Bakhtin's Theory of the Literary Chronotope:

Reflections, Applications, Perspectives

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Kristoffel Demoen, Koen De Temmerman & Bart Keunen (eds.)

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Joy Ladin

for Caryl Emerson

When we talk about what Bakhtin called "literary-artistic chronotopes", we tend to talk about narratives, particularly prose narratives.[1] Bakhtin developed the concept of the chronotope via a historical, cross-cultural and teleological study of the novel, and as Morson and Emerson note, "the chronotope essay and related writings were part of Bakhtin's great project of his third period to elucidate and exalt the genre of the novel" (1990: 372). Though Bakhtin asserted that all language is inherently chronotopic, both Bakhtin and later chroniclers of the life of the chronotope have found that prose narratives most readily exemplify those "fusion[s] of [spatial and temporal] indicators" through which literary "[t]ime […] thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible" and literary "space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history" (FTC: 84). The centripetal forces of syntax, character, scene and plot make most "literary-artistic" prose narratives fertile ground for the emergence of what I have called "incidental", "local" and "major" chronotopes, and dense webs of relationships among them.[2]

As a graduate student, I was dazzled by the chronotope's potential for unlocking the mysteries of literary ontology. In a series of pre-doctoral epiphanies that culminated in my essay "Fleshing Out the Chronotope" (1999), I saw chronotopes and chronotopic relationships everywhere, from Jane Austen novels and Alfred Hitchcock films to shopping malls and cereal boxes. As a poet, I found it inconceivable that chronotopes would not play an equally starring role in my literary-artistic medium of choice. If all language is chronotopic, how could poetry not be? Hence, "Fleshing Out the Chronotope" suggests rather than demonstrates that literary artistic chronotopes function in poetry – even poetry as concise, fragmentary and centrifugal as Emily Dickinson's quatrains – in the same ways in which they function in the prose narratives that provide the bulk of the examples I consider in the essay.

Since the publication of Caryl Emerson's *Critical Essays on Mikhail Bakhtin*, "Fleshing Out the Chronotope" has often been cited in works of chronotopic analysis. However, once I completed my degree, I started avoiding the term "chronotope". In teaching literature to undergraduates, I looked for less-daunting ways of talking about literary space and time. Since experiences on the job market suggested that Bakhtin in general, and the chronotope in particular, were not very marketable, I also

steered away from using the "c" word in critical essays and job interviews, and soon became adept at finding other ways to refer to textual spatiality and temporality.

However, euphemisms come at a price. Having foresworn a consistent, precise critical language for chronotopic analysis, I found myself unable to conduct sustained examinations of literary time-space. I went from seeing chronotopes on cereal boxes to averting my eyes from them even in textual analyses. Even when writing narrative poetry, I never turned to the elaborate taxonomies of "Fleshing Out the Chronotope" in order to sort out my own literary-artistic construction of time-space. When I wrote non-narrative poetry, I didn't think about chronotopes at all.

If the chronotope was as central to literature as I believed, why didn't I ever find it necessary to apply the concept as a poet? I successfully avoided such questions until fall 2007, when I taught my first graduate class in the craft of poetry to poets in the prestigious Master's program in Creative Writing at Sarah Lawrence College. The students were fascinated by the concept of the chronotope, inspired by the idea that they had been unconsciously shaping literary time-spaces – and utterly baffled as to how to apply their new awareness of the chronotope to the process of writing and revising their own poetry. Without rereading the essay, I handed out copies of "Fleshing Out the Chronotope", confident that it would answer all their questions. To my dismay, however, the essay's definitions and demonstrations only confused them more – and when I tried to point them to passages in "Fleshing Out the Chronotope" that would clear up their confusion, I found, to my embarrassment, that the essay assumes rather than explains the chronotope's applicability to poetry.

As I struggled to explain the role of chronotopes in writing poems, I began to question my assumption that the chronotope concept is as applicable to poetry, particularly non-narrative poetry, as it is to narrative prose. As Bakhtin noted, chronotopes arise from the density and fusion of temporal and spatial indicators. In prose narrative, the density of temporal and spatial indicators arises as a natural consequence of setting scenes and explaining action, and those indicators are fused by the centripetal forces of plot, character and so on that encourage us to read the various elements of the text as aspects of a coherent story and world. In non-narrative poetry, however, there is no story to drive the setting of scene or generation of character; there may not even be scene or character. As a result, temporal and spatial indicators can be quite sparse, and there may be little centripetal force to encourage their fusion. In a textual environment bereft of character, plot, scene, in which even the centripetal forces of syntax are frayed by linebreaks and other poetic devices, how can chronotopes form and function? I began to think what had been for me unthinkable: that poetry – at least in its less narrative, more centrifugal forms – might not be chronotopic at all. Perhaps the chronotope, so vital to the life of prose narratives, was, when it came to non-narrative poetry, nothing more than dead and deadening jargon, because in such centrifugal environments, chronotopes cannot be born.

If my despair had proven correct, this would be a very short paper. But when I re-examined "Fleshing Out the Chronotope"'s assumption that chronotopes function

the same way in poetry as in prose, I found myself moving toward a very different understanding of the chronotope than that which had grown out of my analysis of prose narratives. In the centripetal environment afforded by most prose narratives, the stable chronotopes and the relationships among them define consciousness, world and values. In the centrifugal environment of non-narrative poetry, chronotopes flicker and flow in a series of hints, glimpses, dissolves, defining consciousness, world and values via evanescence rather than stability. However, as I hope to show below, the evanescence of chronotopes in non-narrative poetry can be as central to the vitality and meaning of those texts as the stability of chronotopes is to the vitality and meaning of prose narratives.

My new understanding of the chronotope's role in poetry began with re-opening the question regarding chronotopes and poetry that "Fleshing Out the Chronotope" had forestalled. The relevant portions of "Fleshing Out the Chronotope" read as follows:

> [T]hough the chronotopic implications of individual words and sentence fragments are, in ordinary uses of language, absorbed into larger syntactical structures, the chronotopic energies are still present. By changing the balance between centripetal and centrifugal forces, literary texts can harness this energy and allow normally invisible chronotopic implications to take on weight and significance, generating what I call "micro-chronotopes" out of units of speech smaller than a sentence. Micro-chronotopes are arguably more prominent in lyric poetry […] than in other literary forms […] [I]n lyric poetry, centripetal linguistic forces are interfered with by rhyme, meter, enjambment and other devices, giving the centrifugal forces of individual words and phrases greater play. (1999: 216)

This argument is based on Bakhtin's assertion that language is permeated by chronotopic energy. Words can't help but imply "micro-chronotopes". In non-literary contexts, the centripetal forces of language tend to moot or erase these chronotopic implications, reducing them to the verbal equivalent of static. Literary language is inherently more centrifugal than "ordinary uses of language", if only because it is set apart from the practical imperatives that require the language used in daily life to be contextually appropriate, comprehensible, unambiguous and otherwise functional. If centripetal forces tend to weed out chronotopic implications, centrifugality must nourish them – and in the centrifugal soil of literary language, chronotopic energies must more or less automatically bear fruit.[3]

Since lyric poetry is among the most centrifugal of literary forms, it seemed obvious to me that poetry must be at least as chronotope-friendly as prose narrative. Indeed, I suggested, via one brief example, that poems generate chronotopes much more readily than prose:

> [T]he opening of one of Dickinson's most famous poems, "My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun" […] creat[es] a unique space-time (a micro-chronotope) that literalizes the distance between life and self. This process

begins with the capitalization of "Life", which gives the word equal visual weight with "My", and calls attention to the autonomy of "Life" as a noun. The next word, "had", introduces time into the metaphysical space in which the speaker possesses his or her "Life" […] [and] turns the poem into a narrative. This narrative could, of course, remain an abstract and non-chronotopic relation of time without space […] However, the word "stood" consolidates the fledgling micro-chronotope by providing a concrete spatial indicator. "Stood" gives a literal, spatial quality to the distance between speaker and "Life"; "Life" is now not only something that can be possessed but also something that was located in a particular place at a particular time, and perceived by the speaker from both a spatial and temporal distance […] In other words, Dickinson has disrupted the centripetal tendencies of language sufficiently so that the conventions that ensure that the phrase "my life" will be taken idiomatically rather than as a fully operative chronotope are no longer dominant. Thus, by harnessing the latent chronotopic energies of seven simple words, she creates a micro-chronotope in which a speaker's life becomes […] an object with physical and potentially lethal properties […]. (ibid.: 216-7)

The problem with this demonstration is that it reifies rather than tests my assumptions about the genesis of literary artistic chronotopes. While it is true that Dickinson's centrifugal defamiliarization of the cliché "my life" is essential to the blossoming of its peculiar chronotopic implications, centrifugality alone does not – cannot – generate the density and fusion of spatial and temporal indicators necessary for chronotopes to emerge. As a composition teacher, I have read a lot of essays with little grasp of centripetal conventions; none has managed to put flesh on time or make space move to the respiration of history. Clearly, the impairment of centripetality does not a literary artistic chronotope make. The "intersection of axes and fusion of [spatial and temporal] indicators" (FTC: 84) necessary to generate a chronotope could not possibly be accomplished via diffusive centrifugal forces. Dickinson, and the lyric language she here represents, certainly releases chronotopic energies via the disruption of certain centripetal forces; but if those chronotopic energies do indeed coalesce into chronotopes, as I suggested, there must also be centripetal forces at work. Indeed, as Bakhtin emphasizes, centripetal and centrifugal forces are interdependent. By failing to identify those centripetal forces, my analysis gave a profoundly misleading account of the genesis of literary artistic chronotopes in general, and their poetic careers in particular, begging the very questions I purported to answer.

Even now, my reading of "My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun" does not strike me as wrong. However, though the poem does indeed expand the implications of the cliché "my life" into a functioning chronotope, in the opening line, that expansion barely begun; the chronotope doesn't fully emerge until the end of the first stanza, when the voice of the initial speaker is displaced by the voice of the "Gun" that she had offered as a metaphor for "My Life":

> My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun –
> In Corners – till a Day
> The Owner passed – identified –
> And carried Me away –
>
> And now We Roam in Sovreign Woods –
> And now We hunt the Doe –
> And every time I speak for Him
> The Mountains straight reply –
> (Fr 764: 722)[4]

My claim that the spatial implications of the word "stood" fused temporal and spatial coordinates into a functioning chronotope mistakenly projected my synchronic reading of the poem as a whole back onto the opening words.[5] In the process, I fudged the actual process by which this chronotope takes shape – and, in so doing, drastically simplified the chronotope itself. If we read the opening stanza diachronically rather than synchronically, we see that though the word "stood" does indeed give startlingly spatial qualities to the temporal abstraction "My Life", the fusion of literalized space and abstract time is deferred by the implicit simile, "My Life had stood [like] a Loaded Gun". It is quite common for similes and metaphors to illuminate temporal abstractions by mapping them onto concrete spatial equivalents. Though the metaphoric mapping stimulated by these rhetorical gestures suggest the chronotopic fusion of temporal and spatial concepts, they also defer that fusion by encouraging us to think of time in terms of space rather than conceiving a time-space.

However, as the stanza unfolds, it becomes harder and harder to read the space the poem describes metaphorically, and thus to understand time – "My Life" – as distinct from it. In the second line, the phrase "In Corners" drastically amplifies the spatial implications of "stood". The metaphorical "Loaded Gun" that stands for "My Life" is no longer standing in an abstract space, but in a space that has "Corners", a narrow, interior, domestic space defined by junctures of walls. The plural "Corners" also carries a whiff of temporality – technically, a gun can only stand in one corner at any given moment, so if this gun has stood in multiple "Corners", it must have been moved over time. That whiff of temporality begins to blossom into full-blown diegetic time in the following phrase, "till a Day", which places the metaphorical "Gun" in the narrative realm of befores and afters; the next line, "The Owner passed – identified", peoples this metaphorical narrative realm with a character who has his own story – he is just passing through this cornered domestic interiority – and even his own perspective: for an instant, we glimpse him "identifying" the "Gun". In the final line of the stanza, the speaker is completely displaced by her own metaphor. Now, and for the rest of the poem, the first person pronouns refer not to a person whose life had stood like a loaded gun, but to the gun itself, which "roams" an adventurous frontier world (as Susan Howe has pointed out) in the hands of the distant "Owner" it adores.[6]

In other words, over the course of the stanza, the spatial metaphor expands into a metaphoric narrative and then blossoms into a time-and-space-fusing narrative in its own right, a story of the deliverance, vitality and angst that follow a lifetime of standing in corners, awaiting identification and identity. That narrative embodies and pushes to absurd extremes the chronotope I describe in "Fleshing Out the Chronotope", in which "Life" becomes a thing that can be owned and understood as distinct from its "Owner". Though that chronotope is suggested by Dickinson's centrifugal attenuation of the conventions that minimize the ontological implications of figures of speech in the opening line, as the above analysis suggests, the chronotope is constituted and rendered functional by the centripetal forces introduced in subsequent lines. We only really enter a time-space in which "Life" has a life of its own when the spatial and temporal implications that the metaphoric structure kept separate have been fused by the centripetal forces of character, plot, and perspective.

If this were a prose narrative of the types from which "Fleshing Out the Chronotope" draws most of its examples, the "My Life" chronotope would be the "major chronotope" that defines the overall time-space of the narrative and the relationships among the minor chronotopes of which it is composed, such as that which appears at the end of the second stanza, in which the Gun becomes the meeting point between the voice of the "Owner" and the "voice" of nature. However, even a cursory examination of the poem as a whole reveals that that is not what happens:

My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun –
In Corners – till a Day
The Owner passed – identified –
And carried Me away –

And now We Roam in Sovreign Woods –
And now We hunt the Doe –
And every time I speak for Him
The Mountains straight reply –

And do I smile, such cordial light
Upon the Valley glow –
It is as a Vesuvian face
Had let it's pleasure through –

And when at Night – Our good Day done –
I guard my Master's Head –
'Tis better than the Eider-Duck's
Deep Pillow – to have shared –

To foe of His – I'm deadly foe –
None stir the second time –
On whom I lay a Yellow Eye –
Or an emphatic Thumb –

> Though I than He – may longer live
> He longer must – than I –
> For I have but the power to kill,
> Without – the power to die –
> (Fr 764: 722-3)

Somewhere during the adventures of Gun and her emotionally distant but fatally attractive Owner, the "My Life" chronotope vanishes – and with it, any sense that there is a speaker other than Gun, or that Gun's actions, reflections, and yearnings are merely an allegory for some "real" speaker's life. In fact, this narrative is defined not by the consolidation of a major chronotope amid a web of chronotopic relationships, but by the dissolution of the major chronotope (and the character whose consciousness was to be manifested through it) and the absence of any stable relationships among the chronotopes that emerge in each stanza.

In terms of the definitions offered in "Fleshing Out the Chronotope", this is not a narrative at all, but some sort of anti-narrative, a perverse negation of the normal chronotopic functioning of narratives. But once we accept that chronotopes lead very different lives in the more centrifugal environment of poetry, we can see that the poem's treatment of chronotopes as transitory rather than stable is not perverse at all, but typical of poetry, an inevitable outgrowth of poetry's emphasis on the centrifugal aspects of the centrifugal/centripetal symbiosis that is inherent in all language use.

Contrary to my claims in "Fleshing Out the Chronotope," chronotopes don't emerge from either centrifugality or language *per se*; they emerge from language's role in mediating the relationship between subjectivity and intersubjectivity, in the reciprocal transformation of individual, idiosyncratic perception into communicable accounts of the world, and of shared but abstract terms into templates that give intelligible form to private perception.[7] Pure centripetality, if such a thing were possible, would produce language of Platonic sterility and stasis; pure centrifugality would be a tale told by an idiot, signifying nothing. The centrifugal qualities of chronotopes – their basis in the mysteries of individual perception and the flux of consciousness – were obvious to me when I wrote "Fleshing Out the Chronotope". However, I overlooked the crucial role of centripetal forces in making perception and consciousness intelligible to others, and thus expanding language from the medium of personal subjectivities into an intersubjective means of sharing the world with others.

Literary chronotopes represent shifting balances between the centrifugal forces which connote the idiosyncratic, ultimately incommunicable nature of perception, and the centripetal forces which subsume purely personal perceptions into generally agreed upon terms. The more the balance in a given chronotope favors the centripetal, the more stable the chronotope will seem, the greater its intersubjective effectiveness in structuring individual readers' experience, the more pervasively it will structure the elements of the text and the experience of reading it – and the closer it will approach the transhistorical stolidity that for Bakhtin was the holy chronotopic grail. The

more the balance favors the centrifugal, the more fleeting, fragmentary, phantasmal the chronotope will seem, the harder to recognize or define – and the more closely it will reflect the idiosyncratic, transitory nature of individual perception. If the balance is too heavily weighted toward the centripetal, the chronotope will collapse from a fleshy, plot-responsive time-space into convention or cliché, language whose well-worn predictability testifies to its incapacity to reflect or even acknowledge the mysterious richness of individual experience. But if a chronotope is insufficiently defined by centripetal forces, it will not be a distinguishable, functional chronotope at all, but rather an arcane trace of private, incommunicable experience.

In most literary prose narratives, the centripetal forces of genre, character, plot, syntax and so on facilitate the emergence of relatively stable chronotopes, and the bestiary of chronotopic relationships partially taxonomized in "Fleshing Out the Chronotope". I think it is fair to say that chronotopes, failed or otherwise, are an inherent aspect of all narratives, literary or otherwise. Even in as brief and fragmentary a narrative as "My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun", the centripetal forces evoked by narrative are sufficient to give chronotopic form and efficacy to the fleeting time-space implications of "My Life". But poetry does not need to be narrative; some poems, like the following phonemic smear by Clark Coolidge, don't even include words:

> listene
> secting
> erences
>
> miliari
> ontempt
> opposit
>
> compani
> bilitie
> pontane
>
> nerously
> ercussi
> ndition
>
> aluable
> rievable
> fluence
>
> berness
> ionalis
> deliber
> (Gach 1998: 113)

Though this is an extreme example of poetic centrifugality, even more traditional poems often lack the centripetal forces necessary to consolidate chronotopic implica-

tions into chronotopes.[8] Successful poetry has been made out of pure argument, abstract rhetoric, and expressionistic blobs of language, with nary a functional chronotope in sight. In non-narrative poetry, the chronotope is an option, not a necessity – and even in narrative poems, like "My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun", chronotopes may play very different roles than we find in prose narratives.

Because chronotopes are options rather than necessities in poetic language, poems can experiment with highly unstable balances of centrifugal and centripetal forces, creating language that brings us to the borderline between subjectivity and intersubjectivity. As David Porter, reflecting on Archibald Macleish's earlier observations, observed, Dickinson was quite fond of such experiments:

> "Amethyst remembrance", "Polar expiation". [None] of these exists upon the retina. [None] can be brought into focus by the muscles of the eye. The "blue and gold mistake" of Indian summer seems to exist somewhere in the visible – or would if one could only get rid of that "mistake" […] But who can describe the graphic shape of "that white sustenance/Despair"? And yet all of these present themselves as images, do they not? – *act* as images? Where can remembrance be amethyst? Where but in the eye? (Porter 1981: 26-7; emphasis in original)

In such "drained images", as Porter calls them, Dickinson jams together sensory referents ("blue and gold", "amethyst", "Polar", "white") and asensual abstractions ("remembrance", "expiation", "mistake", "sustenance", "Despair") – "idea" words and "perception" words – in ways that simultaneously suggest both the hermetically sealed specificity of individual perception and the intersubjective generality of phenomenology. In these phrases, the centripetal force of syntax (specifically, the relationship between adjectives and nouns) is strong enough to stimulate us to try to construe a chronotope, but not strong enough to actually define one. For example, a phrase like "Amethyst Remembrance" combines the spatial implications of "Amethyst" (you can't have color without a space in which it can be manifested) and the temporal implications of "Remembrance" (you can't have memory without time), but doesn't exert sufficient centripetal force to fuse these implications into a functional time-space through which world or consciousness can be concretely imagined. (Dickinson carefully attenuates the centripetal force by using an atemporal noun for the time-connoting word in this pair, rather than a verb like "remembering" which would carry stronger implications of lived duration and character.) The result is suggestive but maddeningly ephemeral. The abstraction "Remembrance" almost becomes visible, while the crystalline violet translucence evoked by "Amethyst" seems to shimmer with insight into the nature of memory ("I held a Jewel in my fingers"; Dickinson 1998: 261). Such drained images draw unnameable perceptions toward, but not quite into, the intersubjective light of day – and as we try to construe them, we find them pulling us back into the phenomenal depths from which they emerged.

Radical as Dickinson's "drained image" experiments were (and still are), the chronotopic frontiers she explored had been long been pointed toward by seventeenth-century English metaphysical poets such as George Herbert. For example, Herbert's "Prayer (I)" begins

> Prayer the Churches banquet, Angels age,
>   God's breath in man returning to his birth,
>   The soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage,
> The Christian plummet sounding heav'n and earth
> Engine against th' Almighty, sinner's tow'r,
>   Reversed thunder, Christ-side-piercing spear,
>   The six-day's world transposing in an hour,
> A kinde of tune, which all things hear and fear […]
> (Herbert 2009)

Like Dickinson, Herbert utilizes poetry's attenuation of normal centripetal forces to magnify the normally imperceptible chronotopic implications of individual words and phrases. For example, in the compound adjectival phrase "Christ-side-piercing," Herbert narrows space to a small, terrifyingly vulnerable patch of skin – the place where the spear entered Jesus' "side" – while transforming time into a constant, present-tense enactment of that "piercing". Since this is not a narrative or even a complete sentence – Herbert's poem, though written as a sentence, is simply a paratactical list of metaphors for "Prayer", *sans* the grammatically necessary verb, "is" – the centripetal forces here are much more attenuated than in "My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun". By omitting the rhetorical structure of the metaphor, Herbert weakens our impetus to perform the mapping operation that, as I noted above, would normally suspend our chronotope-synthesizing impulses. As a result, each item in the list carries a charge of chronotopic energy, the brief but palpable jolt of bumping from one kind of time-space to another. However, in the absence of larger syntactical or narrative structures, there is insufficient centripetal force for any of these time-spaces to persist beyond the phrases that evoke them.

In short, neither Dickinson's "drained images" nor Herbert's chronotopic phrases generate the sort of full-fledged, functional chronotopes or chronotopic relationships discussed in "Fleshing Out the Chronotope". They are highly localized effects, startling and transient – and effective because they are transient. The chronotopic instability of Dickinson's "drained images", our inability to bring the time-spaces they seem to imply into focus, is precisely what enables them to limn the border between subjectivity and intersubjectivity. The flickering of Herbert's list of nascent time-spaces enacts the poem's implicit argument that "prayer" is both an extraordinarily potent, cosmos-defining activity, and an endeavor so tenuous that it must be constantly renewed lest it and its effects vanish in the next breath.

In non-narrative poetry, such chronotopic friability and evanescence plays as definitive a role as chronotopic stability and relationships play in prose narratives.[9] The chronotopic stability of prose narrative enables us to imaginatively inhabit the world

of the story, to experience fictional time and space as charged with vitality and meaning. In poems like Herbert's, vitality and meaning grow out of the spectacle of time-spaces appearing, disappearing and almost-appearing before our eyes. No wonder my poetry students were confused. They knew that Bakhtin was right about the inherent chronotopic energy of language, but the conceptual framework I offered in "Fleshing Out the Chronotope" taught them nothing about how to recognize or harness that energy in their poetry.

Since prose narratives more or less automatically generate chronotopes, the challenge for their authors is to make those chronotopes vital and effective, and to bring them into meaningful relationship with one another. Poets, on the other hand, need to determine what role, if any, chronotopic energies will play in their poems, and how to stage, manage and make meaningful the evanescence of those energies in the centrifugal textual environment of poetry.

Though my students had never heard of chronotopes, a highly sophisticated handling of chronotopic energies is characteristic of the modernist American poetry on which the poetics they have absorbed through workshops and lectures are largely based. That sophistication is readily recognizable in perhaps the most canonical bit of free verse in the American pedagogical canon, William Carlos Williams' haiku-like "The Red Wheelbarrow". This widely-anthologized poem is justly famous for its use of steep linebreaks – and those linebreaks make it an equally telling example of the paradoxical way in which poetic centrifugality amplifies the chronotopic energies of language while undermining the formation of actual chronotopes and chronotopic relationships. The result is a dazzling play of chronotopic implications and evanescence:

> so much depends
> upon
>
> a red wheel
> barrow
>
> glazed with rain
> water
>
> beside the white
> chickens.
> (1985: 56)

Here, the brief, staccato lines enforce a diachronic reading; the scene and sentence unfold in pieces, with each line registering first as a phrase in itself and then as a fragment of a larger, still-unfolding whole. For example, though the first line, "so much depends", radiates faint implications of size ("so much"), pendulousness ("depends") and time (the present-tense of the verb), the absence of subject, object or image suspends us in a sort of chronotopic void. There is a voice making an assertion, but no context for the voice, and no world to which the assertion refers. In this void, the spa-

tial implications of second line, the isolated word "upon", are magnified, giving us a sense of space forming out of pure abstraction. The "red wheel" of the third line furnishes this nascent space with color and shape. Though the wheel suggests the human world of tools and purposes, for the moment, it is purely symbolic, a red wheel suspended in a void. "So much" does indeed depend upon it, for it is the sole anchor of our entire sense of time-space. The addition of "barrow" shatters that Ezekiel-esque image. The "red wheel" is not a wheel at all, it is a "wheel / barrow", a common farm implement that metonymically connotes the earthy, repetitive world of agricultural work. The "red wheel" could be an abstract shape; the "red wheelbarrow" is ineluctably part of human lives.[10]

Thus far, the poem's temporal dimension has been restricted to the vague, undifferentiated present suggested by "depends". "Glazed with rain", however, attests to an event – rainfall – and thus expands time to include befores and afters, causes – the rain that has fallen – and effects – the glaze on the wheelbarrow.[11] In the final couplet, Williams allows space to expand as well, as the image finally comes into focus. Even here, though, there is significant chronotopic play. The preposition "Beside" places the wheelbarrow into a larger spatial context, but the linebreak after "white" briefly blanks out this context, reducing it to pure, blinding abstraction. The poem teeters on the edge of the chronotopic void from which it has so painstakingly emerged – and that is what makes the resolution offered by "chickens" so comic, and so satisfying. Thanks to the chronotopic evanescence generated by its linebreaks, the prosaic noun "chickens" denotes not only poultry, but the emergence of a stable, visualized world.

Because it consists of a single image, "The Red Wheelbarrow" has become an archetypal pedagogical example of Imagist doctrine. However, when we read it from a chronotopic perspective, we see that the image of a wet wheelbarrow beside chickens plays little role in the experience of reading the poem. In fact, the poem's power grows out of its deferral of the image. The centrifugality of the enjambments transforms what would in prose be an immediately graspable scene – "So much depends upon a red wheelbarrow glazed with rain water beside the white chickens" – into a spectacular chronotopic display. The centripetal force of prose eliminates this chronotopic spectacle – and with it much of the interest of this vague assertion. It is not "the image" but the tension between the constant prompting to synthesize time-spaces and our inability to bring them into focus that accounts for the poem's effectiveness. That tension transforms language from a medium of representation (a means of creating an image) into a medium of ontology, simultaneously highlighting the power of language to summon a world into being, and its inability to render that world stable, complete or coherent. As the inarticulate whiteness the poem has kept at bay swallows the long-deferred word "chickens", it becomes clear that the language of the poem has been unable to create a world at all, that the world corresponding to the image is a world language points to rather than summons into being.[12]

For free-verse poets seeking to add the poetics of chronotopes to their arsenal of craft, Williams' little poem offers one overriding lesson: the steeper the linebreak, the greater its chronotopic effects. The steep linebreak's centrifugal disruption of syntactical and other centripetal structures releases local chronotopic energies and magnifies the chronotopic implications of words and phrases. At the same time, however, the greater the poem's centrifugality, the harder it is for chronotopic implications to fuse into functional chronotopes.

In poems in which lines are longer and linebreaks tend to correspond to syntactical units, the level of centrifugal force is lower; as a result, the play of chronotopic energies will be much more muted. When American poets think of long lines, they think of Walt Whitman. Just as Williams' short, broken lines amplify the centrifugal energies of poetic language, Whitman's prosy, barely enjambed lines amplify its centripetal energies by asserting the stabilizing forces of syntax Williams' lines disrupt. Though Whitman's poetry *is* poetry, and is still significantly more centrifugal than prose narrative, his greater centripetality has a marked effect on the chronotopic energies of his words:

> You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me,
> You shall listen to all sides and filter them from your self.
> (1855: 14)

For all Whitman's programmatic *joi de vivre*, and despite his status as a pioneer of concrete description, much of his verse has the achronotopic flatness of these lines. As "so much depends / upon" demonstrates, even abstract assertion can have marked chronotopic implications. But Whitman's long, syntactically complete lines generate so much centripetal force that the implications of even chronotopically suggestive words such as "look", "eyes", "take", "listen", "sides" and "filter" are suppressed – or, to use Whitman's term, "filtered". In other words, the centripetality of Whitman's lines is so great that relatively few chronotopic implications register as we read them. To charge his language with chronotopic vitality, Whitman has to include distinct spatial and temporal indicators – and when he does so, the centripetal force of his long lines fuses them into highly localized but surprisingly functional chronotopes:

> The bride unrumples her white dress, the minutehand of the clock moves
>   slowly,
> The opium eater reclines with rigid head and just opened lips,
> The prostitute draggles her shawl, her bonnet bobs on her tipsy and
>   pimpled neck […]
> (1855: 22)

Whitman's characteristic naming of characters in terms of their role – "the bride", "the opium eater", "the prostitute" – invokes the spatial and temporal implications of their social contexts. Here, for example, the phrase "the bride" invokes a complex concatenation of intimate time and space (the relationship that led this woman to marriage, and the body she is presumably preparing to share with her husband); rit-

ual time and space (the wedding ceremony and all that surrounds it); and social time and space (that is, the time-space in which the changes in status entailed by a woman getting married take place). The verb "unrumples", itself a highly compressed narrative (only something that has been rumpled can be unrumpled), combines the dense but abstract complex invoked by "the bride" with the concrete spatial implications necessary to bring this chronotope to life. "Unrumples" distils the intersecting sequences of events implied by "the bride" into a single, interstitial moment, a moment between kisses and rituals and social configurations, and locates this moment in the intensely intimate space defined by a hand smoothing a wedding dress.

The drastic narrowing of time and space to this single gesture creates a sense of temporal suspension, as though the unrumpling motion takes place in a bubble of time outside the social whirl suggested by "the bride". That sense of suspension is given concrete expression in the phrase "the minutehand of the clock moves slowly", a juxtaposition which transforms the time-suspending hand of the bride into a literal "minutehand", yoking the intimate time-space of the first phrase to the "objective", or rather intersubjective, time-space created by the chronotopic convention by which we agree to take the motion of clock hands through space as a sign of our common motion through time.

If Whitman used Williams-like steep linebreaks, the centrifugal force would produce such a wealth of chronotopic implications that neither of these phrases would imply clear chronotopes. But his long lines generate sufficient centripetal force for each chronotope to not only be distinguished, but for them to enter into a brief but evocative dialogue. The "minutehand" chronotope prevents the bride's temporal bubble from becoming lyrically disconnected from social time and space, while the "unrumpling" chronotope saturates the motion of the "minutehand" with emotional significance, turning the clock from an objective measure of duration into a meeting-place between intersubjectivity and subjectivity, between the social time-space of rites of passage and the psychological time-space of those who undergo them.

In prose – Poe's contemporaneous concern with the collision between subjective and intersubjective time comes to mind – these chronotopes and their dialogue would have structural implications for the text as a whole. No matter how localized it was, this chronotopic dialogue would have some relationship with and make some contribution to the larger chronotopic network that would charge the story with vitality and significance. Here, however, both chronotopes are immediately displaced by the chronotope of the opium eater in the next line. Of course, there is an implicit parallel between the isolated, contracted time-space of the "just opened lips" of the opium eater and the similar qualities of the chronotopes in the previous line. But even the centripetal force of Whitman's long lines is insufficient to mesh his chronotopes into larger networks and structures. By the end of the opium eater line, the chronotopes of the previous line are already fading; by the time the prostitute draggles her shawl, they are faint echoes that are completely upstaged by Whitman's paratactical sequencing of social outcasts.

As these examples suggest, the degree of centripetal and centrifugal force in a given poem can radically alter the play of chronotopic implications.[13] In more centrifugal poems, those implications are intensified, affording chronotopic vitality to even abstract phrases, but they are in such flux that distinct chronotopes and chronotopic relationships cannot form. In more centripetal poems, chronotopic energies tend to be muted, charging language only when there is sufficient density of spatial and temporal indicators. Unlike the chronotopic flux we find in more centrifugal poems, in more centripetal poems those indicators can fuse into distinct chronotopes and chronotopic relationships. Yet even in most centripetal poems, there is insufficient centripetal force to connect these local chronotopes and relationships into the structurally definitive chronotopic networks we find in prose narratives.[14]

Thus far, I have focused on poems in which the centrifugal or centripetal force generated by linebreaks – or, in Dickinson's case, parallel devices – defines the play of chronotopic energies. But what of poems in which rhyme and meter rather than lineation are fundamental organizing principles? Do we find the same chronotopic dynamics in prosodically organized poems that we have observed in free verse poems? Such questions demand at least a book-length study, but I would like to offer a reading of a well-known poem – John Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn" – to begin the exploration of how prosody affects chronotopic energy:

> Thou still unravished bride of quietness,
> Thou foster child of silence and slow time,
> Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
> A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme […]
> (1994: 185)

While line breaks also play a role, much of the centrifugality of prosodically organized verse is generated by the conflict between syntax and the sensuous sound of words. Syntax subordinates individual words to larger structures of meaning to which the sensuous qualities of phonemes are irrelevant. Prosody emphasizes those sensuous qualities, amplifying stresses into metrical patterns, clustering words into rhythmic patterns, focusing our attention on consonance, assonance and other sonic features. Not only are these features irrelevant to syntactical structures; like linebreaks, they attenuate and sometimes disrupt those structures, drawing attention to individual words and phrases and distracting us from our sense of the whole, slowing the reading process, and tipping the balance of forces toward the centrifugal.[15] Here, for example, the sheer sonic gorgeousness of "still unravished bride of quietness" centrifugally complicates the plain sense of the words (notice how much easier and less interesting it is to say "bride who hasn't yet had sex with quietness"), facilitating the emergence of something akin to Dickinson's "drained images".[16] The three words of "still unravished bride" take three of the line's five beats. The cluster of stresses increases the sensuous density of the phrase, stretching the readerly time it takes to negotiate it, an effect furthered by the play of "i" sounds within the words and the tongue-slowing "l" and "d's" that end them. (By contrast, the only thing that slows

the reading of the opening three words of "The Red Wheelbarrow" is the linebreak that follows "depends"). The sonically intensified focus gives the chronotopic implications of the words time to blossom in the mind, evoking a highly compressed, *in media res* narrative in which the female-figured urn is equated to a woman whose involuntary wedding has taken place but whose long-awaited "ravishing" has not. The temporal implications of the phrase stretch backward into the causal mists in which the forced union was conceived and forward into the future in which it will be consummated, even as space is contracted to the sexualized zone of the "unravished bride"'s body. But this unequal chronotopic union is no more consummated than the allegorical wedding the phrase implies. "Of quietness" yokes the highly concrete image of the unravished bride to an abstraction – "quietness" – that carries only the vaguest chronotopic implications.[17] The chronotope suggested by the implied narrative of "still unravished bride" dissolves into a drained image of non-consensual sexual relations between urns and "quietness".

Like Williams' steep linebreaks, Keats' sound play interferes with the reading process, tipping the balance of forces toward the centrifugality necessary for the bizarre implications of the opening line to register.[18] Reduced to its centripetal essence, all the first line says is "Hey, urn". But though the centrifugal chronotopic fireworks midwifed by the sound play are irrelevant to the rhetorical gesture, they are central to the effect and meaning of the poem, which is all about the collision between lived human time-space and the "deep" time-space of history, and the abstract time-space art seems to offer as an escape from both.

Thus, both the content and sound patterning of the second line continue to highlight and complicate the chronotopic identity of the urn. "Thou foster child of silence and slow time" regresses the body of the unravished bride to pre-nubility, and shifts that body from the relatively concrete space of ravishing (or lack thereof) to the abstract space of genealogy. With two beats distributed among three words and no repeated sounds, the phrase "Thou foster child" is palpably less sonically dense than "Still unravished bride", and correspondingly more centripetal, more readily comprehensible – and less chronotopic. The "foster child" is merely a box on a genealogy chart, biological time translated into diagrammatic space. By contrast, the clustered "s" and modulating "i" sounds of "silence and slow time", and the metrical inversion that slows the line by ending it on two strong beats, generate enough centrifugality to afford a glimpse of a time-space in which a liaison between these non-corporeal entities might take place.

In short, these lines generate a chronotopic flux that is much closer to what we saw in "The Red Wheelbarrow" than to what we saw in the excerpts from Whitman. However, like Whitman's, Keats' longer lines leave his syntax more intact than Williams', and generate correspondingly greater centripetal force. And though Keats' heightened density of sound draws centrifugal attention to individual words and phrases, the relative predictability of the iambic throb and the abab rhyme emphasize larger, and thus more centripetal, units of meaning. As a result of this greater centrip-

etal force, the chronotopic play in Keats' poem is less evanescent than that in Williams' poem. The chronotopic implications of the first two lines are much more substantial, easier to register and explicate, than the chronotopic implications of Williams' atomized lines; the shifts from one fledgling chronotope to another are more marked, creating the potential for active competition among the nascent chronotopes. Since, as in Williams' poem, each new chronotopic implication displaces and erases its predecessors, this competition can't be said to generate dialogue or other stability-dependent relationships; but unlike Williams', these chronotopic implications are distinct enough for us to register the bump from one to another and the differences among them without intensive analysis.

Though Keats is unlikely to have thought of himself as manipulating time-space, his interest in centrifugality-generating sound clusters and in maximizing the vividness of his verse clearly afforded him a sophisticated grasp of chronotopic poetics – a grasp so sophisticated that "Ode on a Grecian Urn"' probes the relationship between art and life via its negotiation of chronotopic instability:

> Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed
> Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu;
> And, happy melodist, unwearied,
> Forever piping songs forever new;
> More happy love! more happy, happy love!
> Forever warm and still to be enjoyed,
> Forever panting, and forever young;
> All breathing human passion far above,
> That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloyed,
> A burning forehead, and a parching tongue.
> (1994: 185)

The first seven lines present the contrast between real life and the idealized life of art that is often been represented as the "meaning" of the poem. In the "happy, happy" two-dimensional art of the urn, life surrenders growth, change and consummation in exchange for being "forever new", "warm and still to be enjoyed", and "young". The trees "cannot shed" their leaves; the piper can't stop piping new songs; the lovers can't complete the playful chase that in life would lead to sex and other complexities of intimacy. By contrast, in the changing world "far above" the urn, human life is in thrall to the bitter causal logic of desire and suffering. In a description the Buddha would no doubt have approved of, "breathing human passion" leads inevitably to sorrow, "cloyed" surfeit of pleasure, fever and unslakeable thirst.

But when we examine the chronotopes associated with each side of this binary, the relationship between them turns out to be more complex than this ontological cartoon suggests. In the "happy" chronotope of the urn, time-space is hardly static; it is charged with vitality, warmth, even creativity (the piper keeps piping "songs forever new"). Space is emotionally anthropomorphic; even the tree limbs are "happy", and

space itself is so filled with "happy, happy love" that subjects and objects barely bother to distinguish themselves. By contrast, the time-space of the "real world" is constricted and static. Time has narrowed to a single tragic chain of events, in which even breathing leads to torment; space has narrowed to parts of a single symbolic body that represents a humanity so general that it lacks gender, history, or any marks of identity.

The competition between these chronotopes would seem to be over before it begins, with the urn's aesthetic time-space winning by knockout. Yet the poem is only half over, because though the poem's centripetal force is sufficient to distinguish and contrast these chronotopes, it is not sufficient to maintain their integrity – and thus a competition between them – in the following stanza.[19] If the poem were indeed about the superiority of idealized aesthetic stasis to "breathing human passion", this chronotopic instability would constitute an ironic and grievous failure, a demonstration that the aesthetic cannot even maintain its perfection for an entire poem. But Keats turns the chronotopic evanescence that could be a demonstration of the frailty of the aesthetic into a means of undermining the apparently absolute contradiction between the aesthetic realm and "breathing" human existence – and, in the process, expands and strengthens the poem's definition of "beauty":

> Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
> To what green altar, O mysterious priest,
> Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,
> And all her silken flanks with garlands dressed?
> What little town by river or sea shore,
> Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,
> Is emptied of this folk, this pious morn?
> And, little town, thy streets for evermore
> Will silent be; and not a soul to tell
> Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.
> (1994: 185)

The centripetality of the previous stanza – its fusion of its numerous descriptions, clauses and exclamations into a single sentence, in which each chronotope is afforded a neatly delineated syntactical space – maintained the contrast between the urn's "happy, happy" chronotope and that of "breathing human passion". The question that opens this stanza – "Who are these coming to the sacrifice?" – centrifugally undermines this contrast by containing no marker to indicate to which chronotope the question refers. This omission creates what Cristanne Miller calls semantic "doubling". When we first read the question, it clearly refers back to "the sacrifice" that is an inevitable consequence of breathing human passion, but when we reach the next line it just as clearly refers to the sacrifice enacted on the urn. As Miller, who develops this concept at length in her study *Emily Dickinson: A Poet's Grammar*, points out, semantic doubling tends to blur ontological boundaries – in this case, the ontological

boundaries that maintained the contrast between the urn's time-space and that of the "breathing human" world.

Though clarity of reference is re-established in the second line, the effects of this blurring are immediately apparent. In this stanza, the chronotope generated by the description of the urn bears little resemblance to the "happy, happy" time-space of the previous stanza. In the previous stanza, we literally couldn't see the trees for the "happy" boughs. In this stanza, we see not only the sacrificial animal but the fact that it is a cow; not only a human figure but the fact that he is a priest; not only the sacrificial nature of the scene but the "silken" texture of the heifer's "flanks". Most importantly, the patent loveliness of the scene does not spare us from hearing the "lowing" of the animal being led to the slaughter. In short, the always-brimming newness of the "happy" chronotope has been replaced by a grim causality that seems to have been spliced from the DNA of the chronotope of "breathing human passion". Just as "passion" leads directly to sorrow, the Classical beauty of this scene is leading directly to death.

The loss of the brimming happiness of the urn-world – and thus of the aestheticism it represents – is reflected in the eerie depopulation that is the subject of the rest of the stanza. However lovely the "little town" may have been, its inhabitants are gone forever. The chronotope of the urn is no longer an idealized alternative to the tragedies of breathing human time and the history that accumulates in its wake. The freshness, warmth and exquisite, self-renewing vitality of art have been ineluctably infected by imminent slaughter, irreversible loss, and a "desolation" that is literally unspeakable, for in this chronotope, there is "not" and will never be "a soul" to break the "silence" and memorialize the lost population with a narrative of their disappearance.

Keats, who famously urged poets to live in uncertainty and doubt, does not resolve the conflict between the two chronotopes associated with the urn-world. Indeed, the paratactical structure of the poem – and the centrifugal force that paratactical omission of connections generates – make it difficult to perceive the conflict between these accounts. One chronotope simply decays into the next, without any centripetal framework to mark or define their relationship – and that decay tacitly but crucially expands the meaning of the aesthetic. In the poem's famous conclusion, Keats' speaker addresses the urn as follows:

> When old age shall this generation waste,
>   Thou shalt remain in midst of other woe
> Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st
> 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty,'— that is all
>   Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.
> (1994: 185)

Had the poem only associated the urn with the "happy" chronotope, the statement "that is all / Ye know on earth" would be a purely sarcastic comment on "beauty"'s

self-delighting exclusion and distortion of the far-from-beautiful "truth" of the "breathing human world". But thanks to the chronotopic decay in the penultimate stanza, the urn also represents a conception of beauty that acknowledges and even comprehends sacrifice, tragedy, and unspeakable desolation – and a beauty that embraces rather than whitewashes the ugliest facts of human existence may indeed be "Truth".

Whatever one makes of this particular interpretation, "Ode on a Grecian Urn" demonstrates that chronotopic evanescence can play as significant a role in prosodically organized poetry as in free verse, and that prosodic devices, like free verse linebreaks, can amplify the chronotopic energy of language by increasing the centrifugality of the text. It also suggests that the chronotopic evanescence promoted by the centrifugality of poetic language can itself embody complex, nuanced modes of thinking – modes of thinking as complex and nuanced as, though qualitatively different from, those embodied in prose narratives by networks of interrelated chronotopes.

The centripetal forces of prose narrative can generate chronotopes stable enough to define genres, cross centuries and languages, and even survive the cultures that gave rise to them. The webs of relationships among chronotopes we find in these narratives can enable us to examine humanness from multiple perspectives simultaneously; can test the notions of morality and metaphysics by subjecting them to the very ontologies from which they were designed to shield us; and can stage with unforgettable vividness and precision the mysterious intersections between consciousness, language and reality. However, the glorious stability of prose narrative chronotopes has at least one significant drawback: there are some perspectives, some notions, some intersections between consciousness, language and reality that cannot be represented via networks of stable chronotopes. We have glimpsed such perspectives already in the phenomenological precipice to which "drained images" bring us, in Williams' visceral enactment of language's attempt to manifest reality, in the autobiography of an abstraction presented in "My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun", in Keats' chronotopic cross-breeding of "beauty" and "truth". In short, as Dickinson demonstrates in the following poem, the chronotopic evanescence of poetic language can do for ontology what "drained images" do for phenomenology – making visible the seams, the cracks, the aporia, inherent in chronotopic conceptions of reality, and the normally inconceivable vistas that lay beyond them:

> It was not Death, for I stood up,
> And all the Dead, lie down –
> It was not Night, for all the Bells
> Put out their Tongues, for Noon.
>
> It was not Frost, for on my Flesh
> I felt Siroccos – crawl –
> Nor Fire – for just my marble feet
> Could keep a Chancel, cool […]
> (Fr 355: 379)

The centripetality of narrative emphasizes chronotopic relationships, demonstrating that heterogenous, even contradictory time-spaces can compose "literary artistic" wholes. As Dickinson gleefully demonstrates here, the centrifugality of poetry emphasizes the opposite, the irreconcilable disparities between one time-space and another. Dickinson's attempt to narrate "It" – some unspeakable experience – leads her to create a paratactical crazyquilt of chronotopes, a narrative composed of narratives that fail not only to tell the story of that experience but even to locate a time-space through which the story could be conceived. The first two lines conjure a post-apocalyptic time-space in which life and death are so hard to distinguish that the speaker is forced to analyze her own posture to tell whether she herself is alive or dead. The next couplet shifts the search for "It" to a chronotope in which "Night" is a condition as difficult to identify as "Death" was in the previous chronotope. In this chronotope too, epistemology has been reduced to brute mechanical fact; it is only the grotesquely childish stuck-out "Tongues" of the "Bells" that enables the speaker to make even the simplest ontological distinctions.

As Miller observes, in poems of this degree of centrifugality, "there is no stable relation between spiritual truth, the facts of existence, and the terms of language" (1987: 39). In fact, the speaker's attempt to determine that "relation" – to define the "spiritual truth" of "It" in terms of language that denotes "facts of existence" such as "Death", "Night" and the speaker's sense of her own body – undermines the chronotopes through which she (and we) normally conceptualize the "facts of existence". When the speaker looks to the primal distinction between life and death to understand "It", she finds herself in a world in which life and death can barely be told apart; when she looks to her own bodily perceptions as a measure, she finds her body morphing wildly under her phenomenological gaze.

But as Miller points out, the centrifugality of Dickinson's language doesn't moot her epistemological efforts; paradoxically, it furthers them, as "[t]hings are perceived and understood through […] cumulative, even contradictory, definition" (1987: 147). Dickinson characteristically carries this tendency to an extreme, but the same statement could be applied to Williams, Whitman and even Keats. Indeed, this method of "definition" is a logical consequence of the chronotopic evanescence generated by the centrifugality of poetic language. Since poets' language is too centrifugal to create stable systems of chronotopic relationships, poets have no way of maintaining coherence or consistency among their chronotopes – and thus the delineation of any aspect of reality becomes, like Keats' definition of beauty in "Grecian Urn", a "cumulative, even contradictory" chronotopic process. In the centrifugal context of poetry, the very failure of chronotopic definition becomes a mode of definition. Each of Dickinson's speaker's failed attempts to delineate "It" brings her closer to the harrowing intimacy required to approach the phenomenon, from the distant impersonality of "Death" and "Night" to the bodily perception of heat and cold, to the precarious reflexivity through which we attempt to "taste" the difference between ourselves and mere versions of our lives:

And yet it tasted like them all,
The figures I have seen
Set orderly for burial
Reminded me of mine,

As if my life were shaven
And fitted to a frame
And could not breathe without a key,
And 'twas like midnight, some,

When everything that ticked has stopped
And space stares all around,
Or grisly frosts, first autumn morns,
Repeal the beating ground;

But most like chaos, stopless, cool,
Without a chance, or spar,
Or even a report of land
To justify despair.
(Fr 355: 379-80)

How does one define or even refer to a state that is "most like chaos", when the very noun "chaos" reduces the overwhelming phenomenon it is intended to denote to tidy demarcation? How can one even know whether one is trying to define a "spiritual truth", a "fact of existence", or the relation between them, when the effort to know itself undermines the chronotopic foundations of knowledge – i.e, that knowledge itself depends on our ability to conceptualize time-spaces in which we can locate and define our epistemological objects?

Dickinson gambles that by intensifying chronotopic evanescence, by using poetic language to stage and restage the spectacle of one time-space being shoved aside by another, she can enact the chronotopic equivalent of negative theology, defining an indefinable time-space by naming the time-spaces that cannot name it. From this perspective, the implicit shipwreck metaphor that emerges in the final stanza is calling attention to the vantage point the previous stanzas have created through their cumulative, contradictory failures to define a vantage point from which to know "It": a vantage point that is defined by the wreckage of the time-spaces through which we attempt to know. "It" can only be known when every attempt to define space and time founders, can only be defined or narrated through language that subjects the reader to that foundering. The failure of the chronotopic vessels that make knowledge possible becomes, here, the beginning of knowledge of what lies beyond them.

This essay cannot conclude, for at best it marks a beginning. By focusing on a few defining features of poetic language – enjambment and prosody – I have tried to suggest how the various degrees of centrifugality of poetic language may affect the "literary artistic" mobilization of chronotopic energy in poetry. This demonstration is

not only based on slender evidence.[20] It also leaves unconsidered the most interesting questions regarding chronotopes and poetry. What, for example, are the chronotopic effects of important elements of poetics such as voice, metaphor, persona, mode of address, and so on? What happens to chronotopic energies in narrative poems whose centripetal force approaches that of prose narrative? And what of the opposite end of the spectrum, poems whose rhetoric is so abstract that their language is essentially achronotopic? By delineating the shortcomings of my account in "Fleshing Out the Chronotope", I hope I have cleared the way for a full exploration of the poetic career of the chronotope.

Endnotes

1. Of course, productive work has also been done on chronotopes in dramatic literature and memoir; there has also been chronotopic analysis of some poetry, though for reasons I will explore below, the chronotope has thus far found much more limited application in poetic analysis.

2. See "Fleshing Out the Chronotope", in which I offer a taxonomy of textual (as opposed to generic) chronotopes. In this volume, what I refer to as "local" chronotopes are called "minor" chronotopes (see Bemong and Borghart).

3. Though I didn't realize it at the time, this assumption reflects the sort of moralizing ideology that often infects critical use of the centripetal/centrifugal binary. Bakhtin, of course, explicitly states that centripetality and centrifugality are interdependent, ideologically neutral forces, equally inherent in and essential to the life of language and the individualities and collectivities for which language provides the medium. In my account, centripetality is implicitly portrayed as a repressive force, centrifugality as a liberating one.

4. Henceforth I will refer to Emily Dickinson's poems following the Dickinson conventions, i.e., the Fr-number followed by the page numbers from the authoritative Franklin edition (1998).

5. A rush to synchronic reading is particularly dangerous in analyzing poetry because most poetry utilizes, and is definitively shaped by, the centrifugal force of linebreaks – specifically, their attenuation of the synchronic force of syntax, which prompts us to read sentences as entire thoughts composed of temporally synchronous elements, into a diachronic process in which the phrase-by-phrase unfolding of language generates a series of tentative readings that displace and revise one another. As I have discussed elsewhere (1994), Dickinson tends to heighten the centrifugal effects of linebreaks through her idiosyncratic use of dashes.

6. Susan Howe's *My Emily Dickinson* (1985), a central work of Dickinson criticism, offers an extended exploration of the intertextual and cultural resonance in "My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun" that profoundly shaped my reading of the poem.

7. Of course, language does not play an identical or equal role in mediating subjectivity and intersubjectivity. As Whorf and Sapir famously argued, individual perception may be shaped by language – witness the experiments that show that native speakers of Australian aboriginal language divide up a color spectrum in very different places than English speakers do. However, anyone who has spent time with preverbal infants knows that subjective perception does not depend on linguistic mediation; humans can, and do, perceive what we have no language for. By contrast, intersubjectivity *does* depend on language. Without language, there is no way to communicate individual perception, no way to externalize or generalize subjectivity, no way to put it into dialogue with the perceptions, the subjectivities, the lives of others.

8. Many poems often self-consciously exploit poetic language's ability to straddle the worlds of pure abstraction and fleshy chronotopic vitality. For example, when Shakespeare famously asks "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day", the sonnet's answers generate a chronotope solely for the purpose of limning the non-chronotopic transcendence of the beloved. As the poem fleshes out the summer's day chronotope, it does so only to define the beloved as that which exists beyond such definable time-space, for no matter how "fair", all time-space must "from fair decline".

9. This generalization may well hold even for most narrative poems, since linebreaks and other poetic devices tend to attenuate chronotope-stabilizing centripetal forces.

10. Since Williams was a frustrated painter with a passionate interest in modernism's impact on traditional representational art, there is no doubt that he was aware of the play between abstract form and concrete representation that he enacts here by splitting "wheelbarrow" across the linebreak.

11. The awkward thud of "water" is a chronotopic effect. Lexically, "rain / water" is directly parallel to "wheel / barrow" – both represent the enjambed division of compound words into their component parts. But whereas the unveiling of "barrow" radically alters our sense of what we are looking at and the time-space implied by it, "water" adds nothing to the implications of rain, and so, for a moment, space and time, which have literally mutated line by line, stop growing.

12. "The Red Wheelbarrow" is also a famous example of the visual element of composition in free verse. Williams' arrangement of couplets emphasizes the physicality of the text, the differential space occupied by three words and one, the instability of this arrangement (if the words were my daughter's building blocks each couplet would topple into incoherence), as well as the whiteness and pervasiveness of the blank space that surrounds them. The white space crowds and permeates the text, turning it into a fragile, fitful effort of language and significance to overcome the semantic blankness of existence – to assert that "so much", or indeed anything at all, "depends upon" the details of the world we wrestle into words.
    Williams' layout makes readerly space – the readers' spatial encounter with the text – part of the experience of the poem. As my painstakingly diachronic reading suggests, the spatiality of the text – the short lines, steep linebreaks and couplets – directly structures our temporal experience of the poem. Even the least expert reader of poetry will read this poem in three- and one-word bursts divided by inexplicable pauses, and experience the halting, stop-and-start quality that is crucial to the poem's more sophisticated effects. In other words, the poem fuses textual space and readerly time, creating what is in effect a chronotope – but a chronotope that exists not in the world of the text (the realm of rain-glazed red wheelbarrows has nothing to do with the extra-diegetic plane of regard from which we perceive the poem's layout) but in the world of the reader.
    Though the fusion of the physical space of the text with temporality of the reading experience that gives rise to such "experiential chronotopes" is common in free verse, it is not ubiquitous. Many free-verse poems minimize experiential chronotopes by using long, more or less regular lines – lines, that is, in which the use of space approaches that of prose. The less the layout of the poem calls attention to itself, the smaller the role of linebreaks in structuring the flow of reading, the less likely a poem is to give rise to an experiential chronotope.

13. Brief as they are, these bits of Williams and Whitman represent much of the range of centripetal and centrifugal force we find in free verse poetry. There are, of course, more extreme examples of both centrifugality and centripetality in free verse, but most fall somewhere in the range these examples delineate.

14. Poetic narratives – that is, narratives which approach the qualities of characterization, plot and so on typical of prose – represent an obvious exception to this generalization. Even in Homeric

epics, though, in which chronotopes can be quite stable and extend for many lines of text, chronotopes tend to manifest locally and paratactically, displacing one another rather than contributing to larger networks of relationship. Authors like Milton and Wordsworth who seek to create the sort of chronotopic complexity we find in prose often find themselves at odds with the centrifugality of their poetic medium, which intensifies parts at the expense of wholes.

15. The conflict between prosody and syntax plays out directly whenever poets use "poetic license" to place words in the "wrong" order to maintain prosodic patterns.

16. Just as free verse poems vary in their degrees of enjambment, prosodically organized poems vary in their degrees of sonic density. Keats – Williams' model when he was young – tends to maximize the sensuous qualities of his language, and thus the centrifugality of his poems. Poets like Robert Frost or Philip Larkin tend to play down those qualities, creating a much more idiomatic, plain-spoken and centripetal poetic language.

17. The promotion of the weak final syllable of "quietness" and the open-ended hiss of the concluding "s" sound make the line, and thus the strangeness of the opening address, seem to linger.

18. Though free verse tends to be less sonically dense than prosodic verse, free verse poets also use sound and stress clustering to increase the centrifugality of phrases and lines. However, in the absence of a regular prosodic structure, those effects tend to be intermittent and fleeting, with linebreaks constituting a much more important means of controlling the speed and coherence – and thus the centripetality and centrifugality – of the poem.

19. It could be argued that this stanza represents not a competition but an example of chronotopic framing, i.e., that the words "far above" signal that the truncated tragic chronotope associated with the world of life is in fact only life as seen from the chronotope of the urn. In this reading, the "happy, happy" aestheticized time-space takes in so little of life that it cannot conceive of an entire human life, or even body. The stanza would thus present not only a view of life as seen from the world of the urn, but an implicit critique of the existential distortion built into the idealized chronotope of the urn-world.

20. The model of the poetic career of the chronotope I offer here is based on examples limited to poems in my native language, English, and to a small fraction of the forms and varieties even within this corpus – for the most part, modern American verse. This narrow evidentiary base means that the model should be regarded as a hypothesis to be tested and contested rather than an authoritative or comprehensive account.

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