Summer 8-2018

Poetry, Points, and Performance: Expanding the Scope of Slam Poetry Analysis

Cara Losier Chanoine

POETRY, POINTS, AND PERFORMANCE:

EXPANDING THE SCOPE OF SLAM POETRY ANALYSIS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Cara Losier Chanoine

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

August 2018

Indiana University of Pennsylvania
School of Graduate Studies and Research
Department of English

We hereby approve the dissertation of

Cara Losier Chanoine

Candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

_____ _____
Kenneth Sherwood, Ph.D
Associate Professor of English, Advisor

_____ _____
Mike Sell, Ph.D
Professor of English

_____ _____
Christopher Kuipers, Ph.D
Associate Professor of English

ACCEPTED

_____ _____
Randy L. Martin, Ph.D.
Dean
School of Graduate Studies and Research

Title: Poetry, Points, and Performance: Expanding the Scope of Slam Poetry Analysis

Author: Cara Losier Chanoine

Dissertation Advisor: Dr. Kenneth Sherwood

Dissertation Committee Members: Dr. Mike Sell
Dr. Christopher Kuipers

This dissertation identifies and illustrates the potential to extend and enrich slam poetry scholarship. Loosely defined, poetry slam is a competition in which a group of poets perform their original compositions in front of a live audience at a designated venue. While extant scholarship has insightfully treated some aspects of slam poetry, the limited scope of this body of work frames the genre in a falsely narrow manner. I argue that expanding the scope of slam poetry analysis can provide a more accurate and complete understanding of the genre. In service of these goals, I develop analytical approaches focused on defining features of slam poetry that have, so far, received insufficient attention, including performative and compositional contexts and the relationships between textual and performative modes.

Because the conventions of slam poetry influence its composition, performance, and reception, I establish these as necessary contextual features to consider in slam poetry analysis, demonstrating this need through an adapted application of Jerome McGann's discussion of radial reading. I also identify the ways in which text and performance function symbiotically within the slam poetry genre, drawing upon Paul Zumthor's theory of mouvance to discuss the significance of recomposition and versioning, ultimately arguing that slam poems are composed and recomposed both within and between modes. Inspired by John Miles Foley's work with slam poetry in *How to Read an Oral Poem*, I use ethnopoetic transcription as a means of analyzing this inter- and intra-modality as a feature of the genre. Finally, I address the ways in which slam poetry analysis can be enriched through the identification of the genre's commonalities with

other, more broadly studied, genres and traditions. Using the African griot tradition, the Basque bertsolaritza competition, and the European improvvisatore tradition as examples, I illustrate how techniques from related genres and traditions can be adapted and applied to slam poetry to expand the scope of slam poetry scholarship moving forward.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: SLAM I AM

On a humid night in August, the basement room at the Cantab Lounge in Boston, Massachusetts is on the verge of breaking fire code. Patrons line the bar and fill in the empty spaces between the seats, creating an amorphous blanket of bodies. People wearing jeans and t-shirts are shoulder to shoulder with those who have purple hair, studded vests, or platform go-go boots. They are every gender. They are every race. Their conversations blend into a homogeneous static as they wait for something to begin on the sparsely furnished stage at the front of the room. This is not a concert. This is not art house theater. This is one of the preliminary bouts of the National Poetry Slam in 2011.

Slam poetry began as an underground phenomenon in the 1980s, and to the general public, it remains a somewhat enigmatic genre over thirty years later. Even literary scholars appear reluctant to initiate slam poetry into the canon of genres worthy of academic analysis. It is likely that there are more extant scholarly works on Emily Dickinson alone than there are on the whole of slam poetry. While scholarship on slam poetry certainly does exist, much of it (often produced by slam poets themselves) is focused on documenting the history of the genre or explaining its features. While this work is valuable in its definitions of the genre, it does not represent the wealth of possibilities slam poetry presents to literary analysis. As a result, slam poetry is currently represented in a falsely narrow manner, one that fails to consider how the very elements that define slam poetry can be employed in its analysis, as well as the ways in which connections to other forms of performative poetry may provide additional analytical fronts. These gaps in critical analysis mislead both scholars and the general public about slam poetry's features as a genre and the ways in which it is related to other genres of performance poetry. My

own work seeks to identify ways in which slam poetry analysis can be extended, with particular attention to the genre's contexts, conventions, media identities, and connections to other performative poetries. Through developing and applying approaches based on these features, I also address the ways in which such extended analysis enables a more complete understanding of how slam poetry's media, contexts, and unique features contribute to meaning.

Of Poets and Gladiators

Because slam poetry is widely considered an underground art form, a brief overview of the genre may be in order before unpacking the claims introduced above. Slam poetry's roots are in mid-1980s Chicago, where "a construction worker named Marc Smith… after tiring of academic readings and good-ol'-boy publishing networks, decided to craft a show that demanded audience interaction and that any person with a poem could participate in" (Woods 18). According to Cristin O'Keefe Aptowicz, Smith "saw poetry being hijacked by academia, and the work being created seemed almost purposefully obtuse and dense" (382). The result of Smith's efforts was an interactive, performative poetry event known as the poetry slam. Nearly every feature of the event was designed to push back against the conventions of the academic poetry reading and publication process.

So what, exactly, is a poetry slam? The answer to this question is complex, since there are several types of poetry slams. I will start with the simplest. A standard individual poetry slam is an event at which a roster of poets (usually not more than ten) compete for scores in hopes of being the overall winner. A panel of random judges, selected from the audience, scores the poems based on content and performance. Variations on this format include national or regional team tournaments, and national individual slams that require prior qualification for participation. Poetry Slam Inc, the official slam poetry organization in the United States, sponsors several

events that fall into these categories, including the National Poetry Slam (NPS), the Women of the World Poetry Slam (WOWps) and the Individual World Poetry Slam (iWPS). Most of these events require participants to win at least one standard individual poetry slam at a slam venue registered through NPS. For example, NPS is a national event (that often also features participants from other countries) in which teams of 4-6 poets from registered venues compete, tournament-style, until a winning team is crowned. Members of these slam teams have to earn their spots by competing at individual poetry slams at their venue of choice. Often times, the slam events leading up to team selection include a series of preliminary slams, one or more semi-final slams, and a final selection slam in which the highest-scoring competitors are chosen for the team. On the other hand, poets compete individually in events like WOWps and iWPS, although participants must still earn their spots. In general, each slam venue registered with PSI may send one representative to each of these events. To select their representatives, most slam venues hold preliminary, semi-final, and final slams, as they do for team selections.

The best way to understand poetry slam as an institution is to observe a slam event in action. To account for the limitations of the printed page, I offer an account of an individual slam I participated in during the summer of 2016. The slam occurred after an open mic and featured reading at Stark Brewing Company, so it was already fairly late in the evening when things got started. During a brief break after the featured reader, all ten competitors drew numbers to determine the order of performance in the first round of the slam. Generally, poets prefer later spots in the lineup because the judges can sometimes take time to "warm up," particularly in the first round. While the judges are encouraged to keep their bases for scoring consistent, it is not uncommon for scores to gradually become higher overall as the slam progresses, a phenomenon referred to as "score creep." I drew the third spot in the lineup, which was not stellar, but could

have been worse. The slam began when the host took the mic and began to orient the crowd to the event. It is customary for hosts to read PSI's "Official Emcee Spiel" at the beginning of each slam because it outlines the rules and conventions for newcomers and serves as refresher for the veterans. Then, the calibration poet was introduced. This poet is affectionately dubbed the sacrifice because they serve as a sort of trial run for the judges. Ideally, the judges are supposed to use their scoring of the calibration poet as a reference point for their scoring throughout the slam. After the calibration poet stepped away from the mic, the judges delivered their scores, on a scale of one to ten, by writing them on miniature whiteboards and holding them up to the host, who bantered for a few moments while the timekeeper and scorekeeper conferred and calculated. In a poetry slam, the timekeeper determines whether the poet has exceeded the three-minute time limit and the scorekeeper records and averages the scores provided by the judges. In a standard poetry slam, with five judges, the scorekeeper drops the high and low score and averages the three remaining scores to determine the final score for each poem. With the calibration poet dispatched, the slam began in earnest.

In the first round, the poets performed in the order dictated by the random draw. My performance earned a lukewarm score, which put my participation in round two in jeopardy, since the five lowest-scoring poets got cut at the end of the first round. There is no standardized structure for the number of rounds and manner of elimination in an individual poetry slam, but this particular venue, Slam Free or Die, generally follows a three-round format, with five poets eliminated in the first round, and two to three poets eliminated in the second round. After the conclusion of the first round, there was a momentary pause in the tension of the competition while the scorekeeper and the host determined the participants and order for the next round. I had noticed that many poets read their pieces from either their phones or a set of printed pages. I

found this odd because poems are judged on both content and performance, so most poets generally memorize their work to maximize their ability to perform. Despite that, these particular judges didn't seem to care whether the poems were memorized or not. Unfortunately, this also meant that they were not particularly impressed by my carefully crafted performance of my poems, setting me on edge as I moved into round two.

In the second round, the poets performed in order of descending scores, with the highest scoring poet going first. With fewer performers, the round progressed quickly, with the host moving both the judges and the scorekeeper at a brisk pace and the audience vociferously expressing both their delight and disdain. At the end of the round, the scorekeeper determined who was moving on by combining each poet's scores from both rounds. While I scored slightly higher in round two, only three poets progressed into round three. Miraculously, I made the cut, and prepared my final poem of the night. At this point, the audience was both excited and exhausted, and the judges looked like they had just emerged from combat. The performance order was determined in the same manner as the second round, and I was performing last because I had the lowest combined score. Although I had the advantage of closing out the competition, I did not win that night. As any slam poet will tell you, losing slams somewhat correlates to the manner in which page poets receive rejection letters from literary journals. It is an inevitability. The event came to a close sometime after midnight, and the crowd gradually dissipated into the night, trailing conversation and cigarette smoke.

Of course, a closer analysis is necessary to understand what makes poetry slam truly unique. Dissecting the individual elements that make up the poetry slam as an event helps to illustrate what distinguishes slam poetry as a genre. To begin with, participants in a standard poetry slam are not handpicked by any sort of authority. Instead, any interested poets are free to

sign up (excepting the cases of regional and National events that require prior qualification, which will be discussed later) for the competition on a first-come, first-served basis ("FAQ-Poetry Slam Inc"). On the surface, this process of participation may not seem much different than a standard poetry open mic, and yet there are key differences. For one thing, a poetry slam is a competition. Tony Medina claims that slam "pits poets against one another in gladiator-like scenarios where they compete for chump change and prestige" (xix). As established, winning a poetry slam can ensure a poet's berth at a PSI event, but it may also garner them a cash prize in the case of standalone buy-in slams where competitors pay to perform. The competitive atmosphere also impacts the way poets view themselves and other competing poets. Whereas participants in an open mic may be likely to develop a sense of fraternity due to shared performance experience, slam poets are naturally divided from their fellow slammers within the context of competition. While slam poets can, and do, support and appreciate each other's work during a poetry slam, they also must, to some extent, view such work as threats to their own success. It is also important to note that the competitive nature of a poetry slam event elevates it beyond the status of a standard open mic. Within the slam community, poetry slams are viewed as main events, often following open mics. In a sense, this is poetry slam's answer to the prestige of an academic poetry reading. However, slam poetry does not bestow such prestige using the same criteria used to select poets to perform readings at universities or bookstores. Scott Woods explains that "the Everyman criticism is necessary in a poetry slam. Slams prove that art meant for people ultimately belongs to people, and proves this to the point that it demands their opinion be made known to be considered a genuine Slam experience" (19). The competing poets may not be laureates or prizewinners, but they are treated with an elevated level of respect because they are doing something that the community recognizes as extraordinary. Poetry slams

often feature poets who might have difficulty securing a reading at a major university. What is more, these poets are evaluated by critics not confined to the academic elite. Slam poetry sends the message that both these poets and these opinions matter, challenging more elitist models of poetry evaluation, performance, and consumption.

The Rules of the Rebellion

Part of what makes a poet's participation in a poetry slam extraordinary is the framework of rules that governs the competition. While poetry slam bucks academia's conventions, that does not mean that they have not come up with some of their own. Any poetry slam event that is affiliated with PSI in any way must adhere to these conventions. Even informal, standalone slams often adopt these guidelines to ensure fair competitions. To begin with, each poet must perform original work, delivered within a three-minute timeframe. If a poem is plagiarized in any way, the poet is disqualified. Additionally, if the poem goes over time, there's a ten-second grace period, followed by a half-point deduction from the score for each additional ten-second interval. For example, a poem that clocks in at three minutes and thirty seconds would receive a one-point time penalty. Officially, the poet must be stopped by the emcee if the poem runs beyond four minutes, but this rule is rarely needed or enforced (Daniel, et al. 30-32). Experienced slam poets are often able to deliver performances within seconds of the time limit, with some even deliberately using the grace period in order to maximize their performance time. Although there is no minimum time requirement and it is possible for poets to score well with very short poems, most slam poems hover in length somewhere around the three minute mark. A final performance caveat is that poets may not use anything that could be construed as a costume or prop. PSI defines a prop as "an object or article of clothing introduced into a performance with the effect of enhancing, illustrating, underscoring, or otherwise augmenting the words of the poem" and a

costume as “any piece of clothing or accessory that is worn on the stage which is not part of the poet’s regular street clothing” (Daniel, et al. 51). The poet’s performance is strictly limited to their vocal and physical inhabitation of their poem. The prop and costume rules have been the source of some controversy in the past. For example, I once attended a slam at which a poet received a props penalty for gesturing using the piece of paper his poem was printed on. However, there are a few, minor exceptions to the props rule. According to PSI, “generally, poets are allowed to use their given environment and the accouterments it offers microphones, mic stands, the stage itself, chairs on stage, a table or bar top, the aisle as long as these accouterments are available to other competitors as well” (Daniels, et al. 30). Some poets take full advantage of this: at the 2009 National Poetry Slam, I saw a group piece performance where the poets used the microphone cords to play double-dutch. All of the expectations and limitations described delineate many of poetry slam’s unique features, and offer insight as to how they might impact both composition and performance in the slam poetry genre.[1]

As far as competitions go, the evaluation methods employed in a poetry slam are distinct and, to some, even shocking. Scholar and slam veteran Scott Woods views poetry slam as a democracy of sorts, claiming that “Everyone criticizes art; we either like the painting or the song or the movie or we don’t. Poetry slams kick up more than their fair share of dust regarding this dynamic. A poetry slam makes that relationship public, and poets are informed in real time, not only by the level of audience participation but by the scores given by randomly chosen audience judges” (19). This is another way in which poetry slam challenges systems of literary evaluation created by the academy. Just as poetry slam enables poets who might not receive scholarly recognition, it also empowers people who might not be viewed as authorities in the evaluation of

[1] Additional rules do apply in the case of team piece performance and team-based slams, and these are covered in “Contextually Frustrated.”

literature. Instead of curated and qualified editors or board members, slam poetry is evaluated by people who are meant to represent the average spectator at an open mic. Oftentimes, judges in poetry slams may know very little about poetry, and may have never previously been to any kind of literary event. The only condition of participation is that the judges must not personally know any of the competing poets. This system of evaluation reinforces the ideology that permeates the identity of slam poetry: that poetry is not just for an elite few but can, in fact, be for anybody.

One of my favorite examples of this democratic system of evaluation in action occurred at a preliminary bout at the 2009 National Poetry Slam in Madison, Wisconsin. It is difficult to describe the National Poetry slam to those who have never attended, but it is somewhat like the poetry version of Comicon or Coachella. Thousands of poets, volunteers, and spectators descend upon the host city, usually localized at a single hotel that serves as a base of operations for the duration of the festival. Open mics, workshops, and other events occur all day at locations throughout the city, with the competitions showcased as main events in the evening. Because there are generally seventy to eighty teams competing at NPS, bouts take place at multiple locations and often run into the early hours of the morning. On a night that I was not competing, I attended a midnight slam where a poet I knew was the bout manager, meaning he was responsible for wrangling the time keepers, scorekeepers, and poets, in addition to selecting judges from the audience. Unfortunately, the late hour of the event made for a thin crowd and the bout manager was not able to find any audience members who weren't affiliated with the competing teams. The slam was delayed while he combed the nearby bars in search of people who would be willing to sit as judges. In the end, he found three homeless men from the YMCA next door and bribed them with beer to get them to participate.

On one hand, stories like this may play a role in the academy's resistance to taking slam poetry seriously. Perhaps some might view this kind of evaluation system as making a mockery of art. It is true that these methods of evaluation are not without their limitations, and it is important to bear in mind that poetry slam scoring is based on a limited and inexpert set of perspectives. The scores in a poetry slam should not be viewed as a legitimate assertion of hierarchy in accordance with literary value and craft expertise. Poetry slam does not assume that a panel of random people in a bar or coffeehouse are the final word on poetry, but it does encourage a broader consideration of both poetry and our responses to it. As a whole, poetry slam sends the message that the value of poetry extends beyond the pages of *The New Yorker* and *Ploughshares*. Complementary to this, the judging process puts into practice the stance that the opinions of the experts or the elite are not the only ones that matter. Only within the context of a poetry slam can three homeless men in a bar wield the same power as a book reviewer for *The New York Times*.

Distorting the Voice

In some ways, it may come as little surprise that scholars have failed to fully identify and interrogate both the full scope of slam poetry's features and the genre's links to other types of performative poetry. As mentioned, slam poetry's self-situation as an anti-academic poetry genre may alienate some of those who might be interested in studying it. Furthermore, slam poetry exists in relation to a complex series of conventions that are challenging to understand without attending a slam poetry event. It can be difficult for those within the community to adequately explain the institution to the uninitiated, resulting in misconceptions of the genre. For example, outside the slam community, slam poetry is often compared to hip hop without sufficient attention to the ways in which it is distinct from that tradition. Having established that many

features of slam poetry mark it as a genre that is distinct and analytically fertile, I return to my prior claims that poetry slam has been academically underrepresented in problematic ways. To support such claims requires both an overview of current and past slam poetry scholarship in addition to an explanation of the problematic impact of such scholarship. Although the sheer amount of scholarship on slam poetry is small in comparison to work done on other performative poetry genres (such as the ballad or the Basque bertsolaritza), a body of critical work does exist. However, the impressions collectively created by this scholarship are misleading as to the depths and scope of the genre.

One potentially problematic feature of slam poetry scholarship stems from the manner in which it is framed. Much extant work devoted specifically to slam poetry (as opposed to simply discussing slam poetry within a larger context or to illustrate a broader genre) seems to be written by members of the slam community. In many ways, this is a very productive phenomenon. Poets provide authentic perspectives on the subject matter based on direct involvement, producing portrayals that are nuanced and accurate. These works can function as points of entry for scholars interested in exploring slam poetry, although they should not be viewed as substitutes for firsthand observations and experiences. However, some of these scholars write primarily from experience, without connecting their ideas to broader, scholarly frameworks. This reinforces the idea that scholarly analysis does not necessarily apply to slam poetry. Part of this is due to the amount of work presented by simply documenting the genre. Many poet-scholars have served primarily as historians. For example, in “Funny Poetry Gets Slammed: Humor as Strategy in the Poetry Slam Movement”, Cristin O'Keefe Aptowicz traces the history of humor in the poetry slam. While she offers several analyses of specific poems and uses research to contextualize her accounts, her article contains no reference to the larger

tradition of humor in performance poetry and misses the opportunity to situate slam poetry within a larger context. Similarly, Scott Woods' mission-statement styled article, "Slam Poetry: The Ultimate Democracy of Art", is entirely focused on illustrating the history and values of the poetry slam through experience and observation. While this article works well to outline the basics of the institution, it fails to connect slam poetry to other performative genres that are politically and socially charged. For example, there is no mention of the Harlem Renaissance or the amoebaean poetry contest as relevant, ancestral contexts. In other cases, the scholar fails to take full advantage of precedents for analyzing features of performative poetry. In "Ragan Fox is a Gay Slam Poet", the author offers a fairly defined overview of the role of embodiment in terms of slam poetry. At a few points, Fox does cite other scholars' views on embodiment, such as those of Mark Doty and Susan Somers-Willett. However, he supports his assertion that embodiment in poetry slam is a testimony of truth primarily through anecdotes, and his own views express a much more literal and reductive view of the significance of performative embodiment than those offered by any of the scholars to whom he refers. Collectively, these examples send the message that slam exists in a vacuum, which could potentially alienate those who might seek to establish it within a larger, literary framework. I do not intend to argue that no poet-scholars ever write broadly about slam poetry, nor do I suggest that the works discussed are not necessary to a comprehensive body of slam poetry scholarship. It is not the responsibility of any single scholar to analyze the slam poetry genre in full. In fact, the articles mentioned above effectively define important contexts and features of the genre, which is a crucial foundation to the further development of slam poetry scholarship. However, with crucial historical documents already in play, scholars can now afford to attend to other features of the genre. Extant works are of clear value, but they are not enough to fully represent the complexities of the genre. If

scholarship more frequently connected slam poetry to larger, literary frameworks, in addition to producing more focused discussions such as those mentioned, it would likely enable and encourage a broader spectrum of future critical works on the genre. Many features of slam poetry, such as its symbiotic textual and performative identities, its performative contexts, and the significance of its links to other forms and genres, have yet to be analyzed in ways that fully illustrate their complexities, and consequently, their significance remains unclear. Identifying and interrogating such features, both in relation to more scholarly popular genres and forms as well as in their own right, has the potential to significantly expand the range of scholarship on the genre. In addition, this broader approach may encourage scholars outside the slam poetry community to take up the subject, which would ultimately enrich the body of work on slam poetry through the provision of a wider variety of perspectives, both internal and external to the slam poetry community.

It is true that some scholars have included slam poetry in critical works on larger categories, such as oral poetry. This is productive in that it validates the genre within an established and active context. This scholarship provides a firm foundation upon which to build a more complex framework of slam poetry analysis. For example, John Miles Foley addresses slam poetry in a very detailed and effectively-contextualized manner in *How to Read an Oral Poem*, essentially inviting slam poetry into the canon of oral poetry. He makes astute observations about specific performances, noting the importance of embodiment, appeals to tradition, and audience participation in the creation of performance. In framing his discussion of slam poetry, Foley states that "poets do write their poems and sometimes their works reach a conventional printed form. But that's not the primary mode. These poems are meant for live performance before an audience..." (156). Foley classifies slam as a "voiced text," a type of oral-

influenced work that is composed on the page but performed orally and received aurally (39). This fosters an understanding of the roles played by text and performance within the genre, which is crucial context for any slam poetry analysis. However, I argue that there is room for thinking beyond primary and secondary modes of both composition and delivery, and that doing so may lead to a more complete understanding of how text and performance function both individually and in concert within the slam poetry genre. I certainly do not dispute that slam poetry is designed for performance, and would even go as far as to say that slam poetry is fully actualized through performance. That being said, to classify slam poetry's mode of expression and reception as only oral/aural trivializes the importance of both the composition process and print versioning. In fact, the publication industry contains some tenuous branches that are specifically geared toward slam poetry, such Write Bloody Press and Timber Mouse Publishing. In addition, while text is indeed the primary mode of slam poetry composition, these poems are sometimes nuanced by moments of oral composition, the product of a given performance and its contexts. To approach slam poetry as only textually composed precludes the potential for understanding a key element of what links it to conventional oral poetry. My own treatment of slam poetry as a multi-faceted genre will use Foley's classification as a point of entry toward a more microscopically-focused analysis of text, performance, and their functions.

Slam poetry also poses a challenge to scholars who seek to analyze content, performance, or form, in part because of its anti-academic self-positioning. With poet-scholars like Woods describing the genre as a means of liberating poetry from the fortress of the ivory tower, it is unsurprising that scholars may feel the need to tread lightly when applying "conventional" methods of literary analysis to slam poetry. Lesley Wheeler also writes about the genre in *Voicing American Poetry*, which traces the history of poetic performance in America and

includes discussions of the elocution contests and lecture circuits of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Wheeler positions slam poetry as an anti-establishment response, stating that "slam seizes contemporary poetry, redefines its audiences and goals, and sounds and embodies it for public consumption" (141). This is very much in alignment with the ideology expressed by the slam community itself. However, Wheeler also expresses some reservations about scholarly analysis of the genre, suggesting that "any academic treatment of slam could be accused of listening *too* closely. The poets I cite at the end of this piece, for instance, might say I am over-hearing their work, applying a kind and intensity of intention inimical to their goals" (142). This viewpoint is particularly distressing in its implication that slam poetry and scholarly analysis are antithetical. In addition, Wheeler's suggestion that analysis might apply an intensity "inimical" to the goals of slam poets suggests a generalization that the genre is not as craft-driven as other poetry or, at worst, that slam poetry is designed to be shallow. This is not to say that Wheeler herself is asserting these viewpoints, but rather that she is acknowledging their roles in the way scholars may approach the genre. Nevertheless, the fact that slam poetry was born of an oppositional response to academic poetry does not mean that the former genre has no place in academia. It was not created for or by scholars, but that is perhaps all the more reason why we should study it. In fact, slam poetry offers a vast landscape for analysis, including links to other, more widely-studied forms of performative poetry. To access this, it is imperative that scholarship moves beyond any limiting prejudices created by the framing ideologies associated with the genre.

One trait of slam poetry that has received a proportionally large amount of academic attention is the genre's potential to serve as a vehicle for expressions of marginalized identity. This is not unreflective of the culture within the slam community. As Somers-Willett writes,

“slam has thrived through the exercise of certain democratic ideals meant to contrast with the exclusive academic conventions” (5). Part of slam's anti-academic rhetoric is the empowerment of previously marginalized voices that may have been, intentionally or not, silenced within the confines of the ivory-tower poetry model. For many slam poets, and larger slam communities, the poetry slam is not just an artistic arena, but also a forum for social reflection and dissent. In fact, Somers-Willett notes that, “as it explores the political possibilities of identity, slam poetry begs to be regarded not only as a performance poetry movement but also—as Marc Smith once suggested—as a social movement” (7). Slam poetry can certainly be analyzed in terms of social movements, or even as forms of social justice activism, and Somers-Willett's work is primarily concerned with the implications of the “slam as social movement” model. As a launching point for this, she draws connections between slam poetry and other socially productive and responsive genres and movements, such as the Black Arts Movement:

> Slam poets, in particular, share much with the performance poets that came before them: they employ live performance, gather at nontraditional venues, express attitudes of political resistance, exercise ideal of nationhood and democracy, and proclaim marginality from dominant and official verse cultures through the performance of identity. In the case of slam poetry, perhaps the pertinent question to ask is: what does this negotiation produce, and what can it reveal about the dynamics of race and identity in American popular verse today (67).

Somers-Willett provides one point of entry for slam poetry analysis, which is productive in light of slam poetry's fringe status in relation to the scholarly literary canon. However, analyzing slam poetry solely as a social movement or a means of expressing marginalized identity also creates reductive ideas about what slam poetry is and how it can be approached.

Of course, Somers-Willett is not the only scholar to focus on the social and political elements of slam poetry. In his article, "Poetry Slams: The Ultimate Democratization of Art," Scott Woods discusses the ways in which slam poetry serves as response to academic poetry, while the eponymously titled "Ragan Fox is a Gay Slam Poet" outlines the impact of embodiment in performing poems with LGBTQI content. While scholars do, and should, continue to write about these kinds of topics, these works would be even more significant in relation to a larger body of scholarship that explores a wider variety of the genre's features. If extant scholarship sends the message that slam poetry is only functional in a sociopolitical manner, then it is unlikely that anyone will be encouraged to explore the unique features of the genre outlined earlier in this chapter. In addition, scholars may miss the opportunity to interrogate the ways in which specific elements of slam poetry, such as accessibility and multimodality, enable such sociopolitical functionalities. I am not arguing that poetry slam does not function as a social movement and a valuable outlet for identity expression, nor am suggesting that that scholarship should not be focused on these areas. Instead, I am arguing that scholarship must additionally address other features and functionalities in order to accurately portray the genre as complex and diverse. Failing to do so reinforces the idea that slam poetry is a "one-trick pony," too simplistic to sustain or deserve scholarly attention.

Perhaps a more insidious implication of this narrow view of the genre is that it can, in some circumstances, place limitations upon the marginalized voices that the poetry slam institution is designed to enable. For example, Canadian poet of color Naila Keleta-Mae describes the ways in which limited analysis can oversimplify the significance of poetry produced by minority poets:

> Many of us who are not white are almost always asked to pinpoint what makes our work representative of whichever cultural signifier peaks the interviewer's interest. Then these interviewers usually collapse our poetry into musings on identity shaped to illuminate the challenge of the said segment of Canadian society. Our hetero, homo, trans, and queer white female and white male colleagues of various classes do not seem to be asked as often to fit into these dominant constructions of Canadian multiculturalism and nationalism. Many of us have also noticed a dearth of substantive analysis of our work (78).

If slam poetry scholarship continues to maintain a tunnel-vision focus on poetry slam as social movement and cultural expression, it runs the risk of perpetuating the kind of reduction Keleta-Mae outlines. As she suggests, to "collapse" a slam poem by a person of color into only an expression of cultural identity or dissent is to disregard many of its other features, leading to shallow or otherwise incomplete analyses. If, as Keleta-Mae suggests, non-minority poets are exempt from this kind of narrow analysis, then it would appear slam poetry scholarship is not accurately reflecting the way in which the poetry slam institution has attempted to, among other things, feature minority voices. While Keleta-Mae is focused primarily upon the experiences of poets of color, the problems she outlines could certainly be applied to other minority voices, as well. If one were to analyze a poem about gender fluidity solely in terms of how it functions as an expression of LGBTQI identity, they would be doing a great disservice to the poem by disregarding the other features that contribute to the poem's meaning and expression, ultimately reinforcing the idea that the literary value of slam poetry is very limited.

As previously stated, addressing this issue within slam poetry scholarship should not entail the excision of social movement and cultural expression from analysis. Instead, I advocate

for a more comprehensive approach to slam poetry scholarship that would allow these features to exist as part of a catalogue of the genre's significant traits. A broader scholastic treatment of slam poetry would also enable scholars particularly interested in social movement and cultural expression to address these areas more fully. For example, a scholar might apply work focused on embodiment to address how the expression of identity in a given slam poem is a partial product of vocal and physical performance. Instead of sending the message that slam poetry's significant features are limited, such scholarship would encourage a more holistic view of the genre.

When considering scholarship relevant to slam poetry, it is also crucial to acknowledge work that relates to the genre less directly. In many cases, approaches to oral and/or performative poetry unrelated to the slam genre can be adapted or built upon. This is a tactic I will employ often in the following chapters. For example, the relationship between slam poetry and its performative contexts has not been fully defined in extant scholarship. However, many scholars have discussed the significance of such contexts in relation to performative poetry in general. In *Distant Reading: Performance, Readership, and Consumption in Contemporary Poetry*, Peter Middleton defines the collective performative contexts of the standard poetry reading as the "scene" of the reading and explains the interpretive significance of each feature of this scene (25). Additionally, both Richard Bauman and Julia Novak address the importance and impact of specific contexts, such as the relationships between audience and poet, the performance venue, and the phenomenon of performative embodiment.

Other relevant, slam poetry-adjacent scholarship includes that which addresses tensions between text and performance. While slam poetry scholarship has yet to fully analyze the significance of the genre's bi-modal identity, extant work on broader and/or related genres and

traditions illustrates how slam poetry scholars might begin to address these features. Both Susan Chambers and Jennifer Esmail discuss the complexities of aurality as it relates to text, noting the inherent aurality of certain textual features, such as line breaks and onomatopoeic phrasing, that contribute to what could be viewed as a form of "hearing in silence" (Chambers 111). This reinforces the idea that text and performance are often interdependent, which is certainly relevant to the composition and transmission process of slam poetry. In *Traditional Oral Epic: The* Odyssey, Beowulf, *and the Serbo-Croatian Return Song*, John Miles Foley describes some of the ways in which text can function in relation to performance, at some points referring to it as a score (5). However, it is also important to consider that primary textual composition does not preclude the possibility of performative composition. Both Paul Zumthor's definition of mouvance and Gregory Nagy's further analysis of the concept illustrate the process through which poems are recomposed through performance. This kind of attention to the synergistic and interrelated functions of text and performance is crucial to the definition of bi-modal genres, such as slam poetry.

Ultimately, slam poetry scholarship is not yet comprehensive enough to provide a sufficiently thorough and accurate representation of the features that distinguish the genre. However, it does serve as a sturdy foundation upon which to build. While some features of the slam poetry genre are still marginalized within slam poetry scholarship, similar features are often effectively addressed in adjacent scholarship. These adjacent approaches can be adapted and applied to fill gaps within slam poetry scholarship.

Opportunities for Growth

It is one thing to delineate the problems associated with past and present slam poetry scholarship, but quite another to attempt to rectify them. In the following chapters, I offer several

avenues for the further development of slam poetry analysis, and also illustrate the value of such approaches through application.

The first chapter, "Contextually Frustrated," concerns itself with the importance of context in the process of analyzing slam poetry. As previously discussed, the unique features of slam poetry are often overly-simplified in cases where scholars attempt to situate the genre within a larger framework. An important starting point is the consideration of slam poetry as a bi-modal genre. A slam poem exists both in text and performance. However, performance outside the realm of drama is a fraught convention within academia. Oftentimes, conventional scholarship views the performance elements of nontraditional performative literary genres as secondary or negligible. In contrast to this, Peter Middleton writes that "meaning is extended, complicated, and sometimes transformed by performance" (28), and applying this line of reasoning to slam poetry assumes acceptance of the idea that a performance of a slam poem offers something different than its print form. I argue that acknowledging these complications (or at least their potential) is crucial to the analysis of any given slam poem.

Because the contexts of a slam poetry performance are likely to be far less familiar to the average literary scholar that the contexts of a slam poem in standard print, I focus primarily upon the ways in which performance analysis can be extended in the case of slam poetry. I situate Jerome McGann's interpretation of "radial reading" at the crux of my prescribed approach. While radial reading requires a consideration of relevant textual contexts in analysis, I adapt this theory to slam poetry performance, arguing the necessity of accounting for slam poetry's unique, performative features.

The first feature to be outlined as a performative context is the audience. As established, the conventions of poetry slam pose the audience as a productive contextual factor in the

"composition" of a slam performance. Because of this, the audience is particularly relevant to the creation of the kinds of complications to which Middleton refers. To illustrate this, I outline the unique role of the audience in the poetry slam, with particular focus on the audience members as evaluators, and explore how this may impact the construction of slam poetry performances both within a poetry slam event and within other contexts. In "Performing the Poet, Reading (to) the Audience: Some Thoughts on Live Poetry as Literary Communication," Julia Novak describes the audience at live poetry events as participants, noting that "it can respond to a performance in various noticeable ways and thereby impact directly on the quality of, and the creation of meaning in, the performance. A live poetry performance, in this sense, is the result of the communication between performer and audience" (373). As I will illustrate, Novak's line of thinking is particularly relevant to slam poetry audiences. I also draw upon Richard Bauman's "heightened awareness of the act of expression" and its impact upon audience and performer to illustrate the ways in which this context helps to produce the performance (11). This chapter also includes a practical application of this approach to specific poetry slam events as a means of demonstrating the analytical value of considering the audience as a contextual factor.

A primary distinction between the printed text of a slam poem and its live performance is the lack or presence of the performing body. To consider the analytical possibilities of slam poetry text and performance in concert, it is necessary to understand how embodiment impacts meaning. As previously mentioned, Ragan Fox argues that embodiment in a slam poetry performance provides a sort of literal representation of the poem's "truth." While I push back against this as problematic in a number of ways, I do use some of Fox's ideas to illustrate the impact that embodiment has on the meaning of the poem. Novak's description of how poetry performance is distinct from other types of performance is a bit more aligned with my own

approach: “the poet-performer presents him-or herself rather than representing a fictitious character. S/he presents his/her own text and thus performs authorship” (364). I argue that performance of authorship is a more widely applicable type of authenticity than the assertion of truth that Fox proposes. Because of slam poetry’s conventions, which demand that poets perform their own original work, the very act of performing a slam poem is a claim to authorship. This contextual feature of the genre creates parameters within which embodiment can be analyzed.

However, I ultimately argue that a comprehensive treatment of performative embodiment within the genre must extend beyond issues of authorship and truth. Consequently, I outline several ways in which analysis can be productively extended. First of all, performative embodiment creates paratextual and/or paralinguistic features that contribute to meaning. Ultimately, these break down into vocal and physical elements of performance. I use Taylor Mali’s “Like totally whatever, you know?” and Mike McGee’s “An Open Letter to Neil Armstrong” to illustrate how vocal and physical performance elements extend and create meaning. Also of interest is the case of ironic embodiment, in which the body on the stage is at odds with the content of the poem in some way. Patricia Smith’s performance of “Skinhead” serves as a launching point for discussing approaches to this type of embodiment, in addition to what they might yield. Other features that complicate standard concepts of authorship and truth include anthropomorphic speakers, such as the piano in Shira Erlichman’s “The Piano Speaks,” or situations in which the performing poet deliberately separates themself from the speaker and/or the content of the poem, as illustrated by Anis Mojgani’s “Direct Orders.” Analyses of the aforementioned poems illustrate how embodiment can create meaning in these scenarios.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that the audience is not the only social context of a poetry slam event. Because a poetry slam is a multi-participant competition, it is often

necessary to view an individual slam poem as part of a larger whole. I argue that an analysis of slam poetry should address how (or if) the performances of other poets in the event impact the performance of the poem being studied. Even if the performance occurs at an open mic, or other non-competitive event, the identity of slam poetry as a genre is still tied to the competitive framework of the poetry slam. To illustrate and explain these points, I rely upon Somers-Willett's and Wheeler's descriptions of poetry slam events and their intra-event social contexts. As examples, I analyze other poets as context across three fronts: the individual slam, the team slam, and the team piece performance. I draw upon my own experiences in poetry slam, as well as insights offered by the national organization, Poetry Slam Inc, to illustrate the ways in which inter-poet dynamics impact performance in individual and team slam situations. To demonstrate the interplay that takes place within a team piece, as well as the impact of such interplay upon performance, I present an analysis of the team piece "Proper Noose," by the Omaha Slam Team.

While my first chapter establishes performative contexts as crucial elements of slam poetry analysis, my second chapter, "Page and Stage as Conjoined Twins," emphasizes the importance of slam poetry's bi-modal identity. I argue that the relationship between a slam poem's textual and performative manifestations is productive in the creation of the poem as a whole, and that a combination of textual and performative analysis is necessary to, but has been absent from, the scholastic treatment of slam poetry. Additionally, I discuss and illustrate the application of established approaches to meet these ends. I also highlight the outcomes of such applications, and how they may enable a more comprehensive understanding of slam poetry.

I use Foley's explanations of voiced text as a branch of orally-influenced poetry as a starting point to discuss the productive, partially symbiotic relationship between text and performance in slam poetry and suggest that an understanding of the slam poetry genre requires

an understanding of this relationship. Using specific text/performance relationships as illustrating examples, I then identify and explain the ways in which elements of performance depend upon or reflect elements of the text. Ultimately, I argue that these connections support the relevance of multimedia versioning to slam poetry analysis.

Accordingly, slam poetry analysis should address the symbiotic ways in which text and performance interact, but how does one get to that point? Anthony Webster and Paul Kroskrity suggest that ethnopoetic theory can enable the "hearing" of traditionally marginalized voices, such as those of primary oral cultures (4). What seems to be implied here is an attention to accuracy, which ethnopoetics addresses through acknowledging and responding to the challenges posed by transcribing an oral performance. While slam poetry may not qualify as marginalized voice, it does exemplify the challenges ethnopoetics explores. In *How to Read an Oral Poem*, Foley illustrates the ways in which slam poetry performances extend beyond conventional text versions by creating ethnopoetic transcriptions that symbolically communicate non-textual elements such as sonic dynamics, pacing, and elements of physical performance. I argue that such transcriptions not only illustrate performative actualities, but can also illustrate the ways in which text and performance are interdependent. Ethnopoetic transcriptions of slam poems in live performance or on audiovisual record are useful tools when analyzed alongside conventional texts because such an analysis allows the scholar to consider how the non-textual elements are related to the textual elements. For example, performative pacing can often be strongly influenced by line breaks and stanza breaks. To illustrate the value of this technique, I create ethnopoetic transcriptions of several slam poems, and analyze these in relation to both audiovisual records and standard print versions of each poem. My primary focus is on how both

the process and the result of such an analysis elucidate specific, productive connections between text and performance.

In my third chapter, "Something Borrowed," I build upon the framework of analysis set up in "Page and Stage as Conjoined Twins," with particular attention to specific approaches to slam poetry analysis and how they are productive. Whereas chapter two focuses primarily upon applying existing analytical approaches to slam poetry, this chapter aims to identify elemental connections between slam poetry and other performative poetry traditions, genres, or forms. My purpose in doing so is to identify the ways in which these traditions, genres, and forms have been analyzed and illustrate, through example, the ways in which these same techniques could be applied to slam poetry. I argue that these techniques could be integrated into an analytical approach that focuses on the textual and performative duality of slam poetry, which would ultimately enable scholars to represent the genre more accurately and thoroughly. In addition, the analyses in this chapter situate slam clearly in relation to other traditions, genres, and forms, reinforcing the idea that slam poetry analysis is not irrelevant beyond its own genre.

Many oral and oral-influenced poetries are viewed in terms of how they function as historical records or reflections. Because the social context of slam poetry includes literacy across multiple media, scholars may not necessarily consider how slam poems reflect and document history. In fact, slam poems often capture unconventional or marginalized perspectives that may add texture to the standard historical narratives created by conventional methods of documentation such as journalism. To explore how a scholar might interrogate this feature of slam poetry, I introduce a much more ancient tradition, that of the griot. I draw upon Daniel Banks's explanation of conventions of African Orature to illustrate the unique ways in which traditions like the griot epics are historically responsive and preservative. D.T. Niane analyzes

the practical and social roles of the griot in the opening essays of Niane and Pickett's translation of *Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali*, which I use to more specifically define the griot tradition within the larger context of African Orature. From there, my discussion expands to include Lorenzo Thomas's analyses of works produced by poets of color leading up to the Black Arts Movement. Thomas explains how features such as linguistic style reflect social norms, literary trends, and other historically relevant contexts within these more contemporary incarnations of the griot tradition. I argue that this line of analysis can also be applied to slam poetry by applying it to Taylor Mali's "What Teachers Make," a slam poem about attitudes toward and realities of being a teacher at the turn of the twenty-first century. I examine the ways in which both textual and performative features can be read as responses to and documentations of social norms, pervasive attitudes, and other features of time and place.

In addition to reflecting history, many performative poetries are also viewed as socially responsive and interactive. In the case of slam poetry, the ways in which the genre can be "read" as socially responsive depend, in part, upon the features of its bi-modal identity. This raises the question of how to connect social responsiveness to such features—fortunately, slam poetry is not the only socially responsive genre or tradition to exist in both print and performance. The European improvvisatore tradition of the Romantic era serves as a precedent. To define the nuances of the tradition, I draw primarily upon the work of Angela Esterhammer, one of the most prolific scholars on the subject. Esterhammer explains the conventions and significance of the improvvisatore tradition in the nineteenth century, including the ways in which the tradition was portrayed in fiction. One such fictionalization, Germaine deStael's *Corrine, or Italy,* serves to illustrate some of the conventions to which Esterhammer refers. Of particular interest is Esterhammer's analysis of how the rise of print media during the time of the improvvisatore

tradition created multiformity that both enriched and complicated the social role of these improvisations. While slam poetry was created within a culture of both print and digital media, its capacity for social response and reflection is very much dictated by its own bi-formal identity. As is the case within the improvvisatore tradition, the relationships between and functionalities of text and performance create complexities that must be attended to in any thorough analysis of the genre. To practically illustrate this, I address the features discussed primarily in relation to text and performance versions of the poem "34" by Patricia Smith. This piece is part of Smith's collection *Blood Dazzler,* which focuses on experiences related to Hurricane Katrina in 2005. My analysis focuses on ways in which both textual and performative features can be read as socially responsive and/or reflective.

The performance component of slam poetry's identity, and even the textual component, is heavily defined by the framing influence of the poetry slam as an event-based institution. Even though slam poetry as a form has moved to extend beyond the boundaries of the poetry slam event, most of the criteria used to define slam poetry originated within the poetry slam. Therefore, I argue that these conventions comprise a necessary context in the analysis of slam poetry. While "Contextually Frustrated" addresses specific ways in which these contexts impact composition and performance, this section is designed to demonstrate how scholarship can approach individual slam poems as part of a larger, literary entity (the competition) and to outline the ways in which such an approach further defines the slam poetry genre. To establish a basis for this kind of analysis, I examine how scholars have approached two other performative poetry traditions that feature competition: the amoebaean poetry contest of ancient Greece and the longstanding Basque bertsolaritza.

While ancient Greek performance most certainly predates digital documentation, many scholars have identified references to and manifestations of the amoebaean poetry context within extant works. For example, Janet Fairweather presents a convincing argument for interpreting the Gallus Papyrus as a fragment of an amoebaean poetry contest, while Dana Burgess explains how the poetry of Catullus addresses the contest through its content. The ideas presented by these authors are used to define the tradition and its competitive framework and also illustrate ways in which analysis of the competitive framework informs these scholars' understandings of the tradition as a whole and the specific texts upon which they focus.

While the bertsolaritza differs from the amoebaean poetry contest in its currency, its roots are almost as ancient as those of the poetry contest. I use Joxerra Garzia's "History of Improvised Bertsolaritza: A Proposal" to establish the features and contexts of the bertsolaritza competition. The elements Garzia describes also serve as focal points in an analysis of the competition itself. John Miles Foley's "Basque Oral Poetry Championships" serves as an example of how a specific competition can be meaningfully documented and discussed, and I emphasize the ways in which his analyses reflect the features established by Garzia. To demonstrate the value of such approaches in relation to the slam poetry genre, I apply these techniques to specific performances and events, explaining ways in which my analyses support a more precise and thorough understanding of the poetry slam competition and its significance within the genre.

In these chapters, I first and foremost seek to illustrate what can be gleaned from a broader analytical approach to slam poetry. I also aim to emphasize the value of such insights and the ways in which they can enrich the current body of slam poetry scholarship. My own analyses are designed to establish the significance of building upon productive approaches by

identifying and attending to features that have previously received limited attention or have been overlooked altogether. In addition, they support the value of continuing to connect slam poetry to other performative poetries, not only for the sake of legitimacy through contextualization, but also for the purpose of using these links to better understand and more vigorously discuss the slam poetry genre. Accurate and comprehensive representation of the genre requires analysis that acknowledges the full spectrum of slam poetry's features.

CHAPTER 2

CONTEXTUALLY FRUSTRATED

To study slam poetry is to study its contexts. Excepting the New Critics, this might seem like common sense to most literary scholars, but slam poetry is frequently decontextualized when scholars privilege text over performance (or vice versa) or fail to comprehensively address the contexts of these components. Of performance poetry, Lesley Wheeler writes that "no one medium, even print, can offer the single, real poem" (13), suggesting that hybrid genres of text and performance require a multimedia-based analytical approach. This is nothing new to the study of performed or voiced, texts. However, I argue it is equally important to consider the contexts of the different media in which the poem exists, particularly in relation to slam poetry. Generally speaking, this would entail a contextual analysis of the text and performance of a given slam poem.

Jerome McGann asserts that the body of a text is not exclusively linguistic (13), a claim which he addresses in part through his radial reading approach, defined as the "decoding of one or more of the contexts that interpenetrate the scripted and physical text" (119). McGann's examples of radial reading include looking up antiquated terminology, referencing appendices, and filling in relevant historical or cultural gaps in knowledge through research. He also acknowledges that such analysis is unlikely to be foreign to a literature scholar, noting that "what is called 'scholarship' is one territory—highly specialized to be sure—where radial types of reading are continually being put into practice" (120). While I wholeheartedly advocate radial readings of slam poetry texts, I also think it important to bear in mind that they address only half the subject matter in the case of slam poetry analysis. Because a slam poem exists in both text *and* performance, any textual analysis must be complemented by performance analysis in order

to avoid decontextualizing the poem by separating the media that identify it (of course, this does not apply in cases when the media are deliberately separated for analysis without the goal of presenting one or the other as independently representative of the poem as whole). To enable performance analysis that is as productive as radial reading is in the case of text, I suggest that McGann's interpretation of radial reading could be loosely applied to performance, as well. Para-performative features of slam poetry, such as characteristics of and differences between forms, framing conventions of the genre, and audience roles, significantly impact meaning, potential for interpretation, and other defining elements. In this chapter, I discuss several key contexts of slam poetry analysis, with a primary focus on performance. I seek to illustrate the value of insights yielded through radial performance readings that incorporate these contexts, with particular emphasis on contexts that are unique to slam poetry. While I treat text as a secondary focus in this chapter, I do so to emphasize the importance of performance analysis and situate it in relationship to textual approaches that may already be familiar to scholars, not to suggest that performance should be privileged over text (in fact, a later chapter outlines the importance of analyzing the ways in which text and performance overlap and connect in slam poetry). "Standard" textual analysis strategies are widely applicable to slam poetry analysis, whereas the performance contexts and approaches are likely to be new terrain.

Boo, Hiss, Cheer: The Audience as Performative Context

The audience is clearly a relevant context of any performed literature, but takes on special significance in poetry slam. This raises the question of how audiences impact the performance of slam poetry. Julia Novak writes that poetry performance is the product of the audience, the text, and the "poet-performer." She also suggests that the audience can impact a performance in progress through its response. It is possible that slam poetry exemplifies this

stance more literally than any other genre of performance poetry. To illustrate why, I offer a brief overview of the audience role in the poetry slam, a type of event that marks slam poetry's place of origin.

In alignment with slam's "poetry for the people" ideology, poetry slam events are generally held in easily-accessible public places, such as bars or coffee shops. This is generally conducive to amassing more diverse audiences than might be found at an academic poetry reading held on a college campus, and this diversity reflects the genre's commitment to empowering both non-academic poets and audience member critics. This is not to say that no poets and/or audience members are academically affiliated, but rather that the fields of performance and spectation are not biased towards academia.[2] Consider, for example, Brewed Awakenings coffeehouse, home of Untitled Open Mic and the Lowell poetry slam. On a warm evening in April, the small space quickly fills to capacity with handfuls of teenagers, the veterans who have been attending for years, and the newbies. Some audience members are avid poets or poetry consumers, but some are not. Some have even stumbled upon the event by accident in their quest for a fair-trade iced latte. This diversity matters, because the audience has a very active role to play in the poetry slam event. Before the event begins, while the high-ceilings still reverberate the synthesis of many conversations, the host asks for volunteers from the audience to serve as judges for the slam, illustrating perhaps the most direct way in which the audience may impact the performance.

According to the judging guidelines provided by Poetry Slam Inc. (the governing organization of slam poetry competitions in the United States), judges are asked to assess both

[2]In fact, many of the historian-scholars so far discussed seem to implicitly suggest that, if any bias exists, it favors the anti-academic.

content and performance, assigning a score of one to ten to each poem performed in the slam. The judges, preferably unknown to the slam competitors, are encouraged to be objective, resist audience and/or poet pressure, and "trust their gut," but are given no special training beyond that, exemplifying Scott Woods' point when he describes poetry slam as an artistic democracy.

Richard Bauman notes that performance of verbal art, such as poetry, creates a "heightened awareness of the act of expression" (11). This is true not just for the audience members, who are essentially consuming the expression, but also for the performer, who is creating it. To take this further, the audience-member-as-assessor role within the context of slam poetry creates a unique dynamic between the audience and the poet. To begin with the audience, poetry slam judges are asked to engage with performance in a very specific way. Whereas a standard audience member at a poetry open mic might engage with a performance in a more passive manner without necessarily considering how their interpretations could be articulated and quantified, the judges in a poetry slam have to assign numerical value to their opinions, and they have to do so quickly. The poet also experiences unique awareness of performance as a result of the audience-as-assessors phenomenon. For the poet, the audience response takes on greater significance than it might in a standard poetry slam. As Lesley Wheeler writes, "slam poets try mightily to impress their non-specialist addressees" (142). The audience is in charge of who advances and who falls by the wayside, meaning that the poet must observe and respond to their reactions in order to be successful. For example, if a poet competing in a poetry slam notices that the judges respond well to humor as the slam progresses—both in terms of verbal and nonverbal reactions, as well as scoring—then that poet is likely to play up the humor of their own poem in performance, using elements such as tone of voice, pacing, or even last-minute content changes to accomplish this. A seasoned slam poet may even be able to adjust their

performance “midstream” in response to the reactions of the judging audience members. In these ways, the judges can be viewed as “shapers” of a given slam poetry performance.

Of course, the judges aren’t the only audience members who wield power in a poetry slam event. For starters, consider how a slam poetry audience differs from the audience at, say, a standard, academic poetry reading. When I was an undergraduate, I attended many school-sponsored poetry readings featuring past poets laureate and other accomplished authors. These occurred in recital halls, usually with the poet behind a podium. The audience was generally silent while the poems were read, applauding politely after each one. It should be noted that I prize these experiences, and am by no means disregarding the value of such readings. I simply offer this example as a contrast to standard audience etiquette during a poetry slam. The audience plays such an active role in your average poetry slam that their participation is even addressed in the official “MC Spiel” created by Poetry Slam Inc. Hosts read variations of this document at the beginning of every poetry slam event, in part encouraging the audience to “Let the judges and the poets know how you feel about the job that they are doing” and “try to sway the judges” (Daniel et al. 28). Wheeler suggests that “the spiel sets a precedent for audience participation that goes well beyond the representative votes of five amateur judges chosen from the crowd” (142).

Shrieks of glee, boos of disappointment, snaps, and bellows of “come on, poet” are audience-response staples at poetry slam events, to the shock and eventual delight of the uninitiated. While the brand of audience participation during a poetry slam is distinct in many ways (as has been, and will be, discussed), it also fits alongside established models of audience participation in the more general field of performative poetry. Novak describes the audience at a live poetry event as participatory, explaining that “it can respond to a performance in various noticeable ways and thereby impact directly on the quality of, and the creation of meaning in, the

performance. A live poetry performance, in this sense, is the result of the communication between performer and audience" (373). While this line of thinking applies to all poetry performances, the prescribed role of the slam poetry audience allows for very specific kinds of participation that are distinct from other types of performances, such as the academic reading. To begin with, the non-judging audience members are actively encouraged to "sway" the judges through their responses, giving even the non-judging audience members a "voice" within the framework of the competition. While the judges are encouraged to avoid audience bias, it is inevitable that audience responses will factor into the judging to some degree because such reactions are, essentially, performances that demand response. Because judge response shapes performance, audience response indirectly impacts performance. Of course, the general audience also impacts performance more directly, because audience members are specifically asked, in the MC Spiel, to comment on the performance through their responses. Because of this convention, the performing poet may view audience response as more of an evaluation than they otherwise would, even if it is not as concrete an evaluation as a judge score. As a result, slam poets often use audience responses as barometers of sorts to determine what kinds of poems are going over "well," tweaking their own performances accordingly.

To practically illustrate how audience impacts performance, I return to Brewed Awakenings, the cramped coffeehouse in Lowell, Massachusetts, where a slam is about to begin. Alex, the host, set the tone as he all but yelled the PSI Official MC Spiel out into the crowd—he barely needed the microphone. After introducing the judges and explaining their role to the audience, he claimed "Judges, you are the smartest motherfuckers here," reminding everyone in attendance, including the competing poets, that these glorified audience members wield all the power in terms of who wins and who loses. It was a small slam, with only three competing poets,

but the stakes were still high, as only two of them would be selected to participate in slam team selection semi-finals later in the year.

One thing worth noting in considering how the judges impact performance is the fact that this example was a relatively high-scoring slam. No judge offered up anything below a seven and, although the rest of the audience still emphatically booed the lower scores, this had a clear impact on the performances the poets delivered. For example, the poets seemed to feel comfortable taking more risks than they might in a lower-scoring slam (to give you some basis for comparison, I once competed in slam in which a judge awarded one poem a three—not mine, fortunately for my team). One poet, M., performed a very brief but beautiful poem in the first round, hemmed in with carefully crafted imagery. His delivery was confident, but his vocal and physical performance were very understated. It was not the kind of performance you frequently see in a poetry slam; it is what most might view as a calculated risk. However, his was the second-highest score in the first round, trailing the high score by only a point or so. In the second round, he delivered a poem similar in length, style, and performative conventions, apparently playing off the solid response his first poem received from the judges. If he had scored poorly in the first round, he might have changed his delivery style, perhaps according his performance more with the high-scoring performances of the night.

In higher-scoring slams, not only are poets likely to take more risks, but they may also deliver performances that are more performatively relaxed. For example, E. was the first competing poet of the night at the Lowell slam, and his delivery very much mirrored the low-key, stream-of-consciousness content of his poem. While it is common for slam poets to memorize their work to maximize their performance in competition, E. read from the page and made little effort at eye contact. His vocal dynamics were relatively flat, and his physical

performance was virtually nonexistent. While he did receive the lowest score in the first round, it was still only a handful of points away from the high score. By no means was he out of the running. As was the case with M., E. delivered a second-round performance almost stylistically identical to his first. Had he scored lower in the first round, he may have felt the need to alter certain elements of his performance based on what was scoring well. He may have been motivated to rely less on the printed page, or perhaps he would have incorporated more vocal dynamics into his delivery.

Both examples illustrate the ways in which the judges can impact a given performance within the context of the poetry slam, but the Lowell slam at Brewed Awakenings also illustrates how the non-judging audience members impact performance by eliciting responses from both the performing poets and the judges. For instance, the crowd at Brewed Awakenings on the night in question included a substantial number of high school students (in case there was any doubt, two of them asked each other to the prom on the open mic). This demographic came into play when L., one of the slammers, performed about suicide. Because poets only get three minutes to perform each poem before they start racking up score penalties, it is uncommon for a competing poet to waste precious seconds on prefacing a poem. Oftentimes, poets do not even offer the title. However, L. prefaced her poem with what pop culture would call a trigger warning, making clear that the poem would deal with suicide. It is likely that this nod to controversial content was influenced by the number of young people in the audience, serving as an illustration of one way that audience can impact the very creation of performance. Had L. been performing for an entirely adult audience, she may have omitted the disclaimer, in accordance with the predominant social attitude (be it accurate or not) that adults require less shielding than teenagers from topics like suicide.

The performance L. delivered was not the only evidence of audience impact that night. At poetry slams, it is not uncommon for the audience to develop a sort of collective voice, especially since audience members are tasked with trying to "sway" the judges. This was certainly the case at Brewed Awakenings during the slam in question, where the audience exuded an unusually genuine vibe of enthusiasm and support. While there are no strict codes that dictate how the audiences should respond at a slam poetry event, the scope of the responses at Brewed Awakenings demonstrated some enduring trends. At many points, the crowd demonstrated their attention through their murmurs of enjoyment and intermittent snaps (a poetry slam staple, designating both approval and also support during botched performances). Particularly well-received performances were met with cries of "come on, poet!" at various points throughout the slam, a common refrain designed to both bestow approval and egg the poet on. I talked to some regulars about the supportive nature of the crowd and, from their responses, got the impression that this was somewhat characteristic of the venue. The audience at Brewed Awakenings that night impacted performance in a few ways. First of all, the demonstrations of attentiveness and support served to put the poets at more ease than they might have been before a stoic or otherwise undemonstrative audience. During their performances, the poets engaged in a sort of conversation of responses with the audience. For example, sometimes a poet would smile at a gesture of approval, or pause to allow for a verbal response to play out. This perfectly exemplifies Novak's assertion that a live poetry performance is produced by both the poet and the audience.

However, it is also important to remember that, within the context of a poetry slam, poets are pandering for more than the gratification of audience approval. This is where the interplay between judges and non-judging audience members comes in. As previously established, the

non-judging audience's job is not only to respond to the poets, but also to respond to the scoring. This often contributes to the aforementioned collective voice assumed by audiences at some poetry slams. Banding together is often the most effective way for the audience to be heard in their protests and affirmations, the best way for them to convince the room that their opinions matter as much as those of the judges. As mentioned before, the April slam at Brewed Awakenings was relatively high-scoring, and this could be attributed, in part, to audience response. Because the audience at this slam was, by nature, supportive and relatively generous in their praise, they did not take kindly to low scores that could be translated as criticism of the poets. Whenever the scores dipped below the 8.0 mark, there were cries of outrage and even flat out boos. One audience member yelled "Listen!" at the judges every time he felt a score was too low. The judges in any poetry slam are, of course, only human, and regardless of how much they are told to ignore the audience, it is unreasonable to expect that this kind of prolonged heckling will not impact their behavior, either consciously or subconsciously. Having established that the general audience impacts the judging, one might ask how that link is connected back to the performance. However, as previously established, the judging does impact both what and how poets perform. If the non-judging audience impacts the judging, it indirectly impacts performance, also.

So far, I have illustrated that the relationship between the poet and the audience impacts performance in precise ways that are often unique to the slam poetry genre. However, audience response may also impact spectator perception of the poem, which is worth considering in analysis. Because the poetry slam institution essentially quantifies the value and/or quality of the art involved, spectators are naturally encouraged to respond in kind. Arguably, all artistic consumption involves an element of evaluation, whether overtly or subconsciously. However,

poetry slam shines the spotlight on this part of the process more so than other genres. Because the audience members are, collectively, viewed as assessors within the context of poetry slam, it is natural for spectators to view their responses as evaluations. As an individual audience member, it is easy to accept that a poem that scores well and receives a boisterous audience response is "better" art than one that scores poorly and garners only silence from the audience. It is important to keep in mind, though, that these audience assessments are not the product of extensive analysis, but rather the product of "gut" responses to content and performance. The ways in which judges define "good" content and performance is entirely subjective, with the conventions of slam poetry offering no additional guidance or restrictions. In many ways, the score a slam poem receives should be viewed as the beginning of its analysis, as opposed to its end. Consequently, scholars should not view such assessments as absolute. Instead, it can be worthwhile to interrogate the motivations for different responses as a means of better understanding a poetry slam event, as well as the institution as a whole.

To further clarify audience response in a poetry slam, it is necessary to grasp a few elements of slam ideology. Susan Somers-Willett writes that "slam's emphasis on diversity, inclusion, and democracy have resulted in a "pluralism" among its poets…As it explores the political possibilities of identity, slam poetry begs to be regarded not only as a performance poetry movement but also—as Marc Smith once suggested—as a social movement" (7). This association between slam poetry and social justice often impacts audience expectations at poetry slam events. Poems about oppression, marginalized identity, and current national or global crises tend to be most highly rewarded with favorable audience responses. For example, Somers-Willett writes that "because of slam's liberal leanings and system of public critique and reward, poets condemning racism may be applauded for their writing, performance, and message, but

they may also be rewarded in part because the audience does not want to appear racist" (80). From an analytical perspective, this kind of attention to audience motivation can be enlightening. For example, if a slam poem about a conventionally white experience scores poorly in front of a predominantly black audience, this may not be so much a reflection of the quality of the poem as it is the tastes and perspectives of the audience members. In analyzing a performance, factors that may impact observable audience biases or tastes could be worthwhile context to consider in understanding how audience response may have shaped said performance.

On paper, the audience judges only the quality of the content and performance, but in practice, there are clearly some unwritten factors that come into play and impact audience assessment. For example, if a poem about using gender-neutral bathrooms receives a higher score and better audience response than a personal coming-of-age poem, it is not a guarantee that the audience genuinely felt that the former poem was better than the latter. Most slam poets are very much aware of the unwritten assessment criteria and, in performance, will often exploit elements of their poems that are likely to appeal to the ethics of their audience. These ethics shift depending on the audience, creating diversity between performances. For example, a white poet performing a poem about police brutality might deliver a very different performance before a predominantly white audience than they would before a predominantly black audience. In this way, even something as specific as audience demographics impacts performance when it comes to slam poetry.

The unwritten assessment criteria of slam poetry also form the basis of one of the genre's more problematic elements, namely the validity of assessing poetry in a quantifiable way through the use of undeniably reductive and unregulated means of evaluation. It is impossible for any judge to thoroughly analyze a slam poem in the five to fifteen seconds the host may give them to

assign it a score. Furthermore, the criteria judges are asked to use in their evaluations are extremely broad and undefined, fostering evaluative inconsistency between judges. Some scholars may view these elements of evaluation as ineffective, overly simplistic, and evidentiary of slam poetry's inability to take its own art seriously. However, it is important to acknowledge that slam poetry does not present its system of evaluation as a nuanced, thoughtful analysis of literature. Instead, it is designed to empower non-academic consumers of poetry. In creating the poetry slam, Marc Smith intended for this system to democratize poetry analysis and evaluation, as explained by Cristin O'Keefe Aptowicz: "By giving these randomly chosen audience members the role of poetry judges, the poetry slam was telling the public that their idea of poetry was just as valid as academia...random citizens were given the power to let a poet know when a poem wasn't connecting with them via their score" (382). The perspectives provided by the scoring in a poetry slam can be viewed not as a replacement of in-depth analysis, but as an additional model of consumption.

Under ideal circumstances, poetry slam would, indeed, reflect the poetry tastes of the general public, as opposed to the academy. However, it is clear that that outcome of a poetry slam is not solely produced by the unvarnished opinions of the audience and the judges, as Marc Smith might have initially intended. Prejudices unrelated to the art itself[3], social justice anxiety, and other factors almost always impact the outcomes of poetry slams, threatening the validity of the slam-based model of assessment, and potentially serving as one reason why academia has seemed to look down its aquiline nose at slam poetry on the whole. Part of the problem is that poetry slam itself seems to be conflicted about the validity of its own scoring system. In its

[3]For example, judges are not required to justify their scores, and there is nothing to prevent a judge from scoring a poem poorly because they think the poet looks mean or knocked over their drink at the bar. Under ideal circumstances, this would never happen, but circumstances are rarely, if ever, ideal.

frequently asked questions section, the Poetry Slam, Inc. website lists the unofficially motto of slam as "the points are not the point, the point is poetry." While this is a nice sentiment, the reality is that the hierarchy of the national poetry slam scene is very much based on points. For example, Poetry Slam, Inc. (PSI) hosts a number of national and international competitions each year, including the Women of the World slam (WOWps), the Individual World Poetry Slam (iWPS), and the National Poetry Slam (NPS). The competitors are representatives or teams from registered slam venues, meaning that you have to win at least one slam at your local venue in order to compete at these national events. While it is possible to register as an independent competitor at some of the individual events, the financial burden of travel, lodging, and registration makes it difficult for many poets to compete in these events without the backing of a registered slam venue, since selected teams and representatives are usually at least partially funded by the venue. This is just one example, albeit a major one, of how the poetry slam institution rewards poets for the points they earn, granting them privileges denied to those who do not score as well. Despite the all-in-fun motto, situations like this send the message that poetry that scores well is better than poetry that does not, despite the subjectivity of the scoring system.

I intend not to argue that this problematic element of the audience/poet relationship invalidates the scholarly value of slam poetry; instead, I suggest that this relationship is one illustration of the defined, specific ways in which audience functions as a necessary context of slam poetry analysis. Interrogating audience demographics, score trends, and other potential factors that impact audience approval and scoring can lead toward a richer understanding of the collective production of performance to which Novak refers.

Theorists like Novak and Bauman argue that the audience plays a noteworthy role in any performance, but I argue that the impact of the slam poetry audience is distinguished by features that require precise and distinct types of analytical attention. The analyses in this section illustrate how the competitive aspect of poetry slam combined with the audience's roles as assessors shape performance in defined ways. Understanding this process can enable a more comprehensive understanding of any slam poem.

Let the Bodies Hit the Stage: The Importance of Performative Embodiment

It is more or less established that the performing body is a crucial part of any performance, poetic or otherwise. Among other things, the performing body extends and solidifies the voice of the poem, which Denis Donoghue describes as "a sign of personal presence" in the text. Performative embodiment takes the personal presence to which Donoghue refers from symbolic to literal, and the conventions of the poetry slam intensify this phenomenon in the case of slam poetry. Because poetry slam requires poets to perform their own, original work (Daniel et al. 28), the performing body is always the author. This feature distinguishes poetry slam from oral and orally-influenced poetries that are passed down from performer to performer as well as from recitation traditions, such as Poetry Out Loud or the elocution competitions of the past. Clearly, the performing body matters within the context of slam poetry analysis, but how? This question has been the subject of some scholarly dissent. In what follows, I offer an analysis of two contemporary viewpoints on this topic to illustrate the benefits and drawbacks of certain approaches before offering my own suggestions.

Slam poet Ragan Fox offers a very direct and specific analysis of how the performative embodiment functions within the context of slam. He explains that "slam and other forms of performance poetry are unique in how they display and call upon performers' bodies to provide

the truth of what is spoken" (421). Being a slam poet who is also gay, Fox cites several examples of how he has used his body in performance to reinforce the authenticity of his poems about gay identity. On this surface, this stance seems aligned with the assertion that the performing body communicates personal presence. However, Fox takes this line of reasoning a bit further, arguing that the presence of the author/performer establishes the truth of the poem by demonstrating that the speaker of the poem is "real." In other words, this model of embodiment as truth depends upon the speaker and the performing poet being the same person or, at the very least, similar people. While this is valid in many cases, this approach is only applicable under specific circumstances. When the performing body clashes with the content of the poem in some way, the logic of Fox's model of embodied truth fails. To fail to extend analysis of slam poetry embodiment beyond this framework perpetuates some narrow and problematic viewpoints about slam poetry, such as the stereotype that all slam poetry is autobiographical.

As established, I am not disputing that Fox's approach is sometimes appropriate, as he illustrates by discussing his personal experiences. However, not all slam poems include a one-to-one relationship between speaker and author-performer. By not acknowledging the limitations of his approach, Fox sends the message that the speaker and the poet are always synonymous in slam poetry and that all slam poems are true in a very literal sense, which gives his readers a false impression of slam poetry in general that may unfairly impact both public perception and attempts at scholarly treatment. More important, though, is that Fox's approach leaves scholars adrift when analyzing slam poetry performances that do not conflate speaker and performer. For example, in Mike McGee's "When Ladybugs are Tempted," the speaker of the poem is an insect. To analyze a live performance of that poem in terms of how performative embodiment proves the poem's truth would be absurd. Another approach would be required to understand how the

presence of Mike McGee's white, male, bearded, performing body is part of the performance's meaning, or "truth". While I reject the specifics of Fox's ideas as too literal and narrow, I do find value in some of his more general implications, namely that the presence of the performing body can both limit and extend the performance of a given slam poem, while also creating a sense of authenticity.

Although I find Fox's views on truth as primary authenticity too reductive for comprehensive application to the slam poetry genre, I do think that the presence of the poet in a slam poetry performance does create a different sort of authenticity. Julia Novak's ideas about authorship in poetry performance illustrate one facet of this. She writes that "the poet-performer presents him-or-herself rather than representing a fictitious character. S/he presents his/her own text and thus performs authorship" (4). Novak focuses on the truth of the performance as opposed to the truth of the content, and although she is not speaking specifically of slam poetry, this approach is much more widely applicable to it than is the previously discussed perspective. As already established, the conventions of poetry slam necessitate that the performing poet and the author of the poem must always be the same, meaning that it is always possible to analyze the significance of authorial performance in the context of slam poetry. However, what can such analyses yield? In a general discussion of performance poetry (with a particular focus on ancient oral poetry), Gregory Nagy writes that "*authority* in performance is a key to the very concept of *authorship* in composition" (19). In the context of Nagy's logic, a performance does not become authoritative or real until performed in an authorized setting and by an authorized performer. In the case of slam poetry, where the performer is conventionally the author, authorship and authority are linked, and the performance of authorship to which Novak refers could also be viewed as evidence of performative authority. For example, in the aforementioned Mike McGee

poem, he writes “war is the biggest way to say you're right, but it can / never be unanimous proof” (21-22). In performance, one could analyze McGee's performing body as a testimony not to the truth of the poem, but to the authenticity of the ideas and emotions. Additionally, because McGee is the author, the performance of these ideas and emotions can be analyzed as authoritative and genuine, as opposed to interpretive.

In analyzing slam poetry, it is important to ask how embodiment extends or creates meaning. However, focusing on authorship, authorization, and forms of truth only scratches the surface. Fox, Novak, and Nagy outline functions of the performing body that are created by the act of performance itself. This is a good starting point, and I suggest that it is also necessary to consider the agency of the poet in the significance of embodied performance. How does the poet deliberately use or manipulate their performing body in service of the meaning of the poem/performance? I acknowledge that this approach will encompass authenticity and even “truth,” even as it expands in scope beyond those two areas of focus.

Slam poets use vocal dynamics and body language to emphasize their poems' emotional landscapes, contexts, symbols, and other features. To some extent, these elements have a long history in performed poetry that extends far beyond slam. For example, Lorenzo Thomas describes the performance style of Langston Hughes, noting that “Hughes understood what his audience wanted. Fashionable and debonair, employing a slightly sardonic tone, he read his poems with precise and elegant diction—even those written in the blues stanza form. His purpose was not to impersonate the unlettered, but to elevate their idiom to a plane where its poetic qualities would be recognized” (304). Thomas draws attention to the ways in which Hughes deliberately manipulated his performing body to serve his poetic agenda, which is a line of analysis that should be pursued when considering slam poetry. These elements of performative

embodiment take on even greater significance in slam poetry than in other performed poetry because the genre specifically emphasizes performance as an evaluative criterion. As such, they are good "building blocks" upon which to construct a revised approach to performative embodiment in slam poetry.

In applying this approach, I want to take care not to conflate vocal and nonvocal features of embodiment. One of Bauman's "Keys to Performance" is the presence of "special paralinguistic features," those "not captured in the transcribed or published versions of the text" (19), suggesting that such features are distinct in their contributions to performance. In light of this, I will begin with an analysis of vocal features of embodied performance, before moving onto the non-vocal.

Taylor Mali's "Totally like, whatever, you know?" works particularly well as a basis for vocal analysis because the entire poem is built around the idea of grammar, syntax, and communication trends. For example, the first stanza is ripe with opportunities for vocal performance:

> In case you hadn't noticed,
> it has somehow become uncool
> to sound like you know what you're talking about?
> Or believe strongly in what you're saying?
> Invisible question marks and parenthetical (you know?)'s
> have been attaching themselves to the ends of our sentences?
> Even when those sentences aren't, like, questions? You know? (1-7)

The entire stanza not only comments on the linguistic trend in question, but also imitates it, giving Mali the opportunity to audibly illustrate the subject of the poem through performance.

The text of the poem also makes it clear that the poem is critiquing this trend quite soundly: “I entreat you, I implore you, I exhort you, and / I challenge you: to speak with conviction.” (33-34). I deliberately included the period at the end of the final line to emphasize the use of more declarative punctuation, which cleverly parallels the speaker's rebellion against the trend of indecisive punctuation and language. The tone of the poem is in turn critical and pleading, offering the opportunity for extension via performance.

In a video of the poem performed at Def Poetry Jam, Mali takes the stage wearing a Scrabble T-shirt, and steeples his hands while he waits for the applause to subside. When he performs the first lines of the poem, he draws out the tonal rise that vocally distinguishes questions from statements, a move that is heightened by the fact that the line is not grammatically a question. His right hand flips up briefly, mimicking the rising tone of his own voice. For a moment, he holds the posture before moving onto the next line, while the audience titters in response. Mali adopts a similar delivery style for the other lines in the first stanza, using his tone and pacing to emphasize the absurdity of this trend. His vocal modulation elevates the satire created by the linguistic structure as he shrilly draws out the rises in pitch that are commonly associated with questions. As mentioned earlier, the text of the poem functions as an example of the trends to which the poem itself refers. However, the illustrative nature of the text is only truly realized through vocal performance, because the poem is about the way people talk, not the way they write. Despite the overall humor in Mali's vocal tone, there are moments of sharpness, though, that remind the audience that this is very much a critique, albeit an entertaining one. For example, when he recites the lines “I have nothing personally invested in my own opinions, okay? / I’m just inviting you to join me in my uncertainty?” (16-17), the humor of his tone is laced with a hint of anger, a hard edge that betrays the speaker's frustration.

The impact of this vocal depth is not lost on the audience, as Mali is forced to pause for an applause break before beginning the next stanza. This break marks a significant shift in the poem, into a stanza where Mali poses genuine questions, as opposed to masquerading declarations. When Mali asks, “What has happened to our conviction? / Where are the limbs out on which we once walked?” (18-19), all humor has momentarily drained from his tone. Mali uses this shift in his vocal delivery to emphasize the more serious nature of the speaker's critique. This use of vocal delivery to emphasize the significance of the critique culminates when Mali delivers the final lines of the poem, “Because contrary to the wisdom of the bumper sticker, / it is not enough these days to simply QUESTION AUTHORITY. / You have to speak with it, too” (37-39). He delivers these lines slowly enough to let the audience process their impact. His tone is firm, but not angry, almost like he is preaching.

Just as analyses of page poetry frequently address the use of white space, a discussion of paralinguistic features of Mali's poem can, and will, address the use of what might be termed “silent space.” The text version of the poem provides us with a basic score that predicts the placement of certain silent spaces in performance, which is an important instance of textual and performative synergy. In addition, though, Mali's vocal performance reflects the ways in which embodiment extends and enriches the impact of these white spaces as they transform into performative silent spaces. Silent spaces in performance reflect more than just the deliberate pacing of the poem as originally composed in text. They also highlight the ways in which the performed poem is a dynamic, fluid, piece of literature by denoting moments of interaction between audience and poet. To begin with, many of the silent spaces of Mali’s performance correlate directly to the white spaces created by line breaks. In addition, though, these silent spaces are often “filled” by moments of interaction between the poet and the audience, a

phenomenon produced, in part, by Mali's embodied performance. For example, after delivering the first line, Mali accompanies the exaggerated tonal performance previously discussed with a two-second pause (which, in the context of a three-minute slam poem, is not insignificant), but this is not simply acknowledgment of a line break. Instead, it is also an invitation for audience reaction, as evidenced by the laughter that fills the seconds of silence. This interpretation is further supported by the fact that this use of silent space is repeated, representing both Mali's acknowledgment of the audience's response and his willingness to enable their participation. It has already been established that audience participation and audience-poet interaction are what Bauman might refer to as "keys" of slam poetry performance. However, to more fully understand this, it is worthwhile to ask how such interactions are created. Silencing the performing body to allow space for audience response is a vocal feature of performative embodiment that contributes to the creation of this performative "key" within the slam poetry genre.

It is clear that vocal performance alone elevates the meaning and impact of Mali's performance of "Totally like whatever, you know?" in specific ways that are also tied to the content and format of the text. However, Jerome McGann suggests that the body of a text is not exclusively linguistic, and the same could be said about the "body" of a slam poetry performance. As I previously mentioned, the paralinguistic contributions of the performing body are as important as the linguistic when it comes to the productive manipulation of the performing body to create and extend meaning. As a counterpart to my vocally-focused analysis of Taylor Mali's "Totally like whatever, you know?", I offer another analysis that shifts the spotlight onto the nonlinguistic features of performative embodiment. In doing so, I aim to illustrate how such features demarcate the performer's reenactment or inhabitation of the poem and ultimately enhance meaning.

Mike McGee is well-known for his humorous work, but "An Open Letter to Neil Armstrong" is one of his more decidedly poignant poems. A print version appears in his collection, *In Search of Midnight,* but there are also many audiovisual performance records of this poem. It is, like Mali's poem, not a persona piece, allowing me to again focus on how the performing body productively inhabits the poem in a way that is separate from inhabiting a character. As the title suggests, McGee's poem takes the form of an epistle to the famous astronaut, a premise used to build a series of parallels between love and space. McGee positions the nerve-wracking wonder of space exploration as a sort of metaphor for falling in love and making a life with someone. The poem is intensely emotional, which is one quality that is fully realized through performance.

One audiovisual record of this poem in performance is from 2014, when McGee performed at the Verses Festival in Canada. He stands before the mic in a red t-shirt that stands out against the black tapestry hanging behind him. The poem begins with McGee reciting the lines, "Dear Neil Armstrong / I write this to you as she sleeps down the hall", and he uses physical performance to set the scene right out of the gate. McGee curls his hands to point both index fingers down when he says, "I write this to you," as though drawing attention to a piece of paper on a desk. He uses his performing body to physically inhabit the world of his poem and extend its reality and meaning beyond the realm of the linguistic. He continues this phenomenon by gesturing stage left when he says, "as she sleeps down the hall." Not only does McGee performatively expand the landscape of his poem in this way, but he also evokes the form of his sleeping lover by situating her in relationship to his own performing body. By connecting the features of his poem to his own corporeality through physical performance, he is making them more spatially "real" in a way that extends beyond the boundaries of text and sound. It is worth

noting that McGee denotes the Neil Armstrong character by addressing him directly, whereas he denotes the lover character (who is not being directly addressed) through gesture. This gestural evocation comes to a head toward the end of the poem, when McGee claims "so yes, for her, I would go to the moon and back, but not without her." When McGee delivers the lines "we could claim the moon for each other," he looks stage left, as though gazing down the fictional hallway toward where his lover sleeps. He moves his hand back and forth toward that space, pantomiming connection and again evoking her presence within the performance space by relating it to his own performing body. This physical enactment of his poem is a technique that McGee employs almost constantly throughout the performance. When he says, "By any chance / did you write her name in the dirt / when the cameras weren't looking," he mimes the motion in front of him, his finger tracing initials into imaginary moon dust.

McGee also uses physical performance to emphasize the significance of certain lines, particularly in the case of figurative or implied meaning. When delivers the lines "I believe that's because it doesn't take rockets / to get you where you belong," he traces his index finger in an arced flight path before bringing it to land over his heart. The implication of these lines is that the speaker imagines that even space travel cannot trump love, which McGee physically emphasizes by gesturing to the heart, a universal symbol of love. While this gesture may be a bit trite, it does emphasize the meaning of the lines, ensuring that the audience does not miss their significance. This gesture is one that McGee repeats, in variations, at other points of the poem as well, with the purpose of illustrating the meaning behind the use of figurative language. At one point, McGee says "the rock you landed on ain't got shit on the rock she's landed on," setting up a metaphor that is extended when he goes on to say "You walked around, took samples and left. / She's built a fire, / cleaned up the place, and / I hope she decides to stay". When McGee

performs the second set of lines, he circles his heart with his fingers, mapping the space and making building motions. Given the text of these lines alone, either on the page or vocally performed, the "rock she's landed on," could be metaphorically interpreted in a number of ways: as the speaker's life or mind, for example. However, McGee's physical performance very blatantly identifies the metaphorical rock as whatever we conventionally mean when we refer to the heart in a romantic context.

As illustrated through the works of Taylor Mali and Mike McGee, both vocal and non-vocal features of performance are productive forces in the creation of meaning within a slam poetry context. However, to focus solely on how these elements relate to authenticity, authorship, and truth is to miss many of the kinds of insights outlined in my analyses. Slam poetry analysis should interrogate how slam poets deliberately use these features of performative embodiment, and I offer below several examples of the kinds of insights such analyses might yield.

One of the most basic examples of how embodiment can meaningfully extend beyond authorship, authenticity, or truth is in the case of ironic embodiment. In some cases, the meaning of a poem in performance is complicated by the degree to which the performing body is at odds with the content of the poem itself. The poem "Skinhead," by slam legend Patricia Smith, offers one of the most glaring examples of this. Somers-Willett offers an analysis of this poem in *The Cultural Politics of Slam Poetry* (92-94), focused primarily on identity construction and critique within the context of a slam poetry performance. In my own analysis, I expand my focus to interrogate Smith's deliberate use of ironic embodiment to extend the poem and create meaning.

Predictably, the poem's speaker is a white supremacist. Lines like "I'm just a white boy who loves his race, / fighting for a pure country" (52-53), and "I sit here and watch niggers take over my TV set, / walking like kings up and down the sidewalks in my head, / walking like their

fat black mamas *named* them freedom" (21-23) communicate a strong sense of racial hatred that permeates the poem. In addition, the poem offers some physical description of the speaker, describing his face as "huge and pockmarked, / scraped pink and brilliant, apple-cheeked" (11-12), and noting that "Two years ago, a machine that slices leather / sucked in my hand and held it, / whacking off three fingers at the root" (13-15). In the wake of the poem's content, the speaker begins to materialize in the mind of the reader, both physically and psychologically.

How, then, does this speaker manifest in performance? Patricia Smith's performance of "Skinhead" on Def Poetry Slam allows for closer consideration of this question. To rely solely on Ragan Fox's idea that verisimilitude between the poet and the speaker in the poem is the key to creating meaning through embodiment would lead to the expectation that the performing body would be white, male, and weathered. However, the fact that Patricia Smith is a black woman nulls this line of analysis from the moment that she steps on the stage. Instead, it is necessary to look beyond the ways in which the performing body directly and/or literally represents the speaker, and consider other, more complex implications. Patricia Smith begins her performance before the mic in a simple red and black ensemble, her short, braided hair forming a close-fitting cap. She smiles briefly in response to the audience's applause, and when it is quiet, she begins. As she performs the poem, the irony of her black, female body assuming the voice of a white, male racist is brutally overwhelming. Smith's embodiment takes the poem from snapshot to critique, playing a crucial role in the meaning of the performance. When she delivers the line "These are the duties of the righteous" (9), she does so strongly and slowly, with a slight nod, calling attention to the words. Her gendered and racial presence encourages the audience to consider this definition of righteous by illustrating that it cannot possibly be one to which the poet herself subscribes. Her embodiment of the poem also impacts meaning by creating some

decidedly uncomfortable moments that enhance the ideological critique. When Smith delivers the lines “Hey, nigger, Abe Lincoln’s been dead a long time” (39), she yells them with a sneer, like the speaker would, her tone dripping with vitriol. The language is certainly taboo within the late-twentieth century context of the performance, and the presence of the black body from which it emerges makes it almost impossible for the audience to discount the damage such language can inflict. Smith's black embodiment of the poem makes it virtually impossible for the audience to interpret this language as anything other than a critique of white supremacist ideology, an accusation of attack. Another moment that illustrates how the irony of Smith's embodiment of “Skinhead” complicates the meaning of the poem occurs when she delivers the line “but fuck you all anyway” (68). Within the context of the text alone, this line is directed to anyone who might question the skinhead's ideology. In performance, though, a curious break of the fourth wall happens. Although the line very much retains its meaning within the context of the poem, Smith also seems to be directing a “fuck you” to all those who operate within her speaker's ideology. The impact of this performative moment is reflected in the vocal audience response, which is particularly significant in light of the fact that the audience is otherwise silent for the duration of the poem (such silence is notable in its own right, since slam poetry audiences are notoriously raucous).

As illustrated, the presence of Smith's performing body is highly ironic in relation to the poem, but that irony extends and enriches the meaning of the performance and, by consequence, the poem. I have already established that focus on ironic embodiment runs counter to the approach outlined by Ragan Fox, but it is also worthwhile to consider how this might extend Novak's and Nagy's ideas about authorship and authority. At a basic level, it is Smith's performance of authorship that authorizes the critique her embodiment of the poem engenders.

She is not merely performing a poem that someone else wrote about white supremacy, in which case the irony of embodiment would reside solely in the performance, as opposed to the poem-in-performance. Instead, the conventions of slam poetry reinforce Smith's creative claim, acknowledging authorship as a necessary condition of performance. The fact that the writer is a black woman contributes to the authority of her critique through ironic embodiment. It is intentional, as opposed to accidental. However, authorship and authorization alone do not suffice to explain how embodiment functions as a context of a performed poem, as the analysis hopefully illustrates. The deliberate manipulation of embodiment to create irony is central to the meaning of this poem in performance and should be analyzed as such. It is necessary to interrogate not just how authorship and authorization are performed through embodiment, but also how poets manipulate these performances and, finally, how these manipulations create meaning. Ironic embodiment is one of example of an element that extends beyond current treatments of embodiment.

Manipulation of performative embodiment for the sake of making meaning does not have to be ironic to be significant. Slam poets constantly manipulate their performing bodies in major and minor ways to serve the meaning and impact of their performed poems. In discussing models of ancient singers, who could be viewed as ancestors to slam poets, Nagy writes, “I think of all song and poetry as mimetic” and that poem/song performance “re-enacts as it imitates” (55). Nagy is not speaking of slam poetry, but his ideas are certainly applicable to it. To superimpose Nagy's views onto slam poetry analysis suggests viewing a slam poetry performance as an imitation and re-enactment of the original composition. The re-enactment component is of particular interest to me because it emphasizes how performance is different from standard speech and implies that the poet inhabits the poem through performance. In slam poetry analysis,

it is worthwhile to ask how a poet is deliberately inhabiting or re-enacting their poem through performance, and how these techniques contribute to meaning and impact.

Persona poems offer an excellent opportunity to observe such techniques in action because slam poets so overtly use these kinds of performances to present a character, as opposed to using the performance as a presentation of self. Consider, for example, "The Piano Speaks," by Shira Erlichman, which begins with the haunting line, "I am the mental hospital piano and I have seen hands" (1). When the speaker of a poem is an inanimate object, the language through which we access that speaker takes on particular significance. A brief interpretation of the poem's major features lays the groundwork for considering how these are tied to the identity of the speaker, and what implications these connections may have in performance.

The text of the poem offers details that give us a sense of who the speaker is in lines such as "They liked me honest which is to say I was broken / Nobody on staff fixed my raspy keys" (23-24), and *"*I have never belonged to opera-houses or your mother's cushy living room" (37). This piano is not regal or refined. It is not pretty. This roughness reflects the patients and doctors who play the piano throughout the poem, who are, arguably, the poem's true subjects. Erlichman uses language that captures both the beauty and wretchedness of the poem's human characters, describing them as "Shamanistic surgeons" (12), and "Heroin-blooded teenagers who wet the bed / they were so terrified of their hallucinations" (14-15). However, the descriptions of their piano-playing hands read like descriptions of sacred objects: "I remember those towering monuments to loneliness / you call hands—they were peacocks spreading in front of me" (16-17), "These are not hands, these are sky-scouting web-weavers. / These are not hands, these are teeth and eyes, and fingers like legs" (6-7). Erlichman's language attends to the value of what is contradictory and complex, and the piano is, in many ways, symbolic of that. The piano is

battered and, quite literally, broken, as are many of the patients and perhaps even the people who work there. However, this broken piano and these broken people create music that is, in its way, beautiful and of worth. Erlichman writes, “I live with those who bang daylight out of moondust, / now you tell me how you do that unless you are built of magic” (37-38), reinforcing the idea that there is unique value to be found in imperfection.

The analyses above are designed to demonstrate that the speaker in this poem is not merely a mouthpiece, but also a manifestation of key parts of the poem’s meaning. As a result, the embodiment of the piano persona is an important part of the poem’s performance. Erlichman’s embodiment is not merely mimetic, but also proprioceptive, an organic product of her creative production and interpretation tied to this specific performance. Of course, the use of an inanimate object as the speaker in a persona poem presents some unique challenges for the performing poet, which are worth considering in relation to Erlichman’s performance of “The Piano Speaks.” For starters, how does one perform the identity of a piano? It is worth noting that the text of Erlichman’s poem outlines some very specific “character” traits that take on deeper, figurative meaning within the context of the poem. As such, performance of these traits is also relevant to analysis. So, then, how does Erlichman perform these elements, and how does her embodiment of them extend and create meaning within the performance of the poem?

Analysis along these lines requires consideration of how the actions of the performing body can be read as interpretations of a character. In considering the ways in which actors embody roles, Richard Kemp writes that:

> They state that all accounts of proprioception agree that “the organized and meaningful perception of self and others depends on a proprioceptive system of a developed body schema organized to allow for an intermodal translation between external and internal

senses"(Gallagher 211-212) This description again challenges the "inside/outside" dichotomy of acting discourse, because the body schema depends on both internal (proprioceptive input) and external (visual and tactile) senses in combination (121-122). This suggests that physical performance of a character is, at least in part, a natural product of internal and subjective activity, such as interpretation. Because slam poetry is performed by its authors, physical elements of slam poetry performance can be read not only as products of interpretation, but also as products of creation, or the creative process.

To practically demonstrate this point, I offer an analysis of a video record of Erlichman performing "The Piano Speaks," at the Providence Poetry Slam in 2008. The performance begins with the poet standing before a microphone in front of a red, Baz Lurhman-esque curtain in a dimly lit room. The first thing I notice about the way she embodies the persona is the timbre of her voice. It is a shade deeper than the speaking voice she uses to introduce the poem by its title, and sounds big, almost hollow. Instrumental. The vocals of her embodied performance seem designed to mimic the instrument she is meant to personify, an instrument that is vast and cavernous. This is not merely an objective imitation, like a child making cow noise while singing "Old MacDonald had a Farm," but is also a performative representation of both her creation and interpretation of the piano persona. The language of the poem also tells the audience that this piano is well-worn and in disrepair, traits that are reflected by the world-weary tone Erlichman employs. She speaks like someone who has been through a war, not without emotion, but with a degree of reserve and hard-won wisdom. (It is also noteworthy that it is Erlichman's very presence on the stage that extends the title of the poem beyond metaphor. The piano only "speaks" in the literal sense when Erlichman embodies the piano persona).

The physical performance of the poem also helps to bring the persona to life. Shira Erlichman is a fairly small person, not more than five feet tall. In light of this, it is no small feat for her to physically perform the piano persona. A piano is a relatively large instrument, and Erlichman uses her hands and arms to increase the amount of space she takes up on the stage. When she performs the line "these are sky scouting web weavers," she spreads her arms and moves her hands like she is plucking invisible strings. Even when she is not using her arms and hands to physically perform specific lines, she usually holds them away from her, softly curved in front of her body as though cradling something larger than herself. Beyond simply performing the size of the persona she has created, Erlichman also employs her gestures and movements to identify her performing body with the features of the piano. When she delivers the line "they tore music out of me with a rusty knife," she pantomimes dragging the knife across her own ribcage, emphasizing the connection between the seemingly inanimate speaker and the living, breathing body on the stage. It is not merely the fact of her physical presence that is significant, but the ways in which she manipulates her physical presence to extend her interpretation of the piano persona beyond words alone. When she uses physical performance in the manner just described, Erlichman conflates the animate with the inanimate in a way that is visually observable. This is particularly significant in light of the fact that the inanimate speaker of the poem reflects, in many ways, the other human subjects. Erlichman's embodiment of the piano intensifies the manner in which the poem comments upon human flaws.

While Erlichman's mimetic and proprioceptive embodiment of the piano persona is impressive, persona poems and character portrayal are not the only contexts in which slam poets may deliberately manipulate their embodiment to further their performances. In fact, it is important to a comprehensive understanding of this slam poetry feature to consider how it comes

into play in poems where embodiment extends beyond personae. It is so common for slam poems to be written in first-person point of view that it is easy to forget that is not the only option. What, then, happens when the poet is not inhabiting the poem by performing as a persona or a version of themself? In these cases, the performing body is often primarily significant in ways that extend beyond interpretation and representation of character or self. As an example, I offer "Direct Orders" by Anis Mojgani, a poem written as a command entirely in second-person point of view. Because the text of the poem is essentially a series of directives, part of its purpose is to evoke some very specific responses from the audience. In many ways, this poem is, in fact, about the audience. This raises the question of how Mojgani uses his performing body to accomplish these ends. As an answer, I offer my analysis of an audiovisual record of a 2011 performance of the poem at New College in Florida.

The video begins with Mojgani, in a short-sleeved button-down and broken-in blue jeans, standing at the mic in front of blue velvet curtain. As the performance unfolds, it is clear that his body language is designed to interpellate the audience within the poem. Whereas Mike McGee calls his fictional lover into being by gesturing to her, Mojgani invites the audience into his poem, beginning with the very first line. The poem begins with a command, setting the tone of the rest of the performance: "You have been given a direct order to rock the fuck out." Mojgani reaches outward toward the audience with open palms, a gesture that almost looks like an offering. This use of gesture continues throughout the poem. When he delivers the line, "rock out like music is all that you got," he points both index fingers toward the audience. Mojgani is frequently reaching "out" during this performance, sometimes to connect his gestures to the audience, sometimes because the audience is the subject of the gesture in question. This enhances the poem's purpose as a command, something designed to impact the audience through

direct address. However, as important as what is present in his embodied performance is what is lacking. Mojgani almost never uses his performance to connect the poem to his own body in a particularly personalized manner. For example, he rarely points to himself or otherwise uses gestures that imply primary ownership of the experiences he is describing. In this manner, he performs the meaning of the poem as external to the speaker. Again, the poem is not primarily "about" the speaker, it is about other people. However, this kind of interpellative embodiment is also complemented by what could be viewed as interpretive embodiment (similar to that in persona or other first-person poems). For example, when Mojgani delivers the lines, "Rock out like somebody's got a barrel to your temple" and "Rock out like your eyes are fading, but you've still got your ears and you don't know for how long", he points to his own temple and eyes as reference points. Through the use of performative elements such as these, Mojgani essentially counts himself among the masses that he is addressing, eliminating a barrier between audience and performer. This takes the speaker from preacher to revolutionary. Like McGee, Mojgani also uses gesture to create the landscape of his poem. When he performs the lines "Rock out like you're on a rooftop and the city is loud and glowing beneath you", he spreads his arms out and up, tracing the city skyline with his hands. He also uses his body to illustrate some of the experiences he is describing, performing a dance step when he delivers the line "Rock out like five-o-clock time meant pop-n-lock time." Through gestures such as these, Mojgani performs his interpretations of these lines, giving them context that extends beyond the meaning of words alone. He is essentially using his body to illustrate the content of his poem in a way that is not primarily tied to personal or persona experience.

Ultimately, one area of productive value in Mojgani's embodied performance is the way in which it underscores the poem's purpose. Through his use of gesture, Mojgani puts the

spotlight on the experiences he describes and their relationships to the audience he addresses. The title of the poem identifies it as an order and, in essence, it is. The poem seems designed to move its audience to action, and Mojgani achieves this end in part by using his performing body to both identify the audience and invite them into the poem, and also acknowledge the connection between speaker and audience member.

While I have offered only a small sampling of the ways in which vocal and nonvocal performatives can be applied to the analysis of performative embodiment in slam poetry contexts, my hope is that these examples have served to illustrate the potential for expanding slam poetry analysis beyond current methods. While slam poetry scholarship certainly acknowledges embodiment as significant, it has not comprehensively addressed the complexities discussed and demonstrated in this section. The impact of performative embodiment is not just an automatic function of the performative act, but also a deliberate act of creation and manipulation and a reflection of authorial/performer interpretation. The sounds and movements of slam poets on stage create elaborate webs of meaning, and we must think about embodiment more broadly to fully comprehend this intricate choreography.

Welcome to Thunderdome: The Shared Stage as Context

When analyzing a slam poetry performance, it is important to understand that relevant performative contexts sometimes extend beyond the duration of the poem itself. As I established in my discussion of audience significance, the competition component of the poetry slam causes some elements of performance to take on heightened and unique roles. A poetry slam, whether individual or team-based, is never just about the performance of a single poet. Lesley Wheeler writes that "slam reveals that poetry has never been an art of solitary voices…poets do labor together in many types of relationships" (163). In a poetry slam, the competitors are pitted

against each other for the most part, but even as they compete they impact each other's performances in a variety of ways. As a result, the other competing poets, and their performances, function as necessary contexts in slam poetry analysis.

In illustrating the productivity of such a contextual examination, I focus solely on situations that occur within the poetry slam institution. However, these findings still apply to slam poetry performances that occur outside the context of a poetry slam event. Slam poems are often performed at open mics, literary showcases, and even, in one notable instance, at the presidential inauguration in the United States. Even in an open mic setting, a slam poet is likely to gauge and tailor their own performance by relating it to the ones others are delivering because they have been trained to do so. Consequently, it may still be worthwhile to view a slam-style poetry performance in context of other performances during the same event, even if the event in question is not a poetry slam.

Within the poetry slam institution, a number of factors determine how other poets may function as contextual elements. First of all, it is worth considering whether the slam in question is an individual competition or a team-based competition. Individual competitions are often held either as standalone events or as part of the selection process for a venue's slam team. In these types of competitions, it is every poet for themself. On the other hand, team-based slams are common and established events at the regional and national levels of competition. Poetry Slam, Inc. tends to use the four-by-four structure for their team slams, meaning that four teams compete over four rounds, with one poem per team per round. While this is not the only format option for a team slam, it is the most common one, and has impacted team size as a result, with most teams being made of between 4-6 people. The dynamics of team competitions are a bit more complex, because the relationships both between and within the teams serve as contextual factors of

performance. Team-based slams also create the opportunity for group pieces, in which two or more members of one slam team collaboratively perform a poem. In this case, multiple performers are simultaneously in action, allowing for an analysis of how the poets intertwine their individual performances to create a unified whole. I use individual slams, team-based slams, and group pieces as examples of circumstances under which other performers could be productively analyzed as contexts.

The individual poetry slam is perhaps the simplest of the three scenarios I have outlined, so I will use it as a starting point. The advent of the poetry slam is not the beginning of inter-performance relationships. Performance poets have a long history of impacting other performance poets. In the foreword to *Bum Rush the Page*, a slam anthology, Sonia Sanchez writes, "I saw other poets, I saw white poets, begin to come and listen to how we read because people didn't read like that, or had not read in that fashion before. And our generation of Black Arts poets began to show poets how to read" (xv). Sanchez positions the Black Arts poetry performances as beneficial context to the understanding of other poetry performances during the 1960s and 1970s, including those delivered by white poets. In light of this, viewing other poets as context in analyzing a poetry slam performance is not new or radical. It is a smaller-scale version of the insights shared by Sanchez. However, the conventions of poetry slam make the performances of other poets impactful in unique and defined ways.

In an individual poetry slam, there are no alliances. In most cases, only one poet can win, making every other competitor a target and a threat. In a poetry slam, there is a real and defined pressure to be "better" than everybody else, a pressure supported by the quantifiable assessments offered by the judges. While the concept of good poetry is subjective in general, it is defined by the judges' scores in a poetry slam. As a result, competing poets pay attention not only to the

scores other performers are receiving, but also to what those performers are doing to earn them. Somers-Willett writes that, "in this respect, slam poetry best resembles show business; poets use what they think will be humorous, verbally impressive, or dramatic in order to compete with each other" (23). Competing poets may consider a variety of factors, such as tone of voice, pacing, use of body language, or volume. If a competing poet notices the judges seem to respond favorably to another poet's fast, boisterous delivery or enthusiastic use of gesture, they are likely to adopt similar elements into their own performance, even if they would not normally perform that way. They do this, in part, to convince the judges that they are better than, or at least as good as, the other poets. The competitive framework of the slam may also impact the content of the poems performed, as poets frequently riff off one another. Most seasoned performers enter into a slam with a variety of pieces in their repertoire. If a competing poet notices that one poet's piece about gender identity scored well, and they happen to have a gender identity poem in their arsenal, they may choose to perform it in order to "out-do" the other poet. Conversely, if certain subjects seem to be scoring poorly, poets may change the poems they were planning on performing in order to avoid them. In some instances, this may involve completely abandoning one poem in favor for another on a topic that is expected to receive a more favorable response. In others, it may include minor changes to content and/or performance that reflect the scoring trends within the event. Such alterations can incorporate adding or dropping entire lines or stanzas, or changing delivery features such as pacing or volume. As a final note, it is worthwhile to consider how the interplay between performers can impact the overall tone of performance as a result of the competitive framework. Somers-Willett writes that:

> In order to be successful with their audiences, slam poets must convey a confidence in their writing and subject matter. In competing with each other, some slam poets may

> emphasize or even exaggerate this sense of confidence, resulting in over-the-top displays of comedy or political critique (and sometimes both)…This context of conviction is a major component of the tone that many poetry slams take—and it seems that the higher the stakes of competition the more intense this sense of conviction becomes (27).

While the overall need for tonal confidence can be attributed in part to the audience, it is the competitive format and the performers' perceptions of each other's performances that results in the successive elevation of this tone.

In team slams, the inter-poet dynamics become more complex. Each poet must function both as an individual and as part of a larger whole, like a limb on the body of a Frankenstein creation. While slam teams can form for recreational or standalone purposes, most teams form for the purpose of competing at official PSI events, such as the National Poetry Slam and regional and invitational competitions. As previously established, PSI also sponsors individual competitions, but the National Poetry Slam, with its team-centered focus, is really the largest jewel in its crown. Wheeler writes that this focus on communal production signifies that "the institutions of slam have declared their primary allegiance to slam as a social form. This commitment to dialogue involves not only the accessibility of the audiences to poet and vice versa, but also camaraderie and collaboration between poets themselves" (155). While even individual slam performances are in part collaboratively produced through response to competition, the type of collaboration to which Wheeler refers is cooperative instead of competitive. Individual performances produced within the framework of a slam team are almost inevitably influenced by the performer's team members and coach, creating an additional layer of inter-poet impact on performance.

With the exception of group pieces (which will be covered later), slam poets perform individually even in team slams. While these performances may come off as autonomous, they are almost always the product of team collaboration. To illustrate this process, I offer some of my own experiences with Slam Free or Die, the New Hampshire Slam Team, in 2009. Just like any other team, slam teams hold practices, in which delivery is critiqued, poems are workshopped, and performance drills are run. On the SFOD team, each member contributed three or four poems to our collective repertoire, and we usually worked on one poem per person per practice. That year, one of my competition poems was called "And a Hard Place," affectionately dubbed "The Suicide Poem." It was about a gay teenager in a blue-collar mill town. I remember vividly the night the performance of that poem coalesced. I ran the poem. "Slower," one of my teammates said. "Let the tension build over time." I ran it again. "Don't bring out your hands until the line about the light switches," my coach said. "I want your hands behind your back until then. Pretend you're seducing Mr. Spock." As my interpretations of their suggestions manifested, our collective creation emerged in performance. The quiet control of the poem's opening built toward a frenzied crescendo. Each performance of this poem in competition bore the marks of collaborative construction, even if their origins were not dramatically obvious to the audience.

Another factor worth considering in the analysis of team slam performances is that each performance is not the poet's alone, but belongs, at least in part, to the larger whole of the team. As a result, the impact of teammates and coaches on performance is slightly different than you would find in a more conventionally collaborative environment, such as a poetry performance workshop. As a member of a slam team, a poet does not always have the complete authority to reject the application of feedback. If a coach asks a slam poet to make change to their

performance, and the request is supported by other team members, it is usually expected that the poet will notably respond to that request in some way. These conventions can result in different versions of performance in competitive and non-competitive environments and/or in team and individual competitions. If a poet uses the same poem as a member of more than one team, variations in performance may also be reflective of different team dynamics. In short, while the poet technically has full creative control of their poems, even in team contexts, it is highly likely that they will exercise this control to produce performances that serve the team dynamic, as opposed to just the poet themself.

So far, I have discussed how the team dynamic shapes poetry performance leading up to a team slam event. However, synergetic performative production does not end when the slam begins. Because poetry slam is competitive by nature, slam teams often tweak elements of performance, including the order of performers, as the slam unfolds. Somers-Willett writes that "strategies to win slams range from simple—such as following a mediocre piece of comedy with a howler so as to demonstrate superiority over one's competitors—to complex—such as establishing "natural sets" and resonance" between certain poems based on performance order" (29). The scenarios Somers-Willett describes highlight the need for last-minute adjustments. For example, a coach may ask a poet to play down the humor in their poem to riff off a more serious performance from another team. This might involve performative elements such as pacing, vocal dynamics, and body language. Within the context of a team slam, any given performance should be viewed, at least in part, as a collectively calculated as well as collectively crafted.

While the contexts of the team slam and, more importantly, the team itself, are relevant to an analysis of individual poems in performance, such contexts also support a move to expand the scope of what counts as a single "unit" of slam poetry. When a team competes in a slam, the

scores of the individual performances are combined, and the team with the highest total wins. The individual scores do not matter beyond their contribution to the whole of the team score. In extreme cases, it is even possible for the highest-scoring poet of the night to be on a team that comes in last. The nature of team slams seems to encourage the analysis of team performances as unified wholes, in addition to any analysis of individual performances as standalone pieces. As illustrated by Somers-Willett's aforementioned comments about performance order and resonance between poems, some collaborative elements of performance impact extend beyond the frame of a single performance. While I am not suggesting that the analysis of single poems within team slam contexts should be abandoned, I am arguing that analysis of the relationships between poems performed by teammates can yield additional insights about the importance of team-based contexts. For example, if a literary analyst observes that a team leads with humorous performances and builds toward more serious performances in later rounds of a slam, they have the opportunity to explore and discuss how these collective and (likely) strategic performance decisions served the team's overall, multi-poem performance. Based on the content and scoring of their competition, coaches and teammates make decisions together about how, when, and by whom poems are performed. The relationships between a team's collected poems within the context of a specific slam may reflect moves toward formal, thematic, or stylistic unity or diversity that define the team's performance as a whole.

Clearly, the impact of team dynamics on performance is analytically significant in a few ways. At the very least, it is important to acknowledge that the production of individual performances within team contexts collaborative. The performances themselves are less autonomous than performances delivered in individual slams. A worthwhile area of analysis may be the comparison of individual slam performances to team-based slam performances. In most

cases, analyzing the performance(s) in relation to the rest of the slam will enable the kind of analyses so far discussed in terms of how other poets function as context within team slams.

So far, I have focused my analysis of socialized performance production primarily on monodic slam poems, and the uninitiated might very well assume such monody to be the full scope of slam poetry. This would not be unwarranted in light of the fact that most standard poetry performances (i.e. non-slam) are delivered by single performers. In fact, team slams often feature team piece performances, in which two or more poets deliver a single poem on stage. While the team dynamics previously outlined are very much at play in these cases, team pieces also offer the interplay of multiple bodies and voices as additional contextual considerations.

Because the team piece is slam poetry phenomenon that complicates previously established ideas about authorship, embodiment, and slam poetry conventions, I offer here a brief overview of its origins, functions, and situation within the larger framework of slam to pave the way for a more nuanced discussion of its potential for analysis. As one might expect, team pieces are specifically relegated to the realm of the team-based slam, since there are no alliances in individual slams. As is often the case with all things slam, the basic team piece conventions are largely the product of PSI. While team piece performances do not need to adhere to these conventions in unofficial contexts, the conventions are firm rules within any official PSI event. In the interest of consistency, even most unofficial team-based slam events also adopt them as rules. According to the PSI handbook, 2-5 poets may deliver a team piece in any given team-based slam. However, the stipulations don't end there; PSI also requires that every primary author must be part of the group performance. For example, many group pieces start off as single-author solo poems that are transformed into group pieces through line division, vocal and physical blocking, and minor additions and revisions. In this case, there would only be one

primary author. However, if the piece is truly written from scratch by multiple poets, then each one of those poets must be on stage and participating in its performance. In addition, PSI has rules in place to prevent one or two poets from carrying the entire team. The handbook states that each poet performing in a team piece, with the exception of the primary author, must also perform as the primary author in another piece (solo or team) during the slam (Daniel et al. 33-34).

While slam poetry itself was created to challenge problematic preconceptions about poetry, team pieces push the boundaries of how we define contemporary poetry even further. Team pieces seem to approach, if not occupy, the liminal space between poetry performance and stage drama. Wheeler writes that team pieces "are more patently theatrical than solo performances. The lines must not only be composed but they must be designated, and performers must collaborate on time and blocking" (153). Because of features such as the ones Wheeler outlines, it can be productive to adapt dramatic analysis techniques to suit slam poetry team pieces. Team pieces do have specific features that should be attended to in such adaptations, however. For one thing, a team piece is always performed by at least one of its authors, which is not always the case in a dramatic production. In addition, the performers almost exclusively function as what might be viewed as the production team. While this is sometimes the case in dramatic productions, it is also common for such productions to incorporate many non-performer members of the production staff. That being said, dramatic productions such as improvisational theater often share many collaborative, performative features with slam poetry team pieces.

Exploring how these kinds of dramatic productions are treated in analysis allows scholarship to consider how such methods might be applied to group pieces, consequently producing a new front for slam poetry analysis. As an example, I introduce a case study of

Fo(u)r Women, a "collaborative, polyvocal, performance piece" (165). The study itself was written by Adeola Agbebiyi, one of the four authors of the performance piece, and offers firsthand insights into collaborative composition process. She narrates the experience from her own perspective, recounting the frenzy, insecurity, and roughness of *Fo(u)r Women*'s early days:

> At our next meeting I cringe with shyness offering items up for approval and as quickly withdrawing them. Before our next meeting, Patience insists we have text. So there we are at Patience's house, rice and fish, Nigerian chilli and . . . text. Like the feeding of the five thousand we are pulling a show out of a few ideas and some pieces of paper. We thrash out a structure. Now we have a show. It is clear where our polyvocals need to go and what they might be about (170).

While *Fo(u)r Women* is not a team piece in a slam-based context, it shares many of those same qualities, being produced and performed collectively by writer-performers. First of all, it highlights the fact that team pieces are not just performed collaboratively, but also produced collaboratively. Like the performance piece Agbebiyi describes, team pieces also depend upon texts, which usually get annotated to determine who delivers which lines, when lines are delivered simultaneously, and how vocal delivery interacts with physical delivery in performance. Even when only one person is speaking at a time during the performance, the decisions about delivery are made collectively. While the creative process may not be something that a literary analyst has access to, understanding the basic production process can enable a more responsible analysis of a group piece by reinforcing the idea that a team piece is not a collection of discrete performances, but instead a unified, polyvocal whole.

Considering the context of a performance's creation is only one part of the analytical process. The performance itself offers a wealth of opportunities for observing and unpacking

interplay between performers. Essentially, interplay between performers occurs vocally and physically during team piece performances, making these focus areas for analysis in considering how such interplay functions as performative context. The value of such an approach can be illustrated by applying it to a team piece performance, such as "Proper Noose," performed by four members of the Omaha slam team in the Group Piece Finals at the 2016 National poetry slam. In addressing this piece, I focus in turn on the ways that vocal and physical collaboration impact and create the performance as a whole.

In terms of content, "Proper Noose" is a poem about lynching, an undeniably incendiary topic. The audiovisual recording of the poem begins with four poets standing in a line on an unadorned stage, each in front of their own microphone stand. Like most slam poems delivered at national competition, the performance runs for roughly three minutes, and the performers have memorized their parts. In delivering the poem, the performers speak both independently and in tandem, weaving the shared garment of their performance from their words. One way the poets' vocal interactions impact performance is through the creation of tonal contrasts that contribute to the poem's emotional landscape. The poem begins gravely, with the lines, "to hang the proper noose, you need a rope long enough to tie the knot, strong enough to hold any size body from the scaffolding, the rafters, or a branch. The most important part of the noose, the hangman's knot, consists of seven coils, tightly wrapped around the rope…" The poet who delivers these lines does so in a stoic, dispassionate voice. It is as though he were reading a set of instructions about how to build a birdhouse to a classroom of bored boy scouts. Tonally, this is reflective of the content's clinical and decontextualized presentation of hanging. However, his vocal delivery also comes across as serious, as opposed to disinterested. He speaks slowly, and his voice is deep, emphasizing the gravity of the subject matter, even without admitting emotion into his

performance. This vocal delivery is significant not only in its reflection of content, but also because it contrasts starkly with the next part of the poem, performed by another poet. She raises her head and begins to tell the story of a woman who was lynched in 1911, narrating the experience from first-person point of view. She speaks more quickly than the first poet, and her voice is husky with emotion as she delivers the lines "they kidnapped me and my babies, drove us to that bridge, flung me over the edge, and I heard my babies scream out "mama, mama."" Her vocal performance communicates lynching's devastating reality, revealing the personal context that is stripped from both the tone and the content of the poem's first section. The juxtaposition of these two vocal performances as part of a larger whole seems designed to draw attention to the ways in which social justice issues can be depersonalized. The tonal contrast is elevated by the fact that the two speakers overlap, and the second poet begins her narrative while the first poet repeats the final words of his section: "over…and over…and over…" For a moment, the dehumanized explanation of the lynching process and the impassioned personal account exist simultaneously in performance, possibly reinforcing the idea that many attitudes about social justice issues also exist simultaneously in the world.

The tonal juxtaposition and braiding continues in "Proper Noose," with the remaining two poets narrating other accounts of lynching from the first-person perspective. Like the first poet to narrate a lynching, their tones are emotionally saturated, but not necessarily in the same way. Instead, the second poet to perform a lynching account does so angrily, his words like short, sharp verbal punches. The third poet's voice is measured but indignant. He is the eye of a hurricane. Interspersed with their accounts is the first poet's apathetic catalogue of the logistics and features of hanging as a means of execution. However, at roughly the two-minute mark of the performance, the vocal dynamics of the poem shift. The first poet's matter-of-fact

descriptions subside, and the remaining three poets take over the performance, discussing events that prove the specter of lynching is still potent in contemporary culture. They do so in tones that are both more personalized and emotionally varied. Their pacing is less measured. This is significant in a number of ways. First of all, the first poet's silence suggests that the callous presentation of the facts of lynching has been overpowered by the individualized narratives. This change to the vocal interplay between poets enhances the meaning of the poem. In addition, the remaining three poets begin to narrate objectively, stepping out of their victim roles to criticize both events and society's responses to them. Their tones reflect this new, accusatory purpose, such as when the poet who narrated the lynching of the mother describes the media response to a community threatening a black man by giving him a noose. Her tone is grave but steady as she begins, informing the audience that "this hate crime was shared over nine hundred times on facebook." Notes of bitterness and sarcasm seep into her voice as she continues, "but the local media doesn't pick it up—no, wait, the *Omaha World Herald* picked it up but then deleted it from its timeline—no, wait, the *News Watch 7* was tagged in a share but there was no response, no coverage, it must not have happened." Another poet picks up the threads of her words, decrying the injustice of such a response. The three poets who are vocally active in this section proceed this way, handing off pieces of their stories to one another. Instead of functioning as mouthpieces for individual stories, their vocal performance marks them as a unified whole, coming together not just to tell the stories of others, but also to interrogate and critique them. The poem closes as it began, with the first poet delivering a matter-of-fact commentary on hanging. Vocally, the poem does not end with the unified, outraged critique, which could be interpreted as a commentary on the efforts that society often makes to silence such voices. However, even though the tone of the final lines is somewhat detached, the message is not an ambivalent one: "a proper

hanging ensures the quick freedom of death, a proper lynching ensures the slow death of freedom." Even an uninvolved tone cannot diminish the impact of those words, and that is perhaps the point—that you cannot separate lynching from the context of its horror.

The interpretive potential of this performance undeniably incorporates the vocal interactions between the poet-performers, but vocality is only one main front of interplay. The way the poets relate physically onstage complements, enriches, and extends the meaning created by vocal interactions. To begin with, it is worth considering the positioning of the poets across the performance space. As already described, their formation is fairly plain: a horizontal line across the lip of the stage. However, the physical characteristics of each poet, in addition to the subtle features of their placement, are significant within the context of the poem. The poet farthest to the right, the one who recites the disinterested comments about hanging, is slightly apart from the group, his mic stand placed a few extra feet away from the next poet in the lineup. This creates a division within the group that, as the poem unfolds, echoes the distinction created by the content and vocal performances. Adding an additional layer of meaning is the fact that the first poet is white, while the other three poets are black. The relationship between the black and white bodies on the stage is interpretively ripe within the contexts of the poem's content. For example, one might argue that the stoic tone and direct language of the white poet juxtaposed with the impassioned vocal performances of the black poets is intended to comment on the differences between how people of color and white people experience and respond to social injustice. That being said, I think that it is also important not to conflate the poets with the speakers. While poets may deliberately use visible identity markers to heighten the significance of physical performance, this is not sufficient grounds for assuming the experiences and attitudes of the poet to be aligned with those of the poem's speaker.

Of course, the physical performance of “Proper Noose” extends beyond how the poets initially appear onstage. Their movements, both collectively and individually, are also telling components of their collaborative performance. Compared to some team pieces, “Proper Noose” is fairly subtle with regard to physical performance. The speakers never move from their spots before their respective microphone stands. This only serves to heighten the impact when they do use their bodies in performance. For example, when the first poet begins the poem with the logistics of hanging the proper noose, the remaining three poets stand with their heads bowed and their hands clasped in front of them. It is a victim's posture, underscoring the roles played by the poets as mouthpieces for those who been killed. Only when the lynching narratives begin do they raise their heads, one by one, as they tell their stories. After each poet narrates their story, they keep their heads raised, reminding the audience that the telling of their stories has interpellated them within the poem. The bowing and raising of heads occurs again at the end of the poem, when the first poet recites the words, “over and over and over and over and over and over and over and over and over again.” At each “over”, one of the remaining three poets drop their heads, before raising them, one by one at the next trio of “over.” On the final over, they bow their heads one last time, and stay that way as the poem concludes. This physical response to the words of the poem seems to emphasize the way in which society can both silence and empower victims of racial violence.

As illustrated, the inter-poet impact on slam poetry performance is varied and/or layered depending upon other performative contexts. The impact that occurs in a standard, individual slam can be viewed as a baseline, since this kind of competitive interplay between poets is also relevant to and present in team slams and team piece performances. As illustrated, though, the team dynamic overlays the competitive interplay with collaborative interplay that occurs within

the team, expanding the variety of ways in which inter-poet impact on performance could be analytically viewed as performative context. The case of the team piece compounds this variety further by incorporating both competitive and collaborative interplay on top of vocal and physical interaction during polyvocal (and polybodied!) performance. All of this is to illustrate not only the value of analyzing poet interplay as slam poetry context, but also the importance of considering all fronts along which interplay occurs.

Closing Thoughts on "Radial-Active" Reading

Like its textual counterpart, a slam poetry performance does not exist in a vacuum. As illustrated by the examples in this chapter, to decontextualize performance by ignoring or erasing any of its formative contexts is to miss many of the interpretive opportunities slam poetry presents and to risk misrepresentation of the genre in ways that perpetuate stereotypical and shallow understandings of it. The application and adaptation of McGann's radial reading to slam poetry can push beyond the scope of previous analysis to identify and discuss slam poetry's most provocative and unique literary features, such as competitive and collaborative performance composition, the relationship between body, content, and meaning, and the active role of the audience. It is also worth noting that some contexts I have discussed significantly extend beyond the performance as a whole, and may require additional research. A good deal of insight about features such as team dynamics, performance composition, and audience-poet relationships can be gleaned from first-person accounts, making poet and organizer interviews a valuable source of information. In advocating this approach, I have tried to attend to contexts that are central (and, in some cases, unique) to the genre. While this chapter by no means offers an exhaustive list of possible contexts, the ones that made the cut are consistently present at and relevant to most slam poetry performances and may serve as launch pads for the identification and incorporation of

additional contexts on a case-by-case basis. If I have done my job, this chapter has illustrated how contextual analysis is fundamental to interpreting meaning and impact in the case of slam poetry. In the past, scholars have focused on marginalized identity expression and anti-academic ideologies as slam's key features of interest. In other cases, they lump slam poetry in with other performance poetry genres without fully attending to what makes it unique. It is time to move beyond that. Incorporating contextual analysis into the larger whole of slam poetry scholarship can help present the genre more accurately, in all of its cutthroat, collaborative, and defiant splendor.

CHAPTER 2

PAGE AND STAGE AS CONJOINED TWINS

When discussing performance poetry, scholars seem to be in agreement about the importance of the various formats in which such poetry exists. Homeric analyses frequently address the relationships between textual editions and oral composition, and the ballad is often analyzed in terms of interplay between text and music. As Denis Donaghue notes, “orality and literacy are never mutually exclusive. It is possible to make the opposition between them appear far too strict” (151). Scholarship on more academically mainstream performance poetry traditions has emphasized the value of analyzing the potential for oral and literate interplay in considering relationships between text and performance. For example, in *Traditional Oral Epic,* John Miles Foley describes text format as “an object and as a libretto for the reader's or listener's personal "performance" of the work"(6). This situates the text as both a tangible referent of and means of recreating performance. In addition, Jennifer Esmail demonstrates how a crucial feature of performance is manifest in text, arguing that “nineteenth-century deaf poets ambivalently maintained an idea of "vocality" in their poetry while underscoring how that imaging "voice" was a silent construct of print" (510). This suggests that the features that characterize the voice of a poem are not strictly products of that poem’s performance. On the other hand, Gregory Nagy describes performance as a front for potential recomposition, suggesting that performance can impact elements such as a poem’s textual voice. The perspectives provided by Esmail and Nagy illustrate the ways in which the different formats of performance poetry interact. Because extant performance scholarship demonstrates the potential for analyzing relationships between formats, or modes, (such as text and performance), one might reasonably assume that slam poetry scholarship has addressed these relationships within its own genre. However, there seems to be a

surprising dearth of analyses that consider textual and performative synergy and overlap when it comes to slam poetry.

To neglect the symbiotic relationship between text and performance characteristic of slam poetry is to risk an inaccurate portrayal of the genre. If it intends to serve as an accurate and comprehensive representation, slam poetry scholarship must expand to include more nuanced and thorough examinations of the genre's bi-modal identity that illustrate the ways in which slam poems evolve across and within modes. Slam poetry is not a product of solely textual or performative composition. In *Traditional Oral Epic*, Foleys argues that "We must actively affirm the historical and evolutionary nature of oral tradition, for this is a crucial aspect of its context" (3). While the slam poetry genre is not traditional oral poetry, slam poems do evolve, through both textual and performative versioning. Just as Foley argues the importance of evolutionary features to the analysis of oral tradition, I argue the need for slam poetry analysis to contextualize the genre within a framework of textual and performative composition and recomposition. To understand this process of composition and variation, scholarship must consider text and performance as interdependent, as well as distinct, modes. This chapter seeks to establish the means to support such analyses. It begins with a brief overview of how established theories of viewing text and performance are relevant to slam poetry before explaining the ways in which extant scholarship has failed to fully explore bi-modal implications. Of course, analyzing a single poem across two modes requires a way to bridge them, and at this juncture, ethnopoetic theory becomes relevant. Jerome Rothenberg writes that:

> Translation is carryover. It is a means of delivery & of bringing to life. It begins with a forced change of language, but a change too that opens up the possibility of greater understanding. Everything in these song-poems is finally translatable: words, sounds,

> voice, melody, gesture, event, etc., in the reconstitution of a unity that would be shattered by approaching each element in isolation. A full & total experience begins it, which only a total translation can fully bring across.

While ethnopoetic theory is perhaps most valuable for the ways in which it empowers obscure or marginalized cultures, genres, and traditions, it has also yielded the necessary tools one would need to analyze a performance in terms of textual representation. Rothenberg maintains that performance can be translated meaningfully into text in a manner that extends beyond language. This link between "page" and "stage" forms the foundation of an analytical approach toward slam poetry's dual identity.

Making the General More Specific

The application of ethnopoetics to slam poetry analysis requires a full understanding of how page and stage exist in relationship to each other in the slam poetry genre. Both text and performance are modes of presentation, and textually-composed performance poetry, such as slam, is bi-modal in nature. While these modes, or formats, are distinct in many ways, they are both ultimately portals to the meaning of a given slam poem. Peter Middleton suggests that, "poems have to be realized, rendered, performed, or as we ordinarily say, read, for their meaning to be produced...just as musical scores require instruments and players for their significance to be fully manifest" (xii). The reading to which Middleton refers can, of course, take multiple forms, including silent reading, recitation in solitude, or recitation before an audience.

In the case of performance poetry genres that incorporate textual composition, this manifestation of meaning through reading becomes more complex. To classify a piece of writing as a slam poem, for example, is to acknowledge that it was composed with the intent of performance. Consequently, in one sense, the poem does not fully manifest until it has been

performed before an audience, raising the question of how performance actualizes the poem in ways that text alone cannot. In "Contextually Frustrated," I outline many of the performative contexts that can be analyzed as a means of answering this question. However, emphasizing the importance of these performative features can sometimes lead scholars to view performance as the slam poem's only meaningful (or most meaningful) form, which marginalizes the role of the composed text in the creation of the performance. In fact, the apotheosized slam poem is a product of both text and performance, making it necessary acknowledge readings of both in the case of slam poetry analysis. Failure to do so results in incomplete and, consequently, inaccurate representations of slam poetry in scholarship.

The unique features of slam poetry, as established in the introduction, require specific applications of the dual readings of text and performance appropriate to textually-derived performance poetry in general. The competitive framework of performance is one factor to account for because it creates certain conventions that impact both textual composition and the performance. Props, costumes, musical accompaniment, and most other accouterments are verboten, and performances longer than three minutes are subject to hefty points penalties. In addition, the rules of the poetry slam require each competitor to perform their own original work. Unlike the case of the epic or any other inherited literature, slam poetry is always performed by the author in competition.[4] These restrictions are unique to the poetry slam, resulting in a distinct sort of loose uniformity among slam performances. Performances tend to be markedly unadorned by external paraphernalia, always delivered by the author, and roughly three minutes in length.

[4] Outside of the competition context, slam poets do often perform each others' work, a practice referred to as "covering." However, slam poetry conventions are largely dependent upon the regulations of the poetry slam competition. While covering is an intriguing example of how slam poetry can extend beyond the framework of competition, performances like this are non-conventional, consequently extending beyond the scope of my points in this chapter.

However, the textual composition process is also influenced by these conventions because the text functions, in many ways, as a script for the performance. While the processes of reading the textual and performative elements of slam poetry are largely similar to the application of these processes to other kinds of performative poetry, the conventions of the poetry slam create some unique features that must be read in context. With a few adjustments, Middleton's stance on the role of reading in the interpretation of poetry is readily applicable to the slam poetry genre.

In most cases, slam poems are most easily recognized as such in performance, because of the degree to which the genre is defined by performative contexts. Slam poems are less easily distinguished from other types of poetry when they are disseminated through text. This may erroneously lead to the conclusion that performance is the primary mode of slam poetry, or the only mode that need be considered in analysis. This is exacerbated by the fact that many slam poets memorize their poems to enhance performance, evoking connections to orally-composed and/or improvised poetry genres and traditions that do not incorporate textual composition. While these connections can be productive when situating slam poetry within the larger context of performance poetry, they become problematic when they feed the misconception that slam poetry is essentially improvised or orally composed. In fact, slam poetry is very much defined by its bi-modal, or dual format, identity. While a slam poem achieves apotheosis through performance, that performance is very much a product of the composed text. In this manner, slam poetry aligns with established ideas about relationships between orality and textuality, such as Donaghue's aforementioned assertion that the two can, and do, overlap.

The nature of such overlapping is further explained by Jennifer Esmail's insights into the concept of voice in relation to nineteenth-century deaf poetry. Instead of thinking in terms of purely textual features and purely performative features, Esmail illustrates that this kind of

binary thinking does not have absolute application by citing elements of voice in poetry composed by deaf authors. Esmail's argument implies that elements of poetry we conventionally think of as sonic need not be conventionally "sounded" in order to manifest. In relation to slam poetry, this line of reasoning suggests that the vocalized performance of a slam poem begins on the page. Consequently, it is productive to think about the sound of slam poetry as a product of textual and performative synergy. As both Esmail and Donaghue's analyses point out, this productive relationship between text and performance is not unique to slam poetry, or even to poetry itself. However, this scholarship establishes a basis for analyzing text and performance in conjunction, as opposed to isolation. The absence of this kind of work in extant slam poetry scholarship leads to a lack of understanding about some of the most important defining features of slam poetry.

Slam poetry, like other poetry that is textually composed and orally delivered, is often classified as a strain of oral poetry, such as in Foley's *How to Read an Oral Poem*. Foley advocates "a healthy pluralism in approaching oral poetry, and that means genuine open-mindedness" (11), which is certainly necessary to situating slam poetry within the larger traditional genre of oral poetry. Such a classification is significant because it enables a broader analysis and discussion of the more fluid textual and performative elements of slam poetry. One might assume that slam poetry's place in the oral poetry genre is secured only by its propensity for oral delivery and aural reception. However, slam poetry also exists in variant versions just as primary oral poetry does. Slam poets create new versions of their poems over time, both through textual revision and moments of oral recomposition through performance. Textual variants are often published on blogs and websites, in addition to literary journals. While performative variants are often more ephemeral, video records of slam poems have made them more

accessible over time. This creates another parallel between slam poetry and "conventional" oral poetry to consider in analysis.

Accounting for variance in slam poetry analysis can enable a more complete definition of slam poetry, as well as a clearer understanding of how slam poetry fits into a larger, literary context. Foley argues that "we must actively affirm the historical and evolutionary nature of oral tradition, for this is a crucial part of its context" (3). To apply this line of reasoning in a more specific manner, analyzing an oral poem as static would decontextualize it, potentially resulting in misrepresentation. As established in "Contextually Frustrated," decontextualizing slam poetry results in problematically inaccurate portrayals of the genre and, if slam poetry shares the evolutionary characteristics of primary oral poetry, variance is a crucial, informative context of slam poetry analysis

Naturally, supporting this hypothesis requires that I establish the connection between variance in primary oral poetry and variance in slam poetry, and, towards these ends, I invoke Paul Zumthor's theory of mouvance. In *Intertextualite et Mouvance*, Zumthor suggests that text and speech are not closed and may be "worked" upon by other texts and discourses (9). Mouvance, or movement, refers to the changes that are created through reperformance, translation, combination, interpretation, and other mediations. Nagy suggests Zumthor's conception of mouvance "seems apt for describing a wide variety of situations where we do indeed observe a distinct degree and even a distinct kind of textual variation" (10). Ultimately, acknowledging mouvance leads toward analyses that interrogate how and why an oral (or oral-adjacent) poem changes over time. Applying the concept of mouvance to slam poetry, in both its performative and textual forms, establishes variability as a feature that the genre shares with primary oral poetry, and, consequently, as a contextual front of slam poetry analysis.

Nagy explains that "the poet goes about his composition by performing it, by *moving* it…to perform the song [poem] is to recompose it, to change it, that is, to *move* it. In this light, *mouvance* is the same thing as recomposition-in-performance"(16). For example, inherited oral poetry is "moved" when a new performer receives and reinterprets the poem through their own performance. While certain features of the poem, such as the general content, may be consciously preserved, mouvance acknowledges the fluidity of elements such as pacing, tone, syntax and word choice, and emphasis. Several features of slam poetry lend themselves to the creation of performative mouvance, as well. Most slam poets develop a repertoire of poems, and it is not unheard of for a slam poet to participate in up to several slams per week. In short, slam poems are frequently reperformed, creating multiple opportunities for variation. A notable feature of distinction is that the mouvance that occurs within these scenarios is very much dictated by the conventions of the poetry slam. As previously established, poets must adhere to a roster of rules if they hope to score well, which limits the ways in which a poem can be "moved" from performance to performance. A poet cannot choose to add musical accompaniment to their performance, for example, nor can they add content that makes the performance longer than the three-minute time limit. Furthermore, the audience members play a unique role in the context of the poetry slam, making this contextual element a contributing factor in the shaping of slam poetry mouvance. While the audience plays a crucial role in the creation of any performance, the agency of the slam poetry audience determines the outcome of the event, making it likely for competitive slam poets to "move" their poems in response to audience preferences. Finally, the performer in a poetry slam is always the author of the work being performed, meaning that the author is always the "mover" in the case of slam poetry variants. This is not necessarily the case within other performative poetry genres, such as traditions in which performed poetry is

transmitted through inheritance. While mouvance links other forms of oral and/or performative poetry to the slam poetry genre, a full analysis of variation in slam poetry requires an understanding of how the conventions of the genre enable and limit the movement of the poetry.

Having established the role of mouvance within the context of slam poetry performance, I now approach the same concept in relation to text, a move which Zumthor might view as unorthodox. Because performance and text are functions of each other in the case of slam poetry, mouvance occurs at both the textual and performative levels in interdependent ways. In the case of orally-composed poetry, textual manifestations are generally viewed as representations, as opposed to integral components, of literary identity. Consequently, Zumthor's application of mouvance to printed texts seems primarily focused upon how variant texts represent performative variations. In the case of slam poetry, the role of variant texts is a bit more significant. As outlined, text and performance are both crucial elements to the identity of the slam poetry genre. Text is the genesis of any given slam poem. It is not merely representing the poem, it is a part of the poem. I will begin with the ways in which performative mouvance also moves the text, as this concept is in alignment with Zumthor's analyses of medieval poetry. According to Zumthor, variant texts represent the ways in which a poem has been mediated in a concrete manner that enables an analysis of their differences (7). This can certainly apply in the case of slam poetry as poems are revised to reflect new versions of performance along the lines of formatting, line breaks, stanza breaks, semantics, and other textual features. However, because the text is more than just a representation of performance in this genre, this kind of reflective mouvance does not just extend from performance to text, but also from text to performance. While a slam poem certainly evolves through performance, it also evolves through textual revision. In these cases, the mouvance created on the page is represented through subsequent

performances. Later in the chapter, I will illustrate this kind of mouvance through the presentation and discussions of several ethnopoetic transcriptions.[5] With regard to primary oral poetry, Nagy suggests that performance and composition are "two different aspects of one process in oral poetics" (1). While this statement must be adapted to fit the case of a textually derived genre like slam poetry, its central concept that performance and composition overlap in their functionality certainly applies.

While I have covered the ways in which mouvance exists within the slam poetry genre, the analytical significance of this feature may not yet be clear. In applying more general frameworks of analysis to slam poetry, it is prudent to question the value of the results. I argue that analyzing slam poetry in terms of textual and performative mouvance can not only demonstrate a symbiotic relationship between text and performance, but also illustrate features of the genre and provide a foundation for considering the contexts of variant versions across both media. By comparing different versions of a poem in text and performance, it may be possible to hypothesize the variations that denote the poem's textual and performative mouvance. In addition, it may be possible to contextualize a variant performance either via live attendance or analysis of a multimedia record that incorporates contextual elements such as audience, venue type, and other performances occurring within the same event. For example, if a conventionally exuberant poem is performed in a more subdued manner as part of a slam in which serious poems are receiving high scores, the performative mouvance is likely produced, in part, by this context.

[5] "Like" by Mike McGee and "Hurling Crowbirds at Mockingbirds" by Buddy Wakefield will be analyzed in terms of mouvance between different formats, and two versions of Alvin Lau's "For the Breakdancers" will be used to discuss mouvance within the a single format.

At this juncture, I have established several ways in which extant frameworks are relevant to slam poetry analysis with regard to text and performance, but the symbiotic relationship between the genre's media remains relatively untapped. As established in the introduction, slam poetry scholarship does delve into some features of the genre, but treatment thus far has largely been focused on historical context, modes of cultural expression, and general connections to larger genres or traditions. As previously discussed, there are print magazines and presses geared specifically toward slam poets, and slam poetry is frequently disseminated and received textually alongside its performance, which, along with the genre's convention of textual composition, reinforces the importance and validity of acknowledging text as a crucial part of slam poetry's literary identity. Performative mouvance is only one part of the movement that occurs within the slam poetry genre. To fully understand how slam poetry evolves, it is necessary to acknowledge and understand the role of textual variance. Applying and adapting extant frameworks to bi-modal analysis of slam poetry can produce a more accurate portrayal of how text and performance are linked within the genre, and may consequently enable broader and more accurate scholarship.

With Our Powers Combined: The Role of Ethnopoetics

At this point, it is necessary to establish a means of treating both text and performance productively in slam poetry analysis. While I have explained how both modes are integral to the identity of slam poetry, each also extends the poem beyond what could be accomplished by either one alone. Just as some elements of performance are often underrepresented in print, certain textual elements may be lost in performance. For example, the first stanza of Mike McGee's slam poem, "Like", entails the speaker imitating a whale noise, which is textually represented as "Hrrrreeeeeewhuuuuuuhhhwwoooaaauuuhh"(5). However, this is at best an

onomatopoeic representation in text, as the sound McGee makes when performing this poem live would not be classified as a word. The textual representation evokes an idea of the sound, but not the sound itself. In other cases, slam poems may contain unique textual features that inform performance, but are not performatively evident. Ethnopoetics provides a launching point for a productive approach to the relationship between text and performance in slam poetry particularly because of its focus on performative representation through text. Dennis Tedlock maintains that "an ethnopoetic score follows the original timing of a recorded performance, dividing the words into lines according to the alternation of sounds and silences" (2), which illustrates the ways in which ethnopoetics accounts for elements of performance that stretch the boundaries of textual representation. Of particular interest are the ways in which ethnopoetic representation accounts for nonlinguistic features of performance that are conventionally absent from standard texts. Jerome Rothenberg's experience with translating American Indian poetry illustrates additional factors that ethnopoetics considers: "I don't want to set English words to Indian music, but to respond--poem for--poem in the attempt to work out a "total" translation --not only of the words but of all sounds connected with the poem, including finally the music itself " ("Total Translation: An Experiment in the Translation of American Indian Poetry"). Creating ethnopoetic translations of slam poetry allows for the simultaneous expression of the genre's textual and sonically performative elements (or, at least, as close to that as one could reasonably hope to achieve), consequently providing a basis for analyzing symbiosis across modes of expression.

Of course, performance is not just an aural format, but a visual one, as well. Consequently, any true understanding of the relationships between slam poetry text and performance requires not only a way of analyzing auditory linguistic features, but also of

analyzing paralinguistic elements of physical performance. Fortunately, such means need not be built from scratch, but can instead be constructed upon the foundation of an existing approach. In *How to Read and Oral Poem,* Foley develops a version of ethnopoetic transcription to demonstrate the limitations of conventional textual representations of voiced texts in performance. He suggests that "by attending to the *performative* dimensions of slam poetry—to vocal qualities of all kinds including the rhetorical force of pausing and silence—we can lift the poet's creation off the page and embody it in our own reperformance" (97), implying that such a practice more accurately represents this literature than do conventional transcripts. As an illustration, Foley creates an ethnopoetic transcription of Lynne Procope's slam poem, "elemental woman", which he presents alongside a standard text version of the poem. The ethnopoetic transcription uses formatting functionalities and symbols to indicate features of the poem such as pauses, rising and falling intonation, and pacing. While underlining is used to denote places where "hand gestures" occur, the gestures are not identified specifically and no other non-sonic performatives are attended to. The end result is what Foley refers to as "a way to partially recover what the conventional printed page deletes; the living, present dimensions that constitute a performance" (101). I use Foley's application of ethnopoetic transcription as a starting point toward developing a version of this system that is particularly suited to slam poetry. In doing so, I have created a repertoire of transcription symbols that account for both linguistic and paralinguistic elements of performance.

Slam-scription in Action

My interpretive goals in this section are particularly informed by several established ideas about text, performance, and poetry. The links between the textual and the performative elements of slam poetry can be viewed as a sort of context, a concept borrowed from Foley's remarks

about oral poetry: “whatever intervenes between the spoken word and its apotheosis as a written record, whether during the performance or at some later time, contributes to the history of that oral text as part of its context” (7). Of course, slam poetry is apotheosized in performance, as opposed to on the page, but Foley’s logic is otherwise applicable. As context, text and performance relationships are necessary to a comprehensive analysis of slam poetry, especially when considering that decontextualization can so frequently result in the misrepresentation this project seeks to mitigate. Ethnopoetic slam-scriptions enable the observation of some of the interventions to which Foley refers, potentially contributing to a more thorough and accurate representation of the genre. Susan Chambers writes that, “we might enrich our understanding of the voice of poetry, its temporality and its sonic possibilities, if we learned to describe more carefully the experience of hearing in silence” (111). Like Esmail, she emphasizes the importance of acknowledging the sonic potential of words on the page. The theory behind ethnopoetic slam-scription involves not only “hearing” the text, but also “reading” the performance.

So far, I have discussed a variety of ways in which the relationship between text and performance is integral to the slam poetry genre, while additionally outlining precedents for analyzing such relationships and establishing the relative dearth of such slam poetry analyses. I have also proposed an adapted version of Foley’s ethnopoetic transcription as a practical means of understanding page and stage relationships within slam poetry contexts. What remains to be presented is the yield of such work. To demonstrate this, I analyze several ethnopoetic slam-scriptions in terms of how they illustrate and extend the understanding of previously-established features of slam poetry, such as the observable ways in which text and performance “create” each other, differences between and limitations of modes, and versioning.

Because slam poetry is textually derived, examining the ways in which the text of a slam poem impacts its performance seems like a natural point of entry into my field of examples. I have chosen, for this purpose, "Hurling Crowbirds at Mockingbars" by Buddy Wakefield, who is one of the first slam poets I ever saw perform live. In creating the ethnopoetic slam-scription of this poem, I relied upon formatting, interjections, and symbols to textually denote the poem's performative features and inter-modal discrepancies. I used a version of the poem from Wakefield's website as my textual source, while a 2009 video (a performance excerpted from "The Elephant Engine High Dive Revival" multi-poet show) served as the performance record. Like Foley did in his translation of Lynn Procope's poem, I created a transcription key to identify what I was representing, and how. It is notable to consider that I focused my efforts upon the elements of the poem I felt to be most salient to my established purpose, as opposed to attempting to document every performative element that extends the text. In focusing my translation, I considered which elements of performance were most crucial to an illustration of how slam poetry changes between and across modes or formats. Vocalized, paratextual elements such as volume and pacing dynamics, manipulation of rhythm are all ways in which the performer extends the poem beyond the text, ultimately creating a new "version" of it. Such performative versioning is also present in the flat-out addition and subtraction of words, phrases, lines, or stanzas, which often represent instances of oral recomposition. I also accounted for the ways in which non-linguistic performatives, such as gesture, movement, and facial expression, extend the poem beyond its text. Finally, I acknowledged the role played by audience response in shaping various elements of the performance. Because the audience impacts performance, it makes sense that such impact would play a role in the versioning that occurs as a result of performance. The result of this focused transcription, as seen below, essentially represents both

text and performance simultaneously, enabling a multifaceted discussion about how specific, textual features may have been productive in the creation of the performance.

An Ethnopoetic Slam-Scription of "Hurling Crowbirds at Mockingbars" by Buddy Wakefield

Translation Key

pause: * (longer pauses = more asterisks)

nonverbal physical performance and audience response: (described in parentheses directly under the relevant words)

rising or falling volume: < + italicized words or > + italicized words

increasing or decreasing speed: < + bold words or > + bold words

tonal shifts/emphasis: all caps

vocalized additions to the text: underlined words

vocalized subtractions from the text: strikethrough words

* If we were created in God's image *
then when God was a child *
he smushed fire ants with his fingertips
(pantomines with
index finger on
right hand)
and avoided tough questions. **

(horizontal swipe with

right hand 2x)

(audience laughter)

There are ways around being the go-to person * <u>everybody</u> *

(open-handed

gesture/right hand)

even for ourselves

even when the answer is clear

<**like the holy water Gentiles ~~drank~~ <u>would drink</u>**

(gesture with raised left hand)

before they realized **>Forgiveness ****

is the release of all hope for a better past. ***

(horizontal hand movement outw ard)

(hands point up and back)

>**I thought those were chime shells * in your pocket**

(forward gesture with

both hands, right hand

pointing out)

so I chucked a quarter at it

(pantomime

flicking quarter

with right hand)

HOPING to hear some part of you

respond on a high note. *

YOU acted like I was hurling crowbirds at mockingbars

(rhythmic throwing pantomime)

and >**abandoned me for not making sense. ****

Evidently, * I don't experience things as rationally as you do.

For example, * I know mercy *

when I have enough money to change the jukebox at a gay bar*

(SOMEBODY'S GOTTA CHANGE THAT SHIT).***

(audience laughter) (audience laughter)

(YMCA dance pantomime) (emphatic thumbs down

right hand)

>**YOU ~~understand the power of God's~~ <u>know</u> mercy**

whenever someone shoves a stick of morphine

(right hand pantomimes movement)

straight up into your heart <u>and damn</u>

It felt AMAZING

>*the days you were happy to see me*

so I smashed a beehive against the ocean

(hands up, palms out) (pushing outward)

> *to try and make our splash last longer.*

(index fingers pointed

up and out)

Remember all the honey *

had me lookin' like a jellyfish * ape

but you walked off the water *>**in a porcupine of light**

strands of gold

~~drizzling~~ drizzled out to the tips of your wasps.

(arms extended, hands

pointing out to the sides)

This * is an apology letter to the both of us

(Gesturing with index fingers)

for how long it took me to let things go. *

It was not my intention to make such a

production of the emptiness between us

> **playing tuba on the tombstone of a soprano**

to try and keep some dead singer's perspective alive. *

*>*It's just that I coulda swore you had sung me a love song back there***

and that you meant it**

<**but I guess sometimes people just chew with their mouth open**

>**so I ate ear plugs alive with my throat**

hoping they'd get lodged deep enough inside the empty spots

that I wouldn't have to hear you leaving

(shakes head)

so I wouldn't have to listen to my heart keep saying

(points to head with right hand)

>**all my eggs were in a basket of red flags**

(vocal stumble)

all my eyes to a bucket of blindfolds

(touches hands to temples)

in the cupboard with the muzzles and the gauze

(open palms rhythmically gesturing outward from

sides of face)

ya know I didn't mean to speed so far out and off

trying to drive all your nickels to the well

when you were happy to let them wishes drop**

>**but I still show up for gentleman practice** **

>i**n the company of lead dancers**

HOPING their grace will get stuck in my shoes.

(cocks head,

closes eyes)

<**Is that a handsome shadow on my breath, sweet woman**

or is it a cattle call

(s h a k I n g h e a d

in a school of fish? ~~Still~~ >**DANCE WITH ME***

e y e s c l o s e d)

LESS LIKE A WALTZ FOR PANIC

more for the way we'd hoped to swing

(bends knees,

lowers posture)

>**the night we took off everything**

(pushes hands

up and out at

shoulder level)

and we were swingin' for the fences

(repeated overhead gesture,

hands moving back and forth)

>don't hold it against

my love

you know I wanna breath deeper than this *

(circular hand motions, inward)

~~you know~~ I didn't mean to look so serious *

(shaking head)

(circular hand motions

inward)

>didn't mean to act like a filthy floor

(pointing hand gestures, both hands)

didn't mean to turn us both into a cutting board

(hand gestures pointing inward,

then outward and inward **)**

but there were knives s-stuck

(pantomime

pulling knife

with left hand,

left hand stays up)

in the words where I came from

too much time in the back of my words.

(left hand points behind

head, right hand points right)

I pulled knives from my back and my words.

(pantomimes knife-pulling with right hand)

I cut trombones from the moment you slipped away

(pantomiming trombone (pointing out right hand)

playing)

*<a**nd I know it left me lookin' like a knife fight, * <u>lady</u>*

<yeah you know it left me feelin' like a shotgun shell

<you know I know I mighta gone and lost my breath

(hand gestures inward and outward,

chest level)

but I wanna show ya how I found my breath

(hands up and open at chest level)

TO DEATH

(vigorous head shaking)

it was buried under all the wind instruments

(left arm extended to gesture left)

hidden in your castanets

goddamn

if ya ever wanna know how it felt when ya left

yeah if you ever wanna come inside

(large, circular inward hand motions)

just knock on the spot*

(pantomime knocking)

where I finally pressed stop***

(pantomime pressing button)

>**playing musical chairs with <u>your</u> exit signs.***

>***I'm gonna cause you a miracle*****

(audible audience response)

when you see the way I kept God's image alive.**

>**Forgiveness**

is for anybody

who needs a safe passage through my mind. ***

(both hands finger-point

toward temples)

>**If I was really created in God's image****

(hands in pockets)

then when God was a boy**

he wanted to grow up to be a man**

a GOOD man**

and when God was a man**

a GOOD man*

>**He started telling the truth in order to get honest responses**. *

He'd say,

>**"<u>Yeah</u> **I know.****

I really shoulda wore my cross *

AGAIN ***

<but I don't wanna scare the gentiles off." ***

(nods)

(walks away from the mic right)

The ethnopoetic slam-scription of Wakefield's poem illustrates some specific ways in which the performance responds to the text. For example, the pacing of the poem is reflected by the connection between the pauses in the performance and the line and stanza breaks in the text. The slam-scription reflects that the performance of the first two lines of the poem includes short pauses at the points where each line is broken: "* If we were created in God's image *
then when God was a child *." This correlation between textual and performative structure suggests that these elements of the performance's pace are, at least in part, products of the text. Additionally, Wakefield's performance often denotes stanza breaks with longer pauses, as illustrated by the following, "slam-scribed" lines: "**is the release of all hope for a better past.** ***" and "(SOMEBODY'S GOTTA CHANGE THAT SHIT).***." The use of longer pauses to denote stanza breaks, in relation to the shorter pauses used to denote line breaks, reinforces the impression that the pacing of the performance is informed by the structure of the text. This is not to say that every line or stanza break is performatively marked by an appropriately long pause, as slam poetry performances are rarely that formulaic, but rather to suggest that the pacing of the performance is a manifestation of textual structure at certain points in the poem. Bringing the textual and sonic elements of the poem's pacing together through the slam-scription provides the foundation for demonstrating and discussing the significance of this relationship, both in relation to the poem in particular, and the genre in general.

The slam-scription also illustrates the observable ways in which Wakefield's physical performance can be viewed as textually responsive. While some of Wakefield's gestures are vague in nature, some are clear pantomimes of language, and I will begin with these more literal examples.

In the first stanza, the slam-scription accounts for the following gesture:

he smushed fire ants with his fingertips

(pantomines with

index finger on

right hand).

Wakefield physically performs the line as a literal representation of the action described. His delivery of the poem's titular line also incorporates this type of gesture:

YOU acted like I was hurling crowbirds at mockingbars

(rhythmic throwing pantomime)

Of course, not all elements of Wakefield's physical performance are direct representations of lines, but that does not mean they are not informed by the text. Consider the following line:

HOPING their grace will get stuck in my shoes.

(cocks head,

closes eyes)

These gestures reflect the significance of the line as the culmination of the buildup created by the two preceding lines. He also performs the line "the night we took off everything" with sweeping, outward, hand movements that emphasize the sense of freedom the line evokes within the context of the rest of the poem.

While the application of ethnopoetics enables the analyst to demonstrate the ways in which slam poetry performance is, in part, a function of its textual counterpart, it also presents the opportunity to examine the ways in which performance extends the meaning of the text. Such extension is not only a feature of how performance defines slam poetry, but is also an illustration of the modal limitations that should discourage analysts from accessing slam poetry only through

one mode. As ethnopoetic slam-scription supports, a genuinely comprehensive experience of a slam poem is unlikely to be accessible through a single mode/format.

"Hurling Crowbirds at Mockingbars" contains many vocal and physical performative elements that extend beyond what is present on the page, such as tone, pacing, and volume choices, as well as movement, gesture and facial expression. One of the most amusing examples of how physical performance enhances meaning is the following:

* I know mercy *
when I have enough money to change the jukebox at a gay bar*
(SOMEBODY'S GOTTA CHANGE THAT SHIT).***

(audience laughter) (audience laughter)

(YMCA dance pantomime) (emphatic thumbs down right hand)

Wakefield accompanies the ensuing pause by dancing the YMCA to illustrate the level of cliché to which he is referring. While the lines are inherently humorous in text, the dance elevates the level of the humor by making them more accessible and concrete. Of course, Wakefield's use of audible performative elements, such as pacing and volume, also serve to enhance the impact of the poem in ways that extend beyond what is present on the printed page. At many points, he manipulates these elements of his performance to draw attention to certain lines or denote a shift in mood. For example, the lines "*>*It's just that I coulda swore you had sung me a love song back there*** and that you meant it**" come toward the end of a stanza in which the speaker seems to be frantically trying to justify his response to the demise of a tumultuous relationship. Wakefield emphasizes the tenderness of these lines, particularly in relationship to the rest of the stanza, by lowering his voice. Consequently, the venom of the line that follows, "<**but I guess**

sometimes people just chew with their mouth open", is enhanced as much by its juxtaposition with the lines that precede it as by the increase in speed that lends it force. Wakefield also manipulates pacing to emphasize the emotional turmoil behind certain lines, such as the following:

*<and I know it left me lookin' like a knife fight, * lady*

<yeah you know it left me feelin' like a shotgun shell

<you know I know I mighta gone and lost my breath

Wakefield begins each of these lines by increasing the speed of his vocal performance, creating a sense of building tension and urgency that complements the anguish expressed by the language of the lines.

At some points, Wakefield also incorporates vocal shifts that are defined by tone, as opposed to volume or speed. Like volume and pacing, these tonal features also contribute to the meaning of the poem in ways that often extend beyond the text. For example, Wakefield performs the lines "hoping to hear some part of you / respond on a high note" with a pleading tone on the word "hoping," which underscores the desperation of the speaker's attempt to connect with the addressed. Additionally, when he delivers the aforementioned line, "Somebody's gotta change that shit" in reference to the jukebox music at the gay bar, he adopts a fourth-wall-breaking, "real talk" tone that almost comes across as a break in performance, as though, for those few seconds, Wakefield is conversing with the audience as opposed to performing for them. This extends the poem beyond the text by creating an interactive moment between audience and performer, one that extends beyond subtle performance adjustments dictated by audience demographics and responses. While this line is admittedly textually marked by parentheses on the page, the impact of Wakefield's tonal shift in performance creates a more

defined and intense audience connection than the textual formatting. In the final lines of the poem, Wakefield delivers the imagined words of God in a deliberately casual and conversational tone, which reflects the diction and syntax of the text. Performatively, this enhances the connection between the God and the humanity of Wakefield's poem. The poet's emphasis of the word "again" in the lines "yeah, I know / I really shoulda wore my cross / again" reinforces this by creating a moment of darkly humorous double entendre. While Wakefield make be conflating God and Jesus in these lines, they still present a higher being as someone casually making a bitter joke as his own expense. The snarky humor of the moment created by this tonal shift reinforces the meaning of the lines at the beginning of the stanza that parallel God and humanity: "If I was really created in God's image / then when God was a boy / he wanted to grow up to be a man."

While I began my analysis of Wakefield's poem with an illustration of how ethnopoetic transcription reveals performance as a partial product of text, it is important to acknowledge that sometimes, performance does not merely extend the text of the poem, it deviates from it completely, offering evidence of mouvance that occurs across modes. In addition to revealing the ways in which text productively impacts performance, ethnopoetic slam-scription also illustrates the ways in which slam poetry is recomposed in performance, resulting in a kind of versioning that connects the genre to primary oral poetry. My ethnopoetic slam-scription of "Hurling Crowbirds at Mockingbars" illuminates several examples of such recomposition.

Perhaps the most glaring differences between text and performance are created when Wakefield adds or omits words to and from the poem. The slam-scription documents these instances, which enables their incorporation into slam poetry analysis. At some points, the additions seem like functions of performative context, such as when Wakefield adds the word

"everybody" to the end of the line "There are ways around being the go-to person." This seemingly minor supplement comes across as a direct acknowledgment of the audience, which is appropriate to the face-to-face experience of a live performance. The connection between the poet and the audience/reader may seem less immediate in the case of text. As established in chapter one, the audience is a crucial part of slam poetry performance, and Wakefield's recomposition can be read as an acknowledgment of that. Textual versions of slam poems do not allow for this kind of immediate response to the audience (reader), although they are often partial products of feedback from previous audiences and readers. This suggests that audience impact manifests differently in text and performance, which should be accounted for in analyses of versions of slam poems across modes. However, the live audience is not the only influential factor in the creation of Wakefield's textual/performative discrepancies. At other points, his additions seem to elevate the tone, emotion, or impact of the poem, such in the following lines:

>**YOU understand the power of God's know mercy**

whenever someone shoves a stick of morphine

(right hand pantomimes movement)

straight up into your heart and damn

It felt AMAZING

>*the days you were happy to see me*

The words "and damn" are performative additions to the original text, and seem to underscore the force of the language in these lines. Wakefield creates a strong, figurative image in the lines preceding the interjection, and follows them with an honest expression of emotion. The additional words not only linguistically elevate impact, but they also allow some additional space and time for the audience to process the performance of the lines in question. In addition to using

interjections to directly respond to audience feedback and underscore use of language, Wakefield also employs them to emphasize how this poem functions as a mode of address. As established by the sporadic use of the pronoun “you”, the addressee within the fiction of the poem is very specific, presumably an intended lover. While this feature of the poem is firmly established in text, Wakefield extends its impact through additional moments of direct address, such as the addition of the word “lady” at the end of the line, “and I know it left me looking like a knife fight, lady” and the added “your” in “playing musical chairs with your exit signs.” Each time Wakefield refers to the addressee in the poem, he calls their fiction into being through acknowledgment. By including additional references, he enhances the presence of the addressee, reminding the actual, live audience that the speaker's audience (at least within context of the poem) is singular and distinct. This creates a layered experience for both the live audience and Wakefield as a performer. On one level, Wakefield is inviting the audience to consume a fiction he is creating for them in real time, and they are doing so. However, my previous points about audience and performer relationships also establish this as a genuine moment of interaction. While I have already acknowledged the productive nature of these interactions, I also maintain that the connection between the poem's speaker and the silent addressee is crucial to both the meaning and analysis of the poem. Wakefield's additional interpellations of the addressee in the poem ensure that this significance is not lost in performance, even as the audience/performer relationship comes into play.

Perhaps less immediately noticeable, but no less analytically significant, are the ways in which Wakefield “moves” the poem by manipulating the pacing. While line and stanza breaks serve as a foundation for the poem's pacing, as previously established, Wakefield incorporates additional pauses at many points to emphasize language or tone. These extra-textual pauses often

serve to draw attention to certain words due to paralinguistic elements such as irregularity, significance, or density, such as the pause that follows the word “chime shells” in the line “ >**I thought those were chime shells * in your pocket**.” The pause allows the audience time to process this unconventional pairing of words and situate it within the larger context of the poem. At other points, pauses are used to foreshadow particularly lyrical turns of phrase, such as the pause in the line “but you walked off the water *>**in a porcupine of light**.” The pause that precedes the phrase “in a porcupine of light” functions as a clear demarcation between the conventional and figurative uses of language in this line. In a sense, the pause is a grace note that prepares the audience for the particularly stylized description that follows.

At some points, Wakefield uses additional pauses as part of a larger effect, such as his manipulation of pacing at the end of the poem. His performance follows many of the last stanza's lines with longer-than-usual pauses, and in doing so, essentially slows down the poem. This allows the audience more time to process these lines, emphasizing their importance within the context of the poem as a whole. Extra-textual pauses may also signify the ways in audience response contribute to a slam poem's mouvance within the context of performance. For example, one of the longest pauses in the performance follows the humorous line, “(somebody's gotta change that shit)”, but this pause is at least partially dictated by the audience laughter that fills it. The lines that follow are much more serious and also include deliberate imagery, so to ensure their maximum impact Wakefield must let the humor of jukebox lines play out before moving on.

Up to this point, I have geared my ethnopoetic slam-scription analyses toward illustrating the two-way productivity of text and performance in the case of slam poetry. While I have covered many ways in which text directly informs performance, the ways in which performance

creates text may seem, at this point, relatively minor. As illustrated through the analysis of "Hurling Crowbirds at Mockingbars," slam poetry is recomposed through performance in ways that can be documented through ethnopoetic slam-scription. However, many paralinguistic elements of this performative recomposition do not conventionally translate into text, making it difficult for their impact to manifest in subsequent textual versioning. Furthermore, the common understanding of a voiced text, as established by Foley, suggests that such poetry is linear in its production, moving from text to performance. However, performative recomposition can, in fact, lead to new textual versions of a slam poem. Ethnopoetic slam-scription offers a means to document the evolution of a slam poem as it changes across modes in a recursive, as opposed to linear, fashion. This yields a more accurate representation of the genre's bi-modal identity and more precisely defines how such an identity relates to the role of mouvance within the genre.

To illustrate this admittedly complex approach to multimedia versioning in slam poetry, I apply my reasoning to the poem "Like", by Mike McGee. My analysis considers three versions of the poem: a text from McGee's website in 2004; a video record of a 2006 performance of the poem during season five of *Def Poetry Jam*; and the version of the poem that appears in his 2009 print collection, *In Search of Midnight*. In addition to demonstrating how ethnopoetic slam-scription enables a concrete discussion of inter-modal mouvance, my analysis of "Like" also delves into evidence of genre traits, such as the participatory role of the audience. This analysis considers how textual composition translates into performance, as well as how performative recomposition manifests in textual revision.

An Ethnopoetic Slam-Scription of "Like" by Mike McGee

Translation key

pause: * (longer pauses = more asterisks)

nonverbal physical performance and audience response: (described in parentheses directly under the relevant words)

rising or falling volume: < + italicized words or > + italicized words

increasing or decreasing speed: < + bold words or > + bold words

vocalized additions to the text: underlined words

vocalized subtractions from the text: strikethrough words

(y'all felt this before, I know you have)

Man * I like you*

Like blue whales like to say, "Hrrrreeeeeewhuuuuuuhhhwwoooaaauuuhh."*

(3x) (audience laughter)

(right hand gesture, lean right, both hands gesture)

<I like you a whole bunch of a lot

(walk stage right)

You're a * pocket full of awesome

(forward gesture w/ open right hand)

<I like you similar to the way pirates and frat boys like booty **

(right hand gesture, finger/thumb circle) (audience laughter)

Like David Copperfield likes performing grand scale, yet, lame-ass feats of illusion *

(hands outstretched forward) (disdainful look) (audience laughter)

Like the U.S. Government likes performing grand scale, yet, lame-ass feats of illusion ***

(similar hand gestures to previous line) (audience laughter and applause)

(holds up hands, palms forward)

<Like testicles and homeboys like to hang **

(frames groin with hands) (audience laughter)

Like homeless people and breakdancers like cardboard *

(gesture with right hand) (audience laughter)

Like Muppets like fisting

I like****** >**(you all act like you've never seen a happy Muppet)**

(audience laughter)

< I like you a whole bunch of a lot and a whole lot more times infinity *

<**and Maybe that's starting to dip into equation of love**

(quick, repetitive gestures with both hands)

Nevertheless, I got a thing for you * like * magnets got it for refrigerators *

***>I'm stuck on you * and I like it** **

(audience "aww") (twirls back and forth in place)

(audience laughter)

<I like you an official metric fuckload *

(audience laughter)

I think you're a body full of soul >**and I hope you like me back**

(emphatic hand gestures)

> **and I guess I'm * just tired of meeting people**

(emphatic hand

who define themselves by what they don't like**

gestures)

I just don't like that **

(audience laughter)

~~However,~~ <**but I do like holding you** *

The way your pillow holds your head when you sleep *

The way * **< gay, lesbian, transgender, transsexual, Irish and Mexican people** hold parades

***

(outstretched right hand)

(audience laughter)

The way ***< **The way the Earth holds the moon and the sun holds the Earth and how**

(outstretched right hand) (pantomime motion of

they'll constantly spin around each other forever

celestial bodies)

and even though that metaphor > **doesn't * really * make sense with regard to this poem**

because that would imply that there were three of us **

(audience laughter)

<(*which would also be awesome!)* *

(right hand thumbs up) (audience laughter)

>*but You get the idea*

In my book you rock, and I like rocks

What the fuck? *

(audience laughter)

~~and~~ Anyhow * > *just because I spent an hour*

*or so writing this down *> doesn't mean you have to like me back*, *

but dammit, *

I would really like that.

~~I like you the way I like my wonton packed full of shrimp~~

~~Like too much syrup on my pancakes (and in my beard)~~

~~Like Mr. Furly enjoyed eavesdropping through kitchen doors~~

~~Like blue whales like to say, "Hrrrreeeeeewhuuuuuuhhhwwoooaaauuuhh."~~

~~I like you a whole bunch of a lot~~

~~You're a pocket full of awesome~~

~~I like you not unlike Aaron Neville likes his mole~~

~~Like Texans like Texas~~

~~Like fat kids like cake~~

~~Like two likes three and four likes six (five has issues)~~

~~Like tuna sandwiches like teeth~~

~~Like cherry flavored Slurpees like to wash down convenience store nachos~~

~~Like La-Z-Boys like Sunday afternoon asses~~

~~I like you whole bunch of a lot and a little bit more~~

~~You're a bottomless basket of extra crispy French fries covered in awesome sauce~~

~~I like you similar to the way pirates and frat boys like booty~~

~~Like newlyweds like Holiday Inns~~

~~Like bohemians, yuppies and Japanese like sushi~~

~~Like David Copperfield likes performing grand scale, yet, lame-assfeats of illusion~~

~~Like the U.S. Government likes performing grand scale, yet, lame-assfeats of illusion~~

~~Like testicles and homeboys like to hang~~

~~Like homeless people and breakdancers like cardboard~~

~~Like Americans like ranch dressing~~

~~Like Muppets like fisting~~

~~I like you a whole bunch of a lot a whole lot more times infinity~~

~~Maybe that's starting to dip into equation of love~~

~~Nevertheless, I got a thing for you like magnets got it for refrigerators~~

~~I'm stuck on you and I like it~~

~~I like you an official metric fuckload~~

~~I think you're a body full of soul and I hope you like me back~~

~~Even if it's like dust likes furniture, at least you're all over me~~

~~I'm making a "pledge" because I guess I'm tired of meeting people~~

~~who define themselves by what they don't like~~

~~I just don't like that~~

~~However, I do like holding you~~

~~The way your pillow holds your head when you sleep~~

~~The way gay, lesbian, transgender, transsexual, Irish and Mexican people hold parades~~

~~The way PBS holds fundraisers~~

~~The way the Earth holds the moon and the sun holds the Earth and how they'll constantly spin around each other foreverâ€¦and even though thatmetaphor doesn't really make sense with regard to this poem becausethat would imply that there were three of us~~

~~(which would also be awesome!)~~

~~You get the idea~~

~~In my book you rock, and I like rocks~~

~~and just because I spent an hour~~

~~or so writing this down doesn't mean you have to like me back,~~

~~but dammit,~~

~~I would really like that~~

Even a cursory glance at the ethnopoetic slam-scription of “Like” reveals evidence of performative mouvance. However, the type of movement differs notably from what is revealed by the ethnopoetic slam-scription of “Hurling Crowbirds at Mockingbars.” While Wakefield's performative recompositions are largely paralinguistic, McGee's recompositions in the Def Poetry Jam performance of 2006 create significant linguistic deviations from the text version of the poem that appeared on his website in 2004. Entire lines, such as “I like you not unlike Aaron Neville likes his mole,” and even stanzas, are cut altogether, as illustrated by the strikethrough formatting and lack of reintegration elsewhere in the poem. Additionally, many of the surviving lines are reordered, as can be observed by analyzing the original positioning of the lines designated in the strikethrough sections of the slam-scription. The reader may note that the line “I like you to similar to the way pirates and frat boys like booty” comes much later in 2004 text version of the poem than it does in the 2006 performance version. Furthermore, the slam-scription contains very few stanza breaks because McGee's performative recomposition dismantled most of the textual stanzas without definitively establishing new groupings. Deviations consisting of genuine linguistic additions (as opposed to content cuts or reorganizations) created through performative mouvance are slightly less dramatic, consisting of supplementary words and phrases, along with a few new lines, such as “Man I like you.”

Inter-Modal Mouvance

A starting point for considering the significance of the deviations between text and performance is to acknowledge the unidirectional mouvance that is created through performative recomposition of the initial text. In a similar manner to Wakefield's poem, the performative mouvance of “Like” establishes an element of oral composition within the genre of poetry slam.

While this does not undermine the primacy of textual composition in the slam poetry genre, it does highlight the need for slam poetry scholarship to acknowledge and attend to the role of oral composition. To some extent, adapting a poem from one mode to another inherently creates degrees of variation. For example, a reader accessing the poem through the printed page interprets tone primarily through response to diction and syntax, while an audience member observing a performance of that poem must also account for features of the performer's auditory voice when interpreting tone. Because the interpretive processes are different, it is likely that the interpretations themselves will vary, at least in minor ways. However, this type of mouvance is not necessarily a deliberate attempt at variation on the part of the author-performer. Instead, it may be a natural consequence of the poem's intermodal shift. Regardless, both ethnopoetic slam-scriptions presented so far illustrate changes that extend beyond such shifts, variants that reflect the author's deliberate and conscious movement of the poem. For example, the addition and subtraction of entire words, lines, or even stanzas are calculated moves that may present in both text and performance. Similarly, an author-performer may choose to use a deliberately ironic tone in performance to create a version that is tonally dissonant from the conventional interpretation of the text. In summary, textual and oral variance in slam poetry is produced through a combination of inter-modal interactivity and deliberate performer manipulation. Understanding these distinctions can enable more productive discussions of inter-modal mouvance within the genre.

Recursive Mouvance Between and Within Modes

The ethnopoetic slam-scription of "Like" catalogues the changes, or movements, that occur between the text version of the poem in 2004 and the performed version in 2006. In alignment with Foley's aforementioned assertion of "interventions" as context in the case of

multimedia versioning, it is worthwhile to more clearly define the value of such elucidation in relation to slam poetry analysis. Perhaps most importantly, analysis along these lines illustrates the ways in which slam poetry may extend beyond the categories in which the genre has previously been placed. Foley's classification of slam poetry as a voiced text emphasizes the significance of how slam poetry moves from text to performance. As illustrated in the previous analyses, exploring the mouvance created through this process can help to illustrate how the genre is defined by fluidity. However, ethnopoetic slam-scription yields even more potential for extending this line of analysis. Inter-modal mouvance is recursive, and the means of comparing textual and performed versions also enable analyses of how performative recomposition plays a productive role in textual versioning. To fully analyze textual versions of poems subsequent to performance is to acknowledge the ways in which performative mouvance may have contributed to their recompositions. This kind of productive collaboration between textual and oral composition is apparent in the comparison of two text versions of "Like," one from 2004 and one from 2009.

To extend the scope of my analysis to consider the recursive relationship between text and performance, I rely upon the connections between the performative features of McGee's 2006 Def Poetry Jam performance and the textual differences between "Like" as it appears on McGee's website in 2004 and as it appears in his collection, *In Search of Midnight*, in 2009. In doing so, I maintain that performative mouvance stemming from both oral composition and textual extension and response is evidence of performance productively impacting textual versioning.

To begin with, it is worthwhile to consider how the paratextual sonic features of McGee's 2006 performance are reflected in the 2009 version of the poem as text. One of the most

immediately obvious examples, perhaps because of its humorous significance, is the way in which the whale noise is altered in the final line of the first stanza. In the 2004 text, it reads as follows: “Like blue whales like to say “Hrrrreeeeeewhuuuuuuhhhwwoooaaauuuhh.”” However, in the 2006 performance of the poem, McGee delivers the whale noise three times, to the great delight of the audience. In the 2009 text, the line(s) read “Like blue whales like to say / “*Hrrrreeeeeewhuuuuuuhhhwwoooaaauuuhh.*” (repeat 3x)”, a textual variation that directly reflects the 2006 performance (and likely many other performances of the poem that occurred between the publication of the 2004 and 2009 versions in text).[6]

At other points, McGee's performative pacing is reflected by differences in line and stanza breaks between the earlier and later texts. In the 2004 text, “I'm stuck on you and I like it” is single, contained line. However, the ethnopoetic slam-scription of the 2006 performance documents an extra-textual pause after the word “you,” which is met with audience laughter: ***I'm stuck on you * and I like it*** **. Presumably, this pause allows the audience to absorb the humor of the “stuck on you” phrase in conjunction with the refrigerator simile of the previous line. This performative movement is reflected in the 2009 text with an additional line break that reads “I'm stuck on you / and I like it.” The textual pacing of the final stanza in the 2009 text also bears evidence of revisions that align with performative recompositions from the 2006 version of the poem. An excerpt from the 2004 version of the poem reads, “Anyhow, just because I spent an hour /or so writing this down doesn't mean you have to like me back”, and the lines are enjambed in a way that feels abrupt and almost unintentional. In his 2006 performance, McGee uses vocal performance to alter the pacing of these lines, adding pauses after “Anyhow”,

[6] This example potentially emphasizes the productive role of the audience in the slam poetry genre, since the repetition of the whale noise was a variation met with notable audience approval.

"so", and "back", while downplaying the line break at "hour" by failing to mark it with a pause: and Anyhow * > *just because I spent an hour*

*or so writing this down *> doesn't mean you have to like me back*, *. As a result, the pacing of these lines comes across as more conversationally narrative. This instance of performative mouvance is reflected in the 2009 text version of the poem, in which the lines are formatted as follows:

"Just because I spent

an hour or so writing this down

doesn't mean you have to like me back"

There are some noticeable differences between the versions of these lines in the 2006 performance and the 2009 text, such as the elimination of "anyhow" at the beginning of the first line and the way in which the second line break in the text version moves the performative pause following "so" to follow "down." This suggests that performative mouvance was not the only factor that impacted the textual variation that occurred between 2004 and 2009. However, many features of the lines as they appear in the 2009 text seem very much in alignment with the changes made as part of the 2006 performance. For example, although the line breaks in the 2009 text deviate slightly from the use of pauses in the 2006 performance, said line breaks do reflect a more conversational pacing than does the harsh enjambment of the 2004 version. While the lines from the 2009 version are certainly not end-stopped, they break at points that feel more natural. In addition, McGee uses indentations to create a visual cascade of lines, emphasizing not only the space between them but also their phrasal unity.

The examples so far discussed comprise of largely paralinguistic performative elements rendered via text, but McGee's 2006 performance of "Like" also contains decidedly linguistic

"movements" that appear to be incorporated in the 2009 text of the poem. To begin with, the ethnopoetic slam-scription of "Like" reveals that McGee cut a number of lines from the 2004 text when he performed the poem in 2006. A comparative analysis of the slam-scription and the 2009 text reveals textual versions of some of these performative cuts. For example, the first stanza in the 2004 version contains the line "Like Mr. Furly enjoyed eavesdropping through kitchen doors", which McGee cuts in performance. This line is also omitted from the 2009 text. The line, "I like you not unlike Aaron Neville likes his mole" is also cut from both the 2006 performance and the 2009 text.[7]

Analyzing ethnopoetic slam-scriptions in conjunction with multiple variant texts can also reveal additional recursive features of slam poetry evolution. As previously addressed, McGee's 2006 performance of "Like" linguistically recomposes content primarily by means of reordering lines and disrupting stanza organization. While the 2009 text bears many of these performatively recomposed elements, it also contains organizational variations of content that align with the 2004 text but were cut from the 2006 performance. To begin with, the opening stanza of the 2009 text reads, "I like you the way I like wonton / packed full of shrimp / Like too much syrup / on my pancakes…eggs…toast—and in my beard / (accident) / Like blue whales like to say / "Hrrrreeeeeewhuuuuuuhhhwwoooaaauuuhh." (repeat 3x)". As illustrated by the ethnopoetic slam-scription, most of these lines are absent from the 2006 performance, but present (with marginal variations) in the 2004 text. The lines "I like you similar to the way pirates and frat boys like booty / Like newlyweds like Holiday Inns / Like bohemians, yuppies and Japanese like sushi" are also restored to the 2009 text after being eliminated in the 2006 performance. The

[7] Had the performance occurred within context of a poetry slam competition, it would be reasonable to attribute the cut lines to adjustments for the time limit rule. However, because the performance was part of a non-competitive showcase, the cuts are presumed to be motivated solely by McGee's creative vision for the performance.

results of this analysis support the assertion that slam poetry evolves not only recursively between modes or formats, but also recursively within them. The three versions of "Like" illustrate the role of reversion in the creation of slam poetry variants. The change involved in versioning is not always linear, at least not in the case of slam poetry. However, the reversion that occurs between the 2004 and 2009 texts would not be apparent if the two texts were analyzed independently of the 2006 performance's ethnopoetic slam-scription. Instead, it would merely look as though much of the poem had remained intact, with the exception of relatively minor revisions. In order to verify that something has reverted to a former state, it is necessary to first establish evidence of initial change, which the ethnopoetic slam-scription provides through representation of both slam poetry formats. While it would be impossible to determine the motivations for such reversions without interviewing the author/performer himself, the fact that they exist suggests that it is necessary to consider variation, or mouvance, across multiple fronts in the case of slam poetry. While mouvance between and within modes yields much insight about the evolutionary process of slam poetry, it is also necessary to consider how these two types of mouvance intersect in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how slam poetry changes over time.

Ethnopoetic slam-scription can yield a deeper understanding of how slam poetry evolves through variations, as well as of the productive role played by inter-modal and intra-modal mouvance in the creation of these variations. In addition, ethnopoetic slam-scriptions can demonstrate specific examples of how slam poetry conventions play a role in both composition and recomposition. These processes are part of slam poetry's identity as a literary genre and, consequently, worth understanding and accounting for as a means of understanding the fluidity of any given slam poem.

Considering this fluidity in relation to a specific feature of the genre, such as the role of the audience, illustrates how individual features of the genre may manifest differently across modes, ultimately impacting inter-modal mouvance. For example, some of the added lines in Mike McGee's 2006 performance of "Like" are directed toward and responsive to his live audience. This aligns with the active role of the audience in creating performance within the slam poetry genre. McGee opens the poem by goading the audience with the line, "(y'all felt this before, I know you have)" He also adds the exclamation, "What the fuck? *" after the line, "in my book you rock, and I like rocks," inviting the audience to appreciate the humorous absurdity of the pun. Some lines even direct responses to audience reaction, as illustrated by the following section of the slam-scription:

Like Muppets like fisting

I like****** **>(you all act like you've never seen a happy Muppet)*****

(audience laughter)

When laughter nearly drowns out McGee's performance, he pauses, mid-line, to directly acknowledge the audience response. These specific examples practically illustrate elements of the audience's impact on mouvance within the slam poetry genre as they manifest in live performance.

The significance of this is compounded by the fact that these performative "movements" do not appear in the 2009 text version. This is relevant to defining the role of the live audience in slam poetry performance and also to illustrating differences between slam poetry's modes. During a slam poetry performance, the audience is present during the creation of the version, whereas the audience (readers) of a slam poem in text only have access to the version after it has been fixed (excepting, of course, those individuals who play a role in the editorial process). As

illustrated by the ethnopoetic slam-scription of “Like”, one feature of the slam poetry genre is that reception of performance is a collaboratively productive experience in ways that differ from the collaboration between author and reader created through textual reception. This is not to say that mouvance within the textual medium cannot be collaboratively produced between versions, but rather that the agency of the audience is different during live reception of a performance. A reader cannot impact, or move, a slam poetry text while reading it on the page in the same way that an audience member can impact a slam poetry performance while witnessing it. This kind of distinction reinforces my argument that slam poetry can only be comprehensively accessed via both its modes of transmission, as certain features may only present either in one mode, or through inter-modal comparison. In addition, this suggests that slam poets may compose and recompose the same poem in different ways depending on the modal contexts. As in the case of Mike McGee's 2006 performance, a poet may add elements specifically geared toward audience response because this kind of dialogue between audience and poet is a convention of poetry slam performance. However, it would not necessarily make sense to include such responses in text due to the different ways in which the poet and the audience relate through this format. The ways in which media conventions inform mouvance between genres offers insight into the ways in which versioning maybe be partially a product of media distinctions.

So far, I have used ethnopoetic slam-scriptions to demonstrate that the compositional and evolutionary processes of slam poetry are more complex than extant scholarship suggests. However, I have also acknowledged the potential for slam-scription analyses to provide examples of how genre features play a role in the composition and recomposition of slam poems. It is also possible to further analyze the features of the genre through ethnopoetic slam-scriptions by considering how competitive contexts (such as slam rules, audience demographics, and

judging trends) impact performance, since the element of competition is part of what makes slam poetry unique as a genre. Of course, this does not mean that slam poetry only exists in competitive contexts (as demonstrated by numerous examples thus far), but rather that the framework of this unique competition is a compositional motivation in the initial development of any slam poem. Because many slam poems are performed both within slam competitions and noncompetitive performance events, it is possible to interrogate the impact of the competitive framework through comparison. A comparative analysis of competitive and non-competitive ethnopoetic slam-scriptions of the same poem is likely to yield a number of differences, with some directly connected to the conventions of the poetry slam competition.

One observable point of divergence in the comparison of competitive and non-competitive slam performance is the degree to which non-essential vocalized and physical performatives (that are not contained within the poem itself) are incorporated. These elements can be viewed as performative paratext. Prefatory remarks, movement, and audience interaction are adjacent to the performance itself similarly to the way paratextual elements such as publication manifests and introductions are adjacent to a given, printed text. These elements shape the ways in which audiences and readers interpret and respond to such literature, and the performative paratext of slam poetry is no exception. Ethnopoetic slam-scription allows for the comparison of "paraperformatives" between variant performances, enabling the interrogation of how differences are significant of the competitive or non-competitive contexts of the poem. To demonstrate, I present two partial ethnopoetic slam-scriptions of Alvin Lau's poem, "For the Breakdancers." The first slam-scription is of a performance during a competition at the 2007 National Poetry Slam, while the second is of a 2009 performance Lau delivered as a featured reader at a Seattle venue in 2009.

Before I move into analysis, I want to draw attention to the difference between the translation key I created for this poem and the one I created for the Wakefield and McGee poems. The way that a slam poem is ethnopoetically transcribed can be tailored to relevant points of analytical focus. While the comprehensive slam-scriptions I created for "Like" and "Hurling Crowbirds at Mockingbars" were designed to enable a discussion of varied slam poetry traits, my partial slam-scriptions of "For the Breakdancers" are intended to illustrate the significance of competitive and non-competitive contexts in performative slam composition and recomposition. Accordingly, I limited my transcriptive focus to elements directly related to this purpose. While this may be viewed as a narrower slam-scription than those analyzed so far, I maintain that slam-scriptions of varied scope are productive components of slam poetry analysis.

Translation Key

vocalized performative paratext: bold font

physical performative paratext: italic font directly beneath relevant lines

physical performatives within the poem: bold and italic font directly below the text

pauses: asterisks (more asterisks for longer pauses)

audience response: parentheses directly beneath relevant lines

1. Slam-scription of "For the Breakdancers" (NPS 2007, Competitive Version)

****

(audience cheering)

looks quickly to the left and right, then bows head

right hand vibrating back and forth at side

for the breakdancers ***

(audience cheering)

finger movements on right hand become

more pronounced, hand rises slightly from side

You** are the shame in summoning baselines out of speakers

look at right hand as intensity of shaking increases;

hand rises gradually to shoulder level

with your six*steps*

circles wrist

of shaking right hand

with left hand

You** are tornadoes rising from turntables of a windsong that defies every law

shaking of right hand spreads throughout body

from graffiti to gravity

left hand releases

right wrist

2. Slam-scription of "For the Breakdancers" (Seattle Poetry Slam 2009, Noncompetitive Version)

Usher does not qualify my book* Luminaries**

(audience laughter)

It's like hearing Nas

(audience laughter)

It's like, nounbelievable*****

(audience laughter)

turns to the left and carries microphone stand out of frame

******

steps right with back to the audience,

begins to turn

Okay**

*****

takes off glasses, wipes hand over face, walks left to put glasses down

*****

walks right middle of the frame, cracks neck, rubs hands over face

****

rocks back and forth, shakes head, rubs hands together

***

stands with hands clasped in front, smiles at the crowd

(audience laughter)

If I am made of wood** make me a real boy

smiles gestures outward with hands

If I am a tin man* please give me soul***

leans back, smiles

for the breakdancers *****

leans forward, looks down at

vibrating left hand held before him

and you**

looks up at audience

are the shades * something baselines * out of speakers

lowers left hand, lowers right hand

raises right, both raises left hand

shaking

With your six*steps***

turns right, circles

right arm with left hand

looks down at them

And you**are tornadoes rising from turntables

looks up begins to shake body in concert

with hands and arms

the windsong that defies every law* from graffiti**to gravity

releases right arm, raises right hand

with palm forward

Having established the potential range of ethnopoetic slam-scriptions, I now turn my attention to the examples above. Comparison between the two reveals several documented distinctions between the two performances. To begin with, the non-competitive version of the poem contains far more linguistic performative paratext (marked by bold font formatting) than the competitive version does. The non-competitive ethnopoetic slam-scription documents a number of conversational and narrative audience interactions leading up to the beginning of the poem, whereas the competitive slam-scription reveals none. A comparison between the non-linguistic paraperformatives of each performance reveals a similar relationship. While Lau's competitive performance is prefaced with only a few brief glances and an extended pause, the non-linguistic paraperformatives preceding the non-competitive version of the poem almost form a miniature Buster Keaton-esque preshow. While each slam-scription captures only the beginning of the poem, they illustrate several key variations in performative paratext that may be partially produced by the competitive and non-competitive contexts in which each performance was created.

These distinctions, enabled by a comparative analysis of ethnopoetic slam-scriptions, are most meaningful when connected to the conventions of competitive and non-competitive slam poetry contexts. A point of entry is one of the most basic features of the poetry slam competition: the time limit. In competition, poets receive point penalties for exceeding the three-minute time limit, whereas non-competitive events, such as open mics and featured readings, generally do not impose such firm and high-stakes restrictions on the lengths of performances. In most poetry slams, a poet's time begins from the moment they first deliberately interact with the audience-verbally or otherwise-making it generally unusual for poets to waste time with banter or slapstick

preambles. Oftentimes, poets don't even title their poems before launching directly into performance. Consequently, the lack of paratextual elements in the competitive version of Lau's poem is very much in alignment with the competitive conventions of poetry slam as an event. In contrast, the paratextual richness of Lau's non-competition version of the poem reflects the absence of the temporal restrictions associated with the poetry slam.

Other characteristic features of slam poetry also manifest differently in competitive and non-competitive contexts, such as the role of the audience. In a poetry slam, the audience is tasked with evaluating poets in very defined, measurable ways. While the audience at a non-competitive slam poetry event may certainly still evaluate the performances, such evaluation is not quantified through scores, and does not impact the outcome of the event. The type of poet-audience interactions represented by the performative paratext of Lau's two performances are notably different. The slam-scription of the noncompetitive performance documents a number of casual interactions between audience and poet, such as Lau's use of exaggerated movement and gesture and the audience's responsive laughter. This reflects the less formal and lower-stakes relationship between audience and performer in this context. Conversely, it might initially appear that the performatively paratextual elements of the competitive version of the poem fail to signify anything about the audience-poet relationship whatsoever. However, viewing this lack of casual interaction between audience and poet in relation to the role of the audience in a poetry slam competition suggests that the lack of performative paratext can be interpreted as a reflection of a different kind of interaction. In the non-competition version of the poem, Lau uses performative paratext to engage the audience in ways that are interactive and entertaining. However, within the context of a poetry slam, the poet and the audience are not just the entertainer and the entertained, they are also the competitor and the judge. The lack of

performative paratext preceding Lau's competitive performance of “For the Breakdancers” creates a less casual atmosphere than the one evoked in his non-competitive performance, consequently reflecting the less casual role of the audience.

In some ways, the role of the poet differs between such contexts, as well. These distinctions are complementary to those established in relation to competitive and non-competitive audiences. While a poet is primarily a competitor within the context of a poetry slam, they are primarily an entertainer within the context of a featured reading or open mic. These role variations create different sets of expectations, and ethnopoetic slam-scription enables the analysis of how poets shape their performances in response to them. For example, it has been established that the competitive slam-scription of Lau's poem documents very few elements of performative paratext. While the significance of this in relationship to competitive audience roles has already been discussed, I now extend this reasoning to encompass the relationship between Lau's use of performative paratext (or lack thereof) and the competitive and non-competitive roles of the slam poet. Within the framework of the poetry slam competition, the poet's primary objective is, arguably, to deliver a competitive performance, a feat that logically necessitates the most potent version of the poem they can execute. Within this context, Lau's lack of paratextual preface in the competitive slam-scription can be read as a means of concentrating the potency of the poem. When compared to his competitive performance, the performative paratext included in Lau's non-competitive performance comes across as playful, casual, and spontaneous:

Usher does not qualify my book* Luminaries**

(audience laughter)

It's like hearing Nas

(audience laughter)

It's like, nounbelievable*****

(audience laughter)

turns to the left and carries microphone stand out of frame

Of course, as a featured reader at a poetry venue, Lau's primary objective is to entertain, not compete, so the atmosphere and tone evoked by the performative paratext are appropriate. Freed from the restrictive rules of the poetry slam that define the role of the competitor poet, the entertainer poet need not worry about performative paratext incurring props violations, time deductions, or any number of other penalties.

Ultimately, a focused, comparative analysis of these two partial ethnopoetic slam-scriptions of "For the Breakdancers" reveals specific ways in which competitive and non-competitive contexts impact how the poem is recomposed in performance. Naturally, the potential application of such analysis extends far beyond this single example. Open mics and featured readings have created a large number of non-competitive performance opportunities for slam poets, in addition to the competitive poetry slams frequently held in the majority of the fifty United States and beyond. Consequently, the variations created by the two contexts contribute to a comprehensive understanding of slam poetry as a genre, and analysis of ethnopoetic slam-scription provides a means of incorporating them into relevant academic discussions.

Reconsidering Recomposition: Movement and Versioning as Subjects of Analysis

While the scope of ethnopoetic slam-scription's functionality within slam poetry analysis extends far beyond the confines of this chapter, the examples presented offer evidence that such a method enables more comprehensive, nuanced, and accurate analyses than extant scholarship has produced. To fully understand the significance of the genre's dual modality, it is necessary to explore the ways in which this genre characteristic contributes to composition and

recomposition. Because slam poetry is textually composed, it may be tempting to focus solely on unidirectional mouvance created through performative recomposition of text. However, as illustrated by the slam-scription analyses, unidirectional mouvance accounts for only part of slam poetry's fluidity, necessitating the consideration of recursive mouvance between and within modes. To fail in the acknowledgment of this complexity is to misrepresent slam poetry, ultimately contributing to its scholarly marginalization. To fully understand how slam poetry is composed and recomposed, scholarship must attend to these relationships and resist thinking of text and performance as primary or secondary. Ethnopoetic slam-scription is useful in the pursuit of this task because it allows for the simultaneous representation of slam poetry in both text and performance, consequently enabling version comparison between and within media. As illustrated, this makes it possible for literary analysts to study the ways in which slam poetry is both composed and recomposed, which cannot only expand the scope of slam poetry scholarship, but also create opportunities for more accurate and productive comparisons between slam poetry and other performative literatures.

CHAPTER 3

SOMETHING BORROWED: LINKS TO PAST AND PRESENT GENRES

In the previous chapters, I focus primarily upon what distinguishes slam poetry from traditional oral and print poetry, and how such qualities are imperative to comprehensive analysis. In addressing contexts and multiformity, scholarship can begin to represent slam poetry more accurately and productively. However, it is also important to acknowledge the ways in which the genre relates to other performative literatures as a means of expanding the scope of slam poetry scholarship. As previously mentioned, scholars have established some connections between slam poetry and other genres, but there is much opportunity for additional exploration, further discussion, and new inter-genre links. I argue that acknowledging the ways in which slam poetry is similar to other genres, traditions, or forms can lead to the development of additional analysis techniques that not only contribute to the accurate representation of slam poetry, but also establish the ways in which slam poetry fits into the broader context of performative poetry as a whole.

The term "performative literature" denotes a vast and rich body of work, including many genres that have yielded far more extant scholarship than slam poetry. Consequently, it behooves the further development of slam poetry analysis for scholars to examine the established approaches toward genres and traditions, or elements of genres and traditions, that bear similarities to slam. Of course, such an exploration demands a nuanced understanding of the slam poetry genre itself in order to yield accurate comparisons. Once such context is established, it becomes possible to begin adapting techniques from more scholastically plumbed genres to slam poetry. To demonstrate both the need for and feasibility of this method, I will explore three

different comparisons between slam poetry and other genres and apply the resulting approaches through practical examples.

As discussed in previous chapters, extant scholarship has attempted to establish some connections between slam poetry and other genres, but these comparisons are often reductive or incomplete. However, the limitations of the comparisons within extant slam poetry scholarship are characterized by more than just oversimplification or misinformation. Even when slam scholarship appropriately links slam poetry with other genres, it often fails to establish the analytical implications of such a connection. For example, Susan Somers-Willett notes that the "formal characteristics [of slam poetry] often reflect the influence of hip hop; indeed, regularly rhymed poetry is usually recognized by poets and audience members as extensions of hip-hop tradition not as formalist poetry" (19). While this parallel provides some useful insight into genre definition, Somers-Willett does not address the ways in which her remarks might impact scholastic approaches to slam poetry. In addition, comparisons between slam and hip hop are pervasive in both scholarship and public perceptions, and Somers-Willett does not add any context or analysis to her remarks that would extend her views beyond what has already been established. However, scholars have also acknowledged slam poetry's formal connections to genres beyond hip hop. For instance, Lesley Wheeler writes in *Voicing American Poetry* that "slam's strictures in some ways resemble those of any other lyric shape. Instead of occupying a prescribed number of lines, a slam poem must occupy a prescribed number of minutes. Visual line breaks do not shape meaning, but pauses do" (147). While Wheeler establishes this information primarily to enable her analysis of how formal conventions determine content within the slam poetry genre, her connections between slam poetry and other genres do not explore the analytical potential created by these links. While her primary point is that slam poetry exists

within a system of formal constraints, Wheeler's comparison misses the opportunity to examine how these formal links might lead to deeper analyses within the genre. When scholars limit their comparative analyses and/or fail to emphasize the significance of such analyses, they perpetuate the narrow definitions of and approaches to slam poetry that plague both scholastic and popular opinions. Slam poetry's anti-academic self-positioning, outlined in greater detail in the introduction, also plays a role in the number and scope of extant comparative analyses. Some scholars, like Wheeler, have even voiced concerns that some might view any sort of scholarly treatment as anathema to the genre. In light of these slam poetry perceptions, it is unsurprising that genre comparisons involving slam poetry are limited in scope. Furthermore, the comparative analyses that do exist make up only a small percentage of slam poetry scholarship.

Juxtaposed against the aforementioned examples, the remainder of this chapter seeks to establish and demonstrate the significance of inter-genre analysis in the further development of slam poetry scholarship. Slam poetry overlaps with many genres or traditions that have been subject to broad and innovative analyses. Consequently, techniques employed by such analyses may be applied to or adapted for slam poetry discussion, ultimately enlarging the landscape of slam poetry scholarship by looking beyond strictly slam-centric approaches. I acknowledge that the goals of academic analysis are multitudinous, and the limitations within slam poetry scholarship I have so far established are, more than likely, simply reflections of precise focus. Because of this, I am certainly not suggesting the abandonment of these established avenues of study. Rather, I advocate supplementing them by rethinking the value of comparative analysis in the study of slam poetry. While there is undeniable value in the current body of slam poetry scholarship, pursuing the creation of a wider variety of nuanced inter-genre analyses will help to develop more refined and inclusive approaches to slam poetry.

Living History: The Griots

I have constructed many contextual frameworks within which slam poetry analysis is appropriate and productive, but these have been largely genre-specific. Movement toward a more complete understanding of slam poetry entails the additional consideration of how slam poetry functions within broader contexts that may be shared by other performative poetry genres. One social role inhabited by many performance poets, both past and present, is that of historian. Performative poetry documents, directly or indirectly, events, trends, pervasive attitudes, and other features of society, and while these elements are generally synthesized in poetry much differently than they are in conventional historical records, such alternative documentations have social value. To garner a better understanding of slam poetry's social functions as features of the genre, it is worth considering whether slam poetry functions as historical record within contemporary society.

Comparing slam poetry to genres and traditions studied in terms of their historical representations is a logical first step toward answering the question of how such scholarly approaches might be adapted to slam poetry analysis. A particularly rich example can be found within African literature, in the form of the griot tradition. While the griot tradition is still a component of contemporary African literature, its ancient incarnations particularly exemplified historical preservation through art. D.T. Niane's preface to his textualized adaptation[8] of thirteenth-century Mali epic *Sundiata* contextualizes the traditional social role of the griot. Niane

[8] While Niane is credited as the author of the adaptation, he clarifies that "this book is, then, the fruit of an initial contact with the most authentic traditionists of Mali. I am nothing more thau a translator, I owe everything to the masters of Fadama, Djeliba Koro and Keyla and more particularly to Djeli Mamoudou Kouyatd of the village of Djeliba Koro (Siguiri) in Guinea" (xxiv). This suggests that, the textual edition authored by Niane functions as a loose reflection of the griot epics composed about the thirteenth-century Mali King, Sundiata.

explains that, “formerly, griots were the counsellors of kings, they conserved the constitutions of kingdoms by memory work alone…in the very hierarchal society of Africa before colonization, where everyone found his place, the griot appears as one of the most important of this society, because it is he who, for want of archives, records the customs, privileges, and governmental principles of the kings” (vii). This information was generally transmitted as stylized oral literature delivered by the griot (also known as a djeli). Within these earlier contexts, the griots and their literary works had clearly defined social functions. Daniel Banks offers additional insight into these functions by situating the griot tradition within the larger genre of African Orature:

> In the fields of African and African-diasporic performance, the term "Orature" is used to foreground the unique skills and production of the oral artist, and to give this means of communication and documentation equal legitimacy next to written texts. Orature preserves the history and culture of individual peoples through performance, using such elements as storytelling, proverbs, riddles, chants, call-and-response, songs, gesture/mime, as well as other presentational techniques. In Orature, important cultural information is passed down from generation to generation. It is a living, spontaneous, and responsive art and the oral artist relies on both memory and improvisation. Orature, thus, has its own logic systems, literacies, and skill sets that are employed to keep cultures alive (239).

While Niane effectively establishes the griot’s traditional role, Banks outlines the practices that distinguish the tradition. The griot tradition, as an example of African Orature, is not mere recitation or speechification; it is, instead, true performance with identifiable stylistic conventions.

In simplest terms, griots can be viewed as living cultural histories, preserved through oral transmission and inter-generational inheritance of the role. The social gravitas of this role is illustrated when Paul Stoller describes the process of becoming a griot in “The Griot’s Tongue:

> Griots must apprentice themselves to masters for as long as thirty years before they are deemed ready to recite their poetry. There are two stages in the training of griots among the Songhay-speaking peoples of the Republics of Mali and Niger. First, griots must master a body of rudimentary knowledge-in their case, the words of Songhay history. Such mastery, however, is insufficient, for griots must also master themselves to embody the power of history. This means that they must learn to dispossess their "selves" from the "old words" they have learned. The words that constitute history are much too powerful to be "owned" by anyone person or group of people; rather these words "own" those who speak them. Accomplished griots do not "own" history; rather, they are possessed by the forces of the past (25).

This explanation illustrates several important features of the griot tradition. Perhaps one of the most significant is the element of inheritance. Performance is not only a means of transmitting cultural history, but also a means of preserving it. Consequently, the language and physicality of a griot’s performance are finely tuned to reflect that duty, undoubtedly a contributing factor to the lengthy and requisite apprenticeships involved. Stoller’s analysis also suggests that the griot is viewed not so much as the keeper of this history, but rather as the conduit through which it is delivered. There is a sense of ceremony surrounding this description of the tradition.

While the landscape of contemporary literature has fostered new “versions” of the griot tradition, it is important to note that what I will refer to as the original griot tradition is still active in Africa. Niane's textual adaptation of *Sundiata* deals with an ancient example, but in “The Role

of the Griot in the Future of Mali," Barbara Hoffman provides insight into how the tradition fits within contemporary contexts. She notes that the twenty-first century landscape of oral poetry and music in Africa differs greatly from the original contexts of an ancient griot epic, such as *Sundiata*: "The conflation of the musical roles of griots and non-griot musicians is so extensive now that there is hardly any caste distinction remaining in the musical domain. Mali's music scene is no longer dominated by griots and their jeliya, but instead by artistes who perform what Ryan Skinner (2005) has called artistiya, which often includes griot stylistics performed by non-griots."(106). While the griot role in Africa initially emerged from within the often hierarchical caste system of the Mali Empire (11th c-17th c), its influence has extended beyond the confines of the griot caste and even the borders of the African continent. In fact, Banks illustrates the impact of the griot tradition in Western culture in his analysis of the contemporary emcee as a griot analogue: "the emcee (or MC) in Hip Hop culture functions in much the same way as the West African djeli (the Mande word for oral artist) or griot (a more commonly known term in the West). Like these oral artists, the emcee also tells of his community's issues, its values, its ancestors, its heroes and heroines, its triumphs, and its struggles—"imparting lessons of social and political history," as scholar Isidor Okpewho writes of the griot" (240). Clearly, elements of the griot tradition are not anathema to contemporary contexts, although such elements may be adapted to the context of multi-modal literacy. It is possible, then, that a relatively contemporary genre, like slam poetry, might be defined by analogous features.

Admittedly, the griot tradition and the slam poetry genre differ in many ways, and it would be inaccurate to say that the slam poet is a contemporary incarnation of the griot. However, there are similarities between the two types of performative literature that establish a basis for viewing slam poetry as a form of historical reflection that might lend itself to avenues

of analysis borrowed or adapted from scholarship on griot epic. Of course, slam poetry exists primarily within societies inundated by information pathways, and the records created through slam poetry are not primary means of accessing histories and preserving cultures, as were traditional griot epics. Instead, slam poems as historical reflections offer alternative points of access through the presentation of subjective experiences and interpretations. Some slam poems document events that are widely publicized and broadly relevant, such as Marissa Joseph's "2016 Election", which itemizes the characteristics that she believes make Donald Trump a poor choice for a president. The poem includes reference to Trump's notorious Twitter presence and his perspectives on immigration. Others document personal experiences reflective of specific spatial and temporal contexts, such as Doc Luben's poem about mental illness, titled "Puny Human." While the narrative of Luben's poem is primarily personal, generalized twenty-first century views toward mental illness are poignantly captured in lines such as "there are a lot of things that are okay when you were a kid that stop being okay when you are older" and "tell your adult employer that you can't come to work this week 'cause you just physically can't stop crying and you don't get to go to that job anymore." As a United States-based poet of the twenty-first century, Luben succeeds in presenting the stigma associated with mental illness in a way that also meaningfully contextualizes it temporally and spatially. Regardless of whether the historical significance of a slam poem is subtle or overt, viewing slam poetry as historical reflection not only acknowledges an additional facet of the genre, but also illustrates how slam poems encourage diverse historical perspectives. While the slam poet does not exist in a society that lacks means of preserving information, they certainly do inhabit a society plagued by binary thinking and tendencies towards absolutes. The slam poet as historian does not merely offer

interpretations of what is happening around them, but also encourages their audience to expand the way they think about these happenings, as well.

While viewing slam poetry as a form of historical reflection may further enrich scholarly understanding of the form, the question of how to analytically approach this feature of the genre remains. Because both the slam poet and the griot can be viewed as historians of sorts, scholarly approaches to the griot tradition could potentially be adapted to a historically focused analysis of slam poetry.

In considering the contemporary incarnation of the griot embodied by some modernist poets of color, Lorenzo Thomas draws attention to the historicity of linguistic style. Maintaining that contexts are crucial to the understanding of not just performance but contexts, he writes that "in some ways, the showmanship has been damaging. To the extent that poetry readings have been perceived as entirely secondary to the existence of poems as printed texts, very little attention has been directed to possible impact of performance contexts on poetic composition"(304). These concerns align very well with my assertions that performative contexts impact not only performance makeup, but textual composition as well. One of Thomas's areas of central focus is the use of dialect and other linguistic stylizations in modernist poetry by some poets of color leading up to the Black Arts Movement. Dialect is conventionally seen as a fraught feature by many scholars and other consumers of literature. However, Thomas illustrates the ways in which the deliberate uses of dialect by some poets of color[9] can be analyzed as reflective of historical contexts such as literary trends and audience tastes (306). He cites Paul Laurence Dunbar as an example:

[9]I use Thomas's discussion of dialect primarily as an illustration of how diction and syntax can be viewed as historically reflective within very specific contexts. This is not to say that the use of dialect always lends itself to this type of interpretation.

> Though he was opinionated and outspoken on social and political issues, Dunbar's readings were straightforward recitals of his poems—written in dialect and standard traditional stanzaic forms...In choosing to write in dialect, Dunbar was certainly attempting to reach a large public. When he was growing up in the 1880s, Joel Chandler Harris's Uncle Remus books were best-sellers, and Negro dialect was also part of poet James Whitcomb Riley's popular repertoire (302-303)

Incidentally, Thomas frames Dunbar's use of dialect as astutely responsive to both the literary marketplace and audience not only for the purpose of entertainment, but also as means to most widely convey the political messages of his works. Contextualized in this manner, Dunbar's use of dialect can be viewed as a coded historical record of public tastes in literature and entertainment during the time period in which he was writing and performing.[10] However, dialect is not the only linguistic style of historical significance to consider in relation to the Black Arts Movement. Thomas also cites Langston Hughes as an example of a poet who used deliberately refined diction to appeal to pervasive audience attitudes: "Hughes understood what his audience wanted. Fashionable and debonair, employing a slightly sardonic tone, he read his poems with precise and elegant diction—even those written in the blues stanza form. His purpose was not to impersonate the unlettered, but to elevate their idiom to a plane where its poetic qualities would be recognized" (305). Inhabiting a later historical space than Dunbar, Hughes's use of language can be read simultaneously as a reflection of the social stratification of this time period and a response against the resulting marginalization of experiences and ideas.

Considering the historicity of its language is one component of an approach to slam poetry's function as historical reflection. As Thomas's analyses demonstrate, diction and syntax

[10] This is not to say that these public tastes were unproblematic, but merely that Dunbar's use of dialect can be viewed as responsive to them.

can be analyzed as reflections of social contexts that facilitate the illumination of historical significance. Consequently, linguistic analysis of slam poetry designed to identify the historical significance of the language must establish the use of language as a partial product of contextual features such as conventional audience demographics, literary trends within the slam poetry genre and beyond, and sociopolitical climates and events. In doing so, it is possible to consider how such language reflects its historical contexts.

In addition to considering how elements like word choice, syntax, and style are historically reflective, it is also worthwhile to acknowledge how the content of a slam poem can be viewed as such. Because the poetry of the griots, both ancient and contemporary, have long been acknowledged as forms of historical record, established scholarly approaches to the content of griot poetry provide a foundation for approaching slam poetry in this manner. It is also important to consider, however, that the content of griot epics may not represent history as literally, linearly, or otherwise directly as do more reportorial records. This phenomenon is a feature of many oral poetry traditions designed to be historically reflective, as Denis Tedlock demonstrates in his analysis of Zuni poetry in "Learning to Listen: Oral History as Poetry." Of history in oral culture, he writes that "people do not reveal their ideas of history only when conversing with an interviewer" (711). At one point in the article, he prefaces his analysis of two transcriptions of Zuni poem/song by declaring that they do not immediately appear to have any historical value. However, his allegorical analysis of the first of these texts reveals an account of space travel and an attempt to reconcile this with traditional, spiritual ideas about the celestial bodies (708). Tedlock argues that "highly metaphorical or poetical speech events can be a source of history" (711), as is the case with certain elements of griot epic. Of course, figurative reflections of history demand a different interpretive process than literal or purely informative

accounts. A performed poem is not merely informative, but also a cultural artifact in itself. Consequently, accessing the histories represented by the griot tradition may entail a certain level of decoding, particularly with regard to the conventions of the tradition. Like griot epic, slam poetry is also a stylized form of performance poetry. Moreover, because society is not dependent upon slam poets as the sole means of historical preservation, the genre can afford a measure of subjectivity. The histories represented by the content of slam poems are generally products of distinct perspectives, as opposed to objective documentations. All of this suggests that understanding the historical significance of a slam poem may also require an analysis of its figurative and otherwise interpretively subjective elements.

As previously noted, the role of the griot in oral society was not only to document history, but also to preserve culture. Niane writes that "One can still find the griot almost in his ancient setting, far from the town, in the old villages like Ka-ba (Kangaba), Djeliba Coro, Krina, etc., which can boast of still preserving the customs of the times of their ancestors" (vii). Consequently, one front of analysis of griot epics is their manner of cultural documentation of time and place. This can require careful analysis at times, but at others, such as in this example from *Sundiata*, it may be quite direct: "Gnankouman Doua discreetly brought to the king's notice that the soothsayer was left-handed. The left-hand is the hand of evil, but in the divining art it is said that left-handed people are the best" (5). The transmitter of the epic (whom Niane identifies as an obscure griot from the village of Djeliba Koro) weaves within the narrative conventional lore of the culture at the center of the tale, and techniques such as this play a role in creating a culturally-representative historical record. Contemporary variations of the griot tradition also function in a similar manner, as noted by Banks: "rap music, at least in its first fifteen years, kept the community abreast of "what's going on," placing the rapper/emcee in the role of the griot,

the historian and carrier of the culture and source of crucial information. This Hip Hop griot is thus understandably a central figure in the day-to-day survival of the culture" (Banks 241). The Hip Hop griot situates the griot tradition within a multimedia social context, and one might assume that the cultural records it creates are of little value in a society at the mercy of so many information outlets. In fact, Banks' analysis suggests that the Hip Hop griot preserves and disseminates culturally significant information in ways that other outlets do not. Consequently, this incarnation of the griot tradition is particularly significant in terms of how it filters historical and cultural elements through subjective lenses to create a wider variety of viewpoints. Like the Hip Hop griot, the slam poet also exists in a multimedia society, which makes it prudent to question not only how the content of a slam poem reflects culture, but also how such reflection is distinguished from alternative record types.

The value of these parallels between the griot tradition and the slam poetry genre is best understood through illustration. In addition to identifying the ways in which the language and content of griot poetry create historical record, I have also acknowledged scholarly approaches to them. Applying these approaches to slam poetry can demonstrate how this base of comparison enables a more fulsome analysis of the genre. Toward this end, I offer a dual-format analysis of Taylor Mali's slam poem, "What Teachers Make."

Published in 2002, Mali's poem documents the experience of the K-12 public school teacher in the late twentieth to early twenty-first century. Accessing the specifics of this documentation requires the same understanding of conventions Banks notes in his description of African orature. Because slam poetry is stylized and subjective, understanding how the content of "What Teachers Make" functions as a historical reflection requires a certain measure of decoding. For example, the poem opens on a dinner party conversation during which the speaker

is questioned about his teaching profession: “I mean, you’re a teacher, Taylor. / Be honest. What do you make?” (12-13). Because these lines are preceded by an account of the interrogator’s criticism of the teachers, the question accrues a disparaging tone. The assumption is that the speaker must not make much, as least as far as income is concerned. The withering question from Mali’s poem is a direct reflection of society’s view of teaching as a less-than-prestigious profession at the time the poem was written. What follows these early lines is a sort of rejection of these viewpoints, further illustrating the details of what society values and fails to value. Consider the beginning of the fourth stanza, which reads as follows:

> You want to know what I make? I make kids wonder,
>
> I make them question.
>
> I make them criticize.
>
> I make them apologize and mean it.
>
> I make them write.
>
> I make them read, read, read (38-43).

In answering the question posed in the first stanza, the speaker chooses to deliberately shift the focus from financial gain to the elements that make up an education. In outlining the “real” value of teaching, Mali draws attention to the way in which the initial question reduces it to financial compensation. This juxtaposition can be read as a protest against ways in which education is devalued by prevalent social attitudes in the United States. Not only does Mali’s poem reflect the salary woes of the twenty-first century teacher, but it also documents the lack of respect their profession receives from the general public. This is reinforced in the final two lines of the poem, “Here, let me break it down for you, so you know what I say is true: Teachers make a goddamn

difference! Now what about you?" (53-54). Viewed in this manner, Mali's poem exists as part of the multiform record of the conditions of the teaching profession during this time period.

In addition, performance is central to slam poetry, as it is to the griot tradition. Consequently, to address the ways in which slam poetry can function as historical record requires consideration of performative features as well as textual features. Analysis of an audiovisual performance record of "What Teachers Make" illustrates how performative elements complement the historical functionality of the poem's text. The record in question documents a 2000 performance of the poem at the National Poetry Slam. When Mali delivers the aforementioned line questioning what teachers make, he emphasizes its reductive nature through his physical performance by rubbing his thumb and forefingers together in a relatively universal gesture signifying money. This reinforces the ways in which the lines reflect millennial capitalism and dismissive attitudes toward the value of teaching. Mali also draws attention to attitudes toward education by pointing out what is not being valued by those who reduce the profession to a paycheck, as illustrated by the previously cited segment of the poem beginning "You wanna know what I make..." In performance, Mali elevates the significance of this section vocally, progressively increasing his volume and making his tone more abrasive as he delivers the stanza. By the time he reaches the line, "I can make a C+ feel like a Congressional Medal of Honor," he has moved the microphone further away from him because he is essentially yelling the lines. The vocal performance extends the juxtaposition created by the text alone by suggesting that the disregard of these elements of the teaching profession is unacceptable. In performance, the poem not only reflects the features of educations that are being marginalized in the twentieth and twenty-first century United States, but also documents the outrage of teachers in response to such treatment. Only in performance can the audience fully experience the vitriol

of Mali's response to the poem's framing question, and that vitriol is a historical reflection in its own right. It represents the ways in which status quo attitudes toward education have been, and continue to be, challenged by teachers.

As I established in my introduction, slam poetry as cultural expression is already a significant area of scholarly interest within the genre. However, attentions in this area are often limited to the ways in which slam poetry serves as a personal expression of marginalized cultural identity. While this is very much in alignment with the cultural preservation associated with the griot tradition, there is an opportunity to expand the way scholars think about slam poetry's functions as cultural reflection. It is common to consider the cultural significance of slam poetry along the lines of identity markers such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and degrees of ableism. In addition, there are other types of cultural categories that slam poets deal with also, such as those defined by profession, age, and geographical or temporal location. As Banks says about the Hip Hop griot, "the content of the lyrics tells the story of the community from which they come." To truly understand how slam poetry records cultural histories, it is necessary to think more broadly about cultural communities, and apply this line of thinking to slam poetry analysis. In many ways, the language of Mali's poem documents the culture of the twenty-first century K-12 teaching community. For example, the lines "I make parents see their children for who they are / and what they can be" (36-37) reflect the ways in which teaching extends beyond the classroom. They demonstrate that teaching is not simply about imparting knowledge, but about being concerned with students as individuals in a wide variety of contexts. In the text version of Mali's poem, these lines document an element of teaching culture that is unlikely to be found in a straightforward description of the teaching profession. In addition, every time Mali

performs this poem, he is reasserting this element of cultural identity not just with words but also with their embodiment.

Historical significance exists not only in content, but also in features created through delivery. As Thomas's analyses of Dunbar and Hughes indicate, the diction and manner of delivery are indicative of specific historical contexts in the case of the griot tradition and its more contemporary incarnations. This approach is also relevant to the historicity of slam poetry. As established in "Contextually Frustrated," the contexts of a slam poem are productive factors in its composition and performance. By questioning what the linguistic elements of both text and performance say about these contexts, one can attempt to identify instances of historical representation.

As I discussed in "Contextually Frustrated," audience is a crucial context of slam poetry analysis. While I have established how the audience can impact the composition and performance of a slam poem, I have not yet discussed how this can be viewed as a historical reflection. Because features of slam poetry, including linguistic and performative style, can be viewed as partial products of the audience, it is reasonable to suggest that there is something to be learned about the audience in the analysis of these features. In this manner, a slam poem can also be viewed as a document of its audience demographic, which can serve as a building block for establishing comparative analyses that may help identify trends in audience demographics over time. At the very least, understanding more about the audience of a given slam poem enables a more productive analysis of that audience's role in shaping the poem's composition and performance. This raises the question of what the language and performance of "What Teachers Make" can reveal about the poem's audience. The opening stanza, leading up to the question to which the majority of the poem responds, reads as follows:

He says the problem with teachers is

What's a kid going to learn

from someone who decided his best option in life

was to become a teacher?

He reminds the other dinner guests that it's true

what they say about teachers:

Those who can, do; those who can't, teach.

I decide to bite my tongue instead of his

and resist the temptation to remind the dinner guests

that it's also true what they say about lawyers.

Because we're eating, after all, and this is polite conversation (1-11).

Mali's diction is clean, but not overly elevated. It suggests that this poem is designed to be accessible to a broad audience, as opposed to an overly erudite one. This first stanza also demonstrates a certain amount of restraint, such as when the speaker merely alludes to the derogatory remark about lawyers as opposed to stating it outright. While this could be read as indicative of a formal audience (or perhaps an all-ages audience), it is also important to consider these lines in relation to the rest of the poem. As the poem's content builds in vehemence, the language occasionally becomes coarser, such as in the lines "because, you see, I have this policy about honesty and ass-kicking" (15) and "Teachers make a goddamn difference" (54). However, while the language becomes more impassioned as the poem develops, it retains its accessibility, suggesting that the audience of this poem is comprised of varied adults who are not expecting overt formality and are, presumably, sympathetic to the poem's worldview.

Because slam poetry is a performative genre, performance records provide us with the means to test hypotheses such as those established above. The recorded performance shows Mali standing before a microphone in a nondescript blue t-shirt and includes almost immediate vocal responses from the audience. Before Mali even begins, the audience cheers and catcalls, including a loud "We love you, Taylor." The raucous nature of this particular crowd resonates with the content-based observations that this poem is likely intended for a relatively informal audience. The performance record also captures other audience responses that suggest additional characteristic features. For example, the informality of the poem's language aligns with the relatively liberal and impassioned viewpoints expressed in the content, naturally suggesting a non-conservative audience. The performance record captures the audience expressing vocal approval at many points of the poem, and this can be read not just as appreciation of Mali's artistry, but also of the meaning behind his words. This audience is sympathetic. They are on his side. This kind of refusal to accept marginalization reinforces the liberal demographic suggested by the use of language. Overall, while the content of the text implies audience characteristics, the performance record confirms them.

In reflecting audience demographic, the language of Mali's poem functions as a historical reflection of one of its own contexts, thus enabling a more productive discussion of how these contexts may have impacted both textual and performative composition. However, the significance of this type of analysis extends beyond the single poem. Analyzing multiple slam poems in this manner, including geographical and temporal groupings, can help to identify audience trends within the slam poetry genre, contributing to an ongoing record of slam poetry's audience.

Like those created by the griot tradition, the historical reflections created by slam poetry are subjective, creative, and often coded. Accessing their full significance may take some work. However, as demonstrated by the examples discussed, that does not mean that such historical representations are without value. In borrowing techniques used to study the historicity of griot poetry, it becomes possible to begin establishing the historicity of slam poetry. Extending slam poetry analysis in this manner illustrates previously overlooked functionalities of slam poetry, such as its ability to document sociopolitical norms, perspectives and events missed by mainstream documentation, and even its own contexts.

The Observant Orators: The European Improvvisatori

From a literary tradition rooted in ancient Africa, I now turn to Europe to explore how the improvvisatore tradition of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries may expand the scope of slam poetry analysis along the lines of social responsiveness. In "The Cosmopolitan Improvvisatore", Angela Esterhammer contextualizes the improvvisatore tradition as improvised poetic performance focused on audience-selected topics chosen through random draw (155). She notes that "these performers were almost exclusively associated with Italy and Italian culture, but their notoriety during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries generates a thoroughly international discourse about improvisation..." (155). This description alone spawns nascent connections to slam poetry, although it also presents some bases of contrast, the largest centering around the general lack of improvisation in the slam poetry genre. However, the fronts along which the improvvisatore tradition has been analyzed provide an opportunity to not only examine similarities to slam poetry more closely, but also to consider how such approaches might be adapted to the latter.

A more thorough understanding of the improvvisatore tradition will behoove an analysis of any scholastically productive links to slam poetry. Esterhammer, who has written widely on the tradition, explains that the practice of improvised poetry in Italy dates back at least to the Renaissance, during which time period the poets (called improvvisatori) were primarily male. However, the tradition was popularized beyond the Mediterranean regions in the nineteenth century ("Coleridge's Improvvisatore" 122). This is illustrated, in part, by the presence of the improvvisatore figure in literature by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Germaine de Stael, and John Galt. Of course, connecting this genre to slam poetry necessitates a more detailed understanding of its conventions. In this regard, Esterhammer's description of an improvvisatore's performance offers an introduction to the practical framework of the tradition:

> …a theatre in Rome is abuzz with anticipation of the evening's performance. The stage, as yet, is empty, although there is activity among the assembled audience. Snatches of conversation can be heard, in several European languages, and some of the spectators are writing on slips of paper, which are being collected and placed in a vase. The performer appears—a slim, elegantly dressed Italian gentleman. He is accompanied by a musician carrying his violin, and by a young child. The child is requested to draw three slips of paper at random from the vase. She hands them to the gentleman, who announces what is inscribed on them: first, the aurora borealis; second, the glory of ancient Rome; third, the death of Hector. The performance begins. As the violinist plays a few pleasant but unobtrusive measures, the gentleman stands pensively, head bowed. A moment later he begins to speak verses in Italian, completely ex tempore; in fact, he invents entire stanzas in ottava rima form…The obvious enthusiasm of the audience, excited by the display of mental agility as well as by the stirring subject, inspires the improviser still further, until he

> chants so rapidly the accompanist is at pains to keep up…Most of the audience is enthralled—although it must be admitted there are a few who appear skeptical, who even keep up a running commentary, to the annoyance of their companions, about the tricks this kind of performer has been known to use. In the end, though, those murmurs are drowned out by rapturous applause ("The Cosmopolitan Improvvisatore" 154-55).

Esterhammer's description reveals that several specific conventions governing elements of the tradition, such as subject matter, composition technique, and the relationship between audience and performer. As is the case with slam poetry, the audience plays an active role in the creation of the performance. While slam poetry audiences contribute primarily through their roles as judges, it seems that the improvvisatore audience dictated content in a more direct manner via topic selection. Of particular interest, though, is Esterhammer's description of the manner in which the improvvisatori's performance is influenced by the less strictly defined audience responses, such as vocalizations or applause. The slam poet, too, feeds their performance on this kind of spectative energy.

In her analyses of the improvvisatore tradition, Esterhammer also discusses the manners in which these performances are shaped by social contexts, which is a crucial feature of the tradition to consider in attempting to parallel the social responsiveness of the improvvisatore with that of slam poetry. She explains that "As touring performers adapt to local conditions, these on-the-spot performances in cities such as Paris, Berlin, and London generate interesting variations on the traditional format according to which the improviser composed verses spontaneously on topics proposed by audience members, often in a specified genre, metre, or rhyme scheme" ("Coleridge's "Improvvisatore"" 122). Because the audience plays such an active role in dictating the content of performances, it makes sense that improvvisatore poetry would

reflect local tastes and culture, both responding to and reflecting these social contexts. As later analyses will reveal, this feature of the improvvisatore tradition is one that slam poetry, to some degree, shares.

Additionally, the modal identity of the improvvisatore tradition is, in many ways, comparable to that of slam poetry. Esterhammer explains that, "poetic improvisation, which in the 19th century always has an anomalous medial status as an oral form of poetry embedded in an age of print, thus brings about reflections on the relations between spectatorship and reading, immediacy and deferral, ephemerality and permanence, and the kinds and degrees of interaction that occur between writer or performer and readership or audience. ("Coleridge's Improvisatore" 122). While nineteenth-century improvisations were composed during performance, they also existed in print, as Esterhammer acknowledges in her reference to the printed tragedies of noted improvvisatore, Tommasso Sgricci ("Coleridge's Improvisatore" 123). While slam poetry differs from European improvisation by means of its bi-modal composition, its existence across two modes resonates with the tensions Esterhammer describes in relation to the dual-format identity of the poetry created by nineteenth-century improvvisatori. She suggests that this duality enables an exploration of inter-modal distinctions, which resonates with many of the inter-modal comparisons I conduct in "Page and Stage as Conjoined Twins." However, in that chapter, I primarily focus on the ways in which differences across media exist as part of a collective whole. Applying Esterhammer's approach to slam poetry facilitates an exploration of how inter-modal differences can yield format-specific interpretive features. This suggests that, although there is much inter-modal synergy within the slam poetry genre, there are also ways in which the textual and performative elements are independent and discrete. To illustrate this, I analyze several slam

poems using Esterhammer's bases of contrast to explore distinctions between media versions: spectatorship and reading, immediacy and deferral, ephemerality and permanence.

Patricia Smith's poem, "34," provides many opportunities for this type of analysis. As part of her collection *Blood Dazzler*, which focuses on Hurricane Katrina, "34" is an homage to thirty-four nursing home residents in New Orleans who were stranded in the storm. Each of the poem's thirty-four stanzas is designed to represent the voice of one of these victims. However, the experience of spectating a live performance of the poem is distinct from that of reading the poem in text, and one interpretive difference created by this base of contrast is the ways in which poem's voices are defined. In performance, the audience is privy to the paratext (or paraperformance) in which Smith explains her vision for this poem, which provides interpretive content that is absent from the text version that appears in her collection, *Blood Dazzler*. Additionally, Smith creates a distinct sound for each stanza of the poem by modulating her vocal performance, which emphasizes the poem's polyvocal nature. For example, she adopts a proud, strong, and direct tone to deliver stanza four, which begins with the following lines: "If you knew my alley, its stink and blue, / if you knew dirt-gritted collard greens / salt port slicked and doused with Tabasco, / then you knew me" (16-19). She speaks quickly, but not frantically, loudly and evenly. She adopts the voice of someone who is friendly and open, at home with who they are. Her delivery of stanza eight, however, is markedly different in tone. Her voice is a bit dreamier, breathy and almost childlike as says, "When help comes / it will be young men smelling like cigarettes and Chevys, / muscled boys with autumn breath and steel baskets / just the right size for our souls" (44-47). The vocal performance of this stanza contains a note of naïve hope, not to mention a distinct lack of fear. Stanza thirteen captures a more desperate, accusatory voice, as Smith performs the following lines: "We are stunned on our scabbed backs. /

There is the sounds of whispered splashing, / and then this: / *Leave them*" (69-72). Her tone becomes hollow and matter-of-fact, devoid of sentiment. When she delivers the italicized lines, her voice drops to a whispered growl, emphasizing the monstrosity perceived within the words. As these three examples demonstrate, the vocal dynamics of Smith's performance dramatize the polyvocality of the poem in ways that the text cannot.

In many ways, the distinctions between the voices of "34" are functions of performance. While the text version of the poem that appears in *Blood Dazzler* is prefaced by a brief news clip explaining the nursing home deaths, there is no direct explanation of the poem's polyvocality, although numbered stanzas emphasize the significance of the number thirty-four. This is certainly not to say that the poem's polyvocality is not implied in text, but rather that it is not defined as directly and definitively as it is in performance. The linguistic variations between stanzas are not significant enough to indisputably establish entirely different speakers, creating an interpretive ambiguity that performance circumvents. It is possible to view the thirty-four stanzas in the text version of the poem as the product of a single, or collective, voice, something the vocal dynamics of the performances precludes. Figuratively, this alternative interpretation of the poem's vocality emphasizes the unity created by the shared experience of these thirty-four victims. This is not to say that the text of the poem does not lend itself to polyvocal interpretation, but rather to illustrate the ways in which text and performance present distinct interpretive opportunities. A comparison of sections one and three of the poem illustrate this more precisely. The first section begins with the following lines: "I believe Jesus is hugely who He says He is / The crook of an arm / a shadow threatening my hair." The third section begins, "Before the rain stung like silver, I had forgotten me. / My name was a rude visitor, arriving / unannounced, without a gift / always leaving too soon." While use of numbers to denote different

sections of the poem does distinguish these two grouping of lines, the significance of the distinction is ambiguous in text alone. While it is certainly possible to interpret each section of the poem as the voice of a different speaker, the linguistic style is, in most cases, similar enough between sections for the reader to interpret this thirty-four part poem as a catalogue of a single speaker's thoughts over time. For example, the two sections cited reveal consistent use of figurative description. However, in performance, Smith uses vocal and physical performance elements to evoke multiple speakers. She delivers the first section in a high, slightly raspy tone of voice, and she stands with her face uplifted, her eyes closed to thin slits. The rhythm of the delivery is conversational, as though the speaker were sitting on a porch explaining something to a friend. In contrast, she begins the third stanza in a deeper tone of voice, and the pacing is slower. The volume is lower, but the tone lends a gravity that invites attention. There is mournful note in Smith's vocal delivery, one that contrasts notably with the more chipper and conversational delivery of the first stanza. The performative dissonance between these two sections makes it less likely that an audience would interpret the poem as the reflections of a single speaker. This is a marked way (though certainly not the only one) in which the experience of the reader is distinct from the experience of the audience member within the slam poetry genre, serving as an example of the tension between reading and spectating to which Esterhammer refers. This suggests it is important to study slam poetry across modes not only because text and performance are synergistic, but also because they are independent. Privileging a single mode may result in wholesale loss of certain interpretive opportunities in the case of slam poetry.

In time periods marked by less evolved technology, performance records existed primarily in text form, but the evolution of media has enabled performance records to become

much more dynamic. As the previous example illustrates, this is invaluable in the comparative analysis of text and performance within performative literary genres of all types. However, it is important to acknowledge that viewing an audiovisual performance record does not offer the same experience as being present for a live performance. While it may more clearly capture performative features, the video still removes the performance from many of its contexts. Esterhammer acknowledges this distinction between record and event in discussing the challenges presented by textual representations of Sgricci's improvisations. She writes that "quoting Sgricci's orally improvised poetry in print involves a significant change of medium: instead of a public spectacle in a crowded theatre, where the relentless pressure of time governs the compositional process of the performer and the listening experience of the audience, the printed review offers a remediated experience of solitary reading where the reader can stop, leave, return, and re-read at any time" ("Coleridge's Improvisatore" 123-124). The implication is that such remediation creates a sort of decontextualization, removing defining contexts of the improvvisatore tradition. This is not to say that remediation does not provide benefits. As Esterhammer acknowledges, textual records of improvisations enabled (arguably) more in-depth analyses. In fact, this serves to illustrate the tensions Esterhammer identifies between immediacy and deferral. Remediation can certainly be viewed as a form of deferral in comparison to the immediacy of live performance. This applies not just to the ways in which the performance is presented, but also to the ways in which it is received. The reading process to which Esterhammer refers allows for a certain amount of deferral in the form of interrupted reading and rereading. The reception of a live performance is not subject to such deferrals, making it more immediate. While my intention is to establish distinction as opposed to hierarchy, the fact remains that certain distinguishing features of the tradition are lost in textual translation.

Of course, Sgricci's works predate contemporary recording technology, but audiovisual records present some of the same challenges regarding decontextualization. While such records generally preserve visual and audible elements that conventional textual versioning cannot capture, their capacities for contextual representation are still limited. This is particularly relevant to slam poetry analysis because, like the improvvisatore tradition, it is a genre that is defined in part by its performative contexts. For example, the video record of Patricia Smith performing "34" offers visual and auditory features absent from the text, but fails to fully represent the physical setting of the performance or the audience size and makeup. As discussed in "Contextually Frustrated", slam poetry venues and audiences generally differ from those associated with academic poetry readings. Because these kinds of elements are part of what defines the genre, their details are not wholly irrelevant to slam poetry analysis. Certain features of slam poetry performance, like those of improvvisatore performance, are only accessible through live experience. However, it is not always possible for scholars to attend live performances of the slam poems they wish to analyze, so it is certainly not realistic to suggest that live performance must be a component of all analysis that addresses the bi-modal identity of slam poetry. Instead, I argue that this parallel between the improvvisatore tradition and the slam genre illustrates the need to acknowledge the limitations of remediations in analysis. While comparative analyses that solely address textual and audiovisual remediations are broadly and richly productive in the study of the slam poetry genre, such analyses should not attempt to address features that extend beyond the scope of the records.

Deferral and immediacy are not the only concepts at play in considering the tensions created by the media of both the improvvisatore tradition and the slam poetry genre. Text and performance are associated with permanence and ephemerality in a variety of ways. Of course, in

the (relatively) technologically limited era of the Romantic improvvisatore, these relationships were relatively direct. Essentially, the performances of the improvvisatori can be viewed as largely ephemeral, but their documentation may make some of these ephemeral elements more permanent. However, not all performative elements lend themselves to conventional, textual documentation. Esterhammer describes one such example within the improvvisatore tradition, the role of the audience: "The audience contributes a topic and the performer responds with a poem; the reciprocal generation of affect on the side of both audience and performer is essential to production and reception alike" ("The Cosmopolitan Improvisatore" 156). As she suggests, the relationship between audience and performer is performatively and compositionally productive, in addition to being integral to the manner in which the tradition is defined. However, as previously established, elements such as this are often omitted from, or simply do not translate well into, conventional, textual documentation. While text may make certain elements of improvvisatore poetry more permanent, there are some that, nonetheless, remain ephemeral.

Due to the additional features of audiovisual documentation, the permanence and ephemerality of slam poetry is a bit more complicated. However, the improvvisatore tradition does provide a valid foundation for considering text and live performance. As the analysis of "34" demonstrates, not all performative elements and contexts translate into text, and their ephemerality may yield distinctions in the way that textual and performative versions of the same poem are interpreted. However, I also established the limitations of audiovisual records in capturing certain features of a slam poetry performance. While audiovisual records usually capture more performative elements than textual ones do, there are still certain elements of slam poetry performance that escape any sort of documentation. This phenomenon is not unique to the

slam poetry genre among performative literatures, but it is certainly something that should be considered in slam poetry analysis. For example, on August 31st, 2017, a local poet at the Manchester, NH venue Slam Free or Die, closed out the open mic by performing an erasure poem created from and in protest of a copy of the anti-trans ban on military service issued by the president of the United States earlier in the week. Had I not been present for the performance, I would have missed several contextual features that informed my interpretation of the poem. This particular performance was, in part, defined by its historical context. The impact of the live performance on the audience was notably influenced by the fact that the performance occurred so soon after the ban was publicized. There was an emotional rawness to both the poet's performance and the audience's responses that reflected the immediacy of the relevant conflict. In addition, because this poet closed out the open mic, the impact of the performance lingered, with no ameliorating poem to follow. However, these circumstantial contexts would prove difficult to capture, even in audiovisual record. Frequently undocumented contexts include the framing event (an open mic or slam) or the demographics of its spectators. This precludes the possibility of experiencing the performance as a part of a larger whole. Consequently, an audiovisual record of the trans ban poem would not enable analysts to study its significance within the open mic. In addition, while an audiovisual record of the poem might capture the sound and look of the emotional climate of the performance, it cannot truly capture what the exchange between poet and audience felt like because it cannot fully replicate the social and temporal contexts that play such integral roles in the creation of such an emotional climate. Both of these elements illustrate ephemeral elements of slam and serve as additional cautions against the conflation of live performance and audiovisual records.

Of course, this is not to suggest that textual and audiovisual versions of slam poetry cannot yield accurate and significant analyses. Instead, these examples support the idea that certain productive contexts of slam poetry performance may exist only in live performance, an assertion that impacts slam poetry analysis in a few ways. The contexts of a performed slam poem change with each consecutive performance, a phenomenon common to many oral and/or performative poetries. This feature of the genre contributes to an understanding of slam poetry as fluid, as established in "Page and Stage as Conjoined Twins." However, the impermanent elements discussed in relation to the above example further imply that the fluid trajectory of any given slam poem many never be completely accessible. It is extremely rare for a scholar to have the opportunity to study a single poem in text, live performance, and audiovisual record, and, while the ethnopoetic slam-scriptions from chapter two illustrate the potential for analyzing inter-media and intra-media fluidity based on text and audiovisual records alone, this potential does not encompass any elements of the poem that may only exist within a specific performance. In light of this, slam poetry analyses are never truly complete or finished, which may be relevant to the general manner in which slam poetry scholarship is framed. This manner of thinking about slam poetry analysis may grate against any conventional approaches that treat literature as a finished product.[11] However, many scholars have discussed elements of both textual and oral literature that suggest the value of thinking beyond completion and closure. In *The Textual Condition*, Jerome McGann acknowledges the versioning that takes place as part of the editorial process, which suggests a plenitude of editions and, consequently, resists the notion of a singular, definitive edition (74). John Miles Foley echoes these concerns as applied to oral poetry, in *Traditional Oral Epic,* noting the importance of "actively affirming" the evolutionary nature of

[11] The analysis itself is, of course, never "finished."

oral poetry in scholarship (3). My assertion that slam poetry analyses are always incomplete is, in many ways, aligned with these views on evolution and versioning. Although it may rarely (if ever) be possible to study every version of a given slam poem, this does not mean that incomplete analyses are without value. Instead, I suggest that embracing these gaps as inherent qualities of slam poetry analysis will enable a more complete understanding of slam poetry's fluidity and evolutionary tendencies. In addition, acknowledging the ephemerality at play within the slam poetry genre broadens the scope for the genre's analysis. Cases studies of open mics, poetry slam, and other slam poetry events may help define the types of features that lack permanence, in addition to giving scholars an opportunity to study how such features are relevant to the significance of a given poem.

While certain elements of slam poetry performance are decidedly transient, slam poetry is also socially responsive in ways that are at least partially documented within the art itself. To fully understand how this manifests and why it may be significant, it is helpful to consider the improvvisatore tradition as another source of socially responsive poetry. As explained by Esterhammer, the social responses of the improvvisatori are dictated, in part, by the conventions of the tradition: "The audience contributes a topic and the performer responds with a poem; the reciprocal generation of affect on the side of both audience and performer is essential to production and reception alike" ("The Cosmopolitan Improvvisatore" 156). Consequently, the topics the audience provides can be viewed as reflections of their interests, concerns, and attitudes relating to the social and historical contexts within which they live. In responding to these topics, the improvvisatore is not only reflecting and responding to society, but also documenting it by making these reflections and responses concrete. While it is true that not all elements of performance are permanent, records of various kinds do ensure a certain degree of

endurance. Of particular significance is what such social documentation tells us about the tradition itself. The conventions of the improvvisatore tradition, considered in conjunction with the content of the improvisations themselves, suggest that Romantic improvisations are socialized in a manner that is distinct from many other types of performative literature. Consequently, when analyzing these improvisations, it may be most worthwhile to focus not merely on the topics themselves, but also on how they are framed, because this framing represents the true agency of the improvvisatore. This is perhaps best demonstrated by the fictional portrayals of the improvvisatore tradition found in Romantic literature. On such portrayal is the subject of Germaine de Stael's *Corinne, or Italy*. De Stael builds her fictional accounts of Corinne's improvisations within the conventions of the tradition, allowing them to function as a loose, practical illustration. For example, the reader is first introduced to the improvvisatrice, Corinne, through the eyes of the morose Lord Nelvil as she performs at the Roman capitol. The fictional contexts of this performance align clearly with those dictated by the conventions of the improvvisatore tradition: "...she asked for the subject that had been set for her. *The glory and happiness of Italy!* was the unanimous cry of all around her. 'Why yes,' she said, repeating it, already stirred, already sustained by her talent...And inspired by love of her country, she raised her voice in verses full of charm which can only be imperfectly rendered in prose" (28). This excerpt hints at the agency Corinne's talents endow her with. While the audience has dictated the point at which her improvisation must begin, de Stael also describes the manner in which Corinne makes the topic her own. This notion is reinforced by Prince Castel-Forte's introduction to Corinne's performance:

> ...she knew how to combine to the highest degree the imagination, the descriptions, the brilliant life of the South with the observations of the human heart which seem to be the

> province of countries where the outside world arouses less interest...He took pleasure, however, in describing the passionate sensibility which inspired Corinne's poetry and her skill in understanding the emotional links between the beauties of nature and the most deep-seated impressions of the soul (25).

These descriptions acknowledge both the connection between the improvvisatrice and her audience and her ability to respond to and articulate their own interests in ways that they cannot. Corinne's abilities to understand and express complex relationships between humanity and the world it inhabits are part of her social functionality and also part of what defines her art. However, de Stael also describes her as uniquely in tune with the tastes and interests of her audience by referencing how her work is particularly aligned with "the brilliant life of the South." Corinne is very much of the people, and that is part of what enables her art to resonate so keenly with its audience, even as it extends beyond anything the audience could articulate, or even conceptualize.

The conventions of slam poetry also dictate the nature of its functionality as a social document. Like the improvvisatore, the slam poet is dependent upon the audience to a certain degree. While audience members do not provide topics in a poetry slam, they do provide evaluation, making the slam poetry performance partially reflective of their tastes, interests, and attitudes. For example, a scholar studying a poetry slam event in which all poems about sexual violence score poorly might consider, in addition to the craft of the poems involved, what this might say about the audience's attitudes toward the subject matter. It can also be worthwhile to explore the topics slam poets choose to address and the manners in which they address them. Because the conventions of slam poetry demand audience consideration in a very immediate way, these choices can be viewed as at least partially reflective of social needs, interests, and

attitudes. For example, Patricia Smith's poem, "34", could certainly be analyzed as a historical reflection through the use of techniques discussed in relation to the griot tradition. However, the framing of the poem also reflects the social features of her audience. Smith does not discuss the hurricane in abstract or general terms in this poem. She does not describe the storm objectively, but instead creates thirty-four personalized and precise perspectives. This reflects a social need to acknowledge the humanity of the event, perhaps beyond the information presented through conventional media during that time. News coverage, as an example, often deals with the most crucial facts of a given event. While news outlets often interview people connected to major events in what they call "human interest" pieces, there are some elements that they do not, or cannot, capture. In the video record of Smith's "34," she mentions that she heard the story of the stranded nursing home residents on the news, so the basic facts of the incident are clearly accessible to the public. However, "34" answers a very simple, very human question that conventional news outlets could not address: What were these people thinking before they died? In her poem, Smith gives voice to the dead and explores the potential of their final shared experience. This ruthless blending of fiction and reality invites readers and audience members to consider perhaps the rawest parts of this event. The poem does not deal with victims as a unified, faceless mass, but as individuals that an audience can relate to and mourn. In part, this may be a product of Smith's membership within her own audience demographics. Her poem demonstrates not just the recognition of a social need to humanize this crisis, but also an acknowledgment that she shares in this need. Like the improvvisatore, the slam poet is linked to their audience in ways that enable them to respond to their audience's needs. Within the improvvisatore tradition, this is elevated by the convention of audience topic selections, whereas the audience evaluation system heightens the connection within the slam poetry genre. However, it is not just that the slam poet

is able to understand these social needs and tastes, it is that they are able to respond to them in a unique manner that the audience may not have access to elsewhere. When analyzing the social function of "34", one should consider not only the way in which it addresses a social need, but also what makes this mode of address distinct.

Esterhammer's prolific scholarship on the improvvisatore tradition attends to both the inter-media tensions and the social functionalities of the poetry, establishing means of understanding these features, and their significance, within the context of the larger whole of the tradition itself. She notes that the improvvisatore tradition, "taking place at the intersection of reading and performance, English adaptations of Italian improvisation become a focal point of medial change in the latter days of Romanticism" ("Coleridge's Improvisatore" 128), suggesting that the analyses of improvisations across both text and performance are tied to greater, historical, literary trends. Consequently, such analyses offer the opportunity to explore the limitations and functionalities of these media in relation to audience/reader experiences, poet and audience relationships, and documentation. While the dual-format identity of slam poetry is not tied to shifting trends between text and performance, the examples above illustrate that similar approaches to the genre are productive toward understanding the significance of slam poetry's media duality. This enables further exploration of how slam poetry is defined by this duality and may provide insight that leads to more accurate and productive attention to this genre feature in future scholarship. Scholarship on and fictional representations of the improvvisatore tradition also emphasize the ways in which the poetry is socialized. While Esterhammer's accounts of improvvisatore events illustrate the communal nature of performative production, de Stael's fictional improvvisatrice, Corinne, demonstrates the unique ways in which these poets respond to

and represent social interests. Applying these approaches to the slam poetry genre contributes to an understanding of the slam poet's social role, and the unique features this role entails.

Last Poet Standing: The Bertsolaritza, The Amoebaean Singing Contest, and Slam Poetry

One of the elements that distinguishes slam poetry from many other forms of contemporary performance poetry is the framework of the poetry slam competition. As discussed in "Contextually Frustrated," the conventions of the competition can be viewed as contexts that impact composition of both text and performance within the genre. While the productivity of viewing poetry slams as contexts of slam poetry has been established, the challenge of studying the competition itself remains unaddressed. A comprehensive understanding of the poetry slam contest is likely to facilitate a more productive contextual analysis of the slam poetry genre, raising the questions of how this feature of the genre can be studied, and what such studies may yield. Fortunately, slam poetry is not singular in its incorporation of a competitive framework. Consequently, much can be learned by exploring other competitive poetries, and the ways in which scholars have incorporated their respective competitions into analysis.

While competition is not a terribly common feature within the larger category of poetry, both historical and contemporary examples do exist. I will draw upon the ancient example of the amoebaean poetry context and the more contemporary example of the bertsolaritza to establish the ways in which competitive frameworks have played roles in other literary traditions. In analyzing how scholars have addressed this feature of both the bertsolaritza and the amoebaean poetry contest, I identify opportunities for additional analysis of the poetry slam.

An exploration of the bertsolaritza leads to the heart of Basque country. In *The Basque History of the World*, Mark Kurlansky describes the somewhat mysterious origins of the unique

Basque culture, including its distinct language, its roles in major historical events, and its tendency toward isolation. Cultural traditions include the poetry competitions known as bertsolaritzas, which reflect both the linguistic distinction and protective attitudes noted by Kurlansky. The bertsolaritza serves as a contemporary example of competitive poetry because it is a tradition still in practice in the twenty-first century. However, it is also worthwhile to note that the bertsolaritza has a long history within Basque culture, and is certainly not as young of a genre as slam poetry. According to Basque scholar Joxerra Garzia the first documented reference to a bertsolaritza dates from the eighteenth century, and some writers have suggested the existence of even older, ancestral forms of the tradition.[12] Because improvised bertsos, the primary format for poetry delivered within the bertsolaritza, were not generally documented due to oral conventions of Basque society, the early history of this tradition contains uncertainties. As Garzia explains, "not until the mid-twentieth century did the use of recording technologies become widespread, thus allowing the guaranteed preservation—and subsequent faithful transcription—of the bertsos improvised by the bertsolaris in town squares and at village crossroads" (77-78). The challenge of documentation posed by the usually improvised performances of the competing poets, or bertsolaris, also illustrates one of the form's culturally significant qualities. While means of textual documentation certainly existed long before the mid-twentieth century, Basque was long an oral culture. While orality and literacy are both part of contemporary Basque culture, orality is valued as an element of cultural heritage, making print documentation inappropriate within the context of the bertsolaritza. While the conventions of the bertsolartiza have changed over time, those of the tradition's twenty-first century incarnation are

[12] While some lore suggests that the origins of bertsolaritza coincided with the creation of Basque culture itself, Garzia acknowledges that this line of thinking defines bertsolaritza in very general terms that may not reflect the full scope of traditional definitions of the form (76).

relatively straightforward. In his article documenting the 2005 Bertsolari Txapelketa, national bertsolaritza event held in Barakaldo, Spain, John Miles Foley summarizes the basic features of contemporary competition:

> The rules for competitive bertsolaritza are at once straightforward and extremely demanding. An emcee reads a topic or prompt to the contestants, who then have a few seconds—usually less than a minute—to assemble an 8-12-line poem along the pattern of a prescribed verse-form that also involves a rhyme scheme. Melodies are chosen from among hundreds of traditional tunes. In other words, poets must fit their unique, never before realized ideas into a highly complex framework of rules and patterns, and they must accomplish all these tasks concurrently in extemporaneous performance. ("Basque Oral Poetry Championship")

While I do not suggest that all bertsolaritzas interpret the conventions of competition in precisely this way, I do pose Foley's account of the Bertsolari Txapelketa as a general example of contemporary conventions.

While competitive elements of the bertsolaritza parallel those of the poetry slam in many ways, the bertsolaritza is not the only form or tradition relevant to the analysis of slam poetry's competitive features. The amoebaen poetry (or singing) contest is another form of competition that has born analysis over the years. However, unlike the bertsolaritza or the poetry slam, the amoeabaean contest is a purely ancient tradition, rooted in Greece and often discussed in relationship to the works of oral poetry titans such as Homer and Theocritus. James B. Pearce plainly describes the format of the tradition as follows:

> The term amoebaean implies an exchange in which there are two singers singing in opposition. The one presents a "lead-off" song on a topic of his own choosing, and

> therefore it may or may not be extemporaneous. The "second" singer then would be expected to respond to the lead-off song in some way; he might give an opposing view, produce a song on a similar theme, or simply add information. His real task of course would be to outdo his opponent in some fashion. The lead-off singer would then begin the second round of the contest with a theme of his own choosing and the entire process would be repeated" (63-64).

Pearce's general summary of basic competition conventions provides a framework within which to consider the ways that scholars have addressed this tradition. Pearce also extends his technical summary by acknowledging different trends with regard to both audiences and performers. For example, he acknowledges the popularity of this tradition among "country folk," such a shepherds (60). While this does not suggest that the audiences and performers of the amoebaean poetry competition were definitively limited to this demographic, it does present the opportunity for viewing the competition as rooted in the common class, which parallels slam poetry's anti-academic roots. Despite its roots, the amoebaean poetry contest existed in a variety of contexts that certainly extend beyond the fields of the shepherds. For example, Pearce explains that such performances were often incorporated into ceremonies, such as the Sicilian tradition honoring Artemis for ending a period of plague "featuring the custom of herdsmen coming to the theater at Syracuse to perform their singing contests for the public" (60).

In order to understand how linking the bertsolaritza and the amoebaean poetry contest to slam poetry provides insight into approaching the poetry slam in analysis, it is necessarily to establish some clear bases of comparison. One potential starting point is the significance of the competition as a component of each of these poetries. Because many forms of performative poetry are noncompetitive, such as the improvvisatore and griot traditions discussed earlier in the

chapter, it is worthwhile to question the purposes served by competition in the contexts of the three genres/traditions in question. By exploring how scholars have addressed such questions in relation to the bertsolaritza and the amoebaean poetry contest, it becomes possible to develop a framework for applying such analyses to the poetry slam.

Scholars have documented the public appeal of both the bertsolaritza and the amoebaean poetry contest. Foley describes the Bertsolari Txapelketa in particularly grandiose terms, inviting his reader to "imagine selling 13,025 tickets for oral poetry. Imagine further an entire 6-7 hours of live performances broadcast on regional television as they happen, with excerpts, summaries, and expert commentary on national television. Imagine a one-day event—the final act in a multi-stage, four-year, Olympian drama of qualification and elimination—galvanizing ethnic, national identity to a degree unparalleled virtually anywhere in the world" (Basque Oral Poetry Championship). The scene Foley describes is a far cry from the conventional idea of the academic poetry reading or the bookstore author appearance. The public investment seems far greater than what one would expect from a contemporary poetry event, raising the question of why so many people are this excited about poetry. In part, this can be viewed as a direct product of the competitive aspect of the genre. The general population seems to be particularly drawn to competitive diversions, and a competitive framing of poetry makes it appealing and entertaining to a wider, more general audience by targeting this tendency. Scholarship on the amoebaean poetry contest also supports the idea that the element of competition contributes to the appeal of the form, as evidenced by Pearce's mention of the contest being used as ceremonial entertainment in ancient Sicily.

Like the bertsolaritza and the amoebaean poetry contest, the poetry slam can also be viewed as a means of fostering public appeal. Establishing the specifics of this functionality

enables a more thorough understanding of how competition is significant to the slam poetry genre beyond its impact on poetry composition. The slam poetry genre was born of Marc Smith's desire to liberate poetry from the realm of the ivory tower and integrate it into the milieu of the general public. However, public perceptions of poetry in the late-twentieth through twenty-first centuries reflect both disinterest and lack of understanding. Smith had to account for poetry's decided lack of mainstream popularity. Consequently, he created the competitive framework now known as the poetry slam, which functioned as "a simple gimmick to attract people to poetry" (Woods 18). While this feature of the poetry slam creates a link between poetry and other, more popular interests of the general population, its significance extends beyond that:

> Poetry slams are a device, a trick to convince people that poetry is cooler than they've been led to believe by wearisome English classes and dusty anthologies, and that they should engage themselves with it every once in a while. By dressing up poetry in the raiment of a fight or a contest, it appeals to the modern taste for sensationalism in art without—when done right—delving into mere caricature or entertainment (Woods 18).

Woods' descriptions of the poetry slam's role in popular culture identifies both features worthy of study and sources of controversy. Describing the poetry slam as a means of "tricking" the general public into consuming poetry is not inaccurate. However, this description can send the message that the poetry slam is mere illusion, and therefore unworthy of serious scholarly attention. As Woods' description points out, the trick is not that the poetry isn't actually "good", but that many of the audience members may have never discovered that they liked it without the unconventional framework of the poetry slam competition. It is important to acknowledge that the poetry slam may intend to trick audience members into listening to poetry, but the slam poetry genre doesn't use the device of the competition to inaccurately frame or otherwise

misrepresent the work. In addition, while Woods emphasizes the importance of not reducing the poetry slam to "mere" entertainment, it is worth considering that the competitive framework is, in part, a means of making the art entertaining. To those who appreciate literature, gimmicks are likely not required to make poetry entertaining. However, the target audience of slam poetry is not limited to such a niche population. Consequently, the competition creates an additional layer of entertainment value that is likely to appeal to those who are new to poetry.

In "Contextually Frustrated," I discuss how specific features of the poetry slam competition can be viewed as context that impacts the production of slam poetry. However, it is also worthwhile to consider the poetry slam as a whole, with consideration of how it is shaped and defined by competitive conventions. This raises questions of how the competitive framework shapes the development of a poetry slam event. Exploring relevant precedents of competition analysis provides a foundation for answering such questions.

To begin with, consider how the conventions of the amoebaean poetry contest impact the features of that event. As established by Pearce, the participants in the contest compete in direct opposition of each other, with the first poet establishing the topic and tone in the "lead-off" poem, and the second poet responding to this in some way through own poem. These conventions produce an inter-performance responsiveness relevant to the analysis of amoebaean poems both individually or as components of competitions in their entirety. The significance of this context is addressed in several analyses of individual examples of amoebaean poetry. Of the amoebaean poetry contest as portrayed by Catullus, Dana Burgess writes that, "reciprocal composition of this sort necessarily involves conventions and expectations as do most ancient genres. An understanding of the rules of the game which Catullus and Calvus are playing is thus essential to an understanding of c. 50" (577). Essentially, Burgess argues that it is impossible to

fully understand this portion of Catullus's poem without acknowledging how its content reflects the conventions of the contest, including the ways in which the poets respond to each other. To remove an amoebaean poem from the context of its framing competition is to decontextualize it in a way that limits comprehensive analysis. Derek Collins' approach to the conventions of rhapsodic competition also reinforce this stance: "…the technical features of their improvisation cannot be understood apart from the competitive context in which they performed. Indeed, to press the point further, the competitive context of rhapsodic performances provides the best explanation for the types of creative improvisation that we find" (131). Of particular interest is Collins' connection between the type of improvised poetry created in rhapsodic competition and the conventions of the competitive framework itself. The socialization created by competition is an element of this framework, suggesting the importance of considering how inter-performance responsiveness when analyzing poetry produced in rhapsodic performances.

The bertsolaritza also incorporates conventions that impact the ways in which poems relate to each other within the competition. For example, as established in Foley's account of the 2005 Bertsolari Txapelketa, it is common for bertsolaritza competitions to require competitors to respond to the same topics within a prescribed format of verse. Consequently, one would expect the poems performed within a given round of a bertsolaritza to seem like variations on a single theme. Foley also explains that "not only must each participant obey the rules of the verse-making game as dictated by the emcee, but he also has to echo the vocabulary and images used by his opponent. This "horizontal" strategy of echoing the opponent's words, which lasts throughout the six-bertso series, is reminiscent of similar tactics in other oral traditions of verbal dueling." Consequently, the poems, or bertsos, are linked not only by their adherences to a common form and topic, but also by the ways in which they respond to each other. While bertsos

can certainly be analyzed individually, it is also productive to analyze bertsos as being shaped by the performative interplay dictated by the conventions of the bertsolaritza.

Although I have established that the poetry slam, like the bertsolaritza and the amoebaean poetry contest, serves in part as a means of establishing a broader audience than performative poetry might otherwise enjoy, it is also worthwhile to consider the significance of this functionality. I have discussed how competition conventions impact the construction of both the competition and the works that comprise it. However, the impact of the competitive framework extends beyond that. It stands to reason that a broad audience and a competitive framework might serve as a catalyst for increased productivity within performative poetry communities by building upon the appeal of a non-competitive event format, such as the open-mic. For example, Joxerra Garzia explains that, "the driving force behind *bertsolaritza* during the 1960s was without doubt the championships, although *bertsolaris* continued performing at the sessions organized in the various towns and villages" (95). This observation suggests that competition can function as a self-sustaining feature of relevant performative poetries, such as slam poetry, beyond the scope of any individual event. Consequently, the poetry slam can be viewed as one means of facilitating the endurance of performative poetry in contemporary society. There are also more specific implications of the self-renewal created by competition in the context of performative poetry. For the bertsolaritza, the popularity and creative fertility created by the competitive framework is significant to the cultural function of the genre. In many ways, the bertsolaritza expresses and preserves Basque culture. Garzia's description of the socio-political function of the bertsolaritza at the turn of the twentieth century serves as one illustration of this: "…the art was appreciated only in so far as it could serve as a vehicle for achieving the much-desired renaissance of Basque culture, an undertaking that was far from easy given that the

majority of the population was illiterate in their own tongue" (83). The bertsolaritza was (and is) not purely artistic entertainment. Additionally, it serves as a vehicle for preserving and transmitting elements of Basque culture. As Garzia emphasizes, the importance of performance is heightened in relation to the degree of illiteracy within early Basque culture. Performance is still a valuable means of cultural preservation, and a reflection of orality's significant role in Basque culture. As Foley writes in his account of the 2005 Bertsolari Txapelketa, "to understand the power and presence of *bertsolaritza*, we need to realize that the art and practice of oral poetry is woven very deeply into the fabric of Basque society, in both formal and informal settings and on a virtually everyday basis." This contextualization reveals that the popularity created through competition is not significant merely in relation to perpetuating and raising awareness of the art itself, but also in relation to cultural preservation. A larger audience for a bertsolaritza competition equals an increase in Basque cultural transmission.

While slam poetry is not tied to a specific, cultural experience as is the bertsolaritza, it is still worthwhile to consider how slam poetry serves as a means of cultural expression, and how the popularity linked to competitive contexts amplifies this. In *The Cultural Politics of Slam Poetry*, Somers-Willett explains how certain performances of identity, particularly marginalized identity, tend to be particularly "rewarded" within the framework of the slam poetry competition. Perhaps in part as a result of this, slam poetry frequently incorporates identity-based content both directly and thoroughly. For example, the Button Poetry YouTube page (one of the most popular publication forums for video records of slam poetry) current features poems on the following topics: rape, menstruation, speaking Spanish, obsessive-compulsive disorder, black women winning Emmy awards, addiction, and more. In many ways, the content trends on the Button Poetry site can be read as reflections of what Marxists would call sign-exchange value within the

social contexts of the poems themselves. When the poetry slam, and its associated modes of publication, "rewards" certain performances of identity through awarding points or granting publication, they are reflecting the values of the social contexts from which the poems emerged. Additionally, these topics incorporate elements of identity that are sometimes avoided in most social contexts, but the social context of the poetry slam has long been established as liberal, and even radical, inviting and fostering content that is controversial or marginalized. However, the audience of the poetry slam has, over time, expanded beyond its socially liberal core of writers and poetry lovers to incorporate people with a wider variety of interests and backgrounds. The competitive component of the genre attracts those who might not otherwise be interested in performance poetry. Consequently, the popular appeal of the poetry slam, combined with its capacity for representing marginalized cultural elements and identities, raises awareness of these issues within the general population. While this social function is less specifically focused than the bertsolaritza's representation of Basque culture, it does illustrate the deeper significance of poetry slam popularity created by the features of competition.

The Call of the Poet: Inter-performative Responses

Naturally, the poetry slam is distinguished in many ways from both the amoebaean poetry contest and the bertsolaritza. Unlike the former, the poetry slam conventionally involves more than two competitors, placing them in less directly oppositional roles. In addition, the conventions of the poetry slam do not dictate topic or form as strictly as the bertsolaritza does. However, several productive bases of comparison remain.

To begin with, competitors in a poetry slam may not be required to directly respond to each other's work, but that does not preclude such responsiveness within the event. It is not uncommon for poems in a slam to be topically linked as competitors try to outperform each

other. At the National Poetry Slam in 2007, I performed as the first poet in the first round of a team slam, with a poem that created a parallel between the Biblical experiences of Jacob's daughter, Dinah, and the experiences of an abused woman in the twenty-first century. My coach later noted that my poem seemed to set a thematic tone for the entire first round, as it was followed by three poems that addressed religion and femininity in various ways. Furthermore, most of the performing poets were women. While the poems performed were not spontaneously composed, as is generally the case in both the bertsolaritza and the amoebaean poetry contest, they do reflect active choices, made by team members and coaches, to follow a female-delivered poem that addresses femininity and religion with other female-delivered poems reflecting femininity and religion. Strategic moves like these illustrate a certain degree of inter-performative responsiveness that may occur in slam competitions. However, an understanding of this almost simultaneously collaborative and competitive effect requires an analysis of the poetry slam event (or at least the first round) as a whole, in addition to an understanding of the competition's conventions.

An analysis of a poetry slam event can, and probably should, also acknowledge the ways in which competitive conventions shape the performances that comprise the slam. Like both the amoeabaean poetry contest and the bertsolaritza, the poetry slam does boast some firm rules, such as the time limits and the props ban discussed in both "Slam I Am" and "Contextually Frustrated." This accounts for a certain degree of similarity when it comes to poem format and performative style within any given poetry slam. However, there are also conventions that reflect trends as opposed to rules. For example, most poets strive to use as much of their allotted three minutes as they can, marking short poems as unusual. In addition, because performance and content are judged in equal measure, most slam poets generally demonstrate deliberate attention

to modulating and manipulating vocal and physical performative elements. A poet who reads their work in a monotone voice without taking their eyes off the printed page would stand out within the context of a poetry slam. While the two examples given qualify as aberrations from the genre's norms, that does not necessarily mean that such poems will not score well in competition. In the late 2000s, Bill MacMillan delivered a poem entirely in sign language at a regional slam held at The Lizard Lounge, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. This performance completely eschewed vocality, which is conventionally a significant part of slam poetry delivery. Ultimately, the poem received a perfect score of thirty points, despite the fact that it differed significantly from performative trends in slam poetry. Especially in cases when unconventional poems score well, it can be worthwhile to analyze how they fit within the larger context of the competition. For example, there are several potential reasons why MacMillan's poem may have received such a high score, despite its deviance from certain slam poetry norms: 1. all of the judges spoke sign language and were incredibly impressed with his content and delivery; 2. None of the judges spoke sign language, but did not want to appear able-ist; 3. The judges were not responding well to more conventional slam poetry performance, and were rewarding the poem for its distinction, or; 4. Any combination of the above reasons. While it may not always be possible to conclusively answer these kinds of questions, viewing the scores and performances of non-normative poems in relation to the scores and performances of more normative poems can produce examples of how poems are evaluated and variations in these methods from competition to competition. Because the judging criteria for slam poetry are relatively subjective, it is important to acknowledge the fluidity of scoring practices when analyzing the competition as a feature of the genre. Over time, this kind of analysis can yield a more complete picture of scoring practices within the slam poetry genre.

Inter-performative Analysis in Practice

Ultimately, I propose that making the poetry slam itself the subject of analysis can lead to both a better understanding of the slam poetry genre and yield additional insights into the poems performed as part of a particular event. To exemplify the value of this approach, I offer an analysis of a poetry slam in which I competed on October 26th, 2017. I participated in this slam with both recreational and analytical intent, so I was able to tailor many of my observations toward impact of poetry slam conventions, event contexts, and strategic responses within competition.

The event in question took place during the Halloween installment of Slam Free or Die's weekly open mic at Stark Brewing Company in Manchester, NH. The slam followed a "masquerade open mic," during which poets read poems related to the costumes they were wearing. The cast of characters included a Harry Potter dementor, a steampunk werewolf hunter, and two different versions of Nintendo's Mario. Roughly twenty-five people turned out for the event, constituting a relatively small crowd for the venue. All of this matters because the poetry slam that unfolded after the open mic was shaped in many ways by these contextual features. To begin with, the masquerade open mic included a costume contest which, in many ways, clashed with the conventions of the poetry slam. Advertising for the event encouraged people to come in costume, but, because official PSI rules do not permit costumes, none of these attendees could compete in the slam in costume. While a mid-event outfit change was certainly an option, the setup essentially required that participating attendees choose between the open mic costume competition and the poetry slam. Most poets who wanted to showcase costumes opted to perform

in the open mic, although one competitor was able to make some last-minute adjustments that took him from costume to street clothes to "legally" participate in the slam. Despite the fact that costumes are not consistent with slam poetry conventions, the masquerade open mic actually served as an unexpectedly appropriate poetry slam appetizer because the event organizers used a similarly democratized system of selecting costume contest winners. During the break between the open mic and the slam, the host asked attendees to submit ballots including their choices for costume contest winners in each category. The audience was given the power to determine who had the best costume and who had the best poem, just as they would later determine who won the slam. This may have made them more willing or prepared to fulfill the prescribed, evaluative audience role during the poetry slam. It may also have contributed to the fact that, despite the fact that some members of the already-small crowd left after the open mic, the host was able to easily find five willing audience members to serve as judges. As illustrated in "Contextually Frustrated," finding judges when the crowd is thin is no small task! A final contextual factor of note is the fact that the roster was only half-full, which impacted the format of the slam. While poets are generally cut after the first round, each of the four competing poets in the October 26th slam performed in both the first and second rounds. The two poets with the lowest cumulative scores at the end of round two were then cut, and the remaining poets competed head-to-head in the third, and final, round.

Once the competition began, I started to observe the ways in which inter-poet and audience-poet responsiveness contributed to the overall style and tone of the slam as an event. Some poetry slams resemble a tonal and stylistic patchwork made up of many different topics and delivery styles. Others, like this one, are a bit more homogeneous. In any case, analyzing the ways in which poets respond to both each other and the audience can lead toward a greater

understanding of how poets and audience members collectively "create" the style and tone of the slam. Additionally, such an understanding offers additional context for analyzing individual performances within the slam.

The tone of the slam that took place on October 26th was decidedly serious and intense, a primarily product of the performances delivered. Poets addressed topics such as sexual violence, romantic relationships, and loss and grief. None of the poems performed could be classified as primarily humorous or otherwise lighthearted. The pervasiveness of this tone was, at least in part, a product of inter-poet response. I have previously discussed such responsiveness in terms of how it is relevant to the analysis of individual poems, but I have not yet addressed how it can be productive in characterizing a poetry slam event as a whole. The following analysis of the second round of the October 26th slam illustrates what this responsiveness looks like in action. I performed first in the second round, opting for a poem about sexual assault that used first-person point of view. K., the poet who followed me, also delivered a first-person sexual assault poem, as did H., the poet who followed her. G., the final poet in the round, opted for a breakup poem, but maintained the serious, personal, tone of the previous performances. The tonal dynamics of this round were not happenstance, but the product of deliberate choices the poets made about how they acknowledged and responded to their fellow performers within the context of the competition.

Of course, the tone of the above-described round also reflected the poets' responses to the audience, in addition to their responses to each other. In this way, the audience members also had a hand in creating the overall tone of the slam. For instance, the poem I performed in the second round of the slam received the highest score of the first two rounds. This sent the message that this type of content was likely to score well, which was not insignificant in light of the

competitive context. If my poem had received a particularly low score, it is unlikely that the remaining poets in the round would have performed poems on similar topics. Instead, their responses to my performance might have been defined by contrast as opposed to accord. In this way, audience response impacted inter-poet response and, consequently, shaped the tone of the poetry slam as a whole.

Of course, poetic content is only one part of how poet and audience interactions and responses contribute to the style and tone of the overall slam. Performative features such a vocal dynamics, use of a script, and use of movement, define the scope of what I will primarily refer to as the style of the poetry slam as a whole. [13] Much like its tone, the style of the slam on October 26th was noticeably consistent in ways that can be tied to specific elements of performance. This phenomenon can be, in part, viewed as a product of inter-poet and poet-audience responsiveness.

For example, whether to use a script during performance is a question many slam poets consider carefully when planning their performances. Because scoring conventions dictate equal attention to content and performance, poets must consider how to most effectively perform their poem, as opposed to merely reciting it. Within the slam community, both poets and spectators have had different opinions about how reading from a script (digital or printed) impacts performance. Some people feel that the poet's capacity for physical and vocal performance is diminished by their use of a script. In cases when the audience shares this viewpoint, memorized poetry performances tend to score higher than those read from a script. These two modes of performance are generally referred to as off-page and on-page, respectively. However, some audiences do not assess performance in a manner that privileges off-page delivery over on-page

[13] For the purpose of this analysis, I primarily identify the tone of a poetry slam with the content of poems performed and the style of the poetry slam with performative features. However, I acknowledge the potential for overlap, and do not pose these classifications as absolute.

delivery, making memorization less of an advantage. In many cases, poets pay attention to which delivery style is being used by other poets, in conjunction with their scores. For example, if a poet is performing after three off-page poems that have scored well, it is likely that they will opt for an off-page poem for their own performance, if it is feasible to do so. Of course, this is not always a realistic option, since slam poets do not have bottomless repertoires, but it is a common, strategic move. For example, based on random draw, I had the luxury of performing last in the first round of the October 26th poetry slam. This meant that I was able to observe all of my competitors before performing in the round myself. I had already planned on performing on-page that night because I wanted to use new poems that I hadn't memorized yet, but I knew that, depending upon the performances of my competitors and the attitudes of our audience, this could result in my poems scoring poorly. However, the three poets who preceded me all delivered on-page performances, some out of notebooks and some from smartphones. If they had all delivered off-page performances, I would have been more likely to abandon my initial plan in favor of delivering an older, memorized poem from my existing slam repertoire. However, my choice to proceed as originally planned was, in part, a response to the delivery styles of my fellow poets. I knew that, even if the audience was not partial to on-page delivery, it would not place me at a disadvantage. In fact, on-page delivery dominated the night, characterizing nine of the ten poems performed. Of course, the consistence of this performative feature within the larger context of the slam was also impacted by the ways in which poets and audience members responded to each other. While this was not a high scoring slam (score range: 22.7-26.4), the judges did not appear to penalize on-page performance, which likely made performers more apt to employ this technique throughout the slam (at any rate, it certainly made me feel more confident about on-page performance).

While the above analyses illustrate how poet and audience response contributed to the uniform style of the slam in question, this event also offered the opportunity to illustrate how calculated style deviations can, and often do, function as strategic moves within the poetry slam. After the second round, the host announced that both K. and I would be competing head-to-head in the final round of the slam. While I held the highest score at the end of round two, this cumulative score would not transfer over into the third round. Each of us would win or lose upon the merit of a single performance. When I initially joined the slam roster, my primary concern was to gather research, and I was not terribly concerned about how well I would score. It was not until I entered the third round that I seriously considered the possibility of winning. I knew that winning the slam would guarantee me a spot in SFOD team selection semi-finals, an opportunity that appealed to me. At this point, the gloves came off. I needed what fans of the *Mortal Kombat* video game would refer to as a "finisher." I crafted my final performance that night in a manner that was very mindful of the overall style and tone of the event. In some ways, I made a conscious choice to work within the established trends of the evening, which included emphasis on content. As previously mentioned, my original plan was to perform new material. However, the remaining poem in my initial lineup was a snarky, vulgar, and irreverent piece called "(This is Not a) Love Poem", after Public Image Limited's "(This is Not a) Love Song." I felt that the raw, serious, and sincere tone was too entrenched by round three for that type of poem to receive a positive audience response. Consequently, I made the strategic decision to perform "Letter to a Dead Lover" instead, a poem that deals with loss and grief. The tone of the poem's content was much more consistent with the established tone of the slam so far. However, I knew that there was a strong chance that K.'s poem would also accord with the dominant tone of the event. I needed to ensure that my poem would be distinctive in a way that would give me an edge.

Consequently, I decided to disrupt the on-page trend that had thus far defined the style of the event. “Letter to a Dead Lover” was an established poem within my slam repertoire, and I felt confident that I could deliver a polished and dynamic off-page performance. Because no one else had performed off-page, I wasn’t certain that this technique would give me a significant advantage, but, from past experience, I felt that it would at least not impact my score detrimentally. I hypothesized that my off-page performance would benefit me in a few ways. For one thing, the lack of script would enable a more physically dynamic performance, expanding the stylistic scope of the event and, hopefully, garnering the attention of the judges. In addition, this deviation from the established style of the slam would set my performance apart from K.’s in the event that we delivered poems about similar topics.[14] My response to the established style and tone of the slam was a precise and deliberate move, one that ultimately paid off. My performance of “Letter to a Dead Lover” received a score of 26.4, although K.’s performance ranked a close second with a score of 25.9.

In some ways, the style and tone of a poetry slam can be viewed as the product of a series of choices that reflect the interactions of poets and audience members. This is an important part of understanding how these features of the event are functions of the genre. In addition, the stylistic and tonal dynamics of a poetry slam may more completely inform an analysis of the individual performances that comprise it. As the above analyses illustrate, individual performances can be, and often are, shaped by the dominant styles and tones of the framing event.

[14] The possibility did exist that K. would also choose to perform off-page, which would have limited the impact of my strategy. When responding to each other’s performances through strategic performance decisions, slam poets have to “read” the event in terms of probabilities.

Like the amoebaean poetry contest and the bertsolaritza, the slam poetry genre is defined, in part, by its features of competition. This suggests that the competition itself should be addressed in slam poetry analysis and, as I have endeavored to illustrate, scholarship on the bertsolaritza and the amoebaean poetry contest establishes approaches to competition analysis that can be adapted to suit the slam poetry genre. Pursing these approaches reveals the ways in which poetry slam conventions are socially reflective and compositionally formative. Furthermore, it leads to a more detailed understanding of significance of the poetry slam event with slam poetry scholarship, including, but not limited to, the ways in which poetry slam performances exist both independently and collectively.

Heritage and Analysis

Contextualizing slam poetry within the larger field of performance poetry benefits scholarship of the genre in many ways. Of course, it provides a more complex and thorough representation of how slam poetry is related to its predecessors and contemporaries. However, perhaps even more importantly, it leads to the identification of tools that enable more in-depth and comprehensive analyses of the genre's defining features than past scholarship has explored. The links between the griot tradition and the slam poetry genre encourages analytical consideration of slam poetry's historical significance. In a parallel manner, exploring the connections between slam poetry and the improvvisatore tradition draws attention to the ways in which slam poems respond to and reflect social interests. Additionally, while the competitive framework of slam poetry may have begun as an entertaining way to package poetry, the genre's connections to other competitive, performative poetries, such as the bertsolaritza and the amoebaean poetry contest, demonstrate that the poetry slam itself is an important part of slam poetry analysis. The examples I have highlighted are by no means exhaustive, but merely

demonstrations of the ways in which slam poetry analysis can be expanded and enriched through broader contextualization and connections.

The slam poetry community prides itself on the distinguishing features of its art, and this may sometimes send the message that slam poetry is a bit of a literary island. However, the reality is that, regardless of its idiosyncrasies, the genre is part of a longstanding literary history of performed and competitive poetries. By actively welcoming slam poetry into this literary fold through analysis, we can more fully appreciate its features, complexities, and potentials.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: SO WHAT?

In comparison to some genres, traditions, and forms of performative poetry, slam poetry is still relatively new. In part, this has contributed to the narrow focus of extant slam poetry scholarship. Only so much analytical ground can be covered in roughly thirty years, especially when considering that the genre's self-identification as "anti-academic" may have initially dissuaded many scholars. Despite this, I do acknowledge that the current body of slam poetry scholarship has informed my proposed expansion of slam poetry analysis in many crucial ways. However, as I hope the preceding chapters have demonstrated, there are many ways in which future scholarship can supplement and enrich what has already been established. To persist only within the parameters that extant scholarship has outlined is to miss out on representing and understanding a significant part of what defines slam poetry, as well as how it fits into the larger category of performative poetry. This not only misrepresents the genre, but may also discourage further scholarship by encouraging reductive perspectives that fail to present the full scope of slam poetry's potential for analysis. It is necessary to build upon the existing foundation of slam poetry analysis in order to fully represent, understand, and contextualize the genre.

This dissertation has aimed to establish and demonstrate the scholarly value of several approaches to slam poetry that would extend and expand extant scholarship, which required that I identify previously marginalized features of slam poetry and establish their analytical significance through practical application of these approaches. In addition, this process extrapolated upon previously-established techniques and ideas posed by both slam poetry scholars and scholars focused on broader and/or related categories of performative poetry. Consequently, I advocate not the reinvention of slam poetry analysis, but rather its evolution.

While this dissertation by no means constitutes an exhaustive analysis of the slam poetry genre and its evolutionary potential, it does address the value of considering several significant and definitive features of slam poetry that extant scholarship has not fully explored, including contexts, inter- and intra-modalities, and connections to other genres or traditions.

Because slam poetry is identified by both textual and performative modes of composition and transmission, consideration of context in slam poetry analysis must account for context across both modes. In chapter one, I outlined the key contexts related to text and performance in slam poetry, with a particular focus on performative contexts that might be more easily overlooked in the application of standard approaches. My proposals and observations were largely informed by Jerome McGann's explanation of radial reading as a means to acknowledge context in text-based literary analysis. While I maintained the importance of textual analysis in the case of the slam poetry genre, I also adapted the concept of radial reading to performance, as a means to illustrate the significance of performative contexts in the analysis of slam poetry. My analyses illustrated the specific ways in which slam poetry is, in part, produced by these contexts.

In addition to the contexts that shape the genre, I was also particularly concerned with the ways in which slam poetry's bi-modal form impacted its composition and recomposition. The poetry slam event is often viewed as slam poetry's ultimate vehicle, which can lead to misconceptions about the significance of text and/or the relationships between text and performance within the genre. These two modes may be viewed in falsely linear, hierarchical, or disconnected manners. While slam poetry does lend itself to a certain degree of independent modal analysis, chapter two illustrates that text and performance are, in fact, largely interdependent features of the genre. Although I found this feature of the genre largely neglected

in scholarship focused specifically on slam poetry, this was not the case in scholarship dedicated to other types of performative poetry. In particular, ethnopoetics served as my foundation for considering the ways in which textual and performative synergy are definitive of genre. John Miles Foley's application of ethnopoetic transcription to slam poetry served as a stepping stone toward the system of ethnopoetic slam-scription discussed in chapter two. While Foley uses ethnopoetic transcription to illustrate the limitations of conventional textual versioning in representing slam poetry on the page, I applied the technique in a slightly different manner. I used my ethnopoetic slam-scriptions to represent textual and performative versions of slam poems simultaneously, ultimately enabling an analysis of consistencies and variations between versions. Drawing upon Paul Zumthor's theory of mouvance as a precedent for recompositional analysis, I established several ways in which slam poetry is recomposed between and within modes.

My final feature of focus was the manner in which slam poetry connected to and overlapped with other genres, traditions and forms. In chapter three, I explored both the problematics and potential posed by these links. Oversimplified connections between slam poetry and other forms of performative literature have contributed to misrepresentations of the genre within both scholastic and general populations. For example, the poetry slam is often paralleled to the rap battle in popular culture in ways that emphasize their similarities and fail to consider their distinctions. This makes it easy for slam poetry to be dismissively defined as being "like" rap battle. Such incomplete and/or inaccurate portrayals of the genre are precisely what I sought to mitigate. However, it was also important for me to acknowledge that connections between slam poetry and other genres, traditions, or forms play crucial roles in contextualizing slam poetry within the broader category of performative poetry, and that this classification is

necessary to the broader and deeper scholarly treatment of the genre. Consequently, I felt the best way to explore these links was to consider how they might create additional techniques for slam poetry analysis. Towards this end, I chose to focus on genres or traditions that are already firmly established and widely discussed within scholarship, including the griot, the bertsolaritza, and the improvvisatore. I identified approaches within this scholarship that could be adapted to features of slam poetry in ways that attend to any distinctions between slam poetry and the initial genre.

While this work seeks to actively expand scholarship through the identification and development of new approaches to slam poetry, it is also intended as a foundation for further exploration of the genre. By no means did I exhaustively attend to slam poetry's complete catalogue of features, presenting the opportunity for future work to identify and analyze additional elements that define the genre. Additionally, there are opportunities to consider the significance of contexts, modalities, and connections to other genres in ways that this work did address. For example, my contextual analysis primarily focused on performance due to the specificity of slam poetry's performative contexts, but, as noted in "Contextually Frustrated," this should not suggest that textual context is of less importance. Considering the features that impact textual composition, recomposition, and publication may lead to a greater understanding of the factors that shape slam poetry. Similarly, the applications of ethnopoetic slam-scription may extend beyond an exploration of mouvance between or within modes. For instance, it may be worthwhile to more thoroughly explore the impact on performance of individual paratextual features, such as venue and audience response. Slam-scription could be adapted to more fully document these contexts to serve a comparison of multiple performances of the same poem. Of course, the focus of "Something Borrowed" offers perhaps the greatest opportunity for further

exploration. The potential for uncovering links between slam poetry and other performative poetry genres extends far beyond what could be covered in a single chapter. Future comparative analyses may present opportunities for adapting established approaches as a means to more fully understand slam poetry.

This dissertation has illustrated the potential for and value of more in-depth analysis of slam poetry across several broad fronts created by slam poetry's defining features. My primary aim has been to contribute, in some small way, to the realization of a more accurate, dynamic, and thorough body of slam poetry scholarship. Additionally, the implications of the approaches discussed in the preceding chapters do not begin and end with the aforementioned applications and examples. I harbor hope that slam poetry scholarship will continue to evolve through both pushing beyond and building upon well-trodden avenues of analysis in ways that can help the world understand the genre for everything it is.

Works Cited

Aptowicz, Cristin O'Keefe. "Funny Poetry gets Slammed: Humor as Strategy in the Poetry Slam Movement." *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research,* vol. 22, no. 3, 2009, pp. 381- 93. *Humanities Source*.

Banks, Daniel. "From Homer to Hip Hop: Orature and *Griots*, Ancient and Present." *Classical World*, vol. 103, no. 2, 2010, pp. 238-35.

Bauman, Richard. *Verbal Art as Performance*. Waveland, 1984.

Burgess, Dana L. "Catullus c. 50: The Exchange of Poetry." *The American Journal of Philology*, vol.107, no. 4, 1986, pp. 576-86.

Chambers, Susan. "Reading Poetry Wrong: Prosody and Performance." *English Language Notes*, vol.46, no.1, 2008, pp.105-111. *MLA International Bibliography*.

Collins, Derek. "Homer and Rhapsodic Composition in Performance." *Oral Tradition*, vol. 16, no.1, 2001, pp. 129-67.

Crisp, Devel, Influence, Oliva Johnson, and Brok "Tryst" Kerbat. "Proper Noose." *YouTube*, uploaded by Poetry Slam Inc, 6 September 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=DcEHamGXDgA.

Daniel, Eric, Debora Marsh, Steve Marsh, Jessie Parent, and Suzi Q. Smith, editors. *The Official Poetry Slam Handbook*. Poetry Slam Inc, 2017.

Donoghue, Denis. "Orality, Literacy, and Their Discontents." *New Literary History,* vol. 27, no.1, 1996, pp. 145-59. *Project MUSE*.

Erlichmann, Shira. "The Piano Speaks." *Internet Archive*, uploaded by Thompson_, 8 October 2007, archive.org/details/Thompson-ShiraErlichmanPPSAS2.20516-2

—.“The Piano Speaks.” *A Poem a Day*, 4 September 2008, exceptindreams.livejournal.com/74357.html.

Esmail, Jennifer. ““Perchance my hand may touch the lyre”: Orality and Textuality in Nineteenth-Century Deaf Poetry.” *Victorian Poetry*, vol.49, no.4, 2011, pp. 509-534. *Project MUSE*.

Esterhammer, Angela. “Coleridge's ‘The Improvisatore’: Poetry, Performance, and Remediation.” *Wordsworth Circle,* vol. 42, no.2, 2011, pp.122-28. *Naxos Spoken Word Library.*

— . “London Periodicals, Scottish Novels, and Italian Fabrications: “Andrew of Padua, the Improvisatore” Re-membered.” *Studies in Romanticism,* vol. 48, no.3, 2009, pp.469-90.

—. “The Cosmopolitan Improvvisatore: Spontaneity and Performance in Romantic Poetics.” *European Romantic Review,* vol.16, no. 2, 2005, pp.153-65.

Fairweather, Janet. “The ‘Gallus Papyrus’: A New Interpretation.” *The Classical Quarterly,* vol. 34, no. 1, 1984, pp. 167-174.

“FAQ.” *Poetry Slam Inc.* Poetry Slam Inc, 2015, www.poetryslam.com.

Foley, John Miles. “Basque Oral Poetry Championship.” *Oral Tradition,* vol. 22, no.2 ,2007, pp. 3-11. *RILM Abstracts of Music Literature*.

—. *Traditional Oral Epic: The* Odyssey, Beowulf*, and the Serbo-Croatian Return Song*. U of California P, 1990.

—. *How to Read an Oral Poem*. UP of Illinois, 2002.

Fox, Ragan.“‘Ragan Fox is a Gay Slam Poet’: An Autobiographical Exploration of Performance Poetry's Performative Implications.” *Text & Performance Quarterly,* vol. 30, no. 4, 2010, pp.420-29. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*.

Galt,John. *Andrew of Padua, the Improvisatore*. Sir Richard Phillips and Co., 1820.

Garzia, Joxerra. "History of Improvised Bertsolaritza: A Proposal." *Oral Tradition*, vol. 22 no. 2, 2007, pp. 77-114. *Humanities Source*.

Hoffman, Barbara. "The Roles of the Griot in the Future of Mali: A Twenty-First-Century Institutionalization of a Thirteenth-Century Traditional Institution." *African Studies Review,* vol. 60, no. 1, 2017, pp. 101-22.

Joseph, Marissa. "Marissa Joseph Poetry Slam: Election 2016." *YouTube,* uploaded by TheDarNews, 14 November 2016.

Keleta-Mae, Naila. "Outskirts to Mainstream? Performance Poetry on the Move." *Canadian Theatre Review,* vol. 149, 2012, pp. 76-79. *MLA International Bibliography*.

Kemp, Richard. *Embodied Acting: Cognitive Foundations of Performance.* Dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 2010.

Kurlansky, Mark. *The Basque History of the World*. Penguin, 1999.

Lau, Alvin. "Alvin Lau: For the Breakdancers." *YouTube,* uploaded by Alvin Lau, 22 August 2007, www.youtube.com/watch?v=VjqqZyfpeUQ.

—. "Seattle Poetry Slam-Alvin Lau "For the Breakdancers."" *YouTube*, uploaded by seattlepoetryslam, 25 May 2009, www.youtube.com/watch?v=To4PFSCmZMU.

Luben, Doc. "Puny Human." *YouTube*, uploaded by ButtonPoetry, 20 August 2014.

Mali, Taylor. "Totally Like Whatever, You Know?" *Youtube*, uploaded by urbanrenewal program, 28 August 2010, www.youtube.com/watch?v=LGAMd-tT6fQ.

—. "What Teachers Make." *TaylorMali*, www.taylormali.com/poems/what-teachers-make/.

—. "What Teachers Make." *YouTube*, uploaded by DevlinPix, 28 May 2012, www.youtube.com/watch?v=RGKm201n-U4

McGann, Jerome. *The Textual Condition*. Princeton UP, 1991.

McGee, Mike. *In Search of Midnight: The Mike McGee Handbook of Awesome*. Write Bloody Publishing, 2011.

—. "Like." *Mighty Mike McGee*, 2004, www.twenty-nothing.com/2005/08/like-mike.html.

—. "Like Mike McGee (Def Poetry)." *YouTube*, uploaded by might32, 22 November 2010, www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q4KkoPVZVCQ.

—. "An Open Letter to Neil Armstrong." *Youtube*, uploaded by Vancouver Poetry Slam, 25 April 2014,www.youtube.com/watch?v=mUxgfywpVPU.

Medina, Tony. "Introduction." *Bum Rush the Page*, edited by Tony Medina and Louis Reyes Rivera, Three Rivers Press, 2001, xix-xxiv.

Middleton, Peter. *Distant Reading: Performance, Readership, and Consumption in Contemporary Poetry*. UP of Alabama, 2005.

Mojgani, Anis. "Direct Orders." *Youtube*, uploaded by homgsh, 20 February 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tvkSPXvejtA.

—. "Direct Orders." *GugaLyrics*, www.gugalyrics.com/lyrics-1656071/anis-moj gani-you-have-been-given-a-direct-order-to-rock-out-the-fuck-out.html.

Nagy, Gregory. *Poetry as Performance: Homer and Beyond.* Cambridge UP, 1996.

Novak, Julia. "Performing the Poet, Reading (to) the Audience: Some Thoughts on Live Poetry as Literary Communication." *Journal of Literary Theory*, vol. 6, no.2, 2012, pp.358-82. *Humanities Source*.

Pearce, James. "Theocritus and Oral Tradition." *Oral Tradition*, vol. 8, no. 1, 1993, pp. 59-86.

Poetry Slam Inc. Poetry Slam Inc, 2015, www.poetryslam.com.

Rothenberg, Jerome. “Total Translation: An Experiment in the Translation of American Indian Poetry.” *Ubuweb Ethnopoetics: Discourses,* http://www.ubu.com/ethno/discourses.html.

Sanchez, Sonia. “Foreward.” *Bum Rush the Page*, edited by Tony Medina and Louis Reyes Rivera, Three Rivers Press, 2001, xv-xvi.

Somers-Willett, Susan B. A. *The Cultural Politics of Slam Poetry*. Michigan UP, 2009.

Smith, Patricia. *Blood Dazzler*. Coffee House Press, 2008.

—. “34.” *YouTube*, uploaded by jaxxengine, 1 May 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZXMI5UhpFL4

—. “Skinhead.” *YouTube*, uploaded by urbanrenewalprogram, 10 August 2010, www.youtube.com/watch?v=Klb5TniRGao

—. “Skinhead.” *Agni Online*, 2008, http://www.bu.edu/agni/poetry/print/2002/56-smithp.html.

de Stael, Germaine. *Corinne, or Italy*. Translated by Sylvia Raphael, Oxford UP, 2008.

Stoller, Paul. “The Griot's Tongue.” *Sensuous Scholarship,* U of P Press, 1997, pp. 24-43.

Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali. Translated by G.D. Pickett, Longmans, Green and Co., 1965.

Tedlock, Denis. “Learning to Listen: Oral History as Poetry.” *boundary 2*, vol. 3, no. 3, 1975, pp. 707-28.

—. “Ethnopoetics.” *Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainment,* edited by Richard Bauman, Oxford UP, 1992, 81-85.

Thomas, Lorenzo. “Neon Griot: The Functional Role of Poetry Readings in the Black Arts Movement.” *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word*, edited by Charles Bernstein, Oxford UP, 1998, pp. 300-23. *eBook Academic Collection (EBSCOhost).*

Wakefield, Buddy. “Buddy Wakefield: Elephant Engine High-Dive Revival.” *YouTube*, uploaded by speakeasynyc, 27 December 2009, www.youtube.com/watch?v=bHX3qtJlmdU.

—. “Hurling Crowbirds at Mockingbars.” *Buddy Wakefield,* 11 August 2009, www.buddywakefield.com/hurling-crowbirds-at-mockingbars-hope-is-not-a-course-of-action/.

Webster, Anthony K., and Paul V. Kroskrity. “Introducing Ethnopoetics: Hymes's Legacy.” *Journal of Folklore Research: An International journal of Folklore and Ethnomusicology* vol. 1, 2014, *JSTOR Journals.*

Wheeler, Lesley. *Voicing American Poetry: Sound and Performance from the 1920s to the Present*. Cornell UP, 2008.

Woods, Scott. “Poetry Slams: The Ultimate Democracy Of Art.” *World Literature Today,* vol. 82, no.1, pp.18-19. *MLA International Bibliography*.

Zumthor, Paul. “Intertextualite et Mouvance.” *Medieval Interventions* no.41,1981, pp. 8-16.