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The Transmutation of Love and Avant-Garde Poetics

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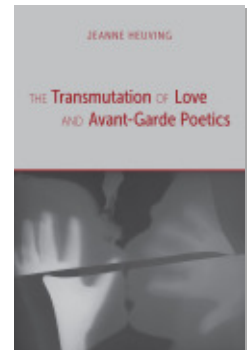
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Introduction

Erotic-emotional innovation is comparatively rare.

—H.D., “Notes on Euripides, Pausanius, and Greek Lyric Poets”

In the twentieth century and now in the twenty-first, there has been much cynicism and skepticism about love. The flourishing of love in Western poetry is thought to be in decline. Love itself is understood to be a mere ideological overlay or imaginary formation for a more “real” desire and sex. *The Transmutation of Love and Avant-Garde Poetics* attests otherwise. In this book I claim that the achievement of the poetry of Ezra Pound, H.D., Robert Duncan, Kathleen Fraser, and Nathaniel Mackey lies significantly in their writing of sexual love. All of these poets begin with a love poetry in which a poetic speaker as lover writes to or about his beloved, and all change this writing to a projective love and libidinalized field poetics. Moreover, I contend that this love writing is critical for avant-garde innovations that partake of its changed energies and relationships even when the poetry is not specifically about sexual love. These authors shift the dramatic locus of their poetry away from a poetic speaker as lover and to their poems’ others and to language. They espouse a powerful love that overtakes their egoistic selves, and they engage language as a medium. As H.D. writes, “yet to sing love, / love must first shatter us” (*Collected Poems* 175).

Throughout different epochs, poets have testified to the synergistic relations between being in love and writing love.¹ While being in love leads to poetry writing, writing love poetry intensifies love, causing poets to write more poetry. Ovid, initially setting out to write an epic based on the heroics of war, is overcome with the experience and writing of love. He complains to Cupid, “Is it true that everything everywhere is yours?” (1.1.15; qtd. in Kennedy 44). Dante writes in *La Divina Commedia*, “I am one who, when / Love inspires me, takes note, and / goes setting it forth after the fashion / which he dictates within me” (24: 52–54; Agamben *End* 94).

The poets I study are no less definite about the importance of sexual love to

their writing. Pound explored the interrelation between sexual love and poetic vision early in his career, asserting, “the servants of Amore saw visions quite as well as the servants of the Roman ecclesiastical hierarchy.” But rather than being troubled “by a dark night of the soul,” their rite of passage was through “delightful psychic experience” (*Spirit* 91, 92). Robert Duncan writes: “The meaning of things seems to change when we fall in love, as if the universe were itself a language beyond our human language we had begun to understand. It is the virtue of words that what were forces become meanings and seek form” (*The H.D. Book* 82–83).

Almost all histories of the formation of Western love have concentrated on the development of an introspective lover and the increase in this disposition over time.² In *Lyric Texts and Lyric Consciousness: The Birth of a Genre from Archaic Greece to Augustan Rome* Paul Allen Miller claims that it is through the love sequences initiated by Catullus that the introspective subject of lyric poetry is born, arguing that Sappho’s poetic speaker does not possess the same introspective qualities (52–77).³ In *The Culture of Love: Victorians to Moderns* Stephen Kern suggests that the transformations of the modern epoch involved a greater sense of “introspection” or “self-reflexivity” “as men and women [have] come to reflect more profoundly on what it means to be in love” (1). In *Tales of Love* Julia Kristeva asserts that an introspective love is defining for Western love, beginning at least as early as Ovid and culminating in Freud, “the most internalized moment in Western historicity.” But she also finds that in the twentieth century this introspective love begins to decline since patriarchal structures that allow for relatively stable forms of identification are weakened: “When the social consensus gives little or no support to such idealizing possibility, as may be observed at the present time . . . the derealization that underlies amatory idealism shows up with its full power.” While Kristeva, in part, welcomes the diminishment of the introspective subject as an “end to codes,” she also notes that without love relationships the subject is dead: “the amatory principle is indispensable for a body to be living rather than a corpse under care.” In this crisis of the subject, this situation of flux, she calls for perpetual relationships of the imaginary, “of love as a builder of spoken spaces” (276, 381–82).

For the poets I investigate here, the rejection of an egoistic or introspective lover as the locus of their poetry enables their projective love and libidinalized field poetics. But instead of ascribing everything to the “imaginary,” as does Kristeva, they create a poetry that transforms received ideas, representations, and languages through the movement of the writing itself. While these poets’ poetics are frequently understood through references to modernist impersonalism or posthuman subjectivity, I inquire into how their subjective orientation evolves in relationship to their intent to write love. I ask, using Charles Olson’s

apt descriptions from “Projective Verse,” how this intention catapults them into a writing which gets “rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego” and in which “ONE PERCEPTION MUST . . . DIRECTLY LEAD TO A FURTHER PERCEPTION” (*Selected Writings* 24, 17). These poets make the process of the composition of their poetry determining for the love they write. For instance, while Pound in his early poem “Praise of Ysolt,” likely written to H.D., constitutes his poetic speaker as a lover who seeks a woman who “holdeth the wonder words within her eyes,” in *Canto I* he presents Aphrodite through a set of concatenating languages: “Aphrodite, / Cypri munimenta sortita est, mirthful, orichalchi . . . / thou with dark eyelids” (*Personae* 17; *Cantos* 5). Pound’s love writing shifts the dramatic focus from the poetic speaker as lover to his poems’ others and languages, enabling him to invoke but also to alter existing signification. Pound’s choice of the Latin for “held sway over the Cyprian heights” (Terrell 3) atypically produces a love figure through consonance rather than assonance and ascribes “mirth” to this figure while sustaining her allure through “dark eyelids.”

In an early poem, Fraser’s poetic speaker as lover laments knowing her lover only in “the dim light” when her need and desire “shine / the way the sun does on those fat blue days / with sky everywhere” (*Change* 3). In a later poem, replacing her questing poetic speaker with an *ex stasis*, a standing outside of herself, she celebrates:

(mare pulling into *mare*)
 horse plowing sea
 Maremma (*when new time folds up* 20)

Here, the poetic speaker rejoices in her love through a “horse plowing sea,” such that mare becomes *mare*, a penetrated and moving sea, carrying forward its eros through mobile italics and into the sounding of the Italian place name “Maremma.” The emphasis is on the action of “plowing,” a feminized, if also traditionally a masculine prerogative, rather than on subject and object.

On the surface, the poets’ movement away from a mimetic rendering of the drama of love, of a lover pursuing a beloved, might be wrongly perceived as a lessening or weakening of love writing. But for these poets, it is an intensification. In forgoing a poetic speaker as an individuated or egoistic lover, they have replaced this controlling figure with erotic energies which cathect directly to their poems’ others and languages. They write an Edenic language because their libidinal investments and language as a full-spectrum semantic, visual, and aural medium concatenate. Or, as Pound describes, this poetry “is language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree” (*Literary Essays* 23).

Throughout the twentieth century and into the present, sexual love has been

much maligned in accounts rejecting what is perceived as its idealizing hypocrisy. One of the mainstays of these critiques has been to divide love from sex, deploring love while celebrating the salutary effects of sex. In 1928, for instance, J. W. Krutch in *The Modern Temper* comments that love is a “superstructure of poetry” built on a “biological urge” (Selinger 77). Eric Selinger in *What Is It Then between Us?: Traditions of Love in American Poetry* takes on this same dichotomy, characterizing the entire twentieth century as a time in which “love’s reductively sexual origins” undermined “its expansive cultural flourishing” (81). In *Desire: Love Stories in Western Culture* (1994), Catherine Belsey claims that “true love” is the ideological formation that “Western culture has created between two kinds of feeling, caring on the one hand and desire on the other” (13). She concludes, “True love is a mode of policing the gaze, excluding errant desires, bringing the subject into line” (148).

Some of the earliest to attack love were avant-garde writers, most notably Mina Loy and F. T. Marinetti. Loy, in her indictments of “Pig Cupid . . . Rooting erotic garbage” in *Songs to Joannes*, asserts in her “Feminist Manifesto,” “Women must destroy in themselves, the desire to be loved.” And she notes, “there is nothing impure in sex—except the mental attitude to it” (*The Lost Lunar Baedeker* 53, 154, 155). In his manifestos, Marinetti links “woman” and “amore,” calling amore an “invention of the poets”: “We scorn woman conceived as the sole ideal, the divine reservoir of *Amore*, the woman-poison, woman the tragic trinket, the fragile woman, obsessing and fatal” (72).

Laura (Riding) Jackson, drawing together a critique of love and gender, advocates a recreated love and sex. In its civilized version, sexual love is produced as a kind of rare brew of bodily impulses, scientific phrases, and literary sentiments, which all conspire to keep women in a passive state. Jackson shows just what this “diffusion which modern society calls love” consists of by revealing what a man’s “I love you” speech means:

My sexual glands by the growing enlargement of my sex instincts since childhood and its insidious, civilized traffic with each part of my mental and physical being, are unfortunately in a state of continual excitement. I have a very good control of myself, but my awareness of your sexual physique and its radiations are so acute that I could not resist the temptation to desire to lie with you. Please do not think this ignoble of me, for I shall perform this act, if you permit it, with the greatest respect and tenderness and attempt to make up for the indignity it of course fundamentally will be to you (however pleasurable) by serving you in every possible way and by sexually flattering manifestations of your personality which are not strictly sexual. (*Anarchism* 189)

In Jackson's analysis, this civilized sexual love is a product of a literature of the "individual real," in which the self "authenticates" itself in relationship to a compromising social order. In contrast, Jackson advocated a poetry of the "individual unreal," of a corrective response, to make way for an actual love (*Anarchism* 46, 47). For Jackson, sex and love have been horribly misconstrued by a civilization in which women serve primarily as a "prop" "for the solemn masculine machine" (196). "Woman" can only look to herself and must become "the death in whom / Love must disaster" (*Poems of Laura Riding* 264).

In claiming that the innovative poets of this book are involved in transmuting love poetry into a projective love and libidized field poetics, I do not mean to suggest that their individual motivations or issues are the same. However, I do begin with the observation that all of these poets come to find lover-beloved forms—a lover writing to or about his beloved—problematic. Moreover, all of the writers in their mature poetry affirm love and engage its power, even when they address its failure or loss. And while each poet composes his or her love differently, each is sensitive to social and cultural changes that directly challenge conceptions of the lover of yore. Changing gender norms disrupt the traditional engendering of love lyrics—of an active masculine lover and a passive feminine beloved. Newly emergent concepts of sexuality, which include theorizations of bisexuality and homosexuality, render the presumed heterosexuality of traditional love poetry problematic. Critiques of racial discrimination and improved conditions for "advancement" give nonwhite lovers new possibilities for saying their love publicly to a mixed-race audience.

Throughout North American, European, and Latin poetic history, love poetry has been empowering for white heterosexual men, but rarely for others.⁴ From Gaius Catullus to Robert Creeley, white male heterosexual love poets have created a rich trove of rhetorical dynamics and semantic meanings. Although poets of diverse identities and orientations have sometimes engaged or travestied these forms, this tradition of lover-beloved poetry remains largely a white, male production.⁵ Indeed, these forms are silencing for other poets both on and off the page—and are implicated in a complex set of negotiations about who can make a public display of their love and to what effect. By transmuting love poetry into a projective, libidized field poetics, the poets I am analyzing here make way for diverse poets to say their love publicly.

Although these poets occasionally have been studied with respect to their love writing, their shared contribution to changing the form of love writing has not been recognized nor has this change been linked to their avant-garde poetics. In claiming that these poets are involved in a shared transmutation of love, I do not mean to suggest that their love writing is the same, but rather to draw atten-

tion to the ways they have shaped a changed poetry economy. The critic Margaret Homans, noting that unrequitedness was the primary condition of love poetry in the nineteenth century and earlier—a poetry in which hierarchical lover and beloved relations pertain—remarks, “attainment would remove the motive for future poems” (570). For the love poetry of the authors included in *The Transmutation of Love and Avant-Garde Poetics*, while unrequitedness and requitedness, disappointment and hopefulness may give rise to their poetry, the focus is almost always on the power of love, not on the unavailability of the beloved. Although H.D. often composed her works in reference to failed love relations, only occasionally in her writing does she take on the position of the lover questing after an unobtainable beloved; rather, she seeks to explore love itself. Addressing the loss of love, Mackey in “Song of the Andoumboulou: 5” in *Eroding Witness* has a muse figure tell the poetic speaker: “beware the beauty of loss.” She further enjoins: “The least eye’s observance of / dawn will endanger what / of love // you take with ‘love’s bite’” (44).

I have chosen poets whose sustained engagement with sexual love is formative not only for their poetry but for others’ poetry. All of these poets convey sexual love with a concerted intensity commensurate with love poets of the past—Sappho, Propertius, Cavalcanti, Shelley, Keats. They seek out the synergistic exchange between being in love and writing love, and create their poetry in significant ways through these energies. I begin with Pound and H.D. because their Imagist poetics are an emergent projective love and libidinalized field poetics, which they develop in their long poems *The Cantos*, *Trilogy*, and *Helen in Egypt*. I then turn to Duncan as he initiates his projective love and libidinalized field poetics in *The Opening of the Field*. Both Fraser and Mackey have early insights into this transmutation—Fraser in *Little Notes to You, from Lucas Street* and Mackey in *Four for Trane*—and work to engage and develop these poetics in subsequent writing. Although there are other poets whose love poetry has contributed to this transmutation, for the poets considered in this book it is a defining question asked and answered in multiple books and over decades of their writing. In the afterword, I take up the issue of other writers for whom projective love and libidinalized field poetics are important and the relation of these poetics to a more broadly practiced projective verse and field poetics. In the last decades, there has been a widespread and electric amplification of field poetics—indeed, a poetry that, if not always a projective love writing, often evinces a libidinalized field—which simply would not have occurred had sexual love either been ignored by these earlier generations or existed as an aside to a more narrowly construed avant-gardism.

The Transmutation of Love and Avant-Garde Poetics presents a revisionist history of twentieth- and twenty-first-century poetry by paying close attention to

the chronological development of the poets' work as they came to write love differently. For them the transmutation of love is a synergistic endeavor embedded in the formation of their poetry. They operate within the tradition well expressed by Propertius in which loving and the writing of love are inseparable: "I, as I have been accustomed to do, get on with my—*amores*" (1.7; qtd. in Kennedy 24). So troubled has been the writing of love in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and so clear has been the clarion call for a poetry that will meet the hard demands of modernity or the insistent complexities of postmodernity that these poets' transmutation of love simply has gone unrecognized. In this book I tell a "long history" of avant-garde activity that concentrates on continuities across several generations of poets, rather than on the differences announced in manifestos and poetic statements, in which in their eagerness to articulate their present moment often deny entanglements with the past. The way a society structures and formalizes (puts into form) its sexual relations is a key to its multiple institutions and casual interactions. By discovering a different way to write love—by shifting their erotic energies away from a poetic speaker as lover and to their poems' others and languages—the poets create a changed eros that replaces a pervasive economy of active lovers and passive beloveds. They close down the gaps, the great distances that yawn, in love poetry itself—and approach an eros or "erotism" that subtends existence and has been theorized variously throughout the ages.⁶

In focusing on sexual love, I distinguish it from sexual desire and erotic play. While it is impossible to distinguish these in any absolute way, I seek to locate how sexual love is uniquely motivating and generative for poetry writing. The state of being in love is usually experienced as more extreme and disturbing than mere sexual desire or erotic play and creates rather different effects in the subject. In love, the poet experiences a subjective dispensation that in Freudian theory greatly reduces "ego-libido" in exchange for "object-libido." For Freud, "being in love" is the "highest phase of object-libido" and is the state in which subjects are most inclined to relinquish their egoistic orientation and to open themselves up to an infusion of otherness (547). These poets exhibit a marked "negative capability" or self-abandonment—as opposed, say, to the often willful agency exhibited in poems primarily of sexual desire or erotic play. These poets move beyond the mimetic form of lover-beloved poetry, outside a limited lover-beloved economy, and engage the ecstatic free fall of sexual love, joining centuries of poets and philosophers who have celebrated an ecstatic love or erotic mania—or what postmodern theorists have referred to somewhat differently as a *jouissance*.

The poets in this book do not change love at the level of love tropes that, abstracted from the writing, provide new definitions, but rather through the

ways they initiate shifting and mobile relations in a form previously dominated by lover-beloved oppositions and subject-object dichotomies. Indeed, while my larger argument in this book is that changes in gender, race, and sexuality have made the white male heterosexual prerogatives of prior love poetry no longer viable, I also explore how these poets have changed love poetry by insisting on their own different dispensations. That is, with the exception of Pound, all of these poets find themselves positioned outside of the dominant love economies of the past, and their differences of gender, sexuality, or race enable them to shift representation once they are no longer tied to the previous form. They change poetry not by going at loggerheads with the Lord Byrons and Don Juans of the past but by altering the form of love poetry so that it is no longer dependent on the dramatization of a poetic speaker as lover but rather produces its love in relationship to a wider libidized horizon. Who says what almost always changes the what—and no more so than in a highly gendered, raced, and sexed love poetry. These poets open up languages that were anchored in the past to particular kinds of poetic speakers.

In this book I define “sexual love” as a sustained attraction for a specific beloved that is compelling and cannot be let go easily, and I understand sexual love to be a physical, emotional, and cognitive (and therefore language) phenomenon. Susan Stewart has argued for poetry’s special role of poesis, of making as cultural formation, but she has also commented on how difficult poesis may be to locate. She understands significant formal change as something that emerges out of a necessity and to be a precise response to an unarticulated need. Thus, an important function for poetry is to bring somatic and social experiences into alignment (*Fate* 116–17). But once created, a successful poem often covers over the space of its necessity, and the historical demand for its formation is rendered mute. Stewart notes that therein lies a “tragedy” for the poet, in “the fading of the referent in time, in the impermanence of whatever is grasped” (*Fate* 2). She adds, “The poet’s recompense is the production of a form that enters into the transforming life of language” and, more broadly, the culture (*Fate* 2). Stewart suggests that a transforming poetry as well as other aesthetic forms should be taken as “central to the epistemological and ethical possibilities of culture’s emergence” (“State” 95)

To inquire into relations that are inherently difficult to locate, in this book I explore three interrelated postulations. The first are the splits between sex and love and between desire and love that emerge in the twentieth century, which obfuscate these poets’ efforts to write sexual love.⁷ While the emergence of discourses of sexuality leads to these divisions, sexual love has persisted as a powerful and integrated phenomenon. This is no more apparent than in the sex theorists

themselves. Freud, who is credited with creating the concept of sexuality, regularly blurs distinctions between sex and love: when he says one, he often means both. Foucault in debunking the cultural importance placed on sex and sexuality as a means of liberation also notes how sexuality has become the *ars erotica* of our time (*History* 156). Second, these poets' writings of sexual love are directly connected to the formal innovations for which they are known. In the cases of Pound, H.D., and Fraser their writing of love leads to their new poetics; in the cases of Duncan and Mackey they integrate sexual love with poetic practices that attract them—and only in doing so are they able to realize the poetry they sought to write. In all cases these poets' most important and defining poetry is significantly derived through their discovery of how to engage sexual love and its energies. While they write love often in the throes of being in love, they also engage it as a sustained limerence or *gloire* activated by writing itself. This heightened emotional state is directly conducive to a metamorphosing of form and representation. Third, this poetry is better addressed by conceiving of the poet and language itself as mediums. While the idea of the poet as a medium is sometimes brought into discussions of these poets, the ways that language itself functions mediumistically has been little explored. The concept of the poet as a receptive medium is an important corrective to the emphasis on willful agency in avant-garde poetics, with the poets discussed here operating both as agents and as mediums. The concept of language as a medium allows for a sense of language as possessing material properties, but it also draws to the forefront its mediumistic attributes—as at once mediating the larger society and the poet's somatic response but also serving as a means of transportation by which these are freshly addressed and thereby referenced. As Mackey puts it, "Writing is a mix of saying what I mean to say and finding out what else the writing might say" ("Interview" 214).

Two large historical conditions of modernity have directly contributed in decisive ways to this changed poetry. The emergent discourses of sexuality not only radically change the dispensation of love but they demand to be answered. Foucault has theorized that these discourses arise as part of a larger modern regime distinguished by its need to regulate biopower, and he has explicated how the liberatory promises that have accompanied the exposé of sexuality come with their own disciplinary logics. For Foucault all disciplining is at once limiting and productive—and he notes how sexuality in the twentieth century came to be identified with the very truth and meaning of our existence. A relative paucity of attention has been paid to the effects of discourses of sexuality on poetry or on modern literature more generally, apart from a wholesale celebratory substitution of an epistemology of sexual desire for one of sexual love. Indeed, dis-

courses of sexuality since their emergence have had beneficial effects for populations for whom the role of lover is gendered, racialized, and sexualized in hostile ways. While only some people can position themselves as lovers—as Don Juans or Creeley’s elusive masculine poetic speakers—everyone “has” sex, “has” sexuality. (Indeed, in one of my graduate seminars, a student eager for the openings that lesbian sexuality and queer theory provided, who was alternately fascinated and perplexed by the subject of the course, asked me, “Why are you going back to love when we have only just begun to have sexuality?”) All of the poets covered in this book are motivated to understand and to engage with the discourses of sex and sexuality. But they also address sexual love itself, in part through classical conceptions that refuse the division between sex and love, namely eros and amour. They challenge modernity with its regulatory and categorical imperatives by seeking what Bataille calls “erotism”: “a substitution of isolated discontinuity” for a “feeling of profound continuity” (15).

While this poetry is attentive to large changes in the disciplining and understanding of sex and love, it is also responsive to a changing orientation to language. Although the turn to language is located historically in the second part of the twentieth century, articulated most forcefully by poststructuralism and by the Language or L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E movement, the experience of language as an object occurs throughout the twentieth century and before. Indeed, the rise of advertising and commodity culture along with a comparative study of cultures and languages (with a strong value placed on the activity of translation) at the outset of the twentieth century produced a sense of language as a medium, conveyor and thing. For example, at the outset of her career, H.D. describes the process of translating Greek words as one of engaging them as “portals, as windows, or port-holes . . . that look out . . . onto a sea that moves and changes” (“Essays on Euripides, Pausanius, and Greek Lyric Poets” 9). Only in the last several decades has a widespread intellectual, academic, and artistic regime elected to become assertive about just what this changed orientation to language may entail, but in doing so it also has tended to reify language. Indeed, with the incorporation of this new understanding into multiple arenas of endeavor, including poetry, an exclusionary emphasis on language has abated. Marjorie Perloff, throughout her career, has been most attentive to mapping out distinctions in how language has been engaged by poets and artists in the twentieth and into the twenty-first century, although she has at times insisted on the materiality of language to the exclusion of more complex meditations with respect to how language functions.⁸ Her 1981 *Poetics of Indeterminacy* comes closest to the sense of language I elaborate on in this book because of how she engages language as a set of shifting significations. But while she emphasizes “indeterminacy,” I

stress a motivated and libidinal engagement with language which separates language from its habitual significations for the purpose of writing love otherwise.

This book is divided into two parts: “Love Poetics” and “Love Poesis.” Although there is considerable overlap between poetics and poesis, in general as well as in the exposition of this book, the two designations demarcate a shift in emphasis. In “Love Poetics,” I provide a generalized description of the poetics of my selected poets and a theoretical investigation into the synergistic relations between being in love and writing love. And I establish Pound’s and H.D.’s Imagist poetry as an initial and emergent projective love and libidinated field poetics. In “Love Poesis,” I focus on each poet’s chronological process as they come to write—or to make—love differently. Although I pay attention to commonalities between the poets, I propose that each poet is engaged in a singular transformation of love poetry, neither entirely generalizable nor paraphrasable, but involving all the mystery and particularity of his or her love and of poetic formation itself. This focus involves considerable close reading, but it is a close reading in service not of interpretation per se but of demarcating the poets’ changed love writing in relationship to the poetry that has earned them their reputations. I give some consideration to biographical events, but I predominantly focus on the poets’ changing poesis. Indeed, in postulating that these poets change the writing of love through an immanent writing that acts on itself, there is no more exacting attention than the tracing of their progress as they engage specific languages and tropes within the context of their evolving oeuvres and individual poems. These poets change love by writing love.

In chapter 1, “Projective Love and Libidinated Field Poetics,” I begin with two examples that have been definitive for avant-garde poetics generally: Pound’s *Canto IV* (which led to his revision of his earlier *Three Cantos* and the writing of his *Cantos* proper) and Duncan’s “Often I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow,” the initial poem in his revolutionary *The Opening of the Field*. In taking my primary terms for this book from Olson’s “Projective Verse,” I argue for a different understanding of Olson’s poetics than is commonly attributed to him as well as for broadening the sense of these poetics with respect to a much wider historical use. Rather than Olson’s “push” and “INSTANTER,” I suggest that a projective writing can also occur through a slowed-down and introjective set of relations. That is, if a defining aspect of the projective is that one perception must lead directly to the next, there is an implicit introjective moment in this associative composition that Olson does not typically account for. Suggesting that something akin to a projective writing may well have been initiated in the nineteenth century by Whitman and Shelley, and rather differently by Rimbaud and

Mallarmé, I consider how, for the poets examined in this book, the increased sense of language as an object or thing within the compositional process alters their sense of that process. While Olson postulates that “a poem is energy transferred from where the poet got it” and may have “several causations,” I address projective poetics when the causal energy is specifically sexual love (*Selected Writings* 16). I explore how for love poets past and present, language itself becomes mediumistic or, as Wilde puts it: “Do you wish to love? Use Love’s Litany, and the words will create the yearning from which the world fancies that they spring” (399; qtd. in Kopelson 2). For the poets covered in this book, altered relations to language means that this mediumistic encounter occurs not only cognitively and emotionally but also in relationship to the aural and visual aspects of language itself.

Chapter 2, “Being in Love and Writing Love,” inquires into the generativity of sexual love for poetry writing. I begin with Plato’s *Phaedrus* and *Symposium* and Socrates’s theories about how erotic energies based in love for a beloved have special properties of extension. Although Plato’s ideas are frequently allied with the modern concept of sublimation, I point out the radical difference between them, both as Freud theorizes sublimation and in its common usage.⁹ I then turn to Freud’s theories for an understanding of how subjects in love become differently disposed. His concepts of “mourning” and “melancholia,” along with the related concepts of “enchantment” and “mania,” are queried with respect to his basic distinctions between “ego-libido” and “object-libido” and to the ways they account for rather different subject dispositions (545–61, 548–89). Overall, this book favors Freudian over Lacanian theories because of Lacan’s insistence on separating out “symbolic” and “imaginary” realms, a division that enforces the bifurcation of sexual desire and sexual love. Yet it finds Lacan’s distinction between “empty” and “full” speech most useful in validating poetry itself (*Ecrits* 30–113). Indeed, both psychoanalysis and projective love writing give considerable importance to the subject’s constitution of his or her speech through an associative delivery. But although each of these historically new practices locates much merit in process-based knowledge formation, psychoanalysts aim for the “cure” of an individual subject whereas the poets put their efforts into creating and altering meaning itself.

Chapter 3, “Imagism as Projective Love,” locates a nascent projective love and libidized field writing in Pound’s and H.D.’s Imagist verse. Little attention has been paid to how the poems Pound selected for his 1914 *Des Imagistes* to represent H.D.’s and his own work are almost all based in erotic relations and texts. I take up the argument developed by Cyrena Pondrom and others that H.D.’s poems served as formative examples for Pound’s poetry and for his exposition of Imagist poetics.¹⁰ H.D. discovered instigating models for her Imagist poetry

in J. K. Mackail's *Select Epigrams from the Greek Anthology* and wrote several of her Imagist poems as creative translations of epigrams written by poets of different sexual orientations. These poets often referred to themselves in the third person and spoke their love with unabashed aplomb.¹¹

In "Love Poesis," each chapter examines the trajectory of an individual poet as they came to write their version of a projective love and libidized field poetics. In each case, the tenor of the poetry and the challenges the poets faced with respect to their social positionalities are different. All of the poets' initial engagement with earlier love poetry encouraged them to create unified and recognizable emotional stances. As they developed poetic speaking positions that were not based on "the lyrical interference of the individual as ego" (Olson, *Selected Writings* 24), their poetry was increasingly ecstatic or, to use a term from Mackey, "strung out" ("Interview" 214). All of the male poets initially engaged the power of melancholic stances, a staple of men's love poetry, but they came to replace melancholic regimes with more complex erotic renderings. Although neither H.D. nor Fraser had access to the established stance of the poetic speaker as male lover and to his melancholic modes, they each managed early on an emergent projective love and libidized writing only to be plummeted into decades of inquiry into what H.D. called the "sex-gender system" before regaining this writing relatively late in life. Indeed, while Pound and Mackey were drawn to impersonal or posthuman poetics, H.D., Duncan, and Fraser found a greater access to their writing through transpersonal or transhuman economies. And while Pound could shift patriarchal representations in decisive ways given his privileged place in these economies, H.D., Duncan, Fraser, and Mackey had to significantly revise their representational fields. All of the poets not only were involved in a personal quest to write their love differently but also were engaged with the public valuations, judgments, and languages that doing so entails. As Agamben puts it, all of these poets sought a writing in which "the object sought by love would correspond with the very language in which [the work] is written" (*End* 60).

Each of the poets faced different historical realities with respect to changing dispensations of gender, sexuality, and race and their relations to these. Pound and H.D. wrote their poetry alert to the implications of emergent discourses of sexuality and changing gender norms. They had to find their ways in a society in which gender was in flux and sexuality challenged love, conditions which at once necessitated and enabled their poetic explorations. Duncan began writing at the cusp of the formation of identity politics and arguably led the way, while rejecting identity formations. His groundbreaking 1944 essay, "The Homosexual in Society," can be seen as an emergent version of these politics that is also alert to their problematics. Although Duncan advocated for the recog-

niton and inclusion of homosexuals in the larger society, he also wrote of experiencing diminishment of his full emotional responses within the exclusive coterie that created separate homosexual cultures. Fraser and Mackey began their writing in the 1960s and 1970s at a time when identity politics were becoming pronounced. While both attended closely to the need for changed gender, sexual, and racial definitions, they sought a writing that exceeded the delimiting demands of identity politics. Fraser understood feminism's need for "a binding voice of women's strength," but she recoiled from the limited registers of what counted as "personal experience" (*Translating* 31). Mackey has remarked on the debasement that occurs through a reception of a poet's work that looks only for what marks it racially. He further notes, "There has been far too much emphasis on accessibility when it comes to writers from socially marginalized groups" (*Discrepant* 17).

While these poets addressed diverse historical moments that affected their relationship to positionality itself, they also engaged divergent traditions and poetry movements. For instance, Pound, alert to modernism across the arts, insisted on making his poetry new, and Fraser brought to modernist and New American poetics a simultaneous involvement with the playful energies of the New York School. Thus, her poetry might be described as "affectional ecstatic," whereas Mackey, who came to his poetics primarily through New American and Black Mountain poetics, creates a "posthuman ecstatic." Mackey—attentive to the ways that African Americans have been left out of the social contract and denied kinship in what amounts to a social death—has been highly alert to how language constitutes "unevenly allotted orders of agency." He accordingly creates an outsiders' outside, an ecstatic that is in service of a love not found elsewhere (*Discrepant* 284). To do so, Mackey has turned specifically to African and Caribbean traditions and myths and to African American jazz to relocate his field of endeavor.

The poets also have related to the projective and introjective strophes of a projective poetics in markedly different ways, and they have manifested much variation in the degree to which they have located their libidinal fields in recognizable cultural or historical figures or in a disruption of language itself. In the highly introjected poetry of H.D. and Mackey, and sometimes Duncan, the same historical and mythical figures are replicated and transformed in books and poems written over several decades. Fraser and Pound, who primarily emphasize projective elements, change their fields of reference more frequently. Indeed, one of the reasons that Pound's early *Cantos* are a more enlivened engagement with the projective love poetics discussed here is that in his later *Cantos* he replicates preordained ideograms and figures without sufficient rebooting. H.D. and Duncan only occasionally disrupt language through visual and aural

materialities that counter sense-making, whereas Pound, Fraser, and Mackey do so more frequently.

In the chapters on the individual poets, I trace how each one came to write love otherwise. Chapter 4, “‘Circe’s This Craft,’” addresses Pound’s radical change from nineteenth-century modes of love writing to projective love as the result of not only his changing poetics but his changing attitudes toward love. His early love writing vacillates between enchantment and melancholia and between celebrating and reviling love, dispositions which he syncretizes in *The Cantos*. Pound’s disappointment and disgust with love are particularly evident in his 1917 *Three Cantos* (his ur-cantos). By 1919 and the writing of *Canto IV*, which led to a rewriting of *Three Cantos*, his ambivalence about love is gone. Ronald Bush remarks about the transition between *Three Cantos* and *Canto IV*: “*Three Cantos* . . . describes. *Canto IV* presents” (200).¹² Even more critically, *Three Cantos* describes love. *Canto IV* presents love. Pound created his characteristic writing in *The Cantos* by projecting a semantic field of obtruding visual and aural materialities that act on his poetic speaker through their concatenating symbolics and materialities in a production that Richard Sieburth, drawing from Deleuze, calls his “schizopoetics” (xxxiii).

H.D. never questioned the power of love nor its relationship to her writing. However, while she extended her early successful Imagist writing in her first volume of verse, *Sea Garden*, a long love poem, she did not regain this projective love writing until relatively late in her career, in her long works *Trilogy* and *Helen in Egypt*. In chapter 5, “‘Love Is Writing,’” I consider the reasons for H.D.’s prolonged and radical revision of her “content” or representational field that enabled her to extend the implicit lessons of what she called her poetics of “clairvoyance” in contrast to Pound’s ability to carry through on his initial Imagist discoveries comparatively quickly. In Pound’s *Cantos* the forward movement of a projective love writing is prominent, but in H.D.’s work introjection is intense. H.D.’s process-based writing finds a rich trove of palimpsestic meanings that surfaced through sets of interacting aural and semantic relations. As she writes in *Trilogy*: “I feel / the meaning that words hide; // they are anagrams, cryptograms, / little boxes, conditioned to hatch butterflies” (*Collected Poems* 540).

In chapter 6, “‘The First Beloved,’” I explore how Duncan, initially attracted to Pound’s and H.D.’s poetics, did not discover how to write a projective love and libidined field poetics until his 1960 volume, *The Opening of the Field*. Writing his early poetry often through willful poetic speakers whose mournful and melancholic stances served to entrench his poems’ subject-object dichotomies, Duncan turned to imitations of Gertrude Stein in his 1953 *Writing Writing* in a deliberate effort to change his poetry. Bringing together the troubled emotions

of his initial work and the playful, loosened writing of the intervening period, he then wrote *The Opening of the Field*, which evinces a poetics described by Duncan as “total freedom in interaction” (“Interview” by Faas 4–5). Throughout his writing, he subtly shifts meanings through his changed relationship to the languages he employs. For example, he writes of falling in love with the manhood in a man, something that is “only there” through “the way we then make love” (“Interview” by Abbott and Shurin 94).

Fraser discovered a projective love writing as early as her 1972 *Little Notes to You*, from *Lucas Street* but did not return to it until the 1990s. In chapter 7, “Kathleen Fraser and ‘Falling into the Page,’” I consider how Fraser, alert to feminism’s critique of what Adrienne Rich called “compulsory heterosexuality” and Rachel Blau DuPlessis named “romantic thralldom,” undermined her own early poetic conviction that without “lust” poetic transport does not happen (Rich 203–23; Friedman and DuPlessis 406–29; Fraser, *Change* 15). During this time she attempted to write love differently but did not achieve the effervescence of her earlier poetry. In the 1990s she rediscovered a projective love writing and the possibilities of an ecstatic writing, and she linked these discoveries to Olson’s poetics in her essay “Translating the Unspeakable: Visual Poetics as Projected through Olson’s ‘Field’ into Current Female Writing Practice.” She writes that the poet is “a field charged with sound. The page begins revising its surface” (*Translating* 10). Beginning initially with a poetry that expressed much dissatisfaction with her beloved, a poetry of absence, she came to write a poetry in which absence and presence are not mutually exclusive, but interpenetrate.

Mackey, initially drawn to Petrarchan melancholic economies, turns from these to combine New American open field poetics with an improvisational jazz aesthetic. If there is an aesthetic, ethical, and political dilemma that threads its way through Mackey’s work, it is how to engage loss and desire, failure and aspiration, without giving short shrift to either. In chapter 8, “Nathaniel Mackey and ‘Black Sounds,’” I explore how he responds to this dilemma by engaging art forms that synergistically combine these oppositions—most importantly jazz, as a love-inflected, African American invention and as a dissonant, syncopated arrangement of sounds that depends on recalling previous musical passages as these are caught up in forward movement.¹³ He turns to African and African diasporic cultural fields to locate a different set of cultural figures than are found in the Western traditions that the other poets engage. Throughout Mackey’s poetry, a sense of ecstasy, a standing outside of himself, prevails. He creates a poetry in which loss and aspiration are syncretically joined: “Some / ecstatic elsewhere’s / advocacy strummed, / unsung, lost inside / the oud’s complaint” (*Whatsaid Serif* 3). To achieve an “articulacy” for his poetics, Mackey engages

homonymic and punning aspects of language in a word “splay” that “subject[s] words to bends, breaks, deformation, reformation—othering” (*Discrepant* 272).

The poets covered in *The Transmutation of Love and Avant-Garde Poetics* take considerable risks—not only in going against dominant literary and intellectual modes and thereby risking the reception of their work but also in their cultivation of various states of embrace and abandon. They take on potentially threatening or accelerated psychological states, as suggested by Sieburth’s term “schizo-poetics” and Norman Finkelstein’s evaluation of Mackey’s work as “shamanistic.”

