revelation of the monstrous void. Penultimacy—incompletion as such—becomes a defence against a mortifying conclusion." See Rebecca Comay, "The Sickness of Tradition: Between Melancholia and Fetishism," in Andrew Benjamin, ed., *Walter Benjamin and History* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 95–96.

[21] Other scholars have discussed this loss in terms of national allegory. For example, Ishizaki has read *Omoidasu koto nado* as a veiled critique of the political events of 1910, including the failed assassination plot against the Meiji Emperor, known as the "High Treason Incident" (*taigyaku jiken*). See Komori, 589. In her article from 2003, Maria Flutsch has argued that the text is a critique of Japanese imperialism: "Sōseki uses the tropes of illness and the deaths of numerous friends to focus on the place of individual human experience, memory and the past in relation to concepts of nature, time and death, in a powerful critique of the dominant political discourses of his day." See Flutsch (2003), 239.

[22] Giorgio Agamben, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, *The End of the Poem* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 93.

[23] William Waters has examined the value of poetry as lyric address in the way that lyric poems mediate contact between the poet and the reader. He writes, "When

Lyric address adds another layer to the warmth and intimacy of remembrance, and suggests that sensual restoration depends on the sympathy of others. In spite of its doubt regarding the transmission of experience as empirical knowledge, *Recollecting and Such* seems to call for a practice of lyric reading that grants at the least the possibility of healing beyond the text's present and into the future, not alone, but through us, the reader.

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poems address their readers, the topic of the pronoun *you* and the topic of reading (what it is like to be a person reading a poem) become two sides of a single coin. This, then, is the end to which my investigation of lyric address leads: the claim that we as readers may feel in second-person poems, in a poem's touch, an intimation of why poetry is valuable, why it matters to us, and how we might come to feel answerable to it." See William Waters, *Poetry's Touch: On Lyric Address* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 2. Helen Vendler has described lyric address as intimacy between the poet and his future, unseen, reader. See Helen Vendler, *Invisible Listeners: Lyric Intimacy in Herbert, Whitman, and Ashbery* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).