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*The Radicant Artist:*

*Echoes of Georgia O'Keeffe in Contemporary Poetry*

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To Simone, my husband, for his patience and love,  
to Angela, our daughter, for her endless encouragement;  
to my parents who have taught me that a path with no obstacles  
probably leads nowhere,  
to my brother and sister, my very first teachers,  
and to my friends, who put up with my overflowing enthusiasm  
and always found the words to comfort and motivate me.



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## Abstract

### The Radicant Artist: Echoes of Georgia O’Keeffe in Contemporary Poetry

This dissertation examines the renderings into poetry of the life and works of the American Modernist painter, Georgia O’Keeffe. This study intends to show how these poems have interpreted, de-codified and translated O’Keeffe’s subjects into words by making room for new meaningful images, thereby expanding what O’Keeffe meant to do with her art, and thus nourishing her artistic legacy. It borrows the term *radicant* from Nicolas Bourriaud to capture the essence of O’Keeffe, as an artist who set her roots in motion in order to approach art in heterogeneous contexts and formats, transplanting and thus sharing new creative behaviors.

The introduction presents the development of ekphrastic writing, a summary of the principal aesthetic and critical theories I have adopted, a reflection on the reasons why O’Keeffe often showed a certain reticence to the world of words, and the explanation of the materials and methodology that support this study. A section of four chapters analyzes the extent to which poetry prompted by O’Keeffe’s paintings provides not only accurate and eulogistic descriptions of her art but also an encounter between what W. J. T. Mitchell called two “paragonal” media that expand the interpretation of her art on the one hand, and the scope of ekphrastic poetry on the other. The first chapter explores the poems related to the places where O’Keeffe lived and from which she drew inspiration, and aims at confirming her idea that her legacy depends on what she made of these spaces. The second chapter examines the poems that refer to O’Keeffe’s living and still natures whose close-up study echoes her idea of realizing the Great American Painting as the celebration of the vastness and miracle of the world in which we live. The third chapter concentrates on the poems inspired by O’Keeffe’s painted human artifacts that emphasize the importance of a poetry of common things, an attitude that O’Keeffe shared with poet William Carlos Williams. The fourth chapter presents

poems inspired by photographs that portray O’Keeffe, and intends to assert photography as the *tertium quid* in the complementary relationship between painting and poetry, thus reaffirming the connecting and radicant power of the arts.

I conclude this study by arguing that in visual art as well as in poetry the shared process of selecting and emphasizing helps the artists to get at the essence of things, and thus to disentangle the complicated facets of existence. The analysis of the resistance of meanings in the dialogue between the artist’s artwork and the poet’s composition appears to define the intangible that artist, poet and viewer/reader have tried to articulate. May Swenson’s “O’Keeffe Retrospective” functions as a final poetic gallery through which the poet conducts the reader/viewer in a radicant lyrical portrait of the painter, where the thingness of O’Keeffe’s things is fully celebrated, and the readers can clearly see what they have merely looked at. The two appendices include the reproductions of the visual references analyzed in this study, and a selection of three poems with my Italian translation.

## Introduction: The Radicant O’Keeffe in a World of Poets

*People will forget what you said,  
people will forget what you did,  
but people will never forget  
how you made them feel.*

Carol Buchner/Maya Angelou

### 1. Georgia O’Keeffe: a Biographical Sketch<sup>1</sup>

The American painter Georgia O’Keeffe (Sun Prairie, November 15, 1887 - Santa Fe, March 6, 1986) has been well known in the USA for more than eight decades and has also attained worldwide recognition in the past thirty years. More than five hundred works by O’Keeffe are preserved in over a hundred public collections in Asia, Europe, North and Central America. O’Keeffe’s first exhibition was held in New York in 1916, strongly supported by Alfred Stieglitz, who was to become her impresario, lover, and husband from 1924 to 1946, the year he died. O’Keeffe’s works have been included in hundreds of monographic and collective exhibitions around the world. At the time of her death in 1986, when she was ninety-eight years old, O’Keeffe owned more than one-half of the 2,029 known works of her total output, as the Georgia O’Keeffe Museum reports.<sup>2</sup> This wide and varied personal collection was meant to keep trace and documentation of the artist’s career throughout her life. O’Keeffe

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<sup>1</sup> This outline of Georgia O’Keeffe is mainly based on the reading of Bram Dijkstra’s *Georgia O’Keeffe and the Eros of Place* (1998) and of three biographies: Laurie Lisle’s *Portrait of an Artist: A Biography of Georgia O’Keeffe* (1997), Roxana Robinson’s *Georgia O’Keeffe: A Life* (1999), and Hunter Drohojowska-Philp’s *Full Bloom: The Art and Life of Georgia O’Keeffe* (2005). No biography of the artist was authorized when O’Keeffe was alive, not even the one written by O’Keeffe’s friend Anita Pollitzer. The reading of the intense correspondence O’Keeffe kept with friends, writers, artists, and fans has been helpful in understanding much about her personality. My reference volumes have been Sarah Greenough’s *My Faraway One: Selected Letters of Georgia O’Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz: Volume One, 1915-1933* (2011), Barbara Buhler Lynes and Ann Paden’s *Maria Chabot - Georgia O’Keeffe: Correspondence, 1941-1949* (2005), Clive Giboire’s *Lovingly, Georgia: The Complete Correspondence of Georgia O’Keeffe and Anita Pollitzer* (1990), and Jack Cowart’s *Georgia O’Keeffe: Art and Letters* (1989). The Georgia O’Keeffe Museum website and the online archive of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library have provided further biographical information. Finally, O’Keeffe’s autobiographical volumes *Georgia O’Keeffe* (1976) and *Some Memories of Drawing* (1988), and the vision of Perry Miller Adato’s documentary films *Georgia O’Keeffe* (1977), *Georgia O’Keeffe – A Life in Art* (2003), and *Alfred Stieglitz: The Eloquent Eye* (2001) have offered a subjective perspective of the artist’s life. This perspective has invited me to follow *Artforum* former chief-editor Phil Leider’s lesson “to trust the artist first,” as suggested by one of the poets involved in this study, Christopher Buckley.

<sup>2</sup>The Georgia O’Keeffe Museum website reports a Museum’s collections of over 3,000 works that comprises 140 O’Keeffe oil paintings, nearly 700 drawings, and hundreds of additional works dating from 1901 to 1984, the year failing eyesight forced O’Keeffe into retirement. <https://www.okeeffemuseum.org/about-the-museum/>.

carefully and meticulously selected the works that best defined her art, as she wanted this collection to be the testament to her elaborate achievements.

Between 1915 and 1918, O’Keeffe was in North Carolina, Virginia, and Texas taking art classes and teaching. In her autobiography, O’Keeffe recalls those years as the best of her life: “there was no one around to look at what I was doing—no one interested—no one to say anything about it one way or another.”<sup>3</sup> O’Keeffe was open to exploring any form of artistic expression, and evaluated abstraction as the best means for original self-expression. Earlier in 1912, she had met art teacher and painter Alon Bement (1876–1954) at Columbia University, eventually becoming his teaching assistant, while Arthur Wesley Dow was the Art Department Head. The meeting of these influential teachers and painters was pivotal for O’Keeffe’s artistic growth: “The encounter with Bement, and with Dow’s theories, altered Georgia’s life” (Robinson 84). Firstly, O’Keeffe was impressed by Dow’s Japanese-influenced approach to design that characterized his career after his encounter with Katsushika Hokusai. Secondly, Bement introduced O’Keeffe to the writings of Jerome Eddy’s *Cubism and Post-Impressionism* (1914) and Wassily Kandinsky’s *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1912). However, although O’Keeffe showed deep interest in what she defined Bement’s “idea of filling a space in a beautiful way,” she had clear ideas in her mind:

I decided to start anew—to strip away from what I had been taught—to accept as true my own thinking. This was one of the best times of my life. [...] I was alone and singularly free, working into my own, the unknown—no one to satisfy but myself.

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<sup>3</sup> Hereafter, all quotations by Georgia O’Keeffe, unless otherwise indicated are from the unpaginated volume *Georgia O’Keeffe* (1976). The volume is organized by juxtaposing O’Keeffe’s visual work next to a related text that describes and explains the painting and the time in which it was realized.

Her interest in abstraction as a more expressive device immediately distinguished her work from the representational art among her contemporaries, who she thought were not producing anything original, and introduced her to the Modernist era—she explains:

In 1914, I went back to New York to study with Arthur Dow at Teachers College, Columbia University. On my first Sunday in the city, I noticed that the American Watercolor Society was having its fall show so, remembering some of my old friends and acquaintances, I went down to see what they were doing. Everyone was just about as they had been six years before.

O’Keeffe was attracted by what Kandinsky defined “inner necessity” (*Concerning the Spiritual in Art* 27) which coincided with her desire for innovation and originality. She took some distance from what she had been taught, and said to herself that she would have been a fool not to paint the way she really wanted. The fervent support of her friend, photographer and activist Anita Lily Pollitzer (1894-1975) was crucial. Pollitzer took a series of O’Keeffe’s abstract charcoals on white paper to 291 Art Gallery owned by the art patron and photographer Stieglitz who, unbeknownst to O’Keeffe, hung them on the wall in May 1916. Gratified by his interest in her work, O’Keeffe gradually extended her experiments to watercolor. Her works in Texas in 1917, resulting in a series of paintings titled *Evening Star*, showed her enthusiasm for the ability to express the vast expanses of the sky, probably enhanced by Stieglitz’s messages of appreciation. She thus returned to a full complement of color and her repertoire showed increasingly recognizable forms that were to become part of her unequivocal vocabulary. O’Keeffe’s inclination to explore aspects of both abstraction and representation would characterize her whole career. Invited by Stieglitz, O’Keeffe moved to New York in June 1918 where she stayed “on the top floor of a brownstone house next to the back of the Anderson Galleries on 59<sup>th</sup> Street”—she records in her autobiography. Her relationship with Stieglitz soon turned into a passionate romance and they eventually married in 1924. From mid-1918

until the summer of 1929, when she first traveled to New Mexico, Stieglitz and O’Keeffe were nearly inseparable, living at the Shelton Hotel and working together in the city during winter and spring, and at Stieglitz’s family estate at Lake George during the summer and fall. Between 1918 and 1923, she produced in oil some of the most remarkable abstractions of her entire career. These works were characterized by a new degree of precision and specificity, probably to respond to the concerns of Modernist photography promoted by Stieglitz. The magnified representations of recognizable forms, such as the flowers for which she remains best known today, revealed her fascination with the photographic medium. O’Keeffe’s unexpected success of her paintings of New York buildings, a body of work that Stieglitz repeatedly considered “an impossible idea—even the men hadn’t done too well with it”—she records in her autobiography—stimulated her to continue on her experimental path. She soon realized that it was extremely strenuous to lead such a pioneering course for a woman, especially after Stieglitz’s retrospective exhibition at The Anderson Galleries where he included several nudes of O’Keeffe creating sensational responses with the public and the critics. The juxtapositions of her nudes and of her abstractions and flowers started to be interpreted from a Freudian viewpoint. Disturbed by this approach to her art, O’Keeffe rejected these perceptions throughout her life. In her address to the critics, O’Keeffe wrote in her autobiography, “You hung your own associations with flowers on my flower and you write about my flower as if I think and see what you think and see of my flower—and I don’t.”

After several nervous breakdowns due to a conjugal life in which she no longer believed and to Stieglitz’s authoritarian attitude, O’Keeffe accepted the invitation to spend the summer of 1929 at the house of arts supporter-writer Mabel Dodge Luhan, who provided her with a studio in Taos, New Mexico. This sojourn started the beginning of a relentless commuting, during which the painter showed her divided self between a fertile location for her creative expression, and her strong bond with Stieglitz and the city.



By 1929, O’Keeffe was already familiar with the Southwest landscapes of Texas and New Mexico: she had been in Amarillo, Texas, as a supervisor of drawing and penmanship in public schools from 1912 to 1914, and in 1916, and then, in 1917, she stopped in Santa Fe during a vacation in and around Colorado with her sister Claudia. New Mexico’s vast skies and vistas and the stark beauty of its landscape immediately impressed O’Keeffe who discovered an immediate affinity with the place. Starting from 1929, the artist spent almost every spring and summer there, painting and harmonizing with the Native communities of Santa Fe and Abiquiu, eventually making New Mexico her permanent home in 1949, after Stieglitz’s death in August 1946. O’Keeffe drove her car, a Ford model A, for hundreds of miles around the areas of Taos, Alcade, Espanola, Santa Fe, and around the Ghost Ranch area. She was struck by the flat-topped mountain of Cerro Pedernal, the white cliff formations near the village of Abiquiu (the area she often referred to as the White Place), and the black hills of the Navajo country, 150 miles west of Ghost Ranch, commonly referred to as the Black Place. O’Keeffe started to take long walking trips during which she collected the bleached desert bones that were to become frequent subjects of her art, sometimes combined with the artificial flowers she found beautifully manufactured by the inhabitants of the place.

Extremely respectful of the culture and tradition of that region, O’Keeffe purchased a house at Ghost Ranch in 1940 and a Catholic adobe property in Abiquiu in 1945, whose long works of refurbishing are documented in *Maria Chabot - Georgia O’Keeffe: Correspondence, 1941-1949*. O’Keeffe spent her summers and falls at Ghost Ranch, and winters and springs in Abiquiu, making these simple architectural forms of houses, scattered churches and adobes the subjects of her works between the 1940s and 1960s, and blending them with the surrounding natural and cultural landscapes made up of crosses, hills, cottonwood trees and rivers.

In 1959, O’Keeffe began a series of trips around the world. The greatest experience that she translated in her works was given by looking at the earth and the sky from above, from the

window of an airplane. The aerial series of paintings *Sky Above Clouds* in the early 1960s marked a return to the nonrepresentational art of her early years, when she started to feel freer and satisfied with what she had done. Implicitly addressing the world of critics again, O’Keeffe wrote in her autobiography: “Where I was born and where and how I have lived is unimportant. It is what I have done with where I have been that should be of interest.”

In early October 1970, the Whitney Museum of American Art installed a successful retrospective of the artist that would shake and conquer the feminist movement. Invited by the movement to become its symbol, O’Keeffe replied with a renowned statement “Go work” (Karbo 217), synthesizing in two words her life-long engagement in the feminist cause since the beginning of her career as a woman artist in the early 1910s<sup>4</sup>. In 1971, she realized she was losing her central vision and retaining only her peripheral sight. At the age of eighty-four, O’Keeffe continued to work in oil with the assistance of potter-sculptor Juan Hamilton, who became a close friend and legal representative. In 1977, O’Keeffe received the Medal of Freedom from President Gerald Ford. At the age of ninety-seven, she was forced to move in with Hamilton’s family to be nearer to medical facilities. In 1985, she was awarded the National Medal of Arts. She died on March 6, 1986 at St. Vincent’s Hospital, Santa Fe.

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<sup>4</sup> O’Keeffe became associated with the National Women’s Party through her friend Anita Pollitzer, a strong supporter of equal rights for women and eventually chairperson of the association. In February 1926, in conjunction with the opening of *Fifty Recent Paintings, by Georgia O’Keeffe* at The Intimate Gallery, which included the depictions of New York architecture completed between 1925 and 1932, O’Keeffe was invited to Washington to address the National Women’s Party. Robinson’s biography reports that “O’Keeffe’s speech in Washington was well-received: lucidly and firmly she spoke of the need for women to become independent and to take responsibility for themselves and their lives [...]. O’Keeffe always took the cause of feminism seriously, but she was neither angry nor confrontational” (Robinson 202). As the painter continued to assert, she favored a form of private feminist activism but always recognized an “innate difference between the male and the female experience” (292) that she meant to express with her art.

## 2. Ekphrasis: the Complementary Art

This study examines the renditions of O’Keeffe’s life and works into poetry. I have collected five hundred and two poems in English, written by seventy-two poets, inspired by the artist before and after her death. In order to show O’Keeffe’s influence on the poets’ creative process of interpretation, decodification and transcodification into words of her visual work, I have selected more than one hundred poems. I define such influence as radicant, according to the definition I draw from French art critic Nicolas Bourriaud, thus one that makes room for new meaningful images and expands what O’Keeffe meant to do with her art in ways that nourish her artistic legacy. My research ventures into considering the voicings of her artwork into the form of poetry and thus challenging what she repeatedly stated, namely that there is “no reason for painting anything that can be put into any other form as well” (O’Keeffe quoted in Cowart 202).<sup>5</sup>

A personal, long-standing appreciation of O’Keeffe’s art, coupled with a scholarly interest in ekphrastic poetry provide the focus of this research. I will analyze the extent to which poetry about O’Keeffe’s paintings provides not only accurate and eulogistic descriptions of her art, but also an encounter between what W. J. T. Mitchell calls two paragonal media that expand both the interpretation of her art and the scope of ekphrastic poetry. O’Keeffe apparently agreed with Leonardo Da Vinci, who claimed the superiority of painting to poetry, as through the eye we can completely and abundantly appreciate the infinite works of nature.<sup>6</sup> Rating the ear second, he stated that poetry can be best enjoyed “by hearing of the things the eye has seen” (Leonardo da Vinci 190). Contemporary ekphrastic writing however has gone beyond this hierarchical evaluation of the senses to show that it is important to abandon the idea that one

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<sup>5</sup> O’Keeffe wrote these words in a letter to her friend William M. Milliken, Director of Cleveland Art Museum, on November 1, 1930: “I have been hoping that you would forget that you asked me to write you of the White Flower, but I see that you do not. It is easier for me to paint it than to write about it and I would so much rather people would look at it than read about it. I see no reason for painting anything that can be put into any other form as well. I see no reason for painting anything that can be put into any other form as well” (Cowart 202).

<sup>6</sup> Leonardo da Vinci asserted this in his volume “Paragone: of Poetry and Painting” (1651).

art is superior to another. For example, James A. W. Heffernan's study and Mitchell's research on the development of ekphrasis offer methodological and theoretical support for a non-hierarchical analysis of contemporary intersections of verbal and visual media.

The etymology of the Greek word *ek* (out) *phrazein* (tell), meaning to "telling in full," has undergone considerable evolutions in terms of usage and definition, at times even conflicting. Ryan Welsh proposes two definitions of ekphrasis in *Theories of Media: Keywords Glossary*,<sup>7</sup> both based on *The Oxford English Dictionary*: the first, dating 1715, provides a definition of ekphrasis as "a plain declaration or interpretation of a thing;" the latter, dating 1814, indicates one further shift in meaning by characterizing the word with "florid effeminacies of style." Teachers of rhetorics used to teach ekphrasis as a way of bringing the experience of an object to a listener or reader through highly detailed descriptive writing. In this sense, ekphrasis was not simply meant to provide artful details of an object, but it also aimed to share the emotional experience of the object with someone who had never encountered it. Thus, it encouraged to go beyond the immediate qualities of an object, and to make efforts to embody qualities beyond the physical aspects of the work being observed.

The idea of relational and radicant art defined by Bourriaud, which I explain in detail in the following section "Approaches to Aesthetic Theories: O'Keeffe as a Radicant Artist," has helped me in the act of delimitating my critical analysis of the ekphrastic poems I have analyzed. I have applied Bourriaud's aesthetic concepts to the ekphrastic practices that O'Keeffe has inspired because they focus on translating and sharing emotional experiences and contents deriving from a detailed description of the visual image they relate with.

In many cases, the poets I have considered in this study have never seen the artwork to which their ekphrastic compositions refer. Most of them have encountered O'Keeffe's

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<sup>7</sup> Ryan Welsh, "Ekphrasis," in *Theories of Media: Keywords Glossary*. In 2004, a group of scholars and students in Visual and Media Studies directed by W.J.T. Mitchell, Eduardo de Almeida, and Rebecca Reynolds at the University of Chicago created this online glossary partially based on *The Oxford English Dictionary* for the etymological meanings of the considered words.

paintings through the massive phenomenon of mechanic reproductions that contemporary new technologies are capable of diffusing, a topic that provides further material for future investigation. The poets have therefore made great “efforts to embody qualities beyond the physical aspects of the work they were observing” (Welsh). The critical discourse implicated by Horace’s “ut pictura poesis” is thus marginal in my approach, as it aims at limiting the hierarchical evaluation of the relationship of words and images. My intention is rather to seek an equilibrium between the verbal and visual media: “art describing art” in Welsh’s words. It also intends to avoid the risk of representing one art overcoming the other by transcodification. To pursue this goal, I consider the role of Edward Said’s system of affiliative relationships in which the artist and the intellectual, the poet in this specific case, are engaged in a virtual dialogue in the reciprocal attempt to expand the emotional value of their respective artistic productions. Throughout my analysis, I employ the terms “affiliative” and “affiliated” in their Saidian sense.

Among the different inflections of the term ekphrasis, Heffernan speaks of it as “the verbal representation of visual representation” (3) still relating the word to its earliest Greek origins. It is true that Heffernan opens the term up to diverse utility and extends it to all verbal commentary or writing. However, as Peter Wagner points out in *Icons-Text-Iconotexts: Essays on Ekphrasis and Intermediary* (1996), Heffernan’s definition fails to draw a distinction between the critical and the literary versions of such writings. These, on the contrary, are central in my study, as poetic translations imply the emotional sharing I want to foreground.

I intend to emphasize that in contemporary ekphrasis, the productive dialectic conflict between image and word have become essential. Wagner and Heffernan’s visions indicate that “as word/image problem expands to involve more and more disciplines there is more and more interest in the ways ekphrasis, an ancient term, can be a part of a modern understanding” (Welsh). The analysis of the poems on O’Keeffe’s art intends to avail itself of the last two of

the three definitions of ekphrasis proposed by Mitchell—“ekphrastic hope,” and “ekphrastic fear” (*Picture Theory* 156). Since my aim is to evaluate poetry directly inspired by the work and life of an artist, the first of his definitions, “ekphrastic indifference,” is not useful for my analysis in the view of the fact that ekphrastic poems reject the idea that the world of words and images might be considered “as two separate modes of representation that cannot be intertwined, as [etymologically] ekphrasis would indicate” (Mitchell 156). On the contrary, “ekphrastic hope,” by opposing the idea of indifference in favor of a hopeful moment in which “ekphrasis ceases to be a special or exceptional moment in verbal or oral representation and begins to seem paradigmatic of a fundamental tendency in all linguistic expression” (Mitchell 153), suggests that the ekphrastic experience may become a complementary medium. Through “ekphrastic hope,” Mitchell echoes both Welsh’s idea linked to the early Greek rhetoricians who believed that “there might be a way to write about objects so that someone could encounter them verbally, but still be impressed with the visual” (Welsh), and Bourriaud’s concept of complementarity offered by relational art.

Finally, Mitchell’s definition of “ekphrastic fear” provides the closest interpretation of ekphrastic writing on which I want to focus:

This is the moment of resistance or counterdesire that occurs when we sense that the difference between the verbal and the visual representation might collapse and the figurative, imaginary desire of ekphrasis might be realized literally and actually. (154)

“Ekphrastic fear” indicates the moment in which the verbal form, displacing and replacing the visual, accomplishes “the goal of replicating the visual in the verbal” (Welsh). In its rhetorical value and as a means of negotiating between the verbal and the visual, ekphrasis represents a constructive basis for the formation and expansion of art. Mitchell cites William Carlos Williams’s poem “Song” in which the poet recalls the “pictorial turn” that poetry was going

through during the first decades of the twentieth century in New York: “undying accents / repeated till / the ear and the eye / lie down /together in the same bed” (Williams quoted in Mitchell 151). Indeed, Williams’s poem synthesizes the idea that my research intends to validate: the eye and the ear, in other words, the “singing shapes”<sup>8</sup> that both O’Keeffe and the poets have reproduced through their pictorial and verbal efforts, may find in ekphrasis their complementary medium.

The poems I have examined open a dialogue, a verbal discourse related to O’Keeffe’s work, and by their multiple different perspectives contribute to the etymological ekphrastic intention of saying in full what the painter wished to express with colors and shapes. My personal acquaintance with poets Kate Braid, Christopher Buckley, Diane Wakoski, and Shurooq Amin have encouraged this vision. I have considered also the contamination in theme and style among the poets who were contemporaries of O’Keeffe and those who wrote their poems after her death. I have tried to understand whether and to what extent these poets and O’Keeffe allowed themselves to be mutually influenced, as in the case of Williams’s work *Paterson*, Diane Wakoski’s “I Have Had To Learn To Live With My Face,” and D. H. Lawrence’s “Autumn in Taos.” I have analyzed the work of those poets who have found in the painter a cultural spokesperson as a woman, a feminist, an avant-garde artist, a modernist, and even a postmodernist. Through their words, this related community of poets has recreated a suggestive vision of O’Keeffe’s works and showed the possibilities of expanding the message of her art by adding the signifying power of syntactical and structural devices that poetic expression implies. The poets have re-written the artist’s urge to translate the material world into subjects capable of conveying her emotional experiences. The relational intersection between poetry and painting has become complementary. This crossing of borders between

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<sup>8</sup> O’Keeffe uses this expression in her autobiography next to the reproduction of her painting *Shell and Old Shingle VI* (1926): “the shingle just a dark space that floated off the top of the painting, the shell just a simple white shape under it. They fascinated me so that I forgot what they were except that they were shapes together—singing shapes.”

one medium of art and the other validates my claim for the radicant attitude that O’Keeffe and ekphrastic practice promote.

### 3. Approaches to Aesthetic Theories: O’Keeffe as a Radicant Artist

Following my intention to show how ekphrastic poetry referred to O’Keeffe’s works has nourished and expanded the artist’s legacy, I have adjusted Nicolas Bourriaud’s concept of “Relational Art” (2002) to provide a theoretical ground for my textual interpretations. Bourriaud’s idea of art finds its theoretical horizon in the realm of human interactions and in its social context, rather than in the assertion of an independent and private symbolic space; it promotes a continuous dialogue, interaction and communion among artists, and points to a radical upheaval of the aesthetic, cultural and political goals introduced by modern art. As Bourriaud recalls, art has always been relational in varying degrees, as a factor of sociability and as founding principle of dialogue. One of the virtual properties of images stands in their power of “reliance,” of “linkage” (*Relational Art* 15): flags, logos, icons, signs, all produce empathy and sharing, and all generate bonds, tightening the space of relations. O’Keeffe was deeply aware of this power, and, in the construction of her identity, she must have considered it with attention, especially when in New Mexico she managed to create around her an affiliative system of relations built upon her iconic figure and the signs of her art.

The poetic productions that my study take into consideration are artistic forms that represent the poets/artists’ desires to continue the dialogue with O’Keeffe, and create the conditions for an exchange and a mutual promotion of each other’s art. To provide an example here, Kate Braid’s poetry offers a fictional and at the same time real example of Bourriaud’s theory. In *Inward to The Bones: Georgia O’Keeffe’s Journey with Emily Carr* (1998), Braid describes a brief encounter recorded in Carr’s journal between her and Georgia O’Keeffe in February 1930 at an exhibition of O’Keeffe’s paintings in New York. Braid uses this



documented meeting as an inspiration to expand it into what would have happened had the two women become friends, and visited each other's place of living and areas of inspiration for their paintings. Narrated through O'Keeffe's voice, the poems also explore the affective relationship the two artists had with their lands and people, their struggle in making their art, and the precarious, often unpredicted power of relationships and friendship, which I have here observed through the challenging perspective proposed by Leela Gandhi's theory of *Affective Communities* (2006) and her compelling engagement with Jacques Derrida's *The Politics of Friendship* (2005). Gandhi articulates an affective community that focuses on individuals and groups who renounce the privileges of imperialist culture in order to seek affinity with the victims of their own expansionist culture, and who associate their lives with marginalized lifestyles, subcultures, and traditions in order to resist and oppose the ruling cultural and political system. This community is in tune with my understanding of O'Keeffe's community as radican. O'Keeffe herself renounced the privileges of New York ethnocentric and masculinist culture to affiliate herself and her art with the Natives and Hispanic Americans, to share their environmental awareness, spiritualism, and aestheticism in order to resist the overpowering system. Gandhi's adaptation of Derrida's concepts of "friendship" and "hospitality" as crucial resources for contrasting any form of domination have greatly helped me understand and articulate the role played by affective relationships in O'Keeffe's life and work. So much so that "affective" is the fourth conceptual keyword of my study.

Bourriaud's analysis of the state of modern and contemporary art contained in *The Radican* (2009) has provided my definition of O'Keeffe as a radican artist, where radican designates an organism that grows its roots in motion and adds new ones as it advances. Bourriaud structures his theory drawing from the botanical systems present in nature, which offer analogies first with O'Keeffe's natural subjects and second with O'Keeffe's mobility as a painter and a woman at the beginning of the twentieth century. Bourriaud argues that in the

course of the twentieth century roots often symbolized a “return to the origin of art or of society [...] rediscovering their essence [by] cutting off useless branches, subtracting, eliminating, rebooting the world from a single master principle that was presented as the foundation of a liberating new language” (*The Radicant* 22). This image fits O’Keeffe’s research about finding a new liberating language in her artistic expression, which she eventually found in New Mexico when she accepted the plurality of her artistic expression.

O’Keeffe can be defined as a radicant artist in the sense that she set her roots in motion; she staged them in heterogeneous contexts and formats, denying them the priority to define her identity. In her diverse attempts to approach art, O’Keeffe translated ideas, transcoded images, and transplanted new behaviors, which she shared with her affiliated community of artists in an attitude of reciprocal stimulus. The large number of people who wrote and visited the artist seeking advice and inspiration symbolized the already present precarious age of the artist and reflected the urgency to create new ways of art expression. Drawing again from botany, I have considered the poems written on O’Keeffe as literary grafts that promote a theoretical renovation in the arts based on already existing artworks. In the process of contemporary artistic creation, Bourriaud has invoked the cooperation of three factors: the concepts “imported” from different disciplines, the “rediscovery” of neglected authors, and the theoretical approach through which the world of art introduces itself at the time of investigation. My study combines these three factors in the process of analysis and evaluation of the poetic compositions inspired by O’Keeffe.

The concept of the radicant is clearly also indebted to Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizome, which grows in all directions on whatever surfaces and, like ivy, attaches multiple hooks to them. Again drawing from the botanical world, the radicant, which develops its roots as it advances, differs from the radical, whose growth is determined by its anchorage on a specific soil. The radicant grows its secondary roots alongside its primary ones harmonizing with its

host soil. O’Keeffe translated herself “into the terms of the space” (*The Radicant* 51) in which she moved. She put herself in motion and in dialogical terms with the environment, feeling the plural need to connect to the place and to uproot. She felt the power of the globalizing role of her art and its singularity. She better perceived her identity as an opening to the other, thus defining herself as the object of a “continuous negotiation” (*The Radicant* 51). Initiated into a world which proceeded by subtractions in an effort to “unearth the root” (51), O’Keeffe’s art on the contrary proceeded by long selection, additions, and acts of multiplication, a parallel she often made with friendship: “Nobody sees a flower really; it is so small. We haven’t time, and to see takes time—like to have a friend takes time.” This allows me to interpret her art in the light of Derrida’s politics of friendship, as expanded by Gandhi.

O’Keeffe embodied the role of the modernist artist that Said described in “Secular Criticism” drawing from Ian Watt’s analysis of the works and authors of late nineteenth century western literature. Watt observed that authors felt the urgency to break ties “with family, home, class, country, and traditional beliefs as necessary stages in the achievement of spiritual and intellectual freedom.”<sup>9</sup> At the beginning of her professional life, O’Keeffe was expected to follow the traditional female-oriented career of an art teacher, obeying the set of filiative patriarchal rules imposed by the system. However, her determination to pursue her artistic dream and oppose this authoritarian model drove O’Keeffe to disappoint the expectations. She decided in fact to become part of the affiliative circle of artists and intellectuals led by Stieglitz. Unfortunately, she soon realized that this affiliative system was only an echo of the patriarchal filiative world she wanted to desert. O’Keeffe was “kept silent [...] domesticated for use inside the culture” (Said 12), which was represented by Stieglitz’s male-centered model.<sup>10</sup> Even her attempt to propose herself as an archetype of sexual liberation in the 1920s, eventually ascribed

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<sup>9</sup> Said is here quoting Ian Watt’s *Conrad in the nineteenth Century*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979, p.32.

<sup>10</sup> Said is here drawing from Michel Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*, Vintage Books Edition, 1990.

the painter inside another (af)iliative and hierarchical system here defined by her sexuality. Hence, O’Keeffe offered resistance, or rather an “outright hostility” (Said 14) towards a cultural pattern embodied by Stieglitz that echoed filiative systems and advocated instead the idea of an affiliated community that shared her larger transcendental system of order and value she adopted in New Mexico.

The idea of an affiliative order and the consequent creation of a related and radicant system of relationships show O’Keeffe as a new “restored” (Said 19) authority in her artistic community, whose ideas, values, and global views validated by the order of a new hierarchy functions as a new cultural mode. These relationships have transformed the natural bonds and their natural offspring in new forms that overcome the personal threshold, nourishing principles such as self-awareness, consensus, collegiality and professional respect. As Said asserts, “The filiative scheme belongs to the realms of nature and of life, whereas affiliation belongs exclusively to culture and society” (20).

According to this critical practice, I have tried to analyze the poems on O’Keeffe not as sterile imitation of her art, as it would happen in the process of representation of a filiative scheme where the known is reinforced “at the expense of the knowable” (Said 22-23). On the contrary, the works of contemporary, also transnational poetry—as in the case of Amin and Bhatt’s poems –confirm the progressive role of an open, related and affective community that is meant to continue the painter’s goal to chase “the unknown always beyond you” in which “you must always be working to grasp” (Drohojowska-Philp 211-212).<sup>11</sup> O’Keeffe embodies the artist’s characteristics in contemporary culture. She is the migrant, the exile, the tourist, and the urban wanderer described both by Said and by Bourriaud (*The Radicant* 51) when, in her mobility, she resembles the plant that does not depend on a single root for its growth, but on aerial and radicant approaches.

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<sup>11</sup> The quotation refers to a letter that O’Keeffe wrote to Stieglitz probably in November 1924.

O’Keeffe knows there is not an ideal place or state of the self or of society such as the one envisaged by Europe and westernized America, but she wishes to create a “comfort zone” (Gandhi 30), a minor utopian society allied with those people and places who have lived ordinary and unexceptional lives, where less has become more. I have drawn this vision from Derrida’s engagement with “ordinary language philosophy,” and from Leela Gandhi’s idea of “being ordinary” as described in *The Common Cause* (2014): “to be ordinary is to derive meanings from strictly communicative, shared, and common contexts (the situation of the speaker; the occasion of a word; the sudden surprise of intimate understanding)” (161). O’Keeffe opposes a world that excludes the ordinary and unexceptional because it believes in an idealist perfection, and favors instead a look to “a certain poetry of the ordinary and solidarity” (Kaur) that she shares with the local people of New Mexico. I suggest that O’Keeffe projects here an affiliated artistic community, whose signs multiply one identity by another, solving that “loss of the subject” described by Said (20).

A step towards this perspective seems to have been made in O’Keeffe’s recent show, *Georgia O’Keeffe in New Mexico: Architecture, Katsinam, and the Land*, which opened at the Montclair Art Museum, New Jersey in September 2012. The exhibition has showed O’Keeffe’s need to explore the new environment and deepen her contact with the diverse peoples and cultures of the land, thus permitting their mutual expansion and broadening. I would add that it has also moved O’Keeffe past the concept of American modernism, which is a characteristic that this study intends to highlight. As a radicant artist, O’Keeffe has taken the road, walked the local for the universal that contains neither origin nor end. She has acclimated herself to “the contexts and the products (ideas, forms) that are generated by these temporary acculturations” (*The Radicant* 52). Setting the artist in motion implies the end of the expression through one specific medium. No fields from the realm of art are to be excluded as they favor a transplant of art to heterogeneous territories (54). Translations and transcodings

represent one further medium of this movement, as they are fundamentally “an act of displacement [that] causes the meaning of a text to move from one linguistic form to another and puts the associated tremors on display” (54). Bourriaud expands on this by stating:

The radican is a mode of thought based on translation: precarious enrooting entails coming into contact with a host soil, a *terra incognita*. Thus, every point of contact that goes to make up the radican line represents an effort of translation. Art, from this perspective, is not defined as an essence to be perpetuated (in the form of a closed and self-contained disciplinary category) but rather as a gaseous substance capable of filling up the most disparate human activities before once again solidifying in the form that makes it visible as such: the work. (54)

This perspective has encouraged my parallel project of compiling an anthology of poems with my Italian translations.<sup>12</sup> Bourriaud and Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan’s theories on translations<sup>13</sup> have helped me to examine in depth both the work of O’Keeffe and the related poems. In addition, working as a translator, who constructs herself out of “borrowings, citations, and proximities” (*The Radican* 55), I have felt to become part of this radican production that contributes to expand O’Keeffe’s artistic goals and the work of contemporary poets. The poets have had an active role in my translations supporting me in the numerous obscure moments that “intersemiotic” transposition and transcreational literary translation have presented. In fact, where traditional poetry translation normally involves exercises of decoding and encoding using one single semantic system as a primary basis, intersemiotic transpositions need to take into account further cultural semantic systems. Claus Clüver’s “On Intersemiotic Transposition” (1989) sustained my attempt asserting the feasibility of intersemiotic

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<sup>12</sup> This bilingual anthology contains a selection of thirty poems by the same number of women poets with my Italian translation. Contacts with two publishers interested in the volume have already been made.

<sup>13</sup> Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan, “Why Translate?” *Ngugi wa Thiong O in the Americas*, 2009 and “Is Translation a Mode?” *European Journal of English Studies*, Vol. 12.1, April 2008: 15–31.

transposition on the same presuppositions that lead us to accept the idea that interlingual translation is possible. Clüver refers the term to the “translation” of a work of art composed within one semiotic system into another, different semiotic system. The difficult process of intersemiotic transposition must be then accepted as we normally accept interlingual translations with their imprecisions due to the cultural and linguistic variances applicable to every culture and language. As Clüver underlines, the meaning of a lyric poem resides indeed in the “interplay of its sounds and rhythms, its images and tropes, its syntactical, prosodic structures, the denotative and connotative dimensions of its lexical items, among other things” (59). The meaning of a painting or of a photograph must instead consider “the system of visual marks that constitutes [a painting] ‘syntactically and semantically dense’” (59), which is an involving process to undertake. Clüver thus examines Nelson Goodman’s view according to whom “every change in hue, saturation, and value, every variation in thickness, direction, and ductus of a brushstroke, every dislocation of a shape or modulation in texture may affect the meaning of a visual text, however slightly” (Clüver 59-60). If Goodman thinks it is possible to establish a semantic equivalence between colors and phonemes, for example, this cannot be said of the articulate system of verbal language, as this one cannot match “the infinite possibilities of the dense color system” (Goodman quoted in Clüver 60). Although this reasoning seems to deny every form of translatability of poetry, Clüver nevertheless insists on the undertaking of broader views of translatability that accept general similarities instead of precise equivalents, which is exactly what this study intends to evaluate. By doing this, the process is still difficult to realize but not impossible, and the translator is asked to accept the burden of this enterprise. Clüver states:

The meaning of a poem is no more self-evident and unambiguous than that of a pictorial text. The translator’s decision as to the preservation of formal features

will be determined by his interpretation and judgment as to the importance and efficacy of these features in the audience's interpretative habits. (61)

Supported by Clüver's definition, I intend to emphasize the interactive collaboration of a network of agents who are essential elements in the composition of a new artistic production where the common denominators are poetry and painting. The act of translation eventually adds but does not diminish the discussion of the relationship between the verbal text and the visual image.

#### 4. O'Keeffe versus Poetry

O'Keeffe repeatedly declared that painting was the art that expressed what no other art could express, and asserted that poetry was an artistic expression she had difficulty in understanding. Writing to her friend Anita Pollitzer, O'Keeffe stated that music was for her the highest form of art: "You asked me about music—I like it better than anything in the world (*Lovingly, Georgia* 60). I intend to challenge O'Keeffe's positioning, to show how poetry instead can work as the connecting bridge that gives voice to O'Keeffe's shapes and colors. I analyze how poetry inspired by her art can represent a sort of related palette which contains all the spectrum of verbal expression with its lexicon, syntax, rhythms, and layouts. In addition, thanks to its sound patterns, poetry can help O'Keeffe's work to be translated into music, as she aimed to do for example with her painting *Music – Pink and Blue* (1918), where she supported the idea that music could be translated into something for the eye, and her painted objects into "singing shapes." In her autobiography, O'Keeffe writes:

[...] one day walking down the hall I heard music from [Bement's] classroom. Being curious I opened the door and went in. A low-toned record was being played and the students were asked to make a drawing from what they heard. So I sat down and made a drawing, too. [...] This gave me an idea that I was



interested to follow later—the idea that music could be translated into something for the eye.

Jack Coward states that O'Keeffe's work refers to experiences, things or events, which he calls the “determinants” (2) that have urged her to create her art.<sup>14</sup> Coward speaks of “necessities” which she needed to translate into visual experiences. Painting was the means through which O'Keeffe could portray her “sensations, ideas, and situations that for her could be expressed no other way” (Coward 2). She made this possible by expressing herself “through her direct phenomenological point of view [using images] grounded in authenticity” (Coward 2). O'Keeffe consciously made of her life a work of art that influenced and nurtured her memories of events, giving them new life. Based on Coward's interpretation, I intend to analyze how the lyrical interpretations of the poets have expanded and opened up O'Keeffe's work to interdisciplinary, related multimedia discourse, even though O'Keeffe found she could say things she had no words for only with color and shapes. My analysis aims at finding how poetry has reached successful renditions of O'Keeffe's aesthetic canon of filling the world with beauty into poetical ones, showing how the poets operate with words in the same way as colors, brushstrokes and objects do in her paintings. Finally, I intend to show how these poems contribute to O'Keeffe's radicant urge to move forward, “to keep on”—using O'Keeffe's expression—never resting on the already achieved. By critically engaging these questions, the study aims first at contributing to the debate about ekphrastic poetry inspired by what we call O'Keeffe's postproduction, thus validating Bourriaud's position in the power of relations in the arts as well as their radicant implications in the creation of an artistic world community that cannot ignore its sociological role.

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<sup>14</sup> Jack Coward's essay “Georgia O'Keeffe: Art and Artist” is included in the volume *Georgia O'Keeffe: Arts and Letters*, published by Bullfinch Press and Boston: Little in 1987.

My Italian translations intend to offer an expansion of O’Keeffe’s art as well as a view on contemporary Anglophone poetry within and outside academic circles, crossing national borders as in the goal of a radicant artist. O’Keeffe has become the “aerial” root, following Bourriaud’s invitation to rethink the idea of belonging or rooting in an aerial sense. Bourriaud calls this approach to art criticism and art production “altermodernity:”<sup>15</sup> “Artists are looking for a new modernity that would be based on translation: what matters today is to *translate* the cultural values of cultural groups and to connect them to the world network” (Bourriaud quoted in Rabaté 207).<sup>16</sup> This is what Rabaté defines as “altermodernism,” a movement connected to “the creolisation of cultures and the fight for autonomy, but also the possibility of producing singularities in a more and more standardized world” (207).

## 5. Materials and Methodology

The writing of this dissertation has combined both a theoretical and an empirical approach. The research and compilation of a list of poems written on O’Keeffe’s paintings and herself as artist has drawn from Robert D. Denham’s general overview *Poets on Paintings: A Bibliography* (2010), which catalogues eighty-eight book collections and over 2,500 single Anglophone poems on paintings of all times and places, from Italian early Renaissance to Japanese art. The number of poems on O’Keeffe in Denham’s volume is high (forty-three single poems, one book collection, and single poems collected in eight different anthologies). Nevertheless, I have discovered so far other four collections of poems on the painter, numerous compositions by single authors on thematic journals such as *Ekphrasis, a Poetry Journal*, *Beauty/Truth: A Journal of Ekphrastic Poetry*,<sup>17</sup> and in anthologies like *Poems from Women’s*

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<sup>15</sup> Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt use the term “altermodernity” in *Commonwealth* (2009).

<sup>16</sup> In *Crimes of the Future: Theory and its Global Reproduction* Jean-Michel Rabaté reports Bourriaud’s keynote speech to the Art Association of Australia & New Zealand Conference 2005 and sympathizes with Bourriaud’s concept of Altermodernity.

<sup>17</sup> The two journals are edited respectively by Carol and Laverne Frith and James Gapinsk.

*Movement* (2009) by Honor Moore. My list to date includes a total of five hundred and two poems on O’Keeffe written by seventy-two poets. This impressive number of Anglophone poets, men and women, of varying degrees of renown, whose poetry has been provoked by the painter, is being considered for the first time. My study intends to put together this wide corpus and relate it to Bourriaud’s idea that “Art is a state of encounter” (*Relational Aesthetics* 18). To this purpose, I have staged a direct dialogue with the poets in order to collect and study their personal responses to my questions on their poems and relationship with the painter. This process has been useful for comparing or drawing interesting parallels. At the same time, I have drawn from the method of deconstructive reading as well as kept in mind W. C. Williams’s theory of objectivism.<sup>18</sup> These, combined with critical theories applied to visual and literary studies, and aesthetic theories combined with post-colonial thought, and translation theory constitute my interpretative tool-box.

For the analysis of the poems, I have principally employed a deconstructive approach. Both O’Keeffe’s artwork and the poems have been read as open-ended, endlessly available to interpretation, and expanding the original authorial intention. By using deconstructive and comparative tools, I have traced new meanings both within one text and its related visual reference, and across others. This process has helped me to underline the provisional and evolving meaning of texts as well as the multiple perceptions of the same object. In regards to this latter consideration, I have interpreted the way poets have taken possession of O’Keeffe’s work as a form of “art appropriation”<sup>19</sup> that operates not to seize but to abolish ownerships of

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<sup>18</sup> In the 1930s’ William Carlos Williams coined the term Objectivist poetry drawing from his reading of Alfred North Whitehead’s *Science and the Modern World*. He described it as looking at a poem “with a special eye to its structural aspects and to the way it had been constructed...” Objectivist poets were mainly concerned with creating a poetic structure that could be perceived as a whole, rather than a series of imprecise but evocative images.

<sup>19</sup> According to the definition given by Chilvers and Graves-Smith in their *Dictionary of Modern and Contemporary Art* (27-28), appropriation in art or art appropriation indicates the use of pre-existing objects or images with little or no transformation applied to them. Its practice traces back to Cubism and Dadaism, but continued into 1940s Surrealism and 1950s Pop Art. In *The Tate Guide to Modern Art Terms* (2008), Wilson and Lack defined it as “the taking over, into a work of art, of a real object or even an existing work of art” (20-21).

forms. Consequently, O’Keeffe’s art and the role she embodied as an artist have been the basis for formation and transformation of new contemporary artistic expressions.

Following Marcel Duchamp’s statement that “it is the viewers who make the paintings” (Duchamp quoted in Bourriaud 161),<sup>20</sup> the poets’ works have challenged passive and static contemplation in favor of an interactive collaboration and collectivism that have nourished both the artist’s primary intentions, and the literary production. Under such perspective, the visual work and the verbal discourse it generated can no longer claim an exclusive hold on the other, but have become an expansion of the primary emotional experience that originated it. This point of view amplifies, yet complicates what O’Keeffe meant to say with her work through the words of poets who have connected to her art and principles, promoting an innovation of the critical discourse around her.

In examining poetic literature that has covered more than half a century, I found it necessary to employ an integrated approach, as one single theory cannot be a valid instrument to cross-examine and translate such a varied body of work. Although I have respected a critical approach in which artists explain artists, I felt the need to be supported by diverse theoretical means in order to account for the combination of the visual and the verbal at the core of my analysis. Aesthetic theories and image studies have allowed me to produce a first decodification of the visual work, a close reading of the work in its historical and social context, in order to proceed in the analysis of the visual text translated into the verbal medium. In detail, I have read and decoded O’Keeffe’s visual work by employing two different approaches. An objective reading of the painting, which focuses on its subject, the iconography it relates to or the symbols it portrays, its formal analysis, style, patronage, historical context, and critical judgment

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<sup>20</sup> Marcel Duchamp’s series *Readymades of Marcel Duchamp* represents the first example of appropriation art in the first decades of the twentieth century.

provides the first approach. The second is given by the emotional response, which appeals to the first personal reception and reactions to the work and their interpretation.

The original approach to visual studies provided by Mitchell and Sunil Manghani has facilitated my analysis. Manghani argues that, although semiotic analysis is still a fundamental means that enables us to decode the visual work, edit it, and then be prepared to the re-encoding process given by the intersemiotic transposition of the visual work into a verbal one, it is still criticized for being a linguistic-based theory where the word, or verbal reasoning, becomes dominant.<sup>21</sup> As this study intends to prevent overcoming one medium with another, it has favoured Mitchell's and Manghani's approaches in understanding and rewriting images. Mitchell's lesson derived by his practical lesson of "Showing Seeing: a Critique of Visual Culture" (2002) functions as Derrida's "Of Grammatology" in challenging the "primacy of language" (Mitchell 169) over the written text. In addition, Mitchell postures the importance of iconology, as both a study of "what to say about images," that is the tradition of "art writing" concerned with the description and interpretation of visual art, and a study of "what images say, that is the ways in which they seem to speak for themselves by persuading, telling stories, or describing" (*Iconology* 1-2). It is hard to keep the two media in an equilibrium of power, and in more than one case the visual and verbal text compete in their process of mutual rewriting. In these situations, Bourriaud's concept of relational art provides support and functions as a balance tool:

Their relation to the history of art does not imply an ideology of signs as property, but rather a culture of using and sharing forms, a culture for which the

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<sup>21</sup> In his *Image Studies: Theory and Practice* (2013), Manghani engages the reader in the critical search of a connection between theory and practice in the process to better understand images and visual culture. By looking across a range of domains and disciplines, Manghani invites the reader to consider the image not as a single, static thing. Conversely, the image can be a concept, an object, a picture, or medium—and all these things combined. In addition, the book focuses on the idea of an 'ecology of images,' through which we can examine the full 'life' of an image, in order to understand how this image may resonate within a complex set of contexts, processes and uses.

history of art constitutes a repertoire of forms, postures, and images, a toolbox that every artist has the right to draw upon, a shared resource that each is free to use according to his and her personal needs. (*The Radicant* 166-167)

The studies on translation provided by Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan have supported my functional translations of the poems into Italian. Post-colonial theory has characterized my critical reading and translation of the poems and the study of O’Keeffe’s affiliative and affective relationships she established with her work. I believe that critical translation theory, which locates meaning in inter-lingual, inter-semiotic, and intra-lingual contexts, is still the tool through which we can evaluate the different modes of expression that speak of the universal. My attempt is to read the various individual voices that have defined and echoed O’Keeffe’s work in counterpoint. Translation has represented for me not only a ground of contamination, but also a ground of radicant fertilization.

## 6. A Roadmap to the Dissertation

The chapters in this study discuss the poets’ creative works on O’Keeffe’s visual and verbal literature by following a thematic pattern. Chapter I “Painting Poems on O’Keeffe’s Places” explores the poems related to the places where O’Keeffe lived and from which she drew inspiration, confirming her idea that it was not important where and how she lived, but what she made and left as her artistic legacy. Chapter II “Painting Poems on O’Keeffe’s Living and Still Natures” examines the poems that refer to O’Keeffe’s paintings on living and still natures whose close-up study echoes her idea of realizing the Great American Painting as the celebration of the vastness and miracle of the world in which we live. Chapter III “Painting Poems on O’Keeffe’s Human Artifacts” concentrates on the poems related to O’Keeffe’s representations of human artifacts, sharing William Carlos Williams’s vision of “no ideas but in things.” Chapter IV “Theorizing Photographs on the Artist” presents poems inspired by

photographs that portray O’Keeffe and asserts photography as the *tertium quid* in the complementary relationship between painting and poetry, thus reaffirming the connecting and radicant power of the arts.

In “The Radicant Lyrical O’Keeffe,” I conclude by arguing that in visual art as well as in poetry the shared process of selecting and emphasizing helps the artists/authors to get at the essence of things, and thus to disentangle the complex facets of existence. The analysis of the resistance of meanings in the dialogue between the artist’s artwork and the poet’s composition seems an effective way to define the intangible that artist, poet and viewer/reader always try to articulate. May Swenson’s poem “O’Keeffe Retrospective” functions as a final lyrical gallery through which the poet provides a last example of the radicant and creative influence exerted by O’Keeffe in her own poetic expression. In Appendix I and II, the reproductions of the visual references analyzed in the study, and three exemplary translations into Italian that are part of my forthcoming anthology are included.





## Chapter I

### Painting Poems on O’Keeffe’s Places

*This space is not emptiness.  
This space is not, as you would say, Nothing there.  
It is a space of fullness, open  
to possibility. You would say A Foolish space.  
Perhaps.*

Kate Braid, “86”

#### I.1. The Painter’s Moveable Spaces

The present chapter “Painting Poems on O’Keeffe’s Places” considers the poems inspired by O’Keeffe’s geographical movements in their chronological order in the attempt to revive the painter’s artistic formative path. The four central sections are titled after the landscapes across which O’Keeffe lived her personal and artistic life: the Plains of her childhood and youth from Wisconsin to North Carolina and Texas; the city of New York, where she reached fame and recognition; the area of Lake George, where she resided in the summers during the 1920s and 1930s, in the Stieglitzs’ estate; New Mexico, where she spent most of her life from 1929 until her death in 1986, engaged in the recuperation of the meaning of her art. The driving force of this chapter is provided by O’Keeffe’s own statement in her autobiographic book *Georgia O’Keeffe* (1976) that recites: “Where I was born and where and how I have lived is unimportant. It is what I have done with where I have been that should be of interest.”

The aim of this chapter is to restage O’Keeffe’s idea through the action of poetry inspired by the painted visions of these places. This related medium shows the multiple different ways to share sensitivity towards common themes, subjects, or objects and confirms the value of ekphrastic writing strategy to produce valuable original artistic expression. There is no intent in these poets’ works to equate O’Keeffe’s art. However, their urgency to share and express their own visions confirms the wide and deep appreciation for the artist’s work as well

as the artist's radiant success in awakening an artistic sensitive reaction once exposed to her creative production.

## I.2. The Open Horizons of the Plains

*Gertrude Stein says  
you have to have flown across the Mid- West  
seeing the patterns of the fields  
to understand modern painting.  
What I say is  
you have to have walked that land  
a whole Dakota afternoon  
to understand modern writing.*

Stephen Scobie, "McAlmon's Chinese Opera"

This first section focuses on a series of poems inspired by the works that O'Keeffe completed in the early years of her career and related to the places she experienced during that time. Some of the poems are titled after O'Keeffe's paintings. Georgia O'Keeffe's *Series I – From the Plains* inspires both Shurooq Amin's "Georgia's Plains (on Georgia O'Keeffe's *Series I – From the Plains*)" and Christopher Buckley's "From the Plains I" (*Flying Backbone* 78). O'Keeffe's watercolor series *Evening Star* inspires Edward Hirsch's "Homage to O'Keeffe" (*The Night Parade* 10-11) and Buckley's "From 10 Variations on the Evening Star in Daylight (#s III, IV, V, VI)" (27). Lavonne J. Adams's "At the Magnolia Hotel" instead draws inspiration from O'Keeffe's biographical accounts of the period she spent in Amarillo, Texas, during her teaching experience in 1918.

Contemporary Kuwait-Syrian multi-media visual artist and Anglophone poet Shurooq Amin and Californian poet and teacher Christopher Buckley write the first couple of poems on O'Keeffe's *Series I – From the Plains* (App. I.1.–Fig. 1). In their poetic representations of O'Keeffe's abstract imagery, the poets seem to elect and decode different images. Amin's poem "Georgia's Plains (on Georgia O'Keeffe's *Series I – From the Plains*)" breaks up underlining the impact of colors, recalling images of the rounded fullness of plums, petals and pleats, and

vibrating energy. Conversely, Buckley's "From the Plains I" translates O'Keeffe's abstractions and turns them into real elements like the whipsaw, the arcs of dust, the windstorms, and the wheat-thick daze. As the poet zooms to the center of the painting, Buckley's vision gets distracted and blurred. Both poems have a distinctive voice. In Amin's work, the painting is a dialogue with one virtual Other, in Buckley it takes the form of a monologue, a literary device that the poet employs for all his compositions dedicated to the painter. Both poems, reshaping the centrifugal drive of the center of the scene, evoke the vigorous force of a relationship, which is clear and explicit in the words of Amin, and more timid in Buckley's words. The opening lines of both poems come out with an assertive exclamation, to reveal the sense of awareness provoked by the encompassing emotion with the painting. Buckley opens with "I think I have it now" (1), and Amin counterpoints with "Ah, this blue" (1), as if the two poets had finally grasped what O'Keeffe implied, each their own way. Amin indulges in chromatic associations with natural palpable elements, as the dark purple of mulberries, the plumber purple of plums, the silver of petal tissues, the lilac, the dark red of wine and the exotic, warm and sensual bold red color of tamarind, which perspire coupling images of Eastern and Western worlds. Differently, Buckley's opening lines fix radiant perceptions of a man-ruled Mid-Western world, where working tools, productive land and atmospheric agents are combined.

The duality that I have defined as O'Keeffe's urgency to *sentirsi al plurale* (feel plural),<sup>22</sup> obsessively preserved by the artist, revives through the lines of Amin and Buckley. On one side, O'Keeffe's "essence of very womanhood," after Paul Rosenfeld's definition (Lynes 178) is recreated by Amin with her colors and shaped words, and on the other side, O'Keeffe's "masculine gaze" (Chave 114) through which at times the painter found herself to look at things, returns in Buckley's lines. However, the duality of these visions that conduct

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<sup>22</sup> I used this expression in the essay "Le finestre di Abiquiu: sguardi e riflessi su un recuperato Trascendentalismo nell'opera di Georgia O'Keeffe" published in the Italian on line literary journal *ALTRE MODERNITÀ* (2015).

the reader to the second part of both poems, reestablishes the asserted and agreed hint of the first lines. While Amin leads us to Far Eastern settings where sounds resonate through a “Tibetan-singing-bowl” (15), having the poet’s Middle-Eastern and Western intermingled cultures resurface, Buckley, instead, projects us on a “Hegelian space,” using Bourriaud’s expression (*The Radicant* 101) where “a red getaway to / the sudden sky” (Buckley 21-22) recalls an American highway.

Both poets celebrate the “easing” and healing power of pleasure. Amin again, endowed with her intimacy with visual means, emphasizes the escalation of both intellectual and sensitive pleasure using two different layouts for her two-stanza composition. The first eight-line stanza develops with a fast rhythm, rich in alliterations to convey the ripeness of the natural elements it describes. The second eleven-line stanza, introduced by the connecting image of the tamarind in the last line of the first stanza, through its wave-like order, visually portrays the radiant sound of the Tibetan singing bowl and its vibrations, originating from its small center. The far-between lines propagate the sound, disseminate it, and reverberate echoes of pleasure. Buckley’s poem, on the contrary, maintains a twenty-two-line structure without pause or layout fractures. Even though the poem starts with objective circular images, like the saw, the arcs, the land, the wind, the center of the storm, as it gets to unroll and unfold the core of the topic moment, suddenly, with a shift of subject, “she might look up, /like me, and wonder....” (14-15), it takes a more linear, straightforward direction, where it seems to regain control and, with a “steady pulse” (19), it confidently undertakes the most direct road towards “jouissance.”

Amin and Buckley succeed at their translations in words of O’Keeffe’s painting as they revive the dual spirit that co-exists in O’Keeffe’s painting: the desire to abstract emotions but only through the vision of objective realities. The different voices of these two poets harmoniously synthesize this. Their plurality helps to reveal the plural voice of O’Keeffe’s art without diminishing it.

This section also studies the poems inspired by O’Keeffe’s series of watercolors *Evening Star* painted in Canyon, Texas (App. I.1.—Fig. 2): Edward Hirsch’s “Homage to O’Keeffe” (1989) and Christopher Buckley’s “From 10 Variations on the Evening Star in Daylight (#s III, IV, V, VI) (2008). Both poems were first published few years after O’Keeffe’s death in 1986. As Buckley states in the preface to his anthological collection *Flying Backbone* (2008), which gathers four of his already published works<sup>23</sup> on O’Keeffe, the painter was very popular in the late 1980s. Anything related to her could be easily marketed as long as it mentioned her name on it. However, Buckley felt appropriate to publish his poems at that time as he had been working on the collection for over a decade. Since the moment was particular, in the preface of his collection, the poet wanted to claim this:

This collection of poems is homage, not homily. I am not attempting to speak for Georgia O’Keeffe, nor am I trying to define her work in any absolute academic or aesthetic way. In my opinion, too many have made that mistake over the years. (*Flying Backbone* 10)

Written in the same years, Hirsch’s poem on the painter intends instead to focus on O’Keeffe’s everyday living as a young artist. Hirsch’s poems are characterized by his rich and tender visions of family and ordinary life that the author has often translated into “memorandums of [his] affections.” (Hirsch 1)<sup>24</sup> Hirsch’s poetry has been defined as the poetry of ordinary things to which the poet has been able to lend an ecstatic and blissful power. In his work, things are not always what they seem. In reviewing the poet’s writing, Peter Campion states that Hirsch’s poems “work to dignify the everyday.”<sup>25</sup> Campion underlines Hirsch’s

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<sup>23</sup> *Flying Backbone* (2008) collects four different books published by Buckley: *Blossoms and Bones* (1998), *Against the Blue* (2001), *The Sudden Sky* (2003), and *2007* (2007).

<sup>24</sup> The quote reprises Hirsch’s first line of his poem “Memorandums” published on *The New Yorker* in 1989. The line is itself a quotation from the British poet John Clare’s journal entry dated 13 June 1825 inspired by some memories of his three-year-old daughter. The same excerpt can be read in *John Clare by Himself*, a volume that includes Clare’s “Journal,” “Sketches and Autobiographical Fragments,” and his “Journey out of Essex.”

<sup>25</sup> Peter Campion, “‘Between Ordinary and Ecstatic’ Review of *The Living Fire: Selected Poems by Edward Hirsch*,” *The New York Times Book Review* 25 March 2010.

ability to balance “the quotidian and something completely other [that creates] an irrational counterforce” that Hirsch himself called “living fire” (Campion), giving then the name to his book published in 2010.

Both Hirsh and Buckley’s poems develop almost as if they were playing “in the same key,” quoting Buckley’s “From 10 Variations” (6), and they demonstrate to know in detail O’Keeffe’s early life. Through their poems, they transpose the artist’s emotional personal narration contained in her autobiography as well as in her wide correspondence which has been partially published in 2011, twenty-five years after her death.<sup>26</sup> The verbal unity of the two poems is represented by the action word “walk,” an image that Hirsch and Buckley might have both drawn from O’Keeffe’s volume *Georgia O’Keeffe* when she explains the origin of her watercolor:

We often walked away from the town in the late afternoon sunset. There were no paved roads and no fences—no trees—it was like the ocean but it was wide, wide land. . . . The evening star would be high in the sunset sky when it was still broad daylight. . . . I had nothing but to walk into nowhere and the wide sunset space with the star.

In the opening line of the monologue, in the words of O’Keeffe, Buckley begins with a series of negative statements that provide space and power to the only presence that surrounds the artist:

I had nothing but to walk into nowhere  
and the wide sunset space with the star—  
far away from town it was high and bright  
in the broad daylight. (Buckley 1-4)

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<sup>26</sup> Sarah Greenough, *My Faraway One: Selected Letters of Georgia O’Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz: Volume One, 1915-1933* Yale University Press, 2011.

Hirsch's poem replicates with a third-person narration that shifts the focus from the artist's view to that of a casual viewer, who, from a distance, follows with the eyes the wanderings of a young O'Keeffe:

She was just a school teacher then  
Walking away from the town  
In the late afternoon sunset. (Hirsch 1-3)

In Buckley's poem, the reader recognizes O'Keeffe in communion and unity with the landscape in which she is immersed:

At this hour, the world is composed  
of but a few basic lines,  
and standing upright in the expanse,  
I am only one more. (22-25)

However, while Buckley offers an abstract imagery of O'Keeffe's surrounding elements, Hirsch continues to lead our gaze through real places and helps us visualize O'Keeffe in a more representational way:

She had nothing to but walk away  
from the churches and banks, the college buildings  
of knowledge, the filling stations  
of the habitable world,  
and then she was alone  
with what she believed— (Hirsch 13-18)

Both poems enable us to perceive the dilemma that the young artist was already feeling, divided between the "inner necessity" to move on from paved artistic paths and the urgency to represent a world she was deeply fascinated by. Hirsch and Buckley put into words the idea of the artist to walk untried roads, as Hirsch openly evokes in his lines:

something unfenced and wild  
About the world without roads,  
Miles and miles of land  
Rolling like waves into nowhere (8-11)

Buckley adds up:

I was face to vast face  
with my elements, one primary hand  
of color like a fountain pushing up  
the star – its yellow filaments  
tinting green, the horizon red  
and rolling as the day sank off  
and somehow the sea, a long desert blue  
in the absence of roads, fences and trees. (10-17)

Hirsch speaks of “a young woman in love” (4), but then he breaks up the line, keeping us in suspense as if he wanted to feed the romanticized vision of O’Keeffe’s life which was common in the 1980s. In fact, that was the critical view of the artist still circulating and affected by the male centered considerations around her art and behaviors, despite the new radical feminist perspective of the earlier decade. On the contrary, Hirsch, in the successive run-on line, reveals what O’Keeffe is truly in love with: it is not the man, Stieglitz, who she met in 1916 and with whom she is keeping an intense correspondence, but the land, “a treeless place” (5) she can walk through. Hirsch uses the same device at the beginning and end of each stanza. In lines 17 and 18, the poet shows us another image of O’Keeffe, “And then she was alone” (17), an apparent dejected vision of the artist. Here, Hirsch wittily seems to make fun of the reader/listener, and adds up “With what she believed” (18), counterpointing a bold and proud image of a young woman who courageously undertakes the untrod ways of art in “The



shuddering iridescence of heat lighting” (19). The final stanza regains possession of the painting, as it is more common in Buckley’s images. The evening star becomes the artist that from above “rising in daylight, /commanding empty spaces” (Hirsch 23-24) ventures into experimental art with audacious representations such as the one describing “Cattle moving like black lace in the distance, / wildflowers growing out of bleached skulls” (Hirsch 20-21).

Buckley’s “Light Coming on the Plains” (*Flying Backbone* 26) is inspired by another watercolor, *Light Coming from the Plains No.1* (App. I.1—Fig. 3) that the poet here presents as a concert stage. The poem debuts upon entering with the line “One long note’s level drive” (1), thus translating the central amber yellow or “custard light” (10) core of O’Keeffe’s painting into a concert stage that propagates its musical light through its circular sound waves. Music is felt in a *crescendo* as the lines turn bluer and bluer in their colored sound diffusion:

Long note’s level drive  
across the wash – we come in  
at the crescendo, on the pollen  
of light from the first idea  
to fill space in a beautiful way. (Buckley 1-4)

The rising light turns into an orchestra whose different elements, like the spectrum’s colors, play each a different instrument just to blend into one harmonic music: “In the spectrum’s short waves / a blue concerto spins /a substance for the eye” (6-8).

With a series of words fittingly picked from the world of music, Buckley blends colors and sounds, and transforms an everyday afterglow in a singer who performs “over the earth’s pale edge” (15), making O’Keeffe’s desire of painting “singing shapes” come true. As the arched lines of O’Keeffe’s strokes recall the pattern of a pentagram, Buckley’s images in words draw from the music scene and the evoked landscape. In a perfect equilibrium of internal rhymes and delicate assonances, the poem develops on a wave motion, which is visually

emphasized by a series of images that recall the same motion: “wash” (2), “water-splash” (9), “moves” (11), “amber waves” (12) , and “swimming up” (17). Buckley’s virtuosity stands in his ability to recreate the exclusive atmosphere of that particular moment in a day when light rises up and starts a *crescendo* of colors that night usually puts back to sleep, helping us to learn the beautiful things that naturally fill our space.

The last poem of this section is Lavonne J. Adams’s “At the Magnolia Hotel” (2011). The poem reveals Adams’s attachment to the figures of pioneering women long engaged in dangerous and exceptional adventures at the beginning of the twentieth century. Profoundly fascinated by the Santa Fe Trail where the voices of brave women sang “human longing, determination, and landscape” (Stripling Byer), Adams’s poetry mingles her love for Native American history with that of the lives of the settlers. Through her researches and creative compositions, the poet has become an eminent poetic spokesperson to understand the role that Southwestern lands had on women like O’Keeffe. In this specific poem, Adams draws us to the Magnolia Hotel, on Polk Street, in Amarillo, Texas, where O’Keeffe lodged during the months she was teaching. Trilled by the enthusiasm of describing a world of dust and smell, Adams zooms to one figure:

amid this reek  
and clatter, like a study  
in black and gray,  
Georgia O’Keeffe  
lifts her fork.” (15-19)

The lifted fork, whose symbolic reading immediately indicates duality, indecision, but also a union of opposites, synthetizes the meaning of the poem. The image of the fork is often used to indicate contradictory drives in one’s own personality that prevents concentration on clear aims, and demands self-analysis and reflection. However, if we change our perspective and

read O’Keeffe’s lifted fork from a Middle Eastern tradition, we see the artist’s willingness to be respected for her activity, especially in a world ruled by men. This reading is in tune with the period she spent in Amarillo, Texas, which coincides with a time of change in the artist’s life, as pointed out by DeVoe.<sup>27</sup> During this time, in fact O’Keeffe destroys all her production to embark on the experimentation of abstract imagery, deeply provoked by an inhabited place “where the sky met the howling wind”—thus she describes it in her volume. Though not specifically dedicated to visive poetry, Adams succeeds here at directing the reader’s eye to focus on that figure at the table, leading us through images that start first with a flashback on O’Keeffe as she is leaving Charlottesville heading west, to Texas. Then, we follow her journey through a series of symbolic images that depict the legendary interpretation of Southwestern landscapes with crossing railroads, colorful scenarios, and black lines of cattle. O’Keeffe had already described this landscape in her volume in the following terms:

It was a place where few people went unless they had cattle they hoped had found shelter there in bad weather. ... We saw the wind and snow blow across the slit in the plains as if the slit didn’t exist. ... We never met anyone there. Often as we were leaving, we would see a long line of cattle like black lace against the sunset sky.

Adams depicts a scene of clouds of dust, of campfires shining along horizons of fading moons, and of sweated cowboys who proudly wear the smell of cattle while they “knock the mud off their heels, / [and] spit before entering the hotel” (Adams 11-12). Adams’s camera eye skims and slides through crowded rooms to stop and center the attention on a black and grey profile, apparently insubstantial, as the non-colors portray it. However, the performed action of lifting the fork loads the scene with emphatic meaning. The vowel rhyme of the name “Georgia

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<sup>27</sup> Richard DeVoe’s article “Georgia O’Keeffe: Sandie was a Rebel” appeared on the *Amarillo Globe News* on March 3, 2012, in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of Georgia O’Keeffe’s arrival in Amarillo where she taught art at Amarillo College.

O’Keeffe” (18) plays with the mute and semivowel sounds of letter “k” and “f” in the line that follows, “lifts her fork” (19) indicating the artist’s determination not to go unnoticed. The radicant O’Keeffe had already set her roots in motion, meaning to leave a relevant sign of her work from the plains and further on.

### I.3. The Hall of Fame: New York City

*The men painted the shapes they knew –  
longer than they were wide –  
and no one tripped.*

*When I painted the shapes I knew –  
round hills, dark spaces –  
suddenly it was all sex.*

Kate Braid, “17”

The French-American painter Marchel Duchamp, acting as the spokesperson of a group of Modernist French artists who first sought inspiration in the USA, clearly expressed his idea about the future of artistic expression in the first decades of the twentieth century in the long headline appeared on *The New York Tribune* in 1915:

If only America would realize that the art of Europe is finished—dead—and that America is the country of the art of the future instead of trying to base everything she does on European traditions! (Duchamp quoted in Chave 88)

Anna C. Chave in her essay “Who will Paint New York?” offers a detailed reconstruction of the major ideas circulating in the late 1910s and 1920s concerning the vision of New York City as the capital of financial power as well as of artistic expression. The construction boom and the extensive building policy to accommodate a growing population that was moving from the rural areas to the City gave New York a radical brand new skyline culminating in the escalating vertical buildings elected as the symbols of a new architectural era. Skyscrapers not only became a symbol of the American Spirit, “restless, centrifugal, perilously poised,” as American

architectural theorist Claude Bragdon<sup>28</sup> pointed out, but they represented “the only original development in the field of architecture” (Bragdon quoted in Chave 88) that would eventually lead to integrate not only architecture, art, and design, but also American divided society. Bragdon’s conceptualization must have had a great impact on O’Keeffe’s original interpretation in her series of more than twenty urban landscapes she painted between 1925 and 1930, which won her unexpected immediate market and critical recognition. At the time, O’Keeffe and Stieglitz were living on the 30th floor of the Shelton Hotel, one of the most significant examples of this innovation, enjoying a perspective that clearly affected the results of the artist’s work. O’Keeffe describes the place in her *Georgia O’Keeffe*:

When I was looking for a place to live, I decided to try the Shelton. I was shown on the 30<sup>th</sup> floor. I had never lived so high before and was so excited that I began talking about trying to paint New York. Of course, I was told that it was an impossible idea – even the men hadn’t done too well with.

In this section I intend to take up O’Keeffe’s challenge of painting a difficult subject, the city, conceived as a peculiarly modern and American vision of success and emancipation, not commonly ascribed to women, through the poetic works of Christopher Buckley, Cathy Song, Alicia Suskin Ostriker, Kate Braid, and C. S. Merrill, among others. The poems inspired by O’Keeffe’s works about New York are deeply affected by the fact that during these ascending years in fame she went through numerous changes that testify her urgency to try, to experiment, as an artist, as well as a woman. The poems transpire the hard criticism O’Keeffe

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<sup>28</sup> Claude Fayette Bragdon (1866 – 1946) was an American architect, writer, and stage designer from Rochester, New York famous for Rochester’s New York Central Railroad Terminal (1909–13) and Chamber of Commerce (1915–17). Bragdon enjoyed a national reputation as an architect working in the progressive tradition associated with Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright. Along with members of the Prairie School and other regional movements, Bragdon developed new approaches to the planning, design, and ornamentation of buildings that embraced industrial techniques and building types while reaffirming democratic traditions threatened by the rise of urban mass society. In numerous essays and books, Bragdon argued that only an “organic architecture” based on nature could foster democratic community in industrial capitalist society. In her essay “Who Will Paint New York,” Anna Chave quotes Bragdon’s article “The Shelton Hotel, New York” which was published on *Architectural Record* in 1925.

started to experience in the late 1920s through the comments of mainly male scholars and art critics following her success with her first magnified close-up flowers. The sexual readings of the critics, promoting a Freudian interpretation of her art, advanced O’Keeffe’s intention to find her own identity, and a defined place in a male centered artistic and economic world ruled by Stieglitz, her impresario and lover, and the circle of male artists and critics he gathered around him. It is possible to detect a mirrored picture of the famous couple in William Carlos Williams’s lines of *Paterson, Book I*:

A man like a city and a woman like a flower  
—who are in love. Two women. Three women.  
Innumerable women, each like a flower.  
But  
only one man—like a city. (33-37)

Stieglitz, one of the symbols of a progressive New York City, embodies the narrative voice of the poem in the ideal city of Paterson in the act of witnessing the fast-changing world he is living in. Stieglitz, like this voice, is trying to find the best medium, the “hieroglyphics of a new speech”—quoting Bram Dijkstra, through which he can tell about the radical changes the city is undergoing. In a simple language that could suitably translate that world and help people to understand it, Williams was seeking to “tell the truth about things”<sup>29</sup> using the same images and subjects that both Stieglitz and O’Keeffe were employing through their photographic and pictorial “equivalents.” Williams’s lines recall the image of the two lovers, Stieglitz, “the man like a city” (33) and O’Keeffe, “a woman like a flower” (33), respectively the symbol of avant-garde projections, and the symbol of a stereotyped womanhood confined within clichéd images of flowers. Whether it was Williams’s intention or not, he was depicting the attitude of the early

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<sup>29</sup> Randall Jarrell, “*Paterson* by William Carlos Williams,” in *No Other Book: Selected Essays*. New York HarperCollins, 1999.

twentieth century still dominated by an evident patriarchal system but also marked by some progressive change. The former is clearly evoked in the very name of Williams's ideal city, Pater-son, Father's son, perfectly embodied by Stieglitz and his circle. The latter is encapsulated in O'Keeffe's magnified flowers: they brought her to a successful though too well-worn image of women artists engaged in woman-like painting motifs, but they also became an occasion for the artist to show her "womanhood" from the ambitious perspective and hardihood that O'Keeffe displayed when she expressed her own perception and vision of the City.

European avant-garde artists, as Chave points out, would not immediately take into account O'Keeffe's images of the New World. The paternalistic vision expressed by Henry Matisse<sup>30</sup> in 1930, which regarded American artists as "primitives," derived from his consideration that American artists had not traveled sufficiently across the old world to perceive their own richness, and thus understand their own country for what it was, an idea that also O'Keeffe affirmed. Nonetheless, Matisse's description of his meeting with New York synthesizes O'Keeffe ecstatic pictorial work she produced over the decade:

The first time that I saw America, I mean New York, at seven o'clock in the evening, this gold and black block in the night, reflected in the water, I was in complete ecstasy...New York seemed to me like a gold nugget. (Matisse quoted in Schneider 606-607)

As Schneider points out in his biography of Matisse, the French painter said he was "truly electrified" (607) by the discovery of New York skyscrapers that provided him "a feeling of lightness ... [and] of liberty through the possession of a larger space" (607). Costantin

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<sup>30</sup> The French artist Henri-Émile-Benoît Matisse (1869 – 1954) was known for his use of color and his fluid and original draughtsmanship. He was a draughtsman, printmaker, and sculptor, but primarily a painter. Matisse, along with Pablo Picasso and Marcel Duchamp, is regarded as one of the three artists who helped to define the revolutionary developments in the plastic arts in the opening decades of the twentieth century, responsible for significant developments in painting and sculpture.

Brancusi<sup>31</sup> defined the same buildings as “a great new poetry seeking its peculiar expression” (Chave 103) and contrasted Matisse’s definition of American people as “primitives” (103) by saying that the country had truly understood art, and specifically modern art, through their skyscraper architecture, which was to attract a steady stream of European, avant-garde artists between the first and fifth decades of the twentieth century. In all this debate, O’Keeffe started to move independently and showed soon to have found a way to paint New York in her legible and lyrical way. As Chave indicates O’Keeffe’s paintings “reciprocated the democratized aspect of the city while evincing the limitless aspirations embodied in its newfound imago, the skyscraper” (Chave 104). O’Keeffe made it possible because modern painting, as Matisse pointed out when he had his first show at Stieglitz’s Gallery 291 in 1912, was an act of “immediate translation of feeling” (Chave 104) that emphasized the role of the spirit in artistic expression, an idea in which she strongly believed.

This study examines three poems written by Buckley included in *Flying Backbone*: “The New York Paintings” (39) celebrates the unexpected success received by O’Keeffe’s challenge of painting the city of skyscrapers; “East River No. I” (41) is another ekphrastic poem named after the same painting; “59<sup>th</sup> Street Studio” (40) offers an intimate insight of the significant 1919 oil on canvas with the same title. This last poem, which imagines a young O’Keeffe into the studio apartment at 114 East 59<sup>th</sup> Street struggling to find the right angle and light to start painting, is being juxtaposed to Cathy Song’s “Black Iris—*New York*” (*Picture Bride* 43-44), where the poet voices the young painter’s singular moments of her life in the city, and to Alicia Ostriker’s “O’Keeffe” (*The Little Space* 223), which mentally pictures the artist staring down from the window in Stieglitz’s apartment. Kate Braid’s poem “19” (*Inward*

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<sup>31</sup> Constantin Brâncuși (1876 – 1957) was Romanian-born sculptor who made his career in France. As a child, he displayed an aptitude for carving wooden farm tools. Formal studies took him first to Bucharest, then to Munich, then to the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. His art emphasizes clean geometrical lines that balance forms inherent in his materials with the symbolic allusions of representational art. Considered a pioneer of modernism, Brâncuși is called the patriarch of modern sculpture.



to the *Bones* 29) contained in “Solo,” the first section of the book, in the voice of O’Keeffe, speaks of New Yorkers as people too busy to see what surrounds them and recoups both Matisse and Duchamp’s ideas about the total unawareness of what the New World was actually blooming into, and how Americans were reacting.

Buckley, in his “The New York Paintings,” aims at translating O’Keeffe’s attraction for the challenging project of painting the city and guides our look through two of O’Keeffe’s works, *City Light* and *New York – Night* (App. I.1.—Fig. 4). Graphically, in the first stanza of the poem, Buckley, by insisting on the use of an alliterated “t” conveys the idea of those towering, vertical buildings in the painting, studding the reader’s senses of sight and hearing. As the poet drives us through the scenes of the paintings, he takes us close to the artist, as if we were just walking next to her, through the streets of New York, staring up at the sky, as in a dream. The opening line confirms the state, “Even now it’s like a dream” (1), and verbalizes O’Keeffe’s thought of being in New York in a sort of unimagined dream, invited by Stieglitz, the most emblematic figure of the artistic panorama, who has given her free rein, *carte blanche* to express her art in complete free authority:

The grand height of all of it  
kept me painting, looking up  
to the perfect rise and rub of blocks (Buckley 8-10)

Soon the city becomes a challenging motif and most of its landmarks lead the painter back to scenarios that are more familiar. Slowly the city loses her industrial attire, and returns to be a translation of natural landscapes where “the sounds of traffic and harbor boats” (20) recall the long and sad lowing of moving cattle (21). The towering “buildings / angled over you like hawks” (24-25) invite you to run away. Chased by a “Billy-the Kid moon” (27) riding and “lurking on a ridge of clouds and smoke” (26), playing a sort of hide-and-seek game, the painter runs through the “spangled avenues” (11) in search of patches of sky lit up by natural stars.

Freudian readings of Buckley's lines would apparently hint to an idea of O'Keeffe who feels "raw" (22) and "hunted" (24) by "this daring vertical continent" (Chave 104), as Fernand Léger put it. They would also try to transfigure the vertical buildings like "high-toned stars" into the haunting realm of critics and reviewers who were ready to interpret O'Keeffe's work on New York buildings as phallic symbols as well. The moon, one the most traditional symbol of femininity, seems to have put on a man's guise, as well, and plays tricks to the artist lost in the dark canyons of the intersecting streets, where the sky is forced to box with light. The moon, a constant presence in the New York series of paintings, plays a twofold role. Its presence needs to assert the feminine identity of the painter, but on the other side, it envisions O'Keeffe and Stieglitz's relationship, where O'Keeffe, the moon, is nothing but a mirror that reflects the light of Stieglitz, the sun, thus representing the shadowy side of the sun's light. Being at odds with this situation, O'Keeffe feels the power of the biting sun whose spots can easily have blinding effects (15-16). The most natural reaction is to take refuge in the dark labyrinthine streets brightened by "dissolving red as a stop light" (18). Thus, Buckley bids us to lower our gaze, and flanks us to O'Keeffe who seems to be worried even by "the sudden snap of a match" (29). Apparently waken up from her dream of New Mexican outlaws, still carried away by her state, she asks a question in Spanish, "*¿Quién es?*" (30)— "Who is it?"—which again tells us about the emotional nostalgia capturing the painter in the city.

Buckley's poem "East River No. I" offers an aerial view of New York. O'Keeffe is "confined to" (23) her apartment, looks out of the window, and paints *East River No. I* (App. I.1.—Fig. 5). The cold feeling that seems to thicken everything (19) has crystallized the world around. Rubbing the little left of life around into her hands, she sets herself to work against the dreariness that surrounds. As to wipe away "the lifeless grey, / the blur and shroud of December" (5-6), she seizes her sweater's arm and clears the window as if she were drawing the curtains on her work, and lets us see the scenario. Buckley here inverts the painting action

as if we were to see the artist's creation before she actually puts it into the canvas, anticipating this way the creative process and the objective visions that triggered the whole genesis. The poet in fact zooms on the river—the reader perceives the cold by the very incipit of the poem, “Dead of winter” (1) and is thrown outside, hovering over “black stacks towering / their throaty smoke [feeling the] frost against a lifeless grey” (3-5). Everything is still. The smoke itself turns into frost in “the blur and shroud of December” (6). There seems to be no life around, not even the dead “will be buried today / no one ferried to the other side” (21-22). The theme of death is repeated three times: “The ramparts of roaring / industry are stopped, black / and bloodless as the bricks, / as the roads going nowhere fast” (12-15).

It is interesting how Buckley translates O’Keeffe’s vision of the industrialized metropolis, anticipating the environment-friendly policy that the artist would later share with photographer Ansel Adams in the years:

As far as I can see  
this could be the city  
of the dead, shades stalled  
among some dimmer shades. (Buckley 7-10)

The repetitive sounds of alliterating “t,” “r,” “s,” and “b,” which overload the first stanza of the poem, beat as hammer and set the rhythm of the scene. All seems suspended, silenced by the frozen air and smoke, but the roads keep “going nowhere fast” (15), in a paradoxical image that Buckley adopts to detour the readers, driving them to an abrupt change of framing. O’Keeffe, shelved “several stories above it all” (16), is thinking. The apparent immobility of the thickening cold subtends a feverish activity where “the roots of ice break up the streets” (20). Taking advantage of “the little glow seeping in / beneath the level of the clouds” (24-25), the painter, gazing down “the dreary air / to where the smoke’s brief light / touches off an ice-white swath” (30-32), sets herself back to paint. She takes her “sweater’s / arm and wipe[s] the

window clear” (33-34) as sweeping away the foggy dismay of mortal thoughts with her hands, she rubs into her hands “the little life” (28) left, and starts “back to work” (29).

Buckley’s “59th Street Studio” refers to one of the most stunning works produced during O’Keeffe’s early staying in New York, *59th Street Studio* (App. I.1.—Fig. 6). The painting has been also the objective source of an important study by Bram Dijkstra, *Georgia O’Keeffe and the Eros of Place* (1998), in which the art historian offers an interesting perspective about the weight of local, domestic landscapes in the formation of the painter and its effects on American culture. The painting surprises for some details in its composition, for example for the small dark red triangle at its lower left, for the tinges of light blue in the center frame, the dark light blue rectangle and the pale red window in the center. As Carter B. Horsley<sup>32</sup> points out in his “Georgia O’Keeffe: Abstraction,” O’Keeffe’s *59th Street Studio* is slightly reminiscent of some of Oscar Bluemner’s work<sup>33</sup> as well as at some of Stuart Davis’s oeuvre.<sup>34</sup> Unique in its subject, as it did not inspire similar compositions of interiors, the painting seems to tell a story that poets like Buckley, Song and Ostriker feel to repeat while they imagine the painter still in her New York’s apartment. The poets wish to see the artist at work, as she walks around the rooms, looking for the perfect light, the perfect truth, the right inspiring motif or mood.

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<sup>32</sup> Since 1997, Carter B. Horsley has been the editorial director of *CityRealty*. He began his journalistic career at *The New York Times* in 1961 where he spent 26 years as a reporter specializing in real estate & architectural news. In 1987, he became the architecture critic and real estate editor of *The New York Post*.

<sup>33</sup> Oscar Bluemner (1867–1938), born as Friedrich Julius Oskar Blümne and since 1933, known as Oscar Florianus Bluemner, is a German-born American Modernist painter. Bluemner moved to Chicago in 1893 where he freelanced as a designer at the World’s Columbian Exposition. In 1901, Bluemner relocated to New York City where he met Alfred Stieglitz, who introduced him to the artistic innovations of the European and American avant-garde. He exhibited in the 1913 Armory Show. Then in 1915, Stieglitz gave him a solo exhibition at his 291 Gallery. Often overlooked in his lifetime, Bluemner now is widely acknowledged as a key player in the creation of American artistic Modernism with Georgia O’Keeffe and John Marin.

<sup>34</sup> Stuart Davis (1892–1964) was an early American modernist painter. He was well-known for his colorful jazz-influenced, proto pop art paintings of the 1940s and 1950s, as well as for his ashcan pictures in the early years of the 20th century. From 1909 to 1912, Davis studied painting under Robert Henri, the leader of the early modern art group The Eight. In 1913, Davis became one of the youngest painters to exhibit in the controversial Armory Show. In the 1920s, he developed his mature style of Hard-edge painting that consisted of mainly abstract still lives, and landscapes; his use of contemporary subject matter such as cigarette packages, spark plug advertisements and the contemporary American landscape have made him a proto-Pop artist.

Buckley opens “59<sup>th</sup> Street Studio” with an anaphora and a chiasmus in the urgency to call for the audience’s emotion and push it forward in the act of reading: “With a northern skylight / and two windows to the south, / with pale lemons walls / and an orange floor” (1-4). In the voice of O’Keeffe, he introduces us into her place, a “loaned space” (5), which seems little welcoming. She takes us from one space to the other explaining the reasons of favoring one room to another:

I chose instead  
the room back of the studio,  
the narrow window opening  
onto a small court – I chose  
the beige and light blue of the evening  
moving through it, (7-12)

Buckley seems at ease while discussing about light, colors, and dark corridors. As the painting invites to peer through a slant doorframe between rooms, where a soft orange light comes through an elongated window suggesting the time of dusk, the readers find themselves into “the room back of the studio” (8). Buckley renders the wobbling edges that mark the entrances from one place to the other through O’Keeffe’s excited telling about colors and walls, edges and glasses, conveying high dynamism to both the painting and poem. The painting does not tell much about the physical place, and neither does the poem, as they are both more interested in giving hints about O’Keeffe’s attitude towards a most intimate place.

Buckley introduces the last image of the poem with an adversative “Without” (18) that opposes the anaphora of the opening lines when the artist confesses, absorbed in an informal conversation with the listener, that the perfect place must be found in our own selves, far from obtrusive showcases:

Without bombast

or bright gates thrown open  
we should discover our place  
subtly, and by degree trim  
the dark from the simple medium  
our heart should be, so  
the little we have to say or see  
resonates, and bears us up. (18-25)

The inspiring light must then be carved “by degree” (Buckley 21), trimming the dark that surrounds the simple expressing medium that the heart represents. In the tiny intimate world that we have discovered within us, “the little we have to say or see / resonates, and bears us up” (24-25).

The American poet Cathy Song writes a poem that also aims to translate O’Keeffe’s relation with the city of New York. The poem “Black Iris, *New York*” (*Picture Bride* 43-44), as openly declared by Song, is the result of her profound identification with O’Keeffe’s work. Song dedicates her collection of poems by entitling each chapter after O’Keeffe’s floral paintings: *Black Iris*, *Sunflower*, *Orchids*, *Red Poppy*, and *The White Trumpet Flower*. The poem “Blue and White Lines after O’Keeffe,” included in *Picture Bride* chapter “Orchids,” unfolds into a sequence of five other poems that recall the chapter titles. As Richard Hugo points out in his Foreword to Song’s collection, the poet’s relation to O’Keeffe’s paintings is a strong ally as it provides a fertile ground in which she can speak for and create herself.

Sharing the painter’s philosophy of hard work and commitment, Song believes that the long act of writing and rewriting pays off if “one remains passionately committed” (Hugo xiv). The poem “Black Iris, *New York*” is the first of the sequence “Blue and White Lines after O’Keeffe.” Though the series of poems is named after O’Keeffe’s flowers, their ekphrastic effort goes beyond the direct description of the visual medium into words. The paintings serve

as a creative matrix for the poems' development. "Black Iris, *New York*," in its five stanzas, opens up like the flower petals in the pregnant moment of their blossoming to match the budding times of the artist's creation. Their process culminates in the last stanza when the self-willed artist, determined to disclose her place in this world, stands up and makes her voice audible through the emphatic line "And I, the young painter" (Song 22). The whole poem seems structured to visually flow into that last stanza, which virtually coincides with the black iris's center. The first stanza sees the painter climbing a reeling staircase of a hotel, an imaginary Shelton, where voices resonate through the walls:

I climb the stairs  
in this skull hotel.  
Voices beat at the walls,  
railings  
fan out like fish bones. (1-5)

Gradually we ascend the stairs with the painter, as in a labyrinth of lives put together in the same space, framed and caged in a sketch of life, exactly like the individual petals of a flower in a canvas, or the cavities of a skull. We meet with "the doorman" (6), a murky figure who passes his time in the attempt to "bend(s) the darkness" and kills it with "his eyes prying under the latch" (6-7). Nothing is admitted under his surveillance, except for "an infantry of roaches, /lapping up the turpentine" (9-10). Climbing up, we face an old woman, waiting outside the door, muted by her chores, her "mouth stuffed with socks" (12). Her son, like an acrobat, walks along the sill and weirdly "chips away at the enamel" (15) of the painter's sink. Voices and movements are so obtrusive and clear that the moment we enter the painter's room, we seem to get flooded in by all these creatures. The singing voice of the son's girlfriend "lives inside" (18) the pipes. Sounds and presences are distinct. "The radiator hisses in the corner, / drawing warm blood, / deflating my tomatoes" (19-21). Encircled by this community, as she has reached

her place, “once again” (23), she prepares to dine alone, while we silently observe the scene. The meal is a fixed palette where green is not contemplated; the gloomy and dreary atmospheres of the place leave little space to imagination: “Silver tubes of paint, / lined like slender bullets” (28-29) in the mental shape of tins of sardines to be peeled back (27) represent the painter’s nourishment, the “ammunition” (30) through which O’Keeffe prepares herself to face her artistic life. She feels “alone,” Song says in line 24, despite the noisy companionship around her. The community of artists who climb up the stairs of artistic success and now rotate around Stieglitz does not provide enough sustenance. On the contrary, they appear as possible adversaries that she prepares to contrast with her “ammunition,” her own art.

New York is again one of the themes in Ostriker’s “O’Keeffe.” The poem does not directly refer to any specific painting by the artist, but tells the story of a girl, O’Keeffe, as the title points out, in New York in 1916. Ostriker sets the scene from the very beginning juxtaposing the three most important characters of the narration in the title and first line, “O’Keeffe—New York: you are staring down from Stieglitz’s apartment” (1). The poet also shows three different places respectively related to the characters: the view from the apartment, a symbolic windowless map room, and the echoed populated streets of New York. The poem proceeds as in a cinematographic set, zooming and widening the framing. Sight, hearing, and smell are kept in a continuous tension, as “tension and excitement” (Ostriker 15) is the main theme of the whole poem. The blossoming buds, the scent of war that pervades the atmosphere before the USA decide for intervention, “America has not yet shown her fist, / it is only 1916” (11-12), a girl who is “not yet unspooled” (9-10), and the “tension and excitement, a horse clip-clops / somewhere out on the street in its timeless way” (15-16) are all images of a world in suspension, in the act of happening. From her privileged detached position, O’Keeffe stares down “at a tub and three trees in someone’s garden” (2), almost unnoticed. Living isolated in the city, chasing the dream of an artistic career promised by Stieglitz’s support, “in a single



warm, dusty afternoon” (3), O’Keeffe observes undisturbed the magnolia buds swelling up “like fetuses” (5).

Ostriker’s ability to evoke with simple striking words a succession of different related images echoes the energy of O’Keeffe’s brushstrokes. Each line marks a thought, as each brushstroke in O’Keeffe translates an emotion. The bold magnolia buds are ready to “prepare their scent” (6) as if engaged in a battle to fill the world with their beauty and encircling perfume. Compared to “generals in a windowless map room / who summarize plans an hour before a battle” (7-8), their goal is challenging. The structured form of magnolia petals that resembles an army of soldiers and the bold blossoming in a warm early spring find a match in the painter’s fighting attitude. In their largeness, in the intrepid way they blossom, in their provocative scent, magnolia flowers mean beauty and magnificence. In their variety of colors they lead to different meanings ranging from purity to perfection (the white magnolias), youth, innocence and joy (the pink magnolias), health and luck (the green magnolias), and good omen (the purple magnolias). Drawing from the Japanese system of flower meaning, magnolia flowers are the symbol of sublime, and they show the love for nature. Associated with the life force, magnolias emphasize the strength of birth giving. In North America, instead their meaning is associated with the South and they are the harbinger of arrival of spring. The flowers are then the emblem of beauty and perseverance, nobility and dignity, ideas that O’Keeffe cultivated all her life.

Ostriker’s gallery shows the fist that America has not yet shown. The particular feminine use of the possessive adjective “her” (11) that accompanies it, “her Midwestern fist” (12) embodies the painter’s determination to win her battle against a world that refuses to see her art. The “square format like a boxing ring” (13) may have a double meaning. Figuratively, it describes the small square courtyard on which O’Keeffe casts her eyes, matching the surrounding urban moods made of horse clip-clops, cats asleep among hollyhocks, men

shaking hands and young women nodding their heads. On a metaphorical level, the square format on which the artist stares is her canvas, her small world, here imagined as a boxing ring, a combat place. The square in fact becomes a ring, as the square can inscribe the circle where each point marks the beginning as well as the end of the action. The poem is suspended in a series of non-actions: the girl who is not yet unspooled, America that has not yet shown her belligerent fist, and in the final stanza, the poet who says that O’Keeffe has “not yet said *There is nothing less than realism*” (18).

Ostriker paints the genesis of O’Keeffe, the artist in her blossoming process, still the bud “safely” (1) protected by Stieglitz, kept distant from the hurly-burly and changing world. However, it is an impossible action to keep a flower from its blooming, and as Ostriker points out in her clear-cut words, nothing can stop the course of the season and “the air grows hotter and more still / one magnolia opens her taffeta skirt” (19-20). The “taffeta skirt” (20) produces a palpable image of the bond that Ostriker establishes between her words and O’Keeffe’s visual medium. The poet, picking up this simple but fitting image, is able to evoke what O’Keeffe has rendered palpable with her paint, with her stroke. The silky, smooth, crispy, and finely weft characteristic of the fabric, reunited in its name, makes up for the same properties revealed by O’Keeffe’s paintings, confirming the ability of artfully picked words to match the realm of colors and lines. Both media succeed at translating and interlacing the realm of nature with that of human creation, which is at times one of the themes most fervently chased by artistic expression. Ostriker’s theme of personal growth and her long-standing passion for painters and painting become the opportunity to reveal the making of the painter, O’Keeffe, in this instance, but at the same time, that of any artist, the poet as well.

With the formal openness that distinguishes her style, affiliated with poets like Walt Whitman, William Carlos Williams, and Allen Ginsberg, Ostriker’s neat images are soaked by historical and natural scientific references. The poet speaks of ontogenetic change, which is for

many aspects unpredictable, but certain, and by all means necessary for the artist's growth. The relevant quotation from O'Keeffe's autobiography, "There is nothing less real than realism. It is only by selection, by elimination, by emphasis, that we get at the real meaning of things" seems to emphasize the artists' right to act and create free from any temporary reading, or contingency, as the artists cannot stop their continuous transformation.

The poems that relate to O'Keeffe's life and work in New York express the artist's determined nature to distinguish herself in the artistic panorama around her. We recognize the tenacious, strong-willed attitude of the artist, which stands out in the series of New York building paintings, as well as her careful perceptiveness of what rotated around her and Stieglitz. In her poem "8" (18) Kate Braid writes:

The broad hand of Stieglitz  
outstretched from New York  
was the only offer of interest. Even then,  
I thought that when he really knew me,  
he would despise the woman I am,  
who took it. (11-16)

O'Keeffe struggles between her need of independence and her attraction for approval by Stieglitz. As Braid points out again in poem "12" (22), it is a matter of resistance, of tension, the same tension Ostriker highlights in her poem. O'Keeffe writes about her wish to be approved by Stieglitz to Anita Pollitzer and she writes about it to Stieglitz himself. She wants to please him, as well as what he represents. Poem "12" recites:

*Georgia O'Keeffe –*

he wrote it like a love poem. Already  
he loved my name. He wrote it  
as one day I would write myself,

so like him I would become— (Braid 1-5)

It takes years to O’Keeffe to learn to appreciate her own name, “so full of loops and exclamations” as Braid describes in poem “16” (26). She prints her initials “inside a small star” (7) on the back of her canvases. The American sculptor Alexander Calder (1898-1976), best known for his mobile or kinetic sculpture, gives her close friend O’Keeffe one of his inspired jewels, a mix of ancient and exotic iconography, with his own organic twist in the late 1940s. The piece, a silver brooch, clearly recalls the painter’s initials. O’Keeffe would wear it on her chest in most official ceremonies, a tangible sign of her personal and professional recognized accomplishment.

However, O’Keeffe’s life in New York is marked by one further biological element. When O’Keeffe starts living with Stieglitz, she is already thirty-seven years old, a mature woman, deeply in love. The thick correspondence with her friend Anita Pollitzer, collected in the book *Lovingly Georgia* (1990), reveals O’Keeffe’s desire of motherhood that her husband Stieglitz conversely refuses to embrace as he considers it a risk that has already brought repeated disgraces in his own family. Stieglitz, in fact, has lost his sister in childbirth, and his own daughter suffers from deep depression. In addition, the patriarchal Stieglitz cannot miss the opportunity to father an artist like O’Keeffe. Braid tells this story with delicacy and tact in her poem “21” (31). Narrated in the voice of O’Keeffe, the readers imagine a brave woman in love afraid of missing any opportunity in her life, even the most dangerous:

I never told anyone  
of my terror of the domestic—  
not the housework nor cooking alone  
nor even the years spent lost in the kitchen  
instead of the studio. No.

My terror was of desperately wanting children. (1-6)

What Braid defines as her “terror of the domestic” (2) coincides with O’Keeffe’s “desperately wanting children” (6). A relentless Stieglitz opposes such a desire explaining the dangers of the action. He suggests a safer solution to this enduring desire: “No, he said. *Take your time, take all your time / and paint. The pictures shall be your children*” (Braid 13-14).

O’Keeffe’s final compliance is declared in a simple line, “Perhaps he was right” (15), which all the same cannot remove the artist’s desire. Braid paints a moving picture of a strained O’Keeffe strolling “In the parks of New York” (15) watching children and their mothers who look at them with “easy glances” (17) and take them “for granted” (17). O’Keeffe seems to find a justification to her choice by saying that the children’s noise could have been unbearable and leading to distraction. However, the poem cannot avoid perceiving O’Keeffe’s contrition emphasized by a suspended “Still” (19), when the painter confesses that sometimes, looking back, she “Still / sometimes [...] dream[s] of a dangerous daughter” (19 - 21).<sup>35</sup>

To conclude this section dedicated to New York, it is important to remember that the time O’Keeffe spent in New York corresponded to the artist’s first success with her floral canvas. The ekphrastic compositions about these works, which relate to a time of accomplishment but also to a time of personal change and turmoil, are analyzed in Chapter II “Painting Poems on O’Keeffe’s Living and Still Natures.”

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<sup>35</sup> The theme of missed motherhood in O’Keeffe is the subject for the in progress anthology whose working title *Figlie Pericolose / Dangerous Daughters* is drawn from Braid’s poem “21” (*Inward to the Bones* 31). A number of women poets have written in fact of it in their poems: Denise Duhamel’s “Reminded of My Biological Clock—While Looking at Georgia O’Keeffe’s Pelvis One” (2001), Carolyn Kreiter-Foronda, Sujata Bhatt, Lyn Lifthin’s long poem “The Daughter I Don’t Have” (2005), and C. S. Merrill, among others.

#### I.4. Lake George's Reflections

*As it's the only place to be alone. Alfred rows us  
to the middle. I close my eyes not to miss  
the pause in motion  
when the paddles catch, the surge forward  
as he draws the oars in, tranquil  
drift of their re-expansion – great wings  
suspended from the oarlocks.*

Jessica Jacobs, "Lake George, 1922"

The third section considers the poems inspired by O'Keeffe's artistic production during her stays at Stieglitz's small estate situated just north of Lake George Village along the western shoreline of Lake George in New York's Adirondack Park. The painter and the photographer spent a series of summers between 1918 and 1934, alternating periods of infinite joy to obscure times during which O'Keeffe perceived the weight of Stieglitz's family and their authority over her. O'Keeffe lived most of her time at Lake George painting in the nearby outhouse, the shelter, which she repeatedly painted in the different seasons of the year. Presenting the 2013 exhibition "Modern Nature: Georgia O'Keeffe and Lake George," at the Hyde Collection Museum in Glenn Falls, New York, Charles A. Guerin, the Museum Director, highlighted the importance of those paintings: "the repetition of the same things over and over again really gave her time to really strengthen that analytical sense between abstraction and realism" (McKinley). Eventually, at Lake George, O'Keeffe set the basis of her more mature self. Her abstract became her stronger and more powerful realism. Always looking for light as it represents the painter's major force of inspiration, O'Keeffe found in Lake George also the regenerative place to recover from a severe psychoneurosis in 1933, the consequence of her failed painting commission at the Radio City Music Hall due to technical and personal difficulties in October 1932. O'Keeffe produced about two hundred works related to Lake George, which represent about a quarter of her all paintings. Her encounter with the place first came in 1908 after she had won the William Merritt Chase Still Life Prize from the Art Students

League in New York. The award consisted in a place in the League's Outdoor Summer School at Amitola, on Lake George. That painting summer, which marked the first outdoor painting for O'Keeffe, left a lasting impression on the artist. O'Keeffe soon realized that "the landscape could act as metaphor of the tumult of emotion" (Drohojowska-Philp 42). O'Keeffe frequently wrote about Lake George's output to her most intimate friends like Anita Pollitzer, Jean Toomer, or Sherwood Andersen. In September 1923, O'Keeffe wrote to Andersen:

I wish you could see the place here—there is something so perfect about the mountains and the lake and the trees—Sometimes I want to tear all to pieces—it seems so perfect—but it is really lovely—(Coward-Hamilton 173)

Ranging from nocturnal landscapes like *Starlight Night, Lake George* (1922), or tributes to the knotted trees on the Stieglitz's estate as in *The Chestnut Gray* (1924) or *The Old Maple* (1926), up to the magnified and seemingly sensual flowers of *Red Canna* (1919) or *Petunias* (1925), the Lake George paintings show the formative influence of the place on the art and life of the artist, and reveal the transformations of her seven-decade career.

Buckley dedicates three ekphrastic compositions to this formative period: "Starlight Night" (23), "Lake George with Crows / Black Hollyhock, Blue Larkspur / The Lawrence Tree" (43), and "Red Hills and the Sun, Lake George" (53), all inspired by the paintings bearing the same titles. Shurooq Amin contributes to O'Keeffe's legacy drawing inspiration from a recently rediscovered painting *Lake George, Autumn, 1922* and writes "Love on the Lake, On Georgia O'Keeffe's *Lake George* (formerly *Reflection Seascape*)." Erinn Batykefer modulates her poetic narration in her book of poems *Allegheny, Monongahela* (2009) and concludes it with "In O'Keeffe's *From the Lake No.3*" (80), an ekphrastic meditation on the artist's oil on canvas *From the Lake, No. 3* (1924). Carolyn Kreiter-Foronda, Gregory Pardlo and Lavonne J. Adams are the authors of three poems that still derive their inspiration from the artist's memories connected with Lake George. Although they are not direct ekphrastic contributions to the

nourishment of the painter's work, they tell us about the pivotal moments in the life of the artist related to her stay in Lake George. In her poem "Summering at Lake George," Foronda speaks of time and friendship. Pardlo's "Restoring O'Keeffe" draws a passionate picture of a just recovered O'Keeffe in 1933 spending a meaningful time with friend and possibly lover, the writer Jean Toomer. Adams's poem "Closeup, Lake George" gives the reader a moving picture of O'Keeffe who, in the act of final parting from Stieglitz, on her knees, reverentially, empties her husband's ashes onto the ground around the lake.

Buckley's ekphrastic poem "Starlight Night" (*Flying Backbone* 23) is inspired and titled after the oil painting *Starlight Night, Lake George* (App. I.1.—Fig. 7). Painted in the fall of 1922, it shows an enveloping deep blue dotted by circular stars reflected on the lake waters. Two gleaming lights reflect on the lake. The organic and rhythmic undulation of the lake water shows how O'Keeffe has almost reached her more mature style, especially if confronted with an earlier work, *Starlit Night*, a watercolor she painted in 1917, and to which she was dearly affectionate (App. I.1.—Fig. 8).<sup>36</sup> Buckley's poem voices a mature O'Keeffe engaged in an earnest reflection over her prolific, professional years in New York and Lake George. The three stanzas develop in Buckley's customary form of the monologue in which O'Keeffe herself narrates the story:

A life like any other on the plains,  
and so I grew looking out to the starlight  
and the unknown, the scintillation  
at the far string's end of my imagining.  
I wished on the spangled fish and

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<sup>36</sup> In "Georgia O'Keeffe: A Late Greeting," included in the volume *Some Americans: A Personal Record* (1981), the English poet Charles Tomlinson narrates about his personal memory of a Christmas card he received from O'Keeffe on January 20, 1964: "The illustration consisted of one of her early watercolors, *Starlight Night* of 1917 [...] it was the sort of starlight night you might find six thousand feet above sea level in the crystalline air of Abiquiu, New Mexico, from where the card had been mailed" (75).



kites of light and wanted to gather  
these worlds the way I felt them there,  
fasten them sparkling above the hum  
and tug of this blue, blue heavy one. (1-9)

Buckley, who strongly believes in Matisse's idea that art exists before any theory, is deeply inspired by O'Keeffe's autobiography and often uses it to translate the painting that provokes his writing. Here, Buckley clearly refers to the first pages of O'Keeffe's autobiography. O'Keeffe's feeling ordinary, her ambition, the attraction for the unknown, but again the rooted necessity of essential elements in her art, the desire to "gather these worlds" (6-7) together, to "fasten" (8) all these things tightly in her own way become the fixed multiple stars spandling her life, of which she was particularly fond. The second stanza speaks of her discipline to attain it all, and the painting again, in its scintillating lattice, embodies the artist's endurance in her artistic growth:

And so each evening I set my heart  
and eye seining among the thinning sky  
and painted the budding schools of stars  
with their rounded corners and irregular fix. (10-13)

The last stanza instead echoes the initial sufferance that O'Keeffe would feel after the harsh criticism of the late 1920s and 1930s. Painting was supposed to be of any value the moment it was "like the men do"—O'Keeffe recorded—a challenge O'Keeffe showed to be able to compete against, as Buckley points out:

But someone is always having a say  
about how it should look, the wise men  
disagreeing about stars and art, my art—  
so many bickering crows of thought (19-22)

The artist is brave and determined to rise up, comforted by *equivalents* of imperfection in Nature:

and finally, I am most interested  
in what they don't say, because  
there can be holes in the hard lines  
of thinking, just as there are clear gaps  
in this heaven's brilliant display. (23-27)

Buckley translates the thick pattern of O'Keeffe's artwork and life with an alternate swapping of negative and positive statements, of fullness and emptiness, concreteness and abstraction that make O'Keeffe's art even louder and recall the conceptual framing of her previous *Starlit Night* to which she was particularly fond.

The second poem by Buckley is "Lake George with Crows / Black Hollyhock, Blue Larkspur / The Lawrence Tree" (1988). This composition gathers three important paintings related to Lake George scenery and inspiration. In this section, my study focuses its attention on the excerpt of the poem inspired by *Lake George with Crows*, an oil on canvas that O'Keeffe painted in the late summer or early autumn of 1921 (App. I.1.—Fig. 9). The painting reveals that O'Keeffe must have picked up a grey gloomish day for this view of the lake. A floating sheer curtain on the right of the canvas shows that it was probably painted from a farmhouse window. The view of the lake is almost aerial, shaped in an oval pond that narrows into a thin inlet on the top left of the canvas. Critics like Clement Greenberg, drawn by the recurrent Freudian readings of her work, associated this ovoid shape to a womb, surrounded by the arms of the shoreline. Critical reviews of O'Keeffe's landscape paintings often refer to the female body and justify that by mentioning her unfulfilled desires. Buckley's poem sees it differently by imagining O'Keeffe lying "on a bench beneath the big tree / on the Lawrence ranch" (2-3) in Taos. It is summer and the sky is "blooming blue" (10-11). Drifted by a suggestive

slumberous atmosphere made of tangling branches of colored hues, suspended above her head as in a rainbow of dreams in colors, O'Keeffe glides into some memories of the past, an "indigo of dream" (13), says Buckley fittingly. The dream leads to Lake George. From this aerial perspective, the tall poplars are seen in their transcendent lure to touch the hills tinged with maroon, the moon is half-seen, as clouds cover it in a silvery sky. "Over the cerulean lake, three crows" (21) equally fly their different paths. Like the three different minds of the crows, O'Keeffe is looking for her own trajectory, perceiving "the flower-cool air in either hand" and in her face (23-24). She asks herself three questions, overlooking the scene:

do I break for the far beyond,  
or fall back slowly to the bench and grey earth,  
or hover a while in between,  
dipping wings to the mirror  
and calling for the firmament to see  
how the powdered light spreads  
before the blank dimension of dawn? (27-34)

Buckley identifies three different *O'Keeffes* in these lines. The first is the pioneered spirited one who wants to break free, to take her own artistic path, taking distances from the known in search of undiscovered territories. The second reflects a more remissive artist, pleased with what she has gained, reclining back onto the bench and asking for no more. The third wonders if it is still necessary to keep hovering "a while in between" (30), observing, understanding, absorbing knowledge, advocating the firmament to see and witness the light of her new dawn. O'Keeffe painted *The Lawrence Tree* in the summer of 1929 in Taos. That year and the summer sojourn in New Mexico definitely changed O'Keeffe's attitude towards herself and the world around her. The first experience of living and painting far from Stieglitz was still a test act on which O'Keeffe was measuring herself, and considering the consequences of the road to take.

The next ekphrastic poem that Buckley dedicates to O'Keeffe's Lake George, "Red Hills and the Sun, Lake George" (53) draws us to the surrounding hills. In O'Keeffe's *Red Hills, Lake George* (App. I.1.—Fig. 10), the lake is not visible as it lays beyond the hills. The painting shines with color and dramatic luminosity. The simplified forms recall Stieglitz circle's distinctive approach to landscape painting. Within O'Keeffe's works, this is considered a transitional work, presaging the stark drama of her New Mexico landscapes, and a homage to her earlier experiences out in the South-West. O'Keeffe often indulged in memory-images that emerged years later, and that she recombined and reinterpreted in fully realized compositions. The memories of her years teaching in Texas, as well as a brief but memorable trip to New Mexico in 1917 seem to have informed this composition. The stunning red in the painting reflects her memories of autumn sunsets at Lake George. The deep burning color of the mountains, fittingly translated by Buckley with the objective image of "wind-burnt color / of pomegranates flayed / and vibrant in the frost" (17-19) from which the sun radiates in concentric circles vividly reveals O'Keeffe's profound responses to her natural surroundings. *Red Hills, Lake George* also reflects O'Keeffe's knowledge and careful study of Kandinsky's treatise *On the Spiritual in Art*. Her experiments with symbolism made her highly receptive to Kandinsky's theories: his ideas on color and form, and their symbolic and spiritual meanings were integrated into her own set of beliefs. In many ways, *Red Hills, Lake George* appears to be a tribute to Kandinsky. The red plain in the foreground appears substantial and limitless, recalling Kandinsky's lesson about red powerful strength and glowing character. Conversely, "the milky rose of mist (that) tips skyward off the surface of the lake" (Buckley 2-4) projects the viewer beyond the horizon line, wishing to transcend the limits of the representation. The brilliant color is confined. The rainbow-hued sun instead radiates outward in soft, concentric waves of yellow, blue, and shades of lilac, "violet arcs" (8) detailed with ductile brushwork. Buckley translates this symphony of colors by drawing from music vocabulary that renders the

landscape movement, and adds to O'Keeffe's intention to have her works as “singing shapes:”

I like this first hour,  
the glissandi of sunlight  
ringing between the sky  
and a land whose skin  
is the wind-burnt color  
of pomegranates flayed  
and vibrant in the frost.

(Buckley 13-19)

In O'Keeffe's studies of Kandinsky's emphasis on finding associations between colors and the sounds of musical instruments, O'Keeffe chooses warm tones to convey a cheerful, upbeat tune, which in turn, Buckley conveys with his refined word “glissandi” (14). The word indicates the continuous slide upwards or downwards between two notes, the energetic vocal movement that is used to express emotional states, to imitate what in nature sounds like crying, moaning, or laughing. In addition, the graphic sign of a *glissando*<sup>37</sup> leaves little to imagination, in its ascending, modulated gliding from one pitch to the other, which seems to be mirrored by the ascending lines of O'Keeffe's brushstroke (App. I.1.—Fig. 11). In the suspended moment conveyed by this unusual verb, the reader/viewer “tips skyward off the surface” (3), where even thinking about speaking should wait, as we let ourselves be drawn into the sun:

...the white center,  
the bare bone of light,  
loosens itself in aqua  
and violet arcs above

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<sup>37</sup> In music, the term *glissando* or *portamento* is used to indicate a continuous and unbroken glide from one note to another. The sign stands for a smooth glide from one pitch to another.

the swales and folds  
of hills whose wind-cut lines  
shrug off the dark in perfect  
memory of themselves. (5-12)

The sun burns intensely at its core of white, Kandinsky's color of joy and purity, here rendered by Buckley's "bare bone of light" (6). The "white center" (5) deserves a moment of stillness and silence in the midst of the radiating colors during which the viewer must abandon him/herself to the enchanting relationships between the elements of nature and the personal intimate reaction. O'Keeffe painted *Red Hills, Lake George* in 1927 and Duncan Phillips<sup>38</sup> already listed O'Keeffe among a group of visionary artists who "have had one aim in common—to link modernity to the infinite by their command of rhythm and by their inventions of new or revitalized instruments of plastic expression"—the collectors wrote to Stieglitz in 1926 (Turner-Weisblat 111). According to Phillips, O'Keeffe was part of the search for underlying mystical qualities dwelling in Nature.

Exploring landscape imagery became an effective vehicle for O'Keeffe's self-expression, which Buckley does not forget to word in his poem. In fact, in the second part of the last stanza, the voice of O'Keeffe, that here shifts from a subjective "I" to a collective "we" (22) to better suit the spiritual mood into which the artist (and the poet) seems to have dived in the presence of such a transcending landscape. The poet envisions an anthropomorphized scenario where hills "lift hands—implicit / in their praise of nothing / more than earth and air"

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<sup>38</sup> Duncan Phillips (1886–1966), art collector and critic, played a seminal role in introducing America to modern art. From the 1920s to the 1960s, Phillips would re-hang his galleries in installations that were following a chronological traditional order as he preferred to present visual connections—between past and present, between classical form and romantic expression—as dialogues on the walls of the museum. He gave equal focus to American and European artists, juxtaposing works by Winslow Homer, Thomas Eakins, Maurice Prendergast, James Abbott McNeill Whistler, and Albert Pinkham Ryder with canvases by Pierre Bonnard, Peter Ilsted and Édouard Vuillard. Phillips's vision brought together "congenial spirits among the artists" and his ideas still guide the museum today. Phillips had the prescience and courage to acquire paintings by many artists who were not fully recognized at the time, among them Marin, O'Keeffe, Dove, Nicolas de Staël, Milton Avery and Augustus Vincent Tack. By purchasing works by such promising but unknown artists, Phillips provided them with the means to continue painting.

(26-29) reminding us that “longing and acceptance / are equal parts of prayer” (32), and defining an endless equilibrium between the wish for liberating independence and a framing public approval O’Keeffe has always had to balance herself.

The almost reverential respect that Buckley reserves for O’Keeffe’s works in his poems is challenged by Amin’s poem “Love on the Lake—On Georgia O’Keeffe’s *Lake George* (formerly *Reflection Seascape*).” Amin’s reading is more daring and seeks to put into words what O’Keeffe’s images wished to tell. O’Keeffe painted *Lake George* in 1922 and the painting is an example of her experiments in the Precisionist style as a revival of folk American art in abstraction (App. I.1.—Fig. 12). The serene atmosphere conveyed by the careful gradations of the blue tones of the flat planes showing the hills, sky, and its own reflection upon the water, has a soothing and restorative look. It reminds us that Lake George was the place where O’Keeffe and Stieglitz used to go for recovering their bodies and minds from the bustling rhythms of New York City. Amin’s poem explicitly reaffirms this sense of balance by recreating the simple and nearly symmetrical structure of the painting, its visual layout, through rhythmic alternations of rhymes and frequent alliterations. The hills are hazy, flat, and almost unreal. Their reflection confirms their essence. The detached viewpoint enhances the sense of depth with a spectator standing on the shore of the lake, enjoying the hour before sunrise, blending memories of recent past with hopeful expectations. The blurry contour lines are blurred to help establish the sense of shadow in pre-dawn light.

The use of contrasting colors within a defined shape gives more understanding of distance and spatial relationships and provokes a vertical rhythm that Amin’s poetry masterfully respects and repeats in her poem. The title itself, “Love on the Lake,” by juxtaposing the two “Ls” of “Love” and “Lake,” repeats the vertical symmetry of the painting construction. As the painting is unified by using the reflection and similar subdued colors and contrasts that alternate, equally the poem respects these reflecting similarities and alternations in its title as

well as in its entire composition. Examples of this idea are given by these lines: “the woman on top / the man under her” (3-4), “the tender breast /and chest” (9-10), “lit up in iridescence / at the point / of convergence” (11-13). The vigorous bright line that separates the real world from its reflection, in Amin's poem becomes the line that marks O'Keeffe's decision to separate from Stieglitz:

but Georgia  
knew that  
love lacerates  
so she  
separated the lovers  
with a livid  
light-shot shaft. (14-20)

Amin uses the alliterate “l” in “love,” “lacerates,” “lovers,” but also in “livid,” and “light-shot” emphasizing the alternate rhythm that distinguishes the poem, as well as the painting. The letter “l” evokes soft and pleasant sounds, and tones suitable for lovers. On the contrary, Amin finds words, such as “livid,” “lacerates,” and “light-shot” that convey opposite emotional reactions, all the more when juxtaposed to the idea of love. The same happens with the alliterate sound of “s” in “so she / separated the lovers” (Amin 17-18). The hushing sound of the consonant “s” is here used to assert the painful but necessary decision of the painter to start taking distances from Stieglitz, who continues to represent the lens through which her work and life is seen and measured.

The series of contrasting images continues until the end of the poem where, in ascending tones, the poem asserts O’Keeffe’s own reading of the painting, voicing the artist’s determined will. Forcing the viewer and the poet to neglect the sensual interpretation of the painting, Amin wants us to see O’Keeffe’s own work through her own eyes, helped by the



authoritative repetition of “no longer” for three times in six lines. The poem scheme gets more and more concentrated towards the end, where it reduces its metrical pattern from an initial trimeter to the final powerful monometer. This emphasizes the sense of isolation of that final “me” (35), and confirms O’Keeffe’s pervading feeling of incomprehension when it came to deal with the interpretation of her works.

One more poem draws inspiration from a painting O’Keeffe realized in Lake George in 1924: Erinn Batykefer’s “In O’Keeffe’s *From the Lake No.3*” (80). The poem is included in the collection *Allegheny, Monongahela* (2012) that tells the story of a family’s memories in Western Pennsylvania in the forms of sonnets and ekphrastic meditations on O’Keeffe’s paintings. Batykefer’s poems, investigating the dramatic collisions between the world and the self, between what we are in our most intimate souls and what we are deemed to become in a textured world, result a further notable expansion of O’Keeffe’s determination at showing the artist’s progressive formation. Batykefer’s poetry, defined as sharp-edged and harsh as O’Keeffe’s paintings in her skeleton images or in the impetuous flowing of torrents of feelings, is described like a floodwater, like a “river’s skin after rain.” (Shumaker <sup>39</sup> The poem “In O’Keeffe’s *From the Lake, No.3*” closes the book of poems summarizing the aim of the entire collection that sees art as the main means through which we may heal, or fail to heal the wounds and cracks of our lives.

O’Keeffe made the painting to which Batykefer refers at Lake George, and it belongs to a copious series of watery landscapes the artist painted throughout her life. *From the Lake, No. 3* (App. I.1.—Fig. 13) exemplifies O’Keeffe’s practice of abstract, intense, and up-close observations as she gazes down into the water at the lake, an exercise she would repeat in New Mexico as well. This virtual aerial viewpoint offers the poet an excellent perspective to review

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<sup>39</sup> Peggy Shumaker, poet, writer and Professor Emerita from University of Alaska Fairbanks, is the founding editor of *Boreal Books*, publisher of fine art and literature from Alaska. She edits the *Alaska Literary Series* at University of Alaska Press. She was Alaska State Writer Laureate for 2010-2012.

her past memories, and provides the necessary distance to abstract and distract the mind from a partial detection of reality that close-up readings would imply. Bearing in mind O'Keeffe's overview of Lake George, Batykefer begins her poem with the ideal image of holding a map before her eyes, "I see a lace of algae as a map" (1) which synthesizes the vigorous elegance that the essential forms and forces of nature blend with human actions. The virtuous picture of a "lace of algae" artfully translates O'Keeffe's use of matted colors and smooth brushstrokes. The unusual perspective becomes a useful "map" (1) where dotted spots of colors populate the valley and make up for Pittsburgh neighborhood where the poet grew up and where the Allegheny River meets up with the Monongahela.

Decoding O'Keeffe's idea of a detached meditation over the role of emotional memory in art expression, Batykefer draws shared images of childhood, evoked by the common pressing of seashells to the ears, waiting for wishes to bounce back, as "tied to stones and dropped in the rivers" (8), bringing "the secrets of our younger selves back / in the semaphores of the sea: furling, / unfurling" (9-10). The folding and unfolding, the coiling and uncoiling provoke the mind in a back and forth movement loaded with memories, emotions, held up thoughts that linger above as if "suspended in a haze of morning" (12). The meandering brushstrokes that form O'Keeffe's unique reaction to the grand scale of the Adirondack landscape, which is at times overwhelming, provide the artist with the necessary time to explore the vastness of space as well as of her mind, trapped and confined in preordered courses.

With *From The Lake, No.3*, O'Keeffe captures the movement and abstract color pattern of Lake George originally. From the start, she departs from the muted parade of paintings coming out of the Hudson River School and enriches her palette that gravitates towards the bright blues of the sky, the bright purples and reds of the flowers, and especially the browns and golds of the trees in fall. O'Keeffe instantly develops an aversion to the green that papered the entire Adirondack landscape and transforms it in the "ochre silt like sandstone" (3), which

Batykefer masterfully defines.<sup>40</sup> The fluidity of the painting, the sloping, rolling, curling and twisting lines foresee the forms and style that would later translate the landscape of the New Mexico desert in a sort of visionary future dream of forms, lines, as well as self-awareness, that distinguish O'Keeffe's recognized style and personality hereafter. Also Batykefer renders this self-recognition in her final lines as well when saying: "we see through the weight of air blued by water / to the shapes we know, the way we see our faces // welling up through a breath-fogged mirror" (13-15). This last image recalls Ostriker's "O'Keeffe," when the painter is seen in the act of sweeping the breath-fogged window from her flat room in the early 1920s, or Buckley's scene in "East River No. I," when O'Keeffe takes her "sweater's / arm and wipe[s] the window clear" (33-34). Self-recognition comes from clearing, cutting, and reshaping, a detailed, peculiar work on the one self that O'Keeffe repeatedly supported.

The 2015 Pulitzer Prize for Poetry Gregory Pardlo, Carolyn Kreiter-Foronda, and Lavonne J. Adams write the following three poems on O'Keeffe and Lake George. The poems are not direct ekphrastic descriptions of O'Keeffe's paintings. They primarily focus on O'Keeffe as a woman, lover, and wife, rather than the artist, and speak about the human happenings and feelings that marked the time spent in Lake George. Pardlo's "Restoring O'Keeffe" (*Totem* 85) speaks of the tender and mutually healing relationship between the painter and the writer Jean Toomer, which actually intensified during the couple's sojourn at Lake George estate after O'Keeffe's psychoneurosis in 1933. Foronda's "Summering at Lake George" (*Gathering Light* 28) is a poem about time, nature and the long-term effort of making friends and valuable relationships. Adams's "Closeup, Lake George" pictures O'Keeffe's physical and spiritual parting from her husband as we see her emptying Stieglitz's ashes near the bank of the lake. The poem is clearly a tribute to the one of the most romanticized couples

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<sup>40</sup> It is noteworthy to recall Cathy Song's analogy with color green in her poem "Black Iris—New York" analyzed in this chapter in section 3, "The Hall of Fame: New York City." In her studio, surrounded by urban dull scenery, O'Keeffe stares at her palette where color green can only be imagined.

of North American artists, and to the American landscapes that they both celebrated.

Pardlo's "Restoring O'Keeffe" deals with an important chapter of O'Keeffe's life and with one of the most important figures of the Harlem Renaissance, American novelist and poet Jean Toomer (1894-1967). Contained in Pardlo's collection *Totem*, which gathers a series of poems sprung from the poet's obsession, as he defines it, for painterly art, "Restoring O'Keeffe" unveils a particular moment in O'Keeffe's life. Much of this particular time is told in a letter that O'Keeffe sent to her friend and photographer Paul Strand on December 26, 1933 from Lake George (Cowart 215-216). After a severe nervous breakdown that forced her to hospitalization in February 1933, O'Keeffe spent a couple of months in Bermuda from March through April, and then, when fully recovered, she spent the autumn at Lake George in company of Toomer. The novelist was invited to stay at Lake George's shanty by Stieglitz, suggesting that the place was perfect to conclude Toomer's translation of the work of Georgei Ivanovitch Gurdjieff (1877-1949).<sup>41</sup> Toomer had lost his first wife in 1931, and was still fighting with his inclination to solitude, which still derived from the loss of his mother. O'Keeffe was struggling to recover from the psychoneurosis due to the professional failure after her renunciation to complete the Radio City Music Hall commission. Besides these common despairs, the artists were both experimenting the limits of their conditions. Toomer's novel *Cane*, published in 1923, was still hailed as one of the most revolutionary works of literature, but this did not help the writer's process of self-identification and validation of his mixed ethnic heritage. As he himself reported, he was a seven-blood mixture who strived both for a spiritual fusion and for a racial intermingling which was meant to prove a real social American consciousness. Toomer rejected to be limited to negro as much as O'Keeffe refused

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<sup>41</sup>Gurdjieff was a Russian mystic, founder of the Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man in Fontainebleau, France. Toomer visited the place in 1926 and learned how to self-develop through intellectual, emotional and physical integration. Gurdjieff became a shared interest among the New York intellectuals and Toomer led Gurdjieff groups in Harlem and Chicago for many years, after then taking distance from the spiritual leader when marrying Marjorie Content in 1934.

to be limited to her role of woman artist. They were both trying to cultivate their literary, artistic and social identities that eschewed racial and gendered affiliations.

It is interesting that academic poet Pardlo finds the occasion to voice their bond, as if he were trying through poetry to help them heal the wounds their bodies, minds, and intellects were carrying. He voices the relieved body and soul of the painter of which O’Keeffe had given a sample in her letter to Toomer on January 3, 1934 from Lake George.<sup>42</sup> O’Keeffe and Toomer shared their artistic search for harmony as well as their desire to stop being objects of art in order to assert themselves as subjects for art. In addition, they both believed that art had a profound influence and responsibility in shaping American culture and identity in a way that legislation and/or political activism could not equate. They both preferred isolation to the urban, mundane turmoil of the city, and transformed their common attitude to creative ends. Pardlo’s poem is thus an intervention on the artistic panorama of the twentieth century with profound historical contents that nourish and revive the profiles of these two artists and their boundless explorations. Pardlo is attentive and caring in his pictures of the two lovers and friends engaged in their reciprocal cure as he soon asserts when speaking about “Something of a cure lay / in that rustic lodge, clear / exhaust off Lake George” (1-3). Winter has already come, and Toomer has been there with O’Keeffe for a week, sharing “her soups and the baskets arrived from New York” (8-9), and “tapping / on his Underwood in the guest room upstairs” (5-7). Pardlo must have found inspiration also reading a letter O’Keeffe had sent from Lake George on 26 December 1926 to her friend Paul Strand:

Toomer being here with me has made the days so vivid that back through that  
and the fever of the cold seems a long time ago. [...] This morning the

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<sup>42</sup> The letter is collected in Cowart and Hamilton’s *Georgia O’Keeffe: Art and Letters*: “You seem to have given me a strangely beautiful feeling of balance that makes the days seem very precious to me—I seem to have come to life in such a quiet surprising fashion—as though I am not sick any more—Everything in me begins to move and I feel like a really positive thing again—seems to have very little to do with you or me—Something you give me that has very little to do with anything you said or did” (216).

typewriter clicks at a great pace upstairs. He works all day. We only talk at night and even then often just sit and read. The snow falls very thick and fast—real winter snow. (Coward 214-215)

Pardlo's poem flows on speaking of citrus fruit, herbs and Gurdjieff's lessons of love. The reader is let into the intimacy of the couple which is translated by the first vision of Toomer's "hesitating palm, / his tawny raceless hand" (11-12). Their bodies seduce the scene, as Toomer whispers words of "freedom of love into the frond of her ear" (13-14), or "Georgia ...with the herb used to seduce, [...] pull[s] together /one night with a Calvados / in the snifter like a handful of flame / and Santa Fe whistling / through the mind like a desert train" (15-21). The world of the writer blends with the mysterious world of the painter, disclosing the poet's passion for images and his wish of appropriation. Toomer's tawny raceless hands evoke the "Tawny earth, and the inelucatable sky" (22) of New Mexico, "though the window held / a pallor of snow and moon / crusted to the clearing beyond a grid of gaslight" (23-25), so dear to both artists. Toomer would eventually marry his second wife precisely in Taos, fascinated by the place.

Pardlo highlights O'Keeffe's sensitivity towards the other in the way she recognizes his dual nature to which she actually feels attracted. "You have a feminine soul, she said" (28), the poet whispers voicing the lovers' conversation. In an escalation of sensual, sinuous images, guided by alliterated sounds where hands, eyes, hips and imaginary places intersect, Pardlo translates O'Keeffe's hands into one poetic photography ever made, in the act of encompassing Toomer's face. It is the first time that we see O'Keeffe's hands touch someone. Stieglitz always portrayed them in a struck, artificial pose, directing them. This time O'Keeffe's hands are free to hold and show her desire:

You have a feminine soul, she said,  
pooling his face in her hands,

measuring his eyes against a gray  
scale of sexuality. She held his head  
to her skirted hip. (28-31)

O’Keeffe cups her vigorous hands around Toomer’s face and stares firmly into his eyes to capture the intensity of his desire, in that “something of a cure” (1) which has legitimated their tryst.

Foronda’s poem “Summering at Lake George” (*Gathering Light* 28) voices O’Keeffe’s idea that the ability to learn to see takes time, exactly as making a friend needs time. The poem is inspired by a letter O’Keeffe sent to Ettie Stettheimer<sup>43</sup> on August 6, 1925 from Lake George (Cowart 180-182). It begins with O’Keeffe apologizing for not having written earlier. The artist is telling her friend Ettie about a dream she recently had about her childhood house. At the end of the letter, O’Keeffe, saying goodbye to her friend, summarizes its whole content with a wonderful expression that Foronda seems to have omitted probably to stimulate our desire to go through O’Keeffe’s letter ourselves:

[Stieglitz] wishes me to send greetings to you and your sisters – and after reading this you will know that if I am fond of you I am hoping that the mechanics of living through the summer are easy and pleasant – for you all.  
(Cowart 182)

As O’Keeffe takes leave, she hopes and wishes that “the mechanics of living through the summer,” and we may add, of life, “are easy and pleasant” (182). The letter offers a slice of the real life led by the iconic artist, a blended recipe of natural passion for nature where human

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<sup>43</sup> Ettie Stettheimer (1871-1944) was Florine and Carrie Stettheimer’s sister. With them, she hosted a salon for modernists in Manhattan, which included Marcel Duchamp, Henry McBride, and Georgia O’Keeffe. Her sister Florine was a painter and poet who often preferred to present her work to these gatherings. Ettie published her sister’s book *Crystal Flowers* privately and posthumously in 1949. Ettie herself is the author of *Love Days*, a memorial volume where the fictional character of Susanna Moore is based on herself. Many other protagonists of the sisters’ circle like Duchamp, whose correspondence with the Stettheimer sisters, and particularly Ettie, was one of his most sustained, are included in the book, witnessing the intense relationships among these artists, including O’Keeffe.

relationships are as hard a crop as any coming from the natural soil. Interactions and relations in nature are a slow creative process made of repeated actions, faults and rubs. The example given by O’Keeffe’s vaccination mentioned in the letter and then reported in the poem is one further example about the impossibility to predict what our actions might lead to, not even the one we have performed with the idea that they would surely take to a positive end: “The reason I didn’t write / is that I’ve been lame—was vaccinated before / coming here—affected the glands in my hip” (8-10). Life, as O’Keeffe says, is a mechanism that triggers actions and reactions that eventually “upset someone else” (182). Both the letter and then the poem highlight one aspect of O’Keeffe’s life that has often created contradictory opinions: was O’Keeffe a solitary, withdrawn, at times misanthropic person, or was she simply more careful when relationships were concerned? Did she apply to people the same rules she used to apply in the process of painting, thus demonstrating how she carefully selected her subjects, eliminated details, and heightened aspects of her subjects through stylistic choices of color, shape, and line, as well as race, gender and class? Are these measures equally relevant in the process of writing poetry?

Foronda, poet, teacher and painter, in her dramatic monologue decides to present us with a nonfictional O’Keeffe. The poem, in the form of a letter in verse written by O’Keeffe herself reveals aspects of her real personality while speaking of ordinary bothersome events. As she speaks of transplanting flowers, of her trials with “the hail storm [that] ruined / the tomatoes, beans, corn” (Foronda 3-4), and of her annoyance with Stieglitz for using her pruning shears to cut wire, we get to know the artist from a closer point of view, which is in the nature of the dramatic monologue. An ordinary, familiar scenario surrounds the reader: the flowers and vegetables of her garden, the people who help O’Keeffe attend the daily domestic chores, and their own families with their problems that become the entire small community’s troubles. The picture is hilarious and lively. Everybody is compelled to participate to a sequence of



scenes of real slow life. There is the “new six-week-old wife who won’t let [Irving Young, the factotum] out / in the rain” (Foronda 38-40); the cook, who goes visiting her uncle and sprains her ankle; the sobbing new cook who substituted the cook whose husband wanted her to be home to cook his meal before she cooked the one for O’Keeffe; Rosenfeld, who tried to cook but fell into the lake and sprained his ankle too as he was replacing the cook who had sprained her own ankle first. In the background, a lame O’Keeffe who tries to find some peace and restoration, a “366<sup>th</sup> island / they talk about out here – the one / that only comes on leap year” (54-56) where she could pitch a tent the following summer, because at the end, everything we do always affects “someone /else” (64-65). The poem, running through the lines of a warm, sincere letter, which continues to reveal O’Keeffe’s need for communication and communion, retraces the artist’s long and radicant journey in her community.

Lavonne J. Adams’s poem “Closeup, Lake George” (2008) closes the session dedicated to Lake George. The composition is particularly meaningful as it marks a poignant moment of O’Keeffe’s life, as a woman, wife, and artist, and it signs the definitive farewell from Lake George. O’Keeffe is framed kneeling on the ground near the lakeshore in the act of digging a small hole with “a garden trowel—/ an intimate tool that leaves little distance / between her hand and the soil” (5-7). Returning Stieglitz’s ashes to the land that saw them in their happiest times, O’Keeffe says her last goodbye to her husband who died on July 13, 1946. Adams’s poetry offers to the readers a chronicle of the culture and history of these two people with intimacy and a sense of urgency. Adams frequently reminds her readers that poetry should allow us to open alternative windows to history and help us understand that the myth can explain the quotidian.<sup>44</sup>

In “Closeup, Lake George,” Adams synthetizes a series of historical moments of

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<sup>44</sup> This is also the theme that inspires Edward Hirsh’s “Homage to O’Keeffe,” analyzed here in section 2, “The Open Horizons of the Plains.”

American art, confirming Octavio Paz's idea that "every poem is an attempt to reconcile history and poetry for the benefit of poetry" (Swigg 186). In a succession of eight couplets, the poet describes some of the most important achievements in American history of art. As the first distich introduces the figure of O'Keeffe in a familiar, most intimate way, using her first name, the second couplet, with "the air and mountains / in variegated shades of cobalt and gray" (3-4), projects us straight into O'Keeffe's paintings characterized by the multi-colored strokes of her most mature art. The third, fourth and fifth couplets draw us to a middle common ground, the earth, when we see the artist as "she turns / aside the grass, exposes the loam" (7-8) with a garden trowel in the act of digging up a "hole [that] would be the size of a pot—" (9). "We end up so little" (10), Adams writes, following O'Keeffe's thought and recapping the poet's dear theme of life transience as in poem "The Nature of Containment."<sup>45</sup> Adams allows the reader time to think, as O'Keeffe pauses "before emptying his (Stieglitz's) ashes" (11) and studies "the clouds one last time as a tribute / to the way Stieglitz would scrutinize them—" (12).

Adams's interest in historical backgrounds for her poetry becomes clear in the line "as an equivalent for death's ebb and flow" (14). Supported by O'Keeffe's pause and staring up to the sky, the poet reminds us of Stieglitz's revolutionary series of photographs of clouds taken from 1925 to 1934, called precisely *Equivalents*, or *Songs of the Sky*. His pictures represented the first example of photographs that freed the subject matter from any literal interpretation as the clouds appeared in the sky without any framing reference, becoming thus the first abstract photographic works of art.<sup>46</sup> As Adams unspools the poem in slow, precise movements, the reader virtually pictures O'Keeffe reviewing her life with Stieglitz in few instant snap-shots. We are all assisting to the burial ceremony that we view through a series of still life images in

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<sup>45</sup> Lavonne J. Adams, "The Nature of Containment," *Tupelo Quarterly* 2, 2013.

<sup>46</sup> Kathleen Pyne's essay "Embodied Intelligence in the Stieglitz Circle" included in *Shared Intelligence* (2011), a volume edited by Barbara Buhler Lynes and Jonathan Weinberg, examines the innovative and explorative work conducted by Stieglitz's circle around photography as an artistic medium.

motion. The protagonists are once again O’Keeffe’s hands, once worshipped by the photographer, now they are paying their last homage to their master and guide: “The weight of the earth, the silkiness of the ashes, / her slender fingers blending the two (Adams 15-16). Adams’s final couplet has one further merit since the poet is able to synthesize O’Keeffe’s art in two lines, without entering any analytical reading. O’Keeffe has been able to give substance, “weight” to the earth subjects with the delicacy, the smoothness of silky brushstrokes, revealing the power of her radiant plurality.

### I.5. Recuperation in New Mexico

*From outside, it must have seemed  
a wonder that it was  
the inside he as me saw  
in the dark there.*

Robert Creeley, “Somewhere”

The poems inspired by O’Keeffe and her portrayed New Mexico describe landscapes and mindscapes with their characterizing objects and subjects. This section limits itself to the poems mainly inspired by the natural and human scenario of the country, as the poems concerned with the desert and local motifs are presented in Chapter II “Painting Poems on O’Keeffe’s Living and Still Natures” and Chapter III “Painting Poems on O’Keeffe’s Human Artifacts.” The hills, the rivers, and the cities that hosted the painter become here the settings of poetic compositions. The poems accompany the artist in her personal adjustment and balancing after her long commuting from New York. British poets Charles Tomlinson and Philip Gross offer two different experiences of their contacts with New Mexico and O’Keeffe. Native American author of Kiowa descent Navarre Scott Momaday tells us about his friendship with the painter and their shared artistic views, while Canadian Kate Braid and New Mexican C.S. Merrill write about their fictional and real times spent with the painter. Amin’s poem “Black Place II” sings O’Keeffe’s only half-hidden love for an aged, demanding man, Stieglitz,

still recognizable in the folds and lines of the hills in Black Place, while Diane Wakoski imagines Ghost Ranch, one of O’Keeffe’s residences in New Mexico, deserted by the painter, as the artist still too beautiful, too young, and too voluptuous to live in the nowhere, chases her artistic dream in New York City. In the end, Lyn Lifshin, instead, translates the landscape painting of *Black Hills with Cedar* into a picture of human struggle, where history and white dominion on the Natives are still detectable.

O’Keeffe visited New Mexico for the first time in August 1917 on her way back to Texas where she was teaching at the West Texas State Normal College, in Canyon. The landscape, the vast skies, clouds and mesas immediately fascinated her. When life in New York with Stieglitz started to become too pressing, O’Keeffe decided to spend most of her springs and summers in New Mexico. On April 27, 1929, the painter arrived at Mabel Dodge Luhan’s estate in Taos, enjoying her first creative summer. The letters sent to Stieglitz, to her sisters, and to her friends record the great attraction that the natural and human landscapes in New Mexico had on her art and life. Shapes and colors seemed to regain their original essence. On June 14, 1930, O’Keeffe wrote to Stieglitz from Taos:

Sunday—

My first night is over—it is perfect—A most perfect moon came bursting over the mountain when I was half asleep—I felt as if I had forgotten what a moon was like when I saw it. (Greenough 532)

Nature itself regained its absolute power and one could plunge into it freely, as O’Keeffe explained in her letter to Stieglitz again from Espanola, New Mexico, on August 3, 1930:

Faraway mountains fine and blue and big looking all around but far enough away not to make one feel shut in—nearer—sort of straight edged and sometimes with many small sharp points—long long ridges—or mountains of pink earth—the river flat—paler small groups of houses along it—always

adobe—small cultivated patches along the river—flowers by the doors—no  
grass—just hard foot trodden earth—always the dark skin and black eyes of the  
people— ...I felt right in the center of something. (Greenough 547-548)

In her endless search of a propulsive creative energy, O’Keeffe recuperated her pulsating center, which poets here seem to have perceived and retrieved, as they look, study, and translate O’Keeffe’s works and words.

The first poems analyzed in this section are affected by the effect that O’Keeffe’s passion for New Mexico has had in the lives and works of British poets Charles Tomlinson and Philip Gross. Tomlinson met O’Keeffe’s art for the first time in January 1946, through a reproduction of her painting *The Mountain* included in *An Illustrated Handbook of Art History* (1939),<sup>47</sup> which the poet received as a gift for his nineteenth birthday. Although the reproduction is “two by three inches and in monochrome”—Tomlinson records in his essay “Georgia O’Keeffe: A Late Greeting” (76), the feeling of being able to grasp the forms and energy of the reproduced massive stone is highly perceived.<sup>48</sup> In his essay Tomlinson stated:

The colors, reduced uniformly to grey...could have been those of ice and fire.  
What the printing could not eliminate was the firm articulation of the  
musculature, the rock-thrust, the held declivities, the sense of an even light  
bringing the whole to bear. (76-77)

This was Tomlinson’s first glimpse of the landscape of New Mexico, though, he would continue writing, he had no idea where to locate and identify the real place and painter. He would eventually associate the painting with a poem by Marianne Moore’s “An Octopus” (1924), anticipating thus his own professional path where painting and writing constantly

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<sup>47</sup> The manual *An Illustrated Handbook of Art History* was written and edited by Frank J. Roos jr in 1938 and published by The Macmillan Company.

<sup>48</sup> Richard Swigg’s book *Charles Tomlinson and the Objective Tradition* (1994) represents one of the deepest studies of the strong connection that linked Tomlinson with the American emergent poetic tradition embodied by Williams’s objective poetics.

mingled. Tomlinson personally met O’Keeffe in January 1963, some seventeen years later, after receiving a seemingly “generous invitation” (77) from O’Keeffe: “Please come Sunday at eleven for lunch” (77). The arrival at Abiquiu was far and beyond expectations, as he himself recounted in his essay, almost like the paintings themselves he had stuck in his memory.

The outcome of this encounter is the poem “Abiquiu” (*The Flood* 1981), although the atmosphere of that meeting resurfaces in many more compositions by Tomlinson, true meditations on the Southwestern landscape, whose deeper and further analysis definitely offers material for further investigation, and shows the strong system of cultural affiliations that the American painter had been able to establish.

In this section, the analysis alights on the single poem “Abiquiu” which catches O’Keeffe’s intonations, accents, and moments of suspense through an enlightened use of line-breaks, parentheses and dashes that much recall the painter’s own writing. Although the poem is narrated in third person, O’Keeffe opens it in the first: “Rattlesnakes I’ve had them / in every room of this house” (Tomlinson 1-2). The poet remembers how he was surprised to see a different woman from the one he had once imagined when first seeing her painting. The tall woman he had portrayed in his mind for almost two decades reveals to be “a vigorous seventy-six, rather small of stature, with a mild but incisive voice, the incisiveness toning the mildness of its sound with a strength that could take itself for granted” (“Georgia O’Keeffe: A Late Greeting” 82). Tomlinson is struck by her smile; by the lines of her face that “possessed an animation that photography in freezing banishes” (82). Their conversation encompasses several subjects: flowers and food, bones and churches, Arthur Wesley Dow and Ernest Fenollosa, animals and people.

“Abiquiu” is written on this last combination, which is evident since its debuts with the sounding image of rattlesnakes. O’Keeffe speaks of the animals that inhabit her house, and tells him about how they still respect their own rites when conversely human beings seem to have

lost any form of respect. Tomlinson cannot avoid noticing her hands, her fingers, as they mimic the killing tangle of the rattlesnake. O’Keeffe has learnt to live the land and its people. The “Empress of Abiquiu” (Karbo 217), who gathers many people around her, pays the highest respect to the creatures who have inhabited the land before her. She frequently asserts her role in New Mexico considering her own life one of the lowest forms of life in that ancestral land. The fear and reverence for the rattlesnake is just one example of her admiration for the primitive creatures:

day or night  
I wouldn’t step  
right out there  
onto the patio  
without looking first: (Tomlinson 15-19)

Tomlinson’s “Abiquiu” is a tribute to the objective tradition that the poet aims to represent when he shows the total respect for the world as objective fact embodied by O’Keeffe’s art as well. Far from the human mythmaking, from the explicit symbolism or egotistic projections, Tomlinson’s O’Keeffe and her local world become, following William Carlos Williams’s idea, a way into the universal, a theme that Tomlinson shares as it confirms the deep belonging to his English poetic tradition and his internationalism.

The triadic line that Tomlinson adopts is more than a metrical device he takes up after Williams. The close friendship with Williams introduced Tomlinson to the passion for a fresh, raw idiom that was growing out of America’s cultural and social heterogeneity, free from the worn-out language of British and European culture, more apt to an enlargement of the mind, as showed for instance by the unfolding of the flower in Williams’s poem “The Crimson Cyclamen.” Williams’s triadic-line poetry, or variable foot, contributed to Tomlinson’s wish of translating the musical qualities of things into poetry. This new language of things and its

musicality become also the subjects of conversations between Tomlinson and O’Keeffe. Like Tomlinson, in fact, O’Keeffe had spent her artistic career in search of a painting technique that could translate her painted objects into “singing shapes”—an aspect that Buckley’s poetry always underscores. The accessibility both of Williams’s language and of O’Keeffe’s painted things and technique deeply influenced Tomlinson’s poetry, which has long been defined as the poetry of landscapes and objects expressed through the “Language of Sense.”<sup>49</sup> Tomlinson’s poems and essays inspired by the American Southwest and by his staying in New York, share Williams’s objective principle of “no ideas but in things” (*Paterson* Book I) as well as O’Keeffe’s visual translations of her landscape and its characterizing objects. The house, the doors, the animals that live with O’Keeffe become in Tomlinson’s poem the settings of both the artists’ inclusive worlds. “Abiquiu,” in particular, discloses O’Keeffe’s adjustment and balancing in New Mexico after her twenty-year-long commuting from the northern areas of New York City and Lake George.

“Abiquiu” translates Tomlinson’s conversation with the painter and reflects the poet’s first intention to capture the painter’s artistic essence. Embodying Williams’s stylistic lesson made of illuminating moments of pause rendered by the enlightened use of line-breaks, parentheses and dashes, Tomlinson reproduces O’Keeffe’s own voice, intonation, accent, and the colloquial, friendly mood of their dialogue. Tomlinson’s O’Keeffe and her local world become, I repeat following Williams’s poetics, a way to reconsider the elementary rules that govern the world. In “Abiquiu,” the triadic line becomes the way to translate O’Keeffe’s voiced world of landscapes and objects into a realm of recuperated universality.

The animals in the poem, the cat and the rattlesnake, acknowledge their mutual otherness. Though inhabiting their own spaces, they often find themselves at the edge of their

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<sup>49</sup> Octavio Paz, Introduction, *In Black & White: The Graphics of Charles Tomlinson*, tr. by Michael Schmidt, Manchester, UK: Carcanet New Press, 1975.



contended spaces. The edge, that is the patio threshold, calls for a dialogue that is conveyed by the cat's and the rattlesnake's primitive oral and visual languages. Tomlinson is able to translate them by using the short line, the frequent pauses, the colloquial rhythm of everyday speech, the language of relationship and co-habitation. The final personification of the rattlesnake, indigenous and undomesticated, which is "whatever its reputation ... a gentleman [as] before he strikes / always lets you know" (Tomlinson 28-31), leads us to understand that only nature can re-engage us in a process of personal re-creation, and growth.<sup>50</sup>

Tomlinson's poem brings us to the edge of a new awareness by focusing on the deleterious effects of human incursions into natural territories. O'Keeffe and Tomlinson help us recognize that there is another world out there, to be recuperated, whose potential as a source of vital renewal as well as danger we ought to reconsider. Their landscapes are constructions of the eye and of the mind. The objective view and its mental perception as we look from the sides of each edge, overlooking the other's space, enjoins closer affective relations that bring enlightenment of self and necessary moral growth. According to what Hirsch states in his essay "Charles Tomlinson—Edward Hirsch" (1980), Tomlinson is one of the few English poets to have extended the inheritance of modernism. The meeting of Tomlinson's English quiet and meditative voice with the vibrant and dynamic compositions of O'Keeffe functions as both an amplifying and magnifying tool in what Neil Levi calls "a contemporary perpetuation of artistic modernism [which surely] reverberates on both sides of the Atlantic for a long time to come." ("The persistence of the old regime" 121)

British poet Philip Gross is also affected by O'Keeffe's landscape and writes "Ghost Ranch: Georgia O'Keeffe," which he included in his collection *Mappa Mundi* in 2003. The poet is used to exploring real and imaginary spaces, where places become identities and where

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<sup>50</sup> Braid's poem "76" (*Inward to the Bones* 98) reformulates Tomlinson's idea and process when the poet imagines O'Keeffe in an animal skin: "I am insignificant but tell no one that. // I fit the folds of these warped hills/ like an animal its skin. // Mongoose, lizard, snake / like these rejected ones [...]" (2-6).

people inhabit history. Gross, as in his more recent collection *Deep Field* (2012) dedicated to his father, a wartime refugee, often tries to find a way through poetry to consolidate identities from his past and homeland, as well as from history. Concerned with the complexity of life conceived as a difficult journey from place to place, where the spirit of home is an uncomfortable companion, Gross's poems put the theme of identity as their central major subject. His recurrent motifs are where we come from, where we live, the names we carry along with us and those we leave behind, the borders that vanish and amplify as we move, and the relationships that swallow us up to spit us up back again.

Place and identity is thus the theme of "Ghost Ranch: Georgia O'Keeffe," exactly in this order. Gross asks the painter a direct question twice, at the beginning and in the middle (9-10) of his fictional conversation with the artist: "How far can you get from...?" (lines 1-2 and 9-10) Gross seems to know O'Keeffe's story: her uneasiness for the elite life of New York and her disgust for the Freudian readings of her flower paintings which seemed to enfold her "like a child / in mother's wardrobe" (13-14). Gross then asks O'Keeffe how she has managed to escape, and at what cost. Ghost Ranch has become her own identity, "Here, there's nothing but studio / inside, outside. Nothing" (4-5), she eventually answers. Gross looks at her face, now the face of a "frontier's woman" (9) that has put aside the iconography of her early long life. She has substituted "iris throats / swallow-you-up-in-one-gulp mauves" (10-11) with "bare rocks" (16) which relentlessly open "for her like a flower, giving up colours /like scents to the sun" (16-18). She "has grown mannish" (8), says Gross, her face, a cluster of "hardening angles" (7). The desert stills time, life becomes slow, it opens up gradually "not like boom - / and-bust-in-one-day desert flora but slowly, hard dome / by [...]" (18-20). The desert teaches time. It allows time to learn. Gross highlights O'Keeffe's pragmatic view when facing the slow timings in the desert, repeating the Natives' lesson on land belonging. There is no time for poetry, O'Keeffe seems to say, "Oh, spare me the / poetry, her eyes say" (20-21). Imperatively,

quoting from her autobiography, Gross lets her burst out with her sudden revelation: "...Look / till you are what you look at: / Landscape" (21-23). Her transfiguration has already occurred. O'Keeffe's poor sights, her eyes that narrow at some distance to grasp what the stranger cannot see have become "Gulches / going blind / as if from too much sun glare" (24-26). They have become part of the place, human landscape. The Natives taught O'Keeffe many lessons about their place. Respectfully observing their teachings, when she was asked about her obsession with Mount Pedernal, she recorded, "It's my private mountain. It belongs to me. God told me if I painted it enough, I could have it," demonstrating the complete sense of belonging, and group identity.

O'Keeffe must have discussed about this when writer of Kiowa descent Navarre Scott Momaday met the painter several times in the 1970s. In *Conversations with N. Scott Momaday* (1997), Matthias Schubnell collects a wide number of interviews with the writer. In his "An Interview with N. Scott Momaday" (1981), while Momaday speaks about his multi-ethnic experience, his concern for ecology and conservation, his theories of language and the imagination, the influences on his academic and artistic path, Schubnell asks the author about his relationships with O'Keeffe. Momaday sounds happy to report of his first encounter between 1971 and 1972 with the painter he mostly admired, and speaks about the 1976 poem "Forms of the Earth at Abiquiu" (*The Gourd Dancer* 60) that he dedicated to the painter and to their meetings. The poem in fact speaks of them, of the small but important gestures that came along, and of the "easy conjugation of stories" (4) that followed. As the title suggests, the poem is about the place and its people once again, to confirm the motif of this chapter, because O'Keeffe has become a shared place rather than a myth, an icon, or simply a person or an artist. Embodying her idea of beauty that is to fill everything around us, as in Bement's teachings, O'Keeffe has transformed the surrounding world around in a set of wonders:

All around there were beautiful objects,

Clean and precise in their beauty, like bone. (6-7)

Beauty is seen, touched, smelled, sensed, and shared: “I wanted to feel the sun in the stones” (11), says Momaday. Beauty strikes Momaday the very first moment he and his wife enter the adobe. He tells it to Schubnell: “She affects the wearing of little black suits and starched white collars and her hair was drawn severely back, very beautiful” (78). Momaday confesses to have come across Stieglitz’s early nude photos of her, where “she is so beautiful and delicate” (quoted in Schubnell 79), and looking at her in her old age, she seems so different, always “beautiful, but not feminine... [as] she has been somehow conditioned by the land” (79). Beauty is kept, though it takes different forms, the flowers have become the stones that she “described ...with the tips of her fingers” (Momaday 17), her feminine surface, the rough body of human hood. In a silent mood of reciprocal understanding, echoed by Momaday’s repetitions of embedding verbs like “imagine,” “know,” and “believe,” the poet and the artist establish a strong “conjugation” (4), a profound inter-subjectivity which is exactly emphasized by the use of these assertive words. They seem to be both speaking the same language, which is made of things, forms, lines and colors that time molds and modifies, drawn closer by the light and far by the coming of cold.

The final lines in fact speak about the end, when the time comes and bears everything away, except for the intimate recreation of the wideness and wonder of the world that we have been able to build inside us. The poem blends memories, and it results in a sort of commemoration, which is also explained by the way the poem has originated disclosed by the very beginning with the verb “I imagine the time of our meeting” (1). Momaday wrote “Forms of the Earth at Abiquiu” while he was in the Soviet Union, as most of the poems contained in *The Gourd Dancer*—he explains to Schubnell and later to Joseph Bruchac. He felt a great compulsion to write about his native land, “perhaps as a kind of therapy” (Bruchac 99) as the spiritual landscape pervaded his mind, which reminded me of Said’s reading of Eric

Auerbach's *Mimesis* in "Secular Criticism." Momaday, similarly to O'Keeffe, to whom he feels a sort of affiliation that he calls "kinship" (Schubnell 79), wants us to perceive, through his words, the sense of belonging to the earth, and his work, as much as that of O'Keeffe, is simply the product of his experience in it.

Diane Wakoski dedicates two poems to Georgia O'Keeffe: "Dawn Buds," included in her collection *Jason the Sailor* (1993), which is analyzed in Chapter II, and her most recent, ironic surrealist poem "Diane's Personal Ghost Ranch," a tribute to the eternal beauty O'Keeffe still preserves in the American collective mind. The invented, imaginary and mythic figures that frequently inhabit Wakoski's poetry are all drawn from the extraordinarily developed sense and practice of a poetry of the everyday. These figures lead the reader into an imaginary, fantastic journey that help us to understand the meaning of life. According to Wakoski, a body of poetry has its own separate and organic life, just as a human being does. She has long conceived the writing process as a living organism, a fantasy life. By drawing from her experiences, poetry has begun to have its own identity, its own life, and has entered other people's lives in return.

In line with Wakoski, poetry is our history, and life and death are the only issues that matter, though we often forget it. In her almost oneiric story, Wakoski, or here simply "Diane," leads us into her own private, "Personal" Ranch, which symbolizes her life, where the main characters are a ghost ranch, a ghost-stallion, Wakoski's recurrent Blue Moon Cowboy (*Argonaut Rose* 41), her beloved moonflowers, the "spritely but mourning ghost" (24) of Marianne Moore, an absent O'Keeffe, and the poet herself. The strong rational poet and the weak emotional woman perceptively described by Ostriker in her book *Stealing the Language: The Emergence of women's poetry in America* (1986) now seem to have become one strong emotional poet, through the truth of an imaginal life and the acceptance of a Dickinsonian duplicity. In "Diane's Personal Ghost Ranch," Wakoski and her generation have "got old" (19),

their ghosts are “quiet now” (15), at times “misty” (16). The “Georgia O’Keeffe” who has long lived within her, the successful one that was welcomed among the literary and artistic circles in New York has moved back to the City, “to Brooklyn, where it’s hip and cool and edgy” (14), leaving the old woman behind.

On the edge of memory, Wakoski recalls the young years of her lively and thriving life in the Beat circles of New York, at the time of her promising publication *Coins and Coffins* in 1962, followed by the successful *The Motorcycle Betrayal Poems* in 1971, when her “weird beauty” seemed to be accepted (Ostriker 80). The poem is a collection of beautiful moments in a beautiful story that Wakoski would like to listen many more times (9-10), narrated by the mythical characters that have long lived in her parallel world made of poetic “fantasy” (Ostriker 81). Now, Diane’s personal Ghost Ranch “give(s) ghost sighs of sadness” (18) in the awareness of having left those years behind. What those memories give in return is just the image of an eccentric “Marianne Moore’s spritely but mourning ghost” (24) wearing “a crown of moonflowers” (27-28), which too have lost their fantastic halo possessed in their names, when we are told that “They are actually [and simply] *datura*” (28) in their mere scientific definition.

One last poem concludes this session about New Mexican landscapes: “Georgia O’Keeffe’s Black Hills with Cedar (1941)” by Lyn Diane Lifshin on O’Keeffe’s *Black Hills with Cedar* (App. I.1.—Fig. 14). The poet is drawn by the impressive use of colors in O’Keeffe’s painting, which reveals the painter’s long dedication to this specific scenario of New Mexico landscape in the 1940s. In her early New Mexico sojourns, O’Keeffe had discovered this declivity in the landscape to which she often drove as the site was situated one hundred and fifty miles northwest of Ghost Ranch, on the Jicarilla Apache reservation. O’Keeffe often camped there, unafraid of the possible dangers—she dramatized in her autobiography, highlighting the bold and brave nature required for every successful

accomplishment. O’Keeffe called the spot “Black Place” juxtaposing it to the “White Place,” *Plaza Blanca*, one further spectacular set of white limestone canyons a mile east of Abiquiu that inspired another series of her work.

In *Black Hills with Cedar, New Mexico*, O’Keeffe emphasized the hollow between the humps, designing a landscape with references that were soon seen as particularly feminine. Consequently, the black twin hills rise breast-like above a fertile cleavage evoking a bodily analogy that is consistent with the artist’s interest in nature’s structures and processes, and affects O’Keeffe’s pictorial and imaginative concerns—a gendered reading of the landscape that Cowley acutely analyzed in her essay “Gender, Landscape, and Art: Georgia O’Keeffe’s Relationship with the Ghost Ranch Landscape.” As the artist increased her familiarity with the outer landscape and with her emotional throbs, the “Black Place” subject got more and more manipulated and subsequently became more focused and abstracted on the dark valley between the smooth rises. Lifshin’s poem captures that breach, soon after having cajoled us with a list of warm and strong natural elements that lead our gaze through the central fertile cleavage of the painting in its exuberant colorful language up to the black hills that cut the horizon. These rocks have been “pulled from each other / two million years ago” (9-10), reminding of the primordial separation of men and women. Lifshin dives into the landscape, wishing to perceive the Native’s Spirit who, in return, tells her stories that Lifshin wants us to know.

Sharing Momaday’s vision, Lifshin shows us that history has left a permanent mark on the territory, still visible in people’s minds. She can still see images of women whose children have been “grabbed on a cattle car /smashed into stone” (12-14). Women’s eyes are “streaked like sky over the black hills” (15-16) as they see their creatures’ “spirit entrance / into the underworld” (18-19). Here, the poet recuperates on of her dearest themes, motherhood, which pervades large part of her production and involves O’Keeffe’s world once again in her long poem “The Daughter I don’t Have” (2005). Lifshin’s “Georgia O’Keeffe’s Black Hills with

Cedar (1941)” is then a tormented lyric where Nature gives and subtracts. Through Lifshin’s accurate use of short lines and minimal punctuation, which at times leaves out a word or two, the poet allows the reader’s imagination to fill in the blanks, a sort of blind spots that only the mind and eye are able to collect and assemble, an idea that O’Keeffe often embraced in her works.



## I.6. Radicant Creative Spaces

*What  
has happened  
makes*

*the world.  
Live  
on the edge,  
looking.*

Robert Creeley, "Here"

Painters have retraced the formative path of the painter, running across places that most of them have met through their representations in O’Keeffe’s works. Some of them felt prompted to go and see these places after having seen O’Keeffe’s paintings. Some have decided to remain with the idea that just sprung from the paintings themselves. Kate Braid has invented an imaginary journey across the lands that in the end takes her back to British Columbia, to the her own native soil with recuperated energy and inspiration. Poems have become an expression of recuperation, an expansion of emotions already either recollected in a moment of careful reflection and consideration, or provoked by a stunning exposition to that emotion. The quality of their ekphrastic strategies has lain in the poets’ particular multiple ways to relate and adapt their emotional responses to the object inspiring that emotion. As suggested in the epigraph from Robert Creeley’s poem “Here,” O’Keeffe learned to look at the world from a privileged point of view.

Always “living on the razor’s edge”—she stated—and experiencing strong emotions, O’Keeffe turned the ordinary world she lived in into an extraordinary one that has attracted many people, artists or not, and sensitized their gaze and expanded it. Again, it is not only what we see that matters, but how we see it, perceive it, and how we are able to communicate it to the others, which was one of O’Keeffe’s aims as an artist that this study often reiterates: “It is what I have done with where I have been that should be of interest.” From the amount of related works that begot through the look at O’Keeffe’s art, it seems that her radicant objective has been successfully accomplished.



## Chapter II

### Painting Poems on O’Keeffe’s Living and Still Natures

*You might think of her as a child on the prairie,  
or an old woman wearing a black hat on the desert,  
but you could never stop wondering about the drawerful  
of poppy red, orchid pink, pansy blue, datura white  
scarves, the phalanopsis, moth-winged floating cloth of  
her imagination, flying out of the drawer.*

Diane Wakoski, “Dawn Buds”

#### II.1. O’Keeffe and Nature

O’Keeffe’s idea about painting must always reflect her absolute faith in reality. Her minute and active observation of the world and the elements around her are closely and scientifically processed, and constitute the basis of all her works. O’Keeffe’s interest in details, her desire to focus on single moments and perspectives show the control she exerted on her subjects, themes, as well as on the methods she employed to represent them. As Andrea Mariani points out in his revealing essay “Due casi di autotraduzione intersemiotica: Georgia O’Keeffe and Elizabeth Bishop,” O’Keeffe rejects impressionistic approaches to art in favor of ideas and bright insights that are always subjected to her mediation, meditations and reworkings. Driven by these expressionistic impulses, O’Keeffe’s *satori* (sudden enlightenment) is imbued with the poetics of the synecdoche: the magnified detail is as a rule overdetermined (Mariani 294), and it is by itself sufficient to instill the issuer’s emotion. The object is filled with meaning to meet the recipient’s subjective interests. The artwork enters a dialogue with those who look at it and the dialogue becomes a fertile ground for both the artwork and the viewers, because their visions, as they look more and more deeply, extend the act of creation itself.

This chapter discusses and analyzes many ekphrastic poems as exemplary of a collection focused on the theme of nature that is meant to be as large as possible. Ranging from Christopher Buckley’s precise imitational voices, to the synecdochic texts of Bhatt Sujata,

Erinn Batykefer and Kate Braid, the occasional hints of Ellen Bryant Voigt, and the notional narrative clues in Cathy Song, ekphrasis related to O’Keeffe’s work becomes a qualified and cogent instrument to prove the argument of this dissertation: that there is, I recall, a radicant, affiliative, and affective influence on O’Keeffe’s creative activity. The relationship between poetry and the visual arts needs to be studied as carefully as the patterns of influence that exist within each of the separate branches of art contribute to each other expansion and confirm the relevance of what Edward Said and Leela Gandhi defined respectively as intellectual and artistic affiliated and affective communities. The origins of this idea of a radicant attitude can also be traced in William Carlos Williams’s early writings, which were strongly affected by the new exciting movements in the visual arts during the 1920s. The interactions between writers like Williams and painters like Demuth and O’Keeffe in Stieglitz’s circle show the specific and general impact this world had on Williams’s early career in poetry. Intensely involved in the enthusiasm emanated by this community of artists, Williams underscored that “ultimately all we can do is to try to understand something in its natural shapes and colors. To do that we may have to go beyond the immediate context of our personal means of expression” (Dijkstra xiii). The affiliated community was thus trying to develop and extend the debate over the expression by the artists and writers in relation to the formative influence they would have on one another.

Poems about paintings can be read as narrative commentaries upon the nature of the relationship between the verbal and the visual, or as a wide allegory of their mutual intersection. A remarkable example of ekphrasis happens when the poem gives voice to the desire of the painting to be carefully looked at and attentively examined. This is exactly what O’Keeffe meant her paintings to do—voice such desire—especially when she started to paint her magnified flowers, the objects that surrounded her, in continuous pursuit of an objective desire that could translate her emotional sense of wonder at the beauty of the world.

This chapter analyzes those poems that best seem to translate O’Keeffe’s will both to see, and to teach “how to see” reality, in Mitchell’s articulation, in her desiring terms. While her paintings expose her viewers to overblown, detailed close-ups of flowers, skulls, churches and shells, the poems under analysis give voice to the painter’s longing for a more poignant observation, meditation and appreciation of a simple world that seemed to have long been forgotten. Again drawing from O’Keeffe’s autobiography: “Nobody sees a flower really; it is so small. We haven’t time, and to see takes time—like to have a friend takes time.”

O’Keeffe expresses her desire in spare words also when she writes letters or her autobiography, which itself offers an auto-translation of her paintings into words. Here too, O’Keeffe favors an objective language where the fragments of her painted objects coincide with the directness of her spoken word: “I often painted fragments of things because it seemed to make my statement as well as or better than the whole could.” Fragmented images multiply in the infinite possible interpretations of the words in her compositions. Interaction becomes fundamental to discover the experience of artistic creation *a posteriori*. Different languages, like different bodies, each with their own movements, scents, and figures sensually interplay to give birth to other bodies with new movements and meanings. The result is a work of art that is a sum of its parts.

This chapter proceeds with eight sections devoted to the analysis of the poems inspired by O’Keeffe’s works on living and still natural elements: “Trees and Flowers,” “The Radicant Trees,” “Flowers: the Red Poppy,” “Flowers: The Jimson Weeds,” “Flowers: Maps of Identities,” “Still Natures of Skulls and Bones,” and the final “Radicant Connecting Emotions.” The focus is kept on the artist’s inmost desire of communicating the heuristic process of her art: the rules and methods derived from her experience with what surrounded her, the process of elimination and of trial and error that led her to become the radicant artist who inspired more than a generation of poets and visual artists.

## II.2. Trees and Flowers

*I decided that  
if I could paint that flower  
in a huge scale,  
you could not ignore its beauty.*

Georgia O'Keeffe, *Georgia O'Keeffe*

By the early 1920s, when O'Keeffe turned her attention from charcoal abstract drawings to representational paintings, she had used flowers as subject matter for almost two decades. Exposed through Alfred Stieglitz's circle to advanced photographic techniques and to Paul Strand's use of cropping for at least half a decade, O'Keeffe combined the principles of photography with those of the composition-based thinking she derived from Arthur Wesley Dow and Alon Bement in the 1910s. The result is what she did with flowers: "It was in the 1920s, when nobody had time to reflect, that I saw a still-life painting with a flower that was perfectly exquisite, but so small you really could not appreciate it." In 1924, O'Keeffe began to make paintings in various sizes, all of which focused on close-ups of flowers. She would continue working on these close-ups for decades, and later in the desert, by interposing the surreal plastic flowers pueblo people used in religious ceremonies with the true elements she could find on the white roads of New Mexico.

*Petunia No. 2* (App. I.2.—Fig. 1) is one of her first large-scale flower paintings, and among the first to be exhibited. It was included with several other similar flower paintings in the show "Seven Americans" that Stieglitz organized in 1925. This painting presents the center anatomy of the flower in sharp focus. The dominant critical view immediately related O'Keeffe's work to her female gender, and suggested that in her flowers there were veiled allusions of female genitalia. O'Keeffe arguably rejected the interpretation and insisted that there was no hidden symbolism in her painting, just the essence of the natural element that we often fail to observe with appropriate attention:

When you take a flower in your hand and really look at it, it's your world for the moment. I want to give that world to someone else. Most people in the city rush around so, they have no time to look at a flower. I want them to see it whether they want to or not.

Private and portrayed life were being mixed up in the 1920s. Stieglitz, who showed (off) their intimacy and waved O'Keeffe's comfort with her nude body before the world, made O'Keeffe and their love affair public. It was impossible to escape from such forms of narrative and criticism. This may legitimize O'Keeffe's strong position against the prevailing readings of her art throughout her life. O'Keeffe in fact would repeatedly state her reasons as she did in a conversation with her colleague Ernest W. Watson in 1943:

Well—I made you take time to look at what I saw and when you took time to really notice my flowers you hung all your own associations with flowers on my flower and you write about my flower as if I think and see what you think and see of the flower—and I don't. (quoted in Watson 10)

O'Keeffe was fighting against the ruling Freudian interpretations of life and work in the first decades of the twentieth century. She opposed them by completing also a significant body of paintings that represent the tall buildings of New York City in 1925 through which she wanted to defy the critics who saw her vertical shapes as phallic forms. Moreover, she questioned Stieglitz's desire to celebrate her—his protégé and best woman painter in the world. O'Keeffe wanted equal recognition both as an artist and a woman, a double challenge that Vivien Green Fryed clearly describes in her essay "The Sexualization of Georgia O'Keeffe As Woman and Artist" (2003).

O'Keeffe herself in 1960 in an interview with Katherine Kuh explained the origin of her blown-up details:

I'll tell you how I happened to make the blown-up flowers. In the twenties, huge buildings sometimes seemed to be going up overnight in New York. At that time I saw a painting by Fantin-Latour, a still-life with flowers I found very beautiful, but I realized that were I to paint the same flowers so small, no one would look at them because I was unknown. So I thought I'll make them big like the huge buildings going up. People will be startled; they'll have to look at them—and they did. (189)

Flowers were thus not subjects she preferred over others. What mattered was the emotion they evoked and the intimate experience the artist had with them. She explained this point clearly in a letter to William Milliken, friend and Director of the Cleveland Art Museum, on November 1, 1930:

I know I cannot paint a flower. I can not paint the sun on the desert on a bright summer morning but maybe in terms of paint color I can convey to you my experience of the flower or the experience that makes the flower of significance to me at that particular time. (Lisle 103)

Although she verbally expressed herself in the diminishing terms of her own incapability of reproducing a landscape or a specific light, her subjects immediately conveyed the truth of her emotional experience and captured the attention of her audience. This indeed is what made O'Keeffe one of the most influential artists.



### II.3. The Radicant Trees

*I was large, lean and long like a birch trunk – my  
hands especially. I pushed into this world hands first.*

Kate Braid, “13”

In Georgia O’Keeffe’s works, trees fill an important place and poets like Karen Etheldatter, C. S. Merrill, and Kate Braid have shared the power of these natural elements in O’Keeffe’s life and artistic production. Among her most renowned paintings is *D. H. Lawrence Pine Tree* (App. I.2.—Fig. 2) painted in 1929 during the first summer she spent in her adopted home state of New Mexico. It shows the trunk and branches of a ponderosa pine, viewed looking up from the base of the tree and reaching a glittering night sky. The tree that inspired O’Keeffe was the red oak standing close to the “cabin” where D. H. Lawrence and his wife were staying at Kiowa Ranch, twenty-five kilometers north of Taos. Just below the tree, there was a carpenter’s desk where O’Keeffe would lie down and look up:

I spent several weeks up at the Lawrence ranch that summer. There was a long weathered carpenter’s bench under the tall tree in front of the little old house that Lawrence had lived in there. I often lay on that bench looking up into the tree – past the trunk and up into the branches. It was particularly fine at night with the stars above the tree.

O’Keeffe read Lawrence’s short novel *St Mawr* written in 1925 (Drohojowska-Philp 262) and found particular inspiration in the excerpt that describes the tree in the ranch of “the New England wife of the trader” (Lawrence 143):

Her cabin faced the slow downslope of the clearing, the alfalfa field: her long, low cabin, crouching under the great pine-tree that threw its trunk sheer in front of the house, in the yard. That pine-tree was the guardian of the place, from the far-off crude ages of the world. Its great pillar of pale, flakey-ribbed copper rose there in strange callous indifference, and the grim permanence, which is in pine-

trees. A passion-less, non-phallic column, rising in the shadows of pre-sexual world, before the hot-blooded ithyphallic column ever erected itself. A cold, blossomless, resinous sap surging and oozing gum, from that brownish bark. And the wind hissing in the needles, like a vast nest of serpents. (Lawrence 144)

The whole description of the pine-trees and the outstretching desert beyond them is essential, I believe, for understanding not only the painting, but also the poems it inspired. The place, Lawrence recalls, speaks about an absolute beauty: “Ah that was beauty!—perhaps the most beautiful thing in the world. It was pure beauty, absolute beauty” (Lawrence 145). Together with the trees and the landscape, further elements of Lawrence’s text must have captured O’Keeffe’s attention. First, she must have identified with the protagonist Lou Witt, a twenty-five-year-old woman once madly in love with her husband Rico, but now less than content in her marriage. Lou is no longer interested in sex after her husband’s infidelity and immaturity. Furthermore, she purchased a ranch in the Southwest where she lives as “Vestal Virgins” (Lawrence 138) used to worshipping and respecting nature’s wild spirituality, according to the teachings of the Native American Phoenix. Indeed, Lou’s actions retrace most steps in O’Keeffe’s life, for example in her attraction for the New Mexico landscape in which she perceives the wild spirit of America, as described by Lawrence in the following terms:

There’s something else for me, mother [...] It’s a spirit. And it’s here, on this ranch. It’s here in this landscape. [...] But it’s something big, bigger than men, bigger than people, bigger than religion. It’s something to do with wild America. [...] And I’m here, right deep in America, where there’s a wild spirit wants me, a wild spirit more than men. (155)

In the letters that O’Keeffe wrote to Stieglitz from New Mexico, collected and edited by Sarah Greenough in *My Faraway One: Selected Letters of Georgia O’Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz* (2011), the painter seemed to be influenced by Lawrence’s work not only in terms of themes

and images, but also in terms of style. Lawrence's short, sharp sentences, mostly similar to fragments of a virtual conversation, the frequent use of dashes and repetitions as if to give more spatial breath to the uttered words, the recurrent starting of sentences with conjunctions, and finally, the preference for simple, everyday words that are far from a refined lexicon are features whose effects O'Keeffe shared and probably took as an example for her writing and even her paintings. Lawrence's following lines, for instance, may have played a relevant role in O'Keeffe's writing style as well as in her idea of looking for beauty beyond the limiting boundaries of illusory horizons:

But beyond the pine-trees, ah, there beyond, there was beauty for the spirit to soar in. The circle of pines, with the loose trees rising high and ragged at intervals, this was the barrier, the fence to the foreground. Beyond was only distance, the desert a thousand feet below, and beyond. (Lawrence 145)

I take for example the few lines that O'Keeffe writes in a letter to Stieglitz in the summer of 1929, without making direct references to the painting *The D. H. Lawrence's Tree*. The letters written during that summer witness the lively artistic period that O'Keeffe was experiencing under the influence not only of the place but also by the reading of Lawrence's poems and *St Mawr*:

My painting moved very fast—tomorrow we will see what it moves into—it sort of knocks my own head off—I am glad we came up again—it has been so quiet—and the painting is such a queer one—(quoted in Greenough 505)<sup>51</sup>

Karen Ethelsdatter, poet and liturgist from Union City, New Jersey, captures and expands the atmospheres created by Lawrence's writing and O'Keeffe's work in her poem "*The Lawrence Tree* by Georgia O'Keeffe." Ethelsdatter's poetry often includes the interfaith celebrations of

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<sup>51</sup> References to the painting appear in Greenough's *My Faraway One* in notes 157 (508), Note 304 (573) and note 316 (577).

her liturgies and affirms in particular the role of women and the feminine creative presence in God. Her long-term interest in women's art and power has brought her to write five poems about O'Keeffe: "Georgia O'Keeffe," from *Earthwalking & Other Poems* (2002), "What leads me on," "On seeing a print of Georgia O'Keeffe's Ladder to the Moon," "*The Lawrence Tree* by Georgia O'Keeffe," and "These red Hills," from *Thou Art a Woman and Other Poems*, (2003).

"*The Lawrence Tree* by Georgia O'Keeffe" (61) revives O'Keeffe's artistic legacy that binds her to D. H. Lawrence with a scene that recalls narrations of O'Keeffe laying "on the ground beneath this tree to paint it" (Ethelsdatter 2-3). The ekphrastic composition refers to a collective "we" making us all look at the painting and listen to its story. However, the realistic tone soon shifts to an imaginary and personal interpretation of what is being seen as "the thick reddish brown trunk" that is soon turned into "a phallus / with branches like the tentacles of an octopus." (Ethelsdatter 3-4) Just one line afterwards, the description returns to actual terms, and the tree is seen "tapering into the deep blue starry sky" (5) and yet it throws us back immediately into sensual symbolic references with the added observation as if "penetrating it" (6). From this moment on, Ethelsdatter definitely abandons any faithful reference to the painting and plunges into an overt, sensuous narrative of the visual scene she is imagining:

The foliage of the mighty tree like the black cloud of hair  
surrounding the sex of a man, the sex of a woman,  
black as the ink exuded by an octopus,  
and almost devouring the sky. (Ethelsdatter 7-10)

The starry sky is simply devoured by the tree as if its desire to penetrate it had finally succeeded and engulfed it all. In "The presence of the man" (Ethelsdatter 11) instead, it is D. H. Lawrence himself who permeates the scene:

The presence of the man D. H. Lawrence,

from whose land this tree arises,  
from whose pen arose tales and poems  
of the sacred power of sexual passion. (Etheldatter 11-14)

The repetition of the verb “arise” with its strong sexual connotation as “the foliage of the mighty tree [looks] like the black cloud of hair /surrounding the sex of a man, the sex of a woman” (Etheldatter 7-8), and the animal-like, unconstrained image of the octopus exuding ink from its tentacles depict a voluptuous sex scene. It is hard to say that it was O’Keeffe’s intention to reproduce such effect while we read the above-mentioned correspondence with Stieglitz in that summer. It is on the other hand interesting that Etheldatter reads a relevant simile in O’Keeffe’s work with the audacious lexicon and visual narrative of the English novelist. It appears clear to me that moved by the landscape and by distances, O’Keeffe was becoming bolder, more audacious. She was making people look not only at nature, but also at what she had seen and made of it; she was producing a self-portrait that implicated the viewer. This implication is one further tangle with potential artists, such as the poets under examination in my dissertation, involved in her artistic process, and it offers another example of her radiant nature.

C. S. Merrill, O’Keeffe’s assistant in the early 1970s, librarian and poet, in her poem “3” from the book *O’Keeffe—Days in a life* (1995) portrays a more relaxing image of the painter’s relationship with the tree subject. The narrative poem reports the conversations Merrill and O’Keeffe had in the painter’s house. The poet pictures a simple but affectionate portrait of O’Keeffe’s freedom in the summer days of 1929, when “O’Keeffe used to go / to the Lawrence Ranch / before Frieda died” (Merrill 1-3). The poem tells us about the painter’s affective relationships in those days with the community of Taos artists, with Mabel Luhan Dodge and her Native American husband John Luhan. Present and past, life and death, and the natural passing of time space out the narration. Now “Trees have grown / and the view is / not

so full / as it used to” (4-7)—Merrill writes, allowing us to hear O’Keeffe’s voice. Then, the poet regains control and returns to a narration about O’Keeffe in her own voice:

She used to rest  
under one tree,  
spent much time  
looking up through branches  
her head by the trunk. (Merrill 8-12)

Merrill’s approach is different from Etheldatter’s: it is more concerned with memories, spoken words and photographic shots of shared moments with O’Keeffe. Without being celebrative nor eulogizing, the poet tells us about the small things of O’Keeffe’s life and days. The tone is colloquial, the words and syntax are simple. Silences and pauses have a specific weight, exactly as in normal, ordinary conversations. Above all, Merrill shows gratitude for what she has been taught by O’Keeffe: observation, relationships, and her persistent search for the essential.

Likewise, Braid often speaks of trees in her poetic journal *Inward to the Bones: Georgia O’Keeffe’s Journey with Emily Carr* (1998), in which she narrates the fictional long journey that O’Keeffe undertook across New Mexico to British Columbia with the Canadian painter Emily Carr.<sup>52</sup> Trees are essential subjects in both artists, though differently represented. As

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<sup>52</sup>Emily Carr (1871-1945) is a Canadian artist and writer. She studied in San Francisco in 1889-95, and in 1899 she travelled to England, where she was involved with the St. Ives group and with Hubert von Herkomer’s private school. She lived in France in 1910 where the work of the Fauves influenced the colorism of her work. Discouraged by her lack of artistic success, she returned to Victoria where she came close to giving up art altogether. However, her contact with the Group of Seven in 1930 resurrected her interest in art (where she met O’Keeffe), and throughout the 1930s, she specialized in scenes from the lives and rituals of Native Americans. She showed her awareness of Canadian native culture through her series of works depicting the British Columbian rainforest, living among the Native Americans to research the subject. Many of her Expressionistic paintings represent totem poles and other artifacts of Indian culture. A relevant and complete portrait of the artist Emily Carr is provided by Sharyn Rohlfson Udall’s *Carr, O’Keeffe, Kahlo: Places of Their Own* (2000). Besides offering a general biographical overview of the artist, Udall compares the art, lives, and achievements of the three influential—I add, radicant—artists who were mutually influenced and often explored similar issues in their paintings. Udall underlines the processes through which each artist searched for an authentic, personal identity and analyzes in detail the issues these women faced in relation to nationality, nature, gender, and the creation of their personal myth. Detailed biographical volumes are Doris Shabolt’s *Emily Carr* (1990) and Maria Tippett’s *Emily Carr: A Biography* (1979).

Mariani underlines in his essay “Emily Carr: il potere dell’albero filosofico” (1988),<sup>53</sup> the reading of Carl Gustav Jung’s *The Philosophical Tree* (1945)<sup>54</sup> is a helpful instrument to understand the multileveled meanings of a tree in painting. Jung examines the history and interpretation of the tree as an archetypal image. Its symbolic representation has undergone changes of meaning throughout the centuries. The tree is associated with growth, protection, life, unfolding of form, old age, personality, death and rebirth. Jung analyzes thirty-two descriptions of a series of pictures drawn by his patients to express their inner experiences—Mariani’s study underscores. Many of these descriptions reveal allusions to psychological processes as the union of opposites, the awareness of the value of the unconscious, regression, the danger of identification with the self, the process of individuation or discrimination between self and ego, the personification of animus, and several others. The tree reveals a collective nature of images and associations and a maternal aspect in its idea of protection, shade, shelter, and nourishment, which in return guarantees solidity, permanence, and firm-rootedness. The tree is also a symbol of old age and death; however, rebirth germinates in its death.

Braid intertwines O’Keeffe’s and Carr’s representations of trees in her verses through the imaginary friendship between the two painters. In her book, Braid rarely addresses specific paintings, but rather refers to their objective representations. Images of trees and their role in the painters’ lives and works are recurrent. The first picture appears in poem “13” (*Inward to the Bones* 23) where Braid imagines O’Keeffe speaking in first person about how she envisioned herself and how she was seen by Stieglitz:

I was large, lean, and long like a birch trunk—my  
hands especially. I pushed into this world hands first,

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<sup>53</sup> Andrea Mariani is also the author of “Emily Carr: The International Context,” published in 1995. As Paula Rabinowitz writes in her essay “Icons of Feminism, Modernism, and the Nation” (2001), Mariani’s text is fundamental to understand Carr’s global, and I add, *radicant* influence.

<sup>54</sup> C.G. Jung’s *Der philosophische Baum* was first published in 1945 and then in a revised edition in 1954. The English translation by R.F. Hull is included in *Alchemical Studies*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967.

moved from one room to another, my hands  
outstretched. Hot. Cold. (Braid 1-4)

According to Braid, O’Keeffe has paid minor attention to her roots and showed more concern with what she could do with her hands, and how she could accomplish her plans working with them, outstretched limbs of her own creative center:

We worked, my hands and I. I bound them together  
—thin sticks—a raft on which I set desire  
and floated downriver toward an unimaginable  
destination. (Braid 9-13)

Braid here recoups O’Keeffe’s friendship with Lawrence and imagines the painter’s anger at those critics who, encouraged by Stieglitz, implicated even her friendship with the author while interpreting her art:

The men painted the shapes they knew—  
longer than they were wide—  
and no one tripped.

When I painted the shapes I knew—  
round hills, dark spaces—  
suddenly it was all sex,  
*the female D. H. Lawrence, orgasmic fountain*  
*on paper at last.* (Braid 1-8)

Braid’s conclusive couplet of poem “17” (27) summarizes the unidirectional analysis of her production, “What made my paintings sell / sickened me” (11-12). In poem “18” (28), the poet continues borrowing from the tree imagery and creates an analogy with O’Keeffe’s hands that bear a resemblance to pieces of wood:



I had no hands. The men chopped them off when  
they saw nothing but sex in my pictures.

There is more to my sex than sex. (Braid 1-3)

With this statement, Braid emphasizes O’Keeffe’s rejection of a biological imperative in the reading of her work narrated by critics like Lewis Mumford or Charles Rosenberg (Drohojowska 242). In her autobiography, next to the painting *New York with Moon, 1925*, O’Keeffe writes about the discouraging comments that Stieglitz and the male artists and critics rotating around him used to make on her “impossible ideas [...] crazy notions” about art. Braid shows awareness of O’Keeffe’s pressure coming from her husband’s circle of artists and, in poem “20,” the poet voices a burdened O’Keeffe who often “killed off all sentiment. Did it for the pictures” (Braid 1-2) since she “was not allowed / to be an artist and a woman too.” (2-3) Poem “26” (39) envisions O’Keeffe mutilated by Stieglitz’s control. Friendship—this time only potential, saves the painter.

Taking inspiration from O’Keeffe and Carr’s unique meeting at Stieglitz’s gallery, An American Place, in New York City, in February 1930, Braid imagines the story of a saving and sheltering relationship. Braid knows that Carr speaks only about O’Keeffe’s *The D. H. Lawrence Tree* in her journal *Hundreds and Thousands: The Journals of Emily Carr* (Carr 45), while visiting O’Keeffe’s exhibition. Carr’s biographer Maria Tippett reports that when the artist saw O’Keeffe’s work, “she was later moved to copy into her notebook the poem by Lawrence which inspired it” (quoted in Kaufman Westra 131). The poem about which Carr speaks must have been Lawrence’s “Autumn in Taos” (Lawrence 408-409), first published in 1923 in *Birds, Beast and Flowers*. This is the only documented example of inverse ekphrasis in O’Keeffe’s work. The poem is imbued with the magnificence of the landscape Lawrence found himself surrounded by. The author wrote that, in New Mexico, a “new part” of his soul “woke up suddenly [and] the old world gave way to a new” (quoted in Bachrach 13). Lawrence

understood that there were no gods, but that “all is god” (Bachrach 13) in Native American religion and this, in the shape of Walt Whitman, had liberated his poetic landscape. The scenes in “Autumn at Taos” seem to occur in real time as we meet the speaker while riding. The poem's rhythm is scanned by the robust “trot-trot” movement of the pony through the contrastingly vast sweep of landscape. The pace is set in a slow motion by repetitions that follow the movements of the reins. As the speaker approaches, the “mottled” aspect of the scene is made clear by the presence of cedar and pinion trees. No sooner have the trees come into focus than, out of the idea of mottled, come the amazing creatures of a tigress, a wolf, an otter, a bear. The words act as a visual bridge to sketch the quick variations of the landscape. The sensual movements and position of the rider moves slowly under pines that are like the “hairy belly of a great black bear” (22). The land and the sensuous life-force it embodies win over its colonizers, artists included, who have long ridden upon it. There is always a new world within the known world, according to Lawrence. The vision of natural integration between the land and the subliminally present creatures that live within it opens wider horizons, as exemplified in the following lines:

But under the pines

I go slowly

As under the hairy belly of a great black bear. (Lawrence 15-17)

Carr, as she reports in her own journal, while visiting the Gallery, reads this poem and at the same time looks at O’Keeffe’s painting, which is positioned next to it. Braid must have been impressed by this comparison and, in poem “26” (39), she leads us slowly through the rooms of Stieglitz’s Gallery and makes us see Carr who walks along the scene. O’Keeffe observes this strange woman—an unusual sight for a New York City Gallery. Dressed in a “gunny sack” (Braid 2), she smells “of cedar” (Braid 3) and O’Keeffe is excited by this scented sight:

Who is this strange woman

got up like a gunny sack,  
smelling of cedar and something else?

An excitement, I smell, that matches my own. (Braid 1-4)

Poem “26” (Braid 39) pictures O’Keeffe watching “from Stieglitz’ broom-closet of an office / as [Carr] tours the gallery” (Braid 5-6). O’Keeffe is wondering what this woman sees in front of her paintings as “With the men’s dark things she is merely polite / but in front of [O’Keeffe’s] bright flowers / she stiffens. What does she see?” (Braid 7-9). “Dying to ask” (Braid 11), O’Keeffe remains “frozen here /in [the Gallery] dark cell, alone with the critics, including Stieglitz / who sees sex and sales in everything” (Braid 10-13). Braid forces the scene and wants the artists to meet. They belong to “the same garden” (Braid 16).

In poem “27” (40), the two artists “part / Emily for some other gallery /insisted on by Stieglitz, [O’Keeffe], to paint—(Braid 7-9). Stieglitz may even separate them, but the encounter has already happened. The strange woman in the gunny sack and O’Keeffe have finally discovered one another and whisper: “*Sister. / We are met at last*” (Braid 12-13).

From that moment on, the fictional journey to New Mexico and then to British Columbia has started. Braid will take the reader from the green-less trees of Southwestern deserts—O’Keeffe’s land, to the verdant forest of Canada—Carr’s territory. Braid plays with words to describe Carr’s endlessly pining for forest (as in poem “32”), and conversely O’Keeffe’s ability to live only “on cactus and thread” (Braid 55). In poem “43” (56), Braid narrates how the beauty of this friendship develops, while O’Keeffe watches Carr “painting trees below the cliff dwellings at Bandelier” (4) as if she were “back in her rain forest” (5):

[...] Shadows dash across her face, her  
body twitches in animate conversation with that limb, that trunk,  
[...]  
I hear her arboreal music, smell perfume – pine. Emily doesn’t

paint—she surrenders her paintbrush to the tree. (Braid 5-12)

O’Keeffe here becomes the singer or even, as in poem “45” (58), “the song,” and Carr is “the instrument” (16-17); they attract each other as such. Braid gets back to this simile in her long poem “48” (62-63):

We are solo instruments, she and I.

We hardly fit. No harmony, so much the like.

I drum my fingers—staccato, accelerando

and watch the candle burn.

It is darker, lonelier without her.

Music continues—a wooden handhold of keys,

a long walk under string of trees. (Braid 30-36)

The presence of trees and their symbolism becomes even thicker in Braid’s section “British Columbia: Duet.” The painters have started to know one another and are trying to grasp each other’s secrets. Overwhelmed by the wetness of Carr’s land and by “pillows of moss and lichen [...] hemlock and cedar, pine, spruce and fir” (“58” 22-24), O’Keeffe surrenders to an abundance of warmth and darkness that almost drowns her. Guided by her friend, O’Keeffe starts to reconnect with the land’s fertility, and the generative power she learned to forget in the desert. In poem “70” (89), Braid speaks of a recovered O’Keeffe, who, thanks to Emily, seems to have regained confidence and trust:

Emily is my mother, lover, child.

She does not know this,

that with her,

I break the bonds

of the demon that rides me

to perfection. (Braid 1-6)

O’Keeffe “can be / merely Georgia” (Braid 7-8) once again. She can finally get rid of her barricades, as poem “72” (91) recounts:

My job has been to build a barricade

between me and everyone else

except Stieglitz

and lately him too. (Braid 1-4)

In poem “71” (Braid 90), O’Keeffe recalls when Carr told her about having learned to listen to the sounds of the trees and their “vibrating chord” (3), or better having learned to trust the intimate voices that vibrated inside her, with no fear. In poem “72” (91), Braid speaks of the important lesson O’Keeffe has learned from Carr: to have no fear and avoid building enslaving barricades. Their lives silently intertwine like the branches of their painted trees.

Braid’s poem “74” (96) includes a specific date: March 2, 1945, the date of Carr’s death in Victoria. Fifteen years have passed since that imaginary journey took place and O’Keeffe wakes up “in the night at the hour when the moon comes round” (Braid 1-2). Like in a dream, “Emily sits at the foot of [O’Keeffe’s] bed. [...] She has come to say good-bye” (Braid 1-8). Friendship has made O’Keeffe more confident. She will no longer feel alone since what Carr gave to her now resides within her forever: “what she gave to me then is mine forever” (Braid 11).

The last poems of Braid’s *Inward to the Bones* reveal a self-conscious O’Keeffe who has learned to accept the struggles of a consuming creative life. Braid’s merit is to have given both O’Keeffe and Carr a true, vibrating voice. She has been able to weave different themes inspired by passion, loneliness, desperation, and competitiveness, through her use of words saturated with colors that interlace the painters’ respective landscapes. As in Jung’s lesson, Braid’s trees represent a fundamental instrument in Carr’s and O’Keeffe’s artistic growth, since

they have helped the artists to grow comfortable in foreign landscapes, both real and symbolical. *Inward to the Bones* sensibly follows Braid's previous collection of poems in response to Carr's paintings *To This Cedar Fountain* (1995) and reinforces the poet's fascination with both artists and their respective intimate landscapes. *Inward to the Bones* closes with a quotation sketched from one of the letters O'Keeffe wrote to her friend Anita Pollitzer. The inspiring letter was sent to Anita from Canyon, Texas, in September 1916, while O'Keeffe was teaching art at West Texas State Normal College.<sup>55</sup> Braid ends her book of poems with an excerpt from this letter:

...I discovered that by running against the wind  
with a bunch of pine branches in your hand  
you could have the pine trees singing  
right in your ears... (Braid 113)

This section concludes by mentioning a further issue that affected O'Keeffe profoundly: the translation of her paintings into singing shapes, music for the eyes as well as for the ears. Again, the power of combining different artistic expressions is emphasized. Braid allows us to hear O'Keeffe's words and presents them as echoes of Henry D. Thoreau's philosophy stating that when we hear music, we never fear any danger. The power of music makes us feel invulnerable and relates us to the land. As Thoreau wrote in his *Journal*, once we are able to connect with the land, every sound becomes comforting music: "Every sound is music now" (23). He compared his reflection upon the sense of hearing to Ralph W. Emerson's sense of vision and derived that the powerful force of sounds, shaped by natural elements, is able to create the most beautiful forms. This idea must have contributed to O'Keeffe's dream to realize "singing shapes" through her work. Many poems such as Susan J. Barbour's "O'Keeffe's

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<sup>55</sup> The letter is included in *Lovingly Georgia, the complete correspondence of Georgia O'Keeffe and Anita Pollitzer* (1990).

Music—Pink and Blue” and Robert Kirschten’s “Georgia O’Keeffe’s Painting ‘Music—Pink and Blue, II,’ 1919,” among others, on O’Keeffe’s abstraction have related to this specific plan by O’Keeffe and offer further future material of examination.

#### II.4. Flowers: the *Red Poppy*

*In Andalusia,  
it is the men  
who are afraid of the darkness,  
charging into the night like bulls –*

Cathy Song, “Red Ropyy”

This section, divided into three parts, examines the poems inspired by O’Keeffe’s paintings of flowers. One of the flowers that has most fascinated O’Keeffe’s viewers is the *Red Poppy* (App. I.2.—Fig. 3) painted in 1927. Although the original of this piece is relatively small, 30" x 36" (76 x 91cm), the viewer sees the flower in a big way, because the perspective from which it was painted is an open invitation to feel close to it. The poppy consumes almost the entire composition. Since the close up is extreme, the edges of some petals are cut off. Such closeness forces the viewer to stop and take in every detail. O’Keeffe’s goal was apparently to invite us to stop and take time to see the beauty that otherwise we all miss every day. Along with the use of perspective, O’Keeffe’s research relies on colors, employed to translate her inmost emotions and transmit them to her audience. The stark contrast of the red poppy on the white background seems to make the flower jump off the canvas, diving into the viewer’s space. The fuzzy grays and black of the background pervade the edges of the viewer’s focus on the flower thus imitating the way someone might actually see a flower in a close-up experience. The vision is blurred and obstructed around the periphery thus pointing our attention to the energetic center of the plant. O’Keeffe employs a sophisticated method of shadowing to add depth to the surface and texture of her flowers. She uses oranges to model the petals in order to gain a three-dimensional effect, and shades the reds with tints of white and black to add darkness and light.

Besides giving the poppy a velvety quality, the two-toned oranges and reds present the illusion that the viewer is really close to the flower, close enough to see the soft and lush texture illuminated by the sun. We are overwhelmed by the single vision of such small element, or even just part of it. As O’Keeffe would explain in her volume, “Details are confusing. It is only by selection, by elimination, by emphasis, that we get at the real meaning of things.” So, something as tiny as a poppy can have amazing beauty, which can be better seen once we block out everything else in the world.

The influence of abstraction on O’Keeffe has always been consistent: she explores the elements of color, shape and texture of any objects she paints. Her earliest flower paintings prove that she is concerned with the simple forms from the very beginning. The boldness and brightness of color plays a dominant role: she carefully modulates it to achieve the sensuality and smoothness of silky human skins.<sup>56</sup> O’Keeffe’s red poppy silkiness and smoothness, its boldness and brightness inspired Janine Pommy Vega’s “The Poppy of Georgia O’Keeffe,” which is included in her last collection *Green Piano Poems* (2005). Pommy Vega is considered one of the most important female figures in the Beat scene together with Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso and Peter Orlovsky. After the tragic death of her husband, the painter Fernando Vega, while they were in Europe, she returned to California where she attended the meetings of the nonconformist dissenting group of the Diggers, the Hells Angels, and the writers of North Beach with the countercultural poet Lenore Kandel. She spent a long time living as a hermit on the Isla del Sol on the Bolivian-Peruvian border on a self-imposed exile, where she finished *The Journal of a Hermit* and *Morning Passage* and got herself affected by the conditions of women prisoners and minorities.

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<sup>56</sup> Fryed provides a poignant description of the painting in her essay “The Sexualization of Georgia O’Keeffe As Woman and Artist” (2003).



It is stimulating to compare Pommy Vega's ekphrastic composition with those of other six poets who have written on the same subject: Buckley's "Red Poppy," Gillian Clarke's "Red Poppy, 1927," Foronda's "Red Poppy," Bhatt Sujata's "The Light Teased Me," Song's "Red Poppy," and F.J. Bergmann's "The Culture of the Impractical." Poets bring their own perspective giving motion, both temporal and spatial to the visual composition. Each poet "enlivens" (Foronda 12) the flower, or gives it new anthropomorphic shapes. Pommy Vega transforms it into "the skirts of a Spanish dancer" (2) engaged in a swirl. Buckley writes of veins and blood flowing through the poppy's "papery flesh" (34). Foronda draws the reader, in the likeness of a "recognizable, small / delicate as a robin" bird (16-17), into a magic garden inhabited by minute lively similar creatures like "cardinals in flight" (9) whose wings are petals "gathering sun" (30), or like a "tanager calling / its mate (11-12). Clarke chooses an imaginary field of poppies where to "lie in long grass with beetle and ladybird" (11). Bhatt imagines the appearance of a fat pregnant tarantula from the deep darkness of the poppy's core. Song takes the reader back to Spanish nocturnal atmospheres of restless men. In the end, Bergmann's poppy cries the "urge to venture closer, sliding" (3) inside the "hot labyrinth of obsession" (2) that the artist/poet sees in those flowers in her "need to make [her] gender notorious (5).

Although the approaches to the painting are different, each "seeped through" (Buckley 19) a personal experience with the flower, the seven poems seem to be all led by O'Keeffe's intention: to see the flower, and to really see it takes time. The idea is so essential that Foronda, Clarke and Buckley do not miss the opportunity to quote O'Keeffe's own words in their poems. Foronda's poem "Red Poppy," included in the book *Gathering Light*, is introduced by citing directly O'Keeffe's relationship with flowers and starts in fact by repeating and paraphrasing the artist's words:

To see the flower,  
to really see it

takes time: knowing  
what to praise  
and for how long. (Foronda 1-4)

Clarke instead lingers on the supremacy of color over the power of words in O’Keeffe’s thought, and chooses to quote from the artist’s idea that “The meaning of a word / is not as exact / as the meaning of a colour” (Clarke 1-3). Clarke quotes O’Keeffe in inverted commas but she willingly deflects from the painter’s real words by just adding the single letter “u” in the English spelling of the word “colour.” I wonder whether by doing so Clarke intended to claim her own subjectivity in the poem. Clarke’s poem contemplates all the poets’ shared visions about the poppy, thus contributing to a poetics that has “traversed through great distances to achieve a total integration with humanistic themes” (Banerjee unpaginated).<sup>57</sup> By using O’Keeffe’s artistic contribution to the world of art, Clarke proclaims the existence of a shared world, a common “Nation” where women’s expression becomes an “arena of female fortitude and spiritual beauty, as wide as the sky, as deep as the ocean and as diversely ornate and multi-hued as a garden” (Banerjee 144). Clarke’s “Red Poppy” recites:

So she walks out of rectangles  
Of hard, crowded America  
And floods the skies over southern plains  
[...]  
You can put out the sun with poppy,  
[...]  
She paints out language, land, sky,  
so we can only look and drown in deeps

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<sup>57</sup> Laksmisree Banerjee’s essay “Nations of the Soul and Female Poetic Activism” investigates on how female poetic writings in times of independent postcolonial societies have assumed a new literary significance giving birth to a new, shared space where allied female voices are carving more balanced, modernized and equalized “Nations of the Soul.”

of poppy under a thundering sun. (4-24)

Clarke, together with the other female voices and Buckley's sensitive attention to O'Keeffe's project, help overcome ghettoized and gendered spaces in order to reach more "significant spheres of human issues and experiences grounded in a globalized reality of worlds within and beyond worlds" (Banerjee 144).<sup>58</sup>

Clarke sees the music and "drumbeat" (9) that Pommy Vega herself emphasized to describe the urgency to give audible echo to this boundless space. She also shares Buckley's childhood images of using poppy petals to shade their eyes "under a thundering sun" (Buckley 24) and provoke collective memory. She perceives the objective sensuality portrayed by those petals that open up to show a "heart of charcoal" (Clarke 15) in the act of spraying dust of life to claim the liberalization of woman's sexual pleasure. The image of a mountain "where the light slides" (Clarke 21) recalls the same sensual reference present in the swirling skirts of Pommy Vega's "Spanish dancer" (2) that again open up like "the skirts of a mountain / filled with the morning sun"(Pommy Vega 10-11) in the act of reaching audible sexual pleasure:

we climb

and reaching the pinnacles shout

like the flower

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<sup>58</sup> The quotation comes from Banerjee's *I am the Woman: I am the World* (New Delhi, UBS Publisher, 2004). In her essay, "New Ethical Perspectives and Cultural Nationalities in the Writings of Global Indian Women Poets, she examines the new Literatures of English across the globe that have emerged with multifarious connotations, parameters and dimensions in the complex, whirlwind lives of the Twenty-first Century. Banerjee suggests that "these newly configured and constructed literatures of contemporary times with the phenomena of increased migrancy, multi-culturalism, pluralistic ethnicities and shifting realities with new ethical values" have developed "an evolving and transitional understanding of what one may now possibly see as 'Feminist,' 'Feminine,' 'Neo-colonial' or 'Postcolonial.'" Poetic writings of global Indian women poets such as Sujata Bhatt, a migrant globetrotter with several homes away from homes who connects bridges between home and exile, may be viewed "as constructive linkages who have created a new kind of poetry born from these fissures and tensions of their multi-cultural heritage. These poets are no longer the authors of any spurious 'Feminist' political agenda but are genuine creators of transparent movements entrenched in real-life experiences and builders of communicative and sometimes audacious human bridges. Their poetic compositions actualize the natural contours of history by scouring between the lines and chasms in search for identity, roots and new values. Often their conflicting identities and trans-cultural fluidities are grounded in a new kind of stasis which transcends borderlines and barriers while connecting Feminism with Humanism." The long excerpt is drawn from a talk Banerjee presented at the 2011 Conference of Centre for the International Study of Literatures in English at the University of Innsbruck.

in strict discipline, in eloquent *satori*

in the wild grace of black and red. (Pommy Vega, 12-16)

On her side, Pommy Vega chases that dynamic perspective to set the painting in motion to deliver its message. She does so by using the action verbs of disciplined “climb[ing]” and “reaching” that indicate the painter’s struggle to achieve the perfect wilderness of pleasure here depicted in the “grace of black and red” (Pommy Vega 16).

The poets succeed in echoing O’Keeffe’s red poppy and empowering its dynamic side by adding touches of light, in the attempt not only to reveal something more about O’Keeffe’s art but also to have an opportunity to loosen the chains of mutual self-control. Poetry and art mutually support one another in this process: in their individual research of the right tone and hue, of the musical speaking word that voices the unsaid.

The unsaid is additionally and diversely revealed in Bhatt’s poem “The Light Teased Me” and in F.J. Bergmann’s “The Culture of the Impractical, for Georgia O’Keeffe’s *Oriental Poppies*, 1928.” Bhatt’s poem belongs to the collection *The Stinking Rose* (1995), where the author investigates the various mythologies, such as the magical and practical features of the plant of garlic in Gujarati tradition that gives the title to the collection. While Clarke’s poetry is meant to “invigorate and illuminate the wider zones of human thought and activity” (Banerjee), Bhatt’s writing is directed at engaging a dialogue between new and old worlds. Her bilingual poems, that bring Gujarati and English together, confirm her willingness to explore the varied linguistic, cultural and symbolic precincts of the “Nations of the Soul” (Banerjee) that inhabit the poet’s mind and heart. Bhatt confronts herself with an iconic image of American cultural tradition. I imagine the poet blinded by too much information about O’Keeffe’s painting, here symbolized by an intrusive light that “teases” the poet. Bhatt tries to go beyond the depicted scene and lets herself be drawn by the appearance of a fat tarantula. The mysterious and powerful symbolic image of the spider woman merges two different cultural sources to

which Bhatt belongs: the Spider Grandmother of the Southwestern Native tribes, such as the Hopi and Navajo, which represents a strong and helpful teacher of esoteric wisdom, and the Maya, from the Sanskrit root “Ma,”—meaning “no form or limit”—which sees in the spider and in her web weaving the illusory nature of appearance in Indian culture according to which not all things in life are as they appear. The fat pregnant tarantula in Bhatt’s poem perfectly concentrates O’Keeffe’s artistic philosophy by using objective animal figures deeply respected by the painter, which add emphasis. Embodying the role of the “Empress of Abiquiu,” as the Navajo people used to call her, through the enlarged painting of small, neglected elements, O’Keeffe guided her viewers to rely on a deep respect for the primitive—I would rather say, primordial—sense of things. As she wrote to her friend Sherwood Anderson, in late February 1924:

My work this year is very much on the ground. There will be only two abstract things-or three at the most-all the rest is objective, as objective as I can make it . . . I suppose the reason I got down to an effort to be objective is that I didn't like the interpretations of my other things. (quoted in Cowart 174)

O’Keeffe’s “effort to be objective” however does not characterize her entire career. O’Keeffe is pushed to such extreme that when the object is hugely magnified, its objectivity dissolves. The poets point it out quite clearly. Take for example the last two poems by Song and Bergmann, respectively “Red Poppy” (46) and “The Culture of the Impractical—for Georgia O’Keeffe’s *Oriental Poppies*, 1928.” O’Keeffe’s paintings provide an opportunity to speak about roles and constrictions in the gender structure. Back into Spanish settings, Song’s poem is imbued with historical references. The direct starting line throws the reader back to Spain, “In Andalusia” (1). The poem is focused on men who, “afraid of the darkness, / [charge] into the night like bulls [...] Their fathers instruct them /holding the blade; / while the women sleep” (3-10).

Song faces the theme of patriarchy and male dominance from an original point of view that is marked by a simple but incisive introductory verb phrase: “it is the men” (2). This clear-cut gendered statement indicates that the perspective is relative and implies the speaking voice of a woman who, on the contrary, is not afraid of the darkness, does not need to charge demons into the night like bulls, nor hold a blade to conquer her place in the world. Women within this framing can quietly remain in a regenerating sleep. Their bodies in the shape of “back-bent hills” in their night rest are still able to create and “hold olive fields” (Song 11-12). Drawing from O’Keeffe’s imagery through fast but intense brush strokes of words as in the title of the poem, or in the image of those “back-bent hills” (12), Song gives a new perspective to the painter’s painting of flowers. As the flower is apparently asleep, in the shape of a mysterious woman, who lets herself be cradled by the night, the Andalusian men, confused by their own roles, cannot find peace and remain vigil to fight the invisible monsters of the unknown. Song’s poem perceives and translates O’Keeffe’s courage as a woman to explore the unknown world of representation, using the harmless means of flowers, unafraid of the belittling criticism for her feminine choice of her subjects. O’Keeffe’s and Song’s flowers, in their anthropomorphic envisioning, speak of identity, pride, fertility, and courage—all themes that the painter wished to communicate through her works.

Bergmann’s poem “The Culture of the Impractical—for Georgia O’Keeffe’s *Oriental Poppies*, 1928” uses the poet’s scientific mind to select precise lexical terms to convey the urgency to give explanation about our intentional existential duplicity, which—I would add—is also natural and instinctive. As Bergmann herself pointed out in her conversation with me on July 7, 2015, O’Keeffe’s flowers are simultaneously profoundly meditative as the flowers have grown to fill all the available viewing space, and profoundly sensual, passionate and luxuriant in their obsessive focus and richness of color and texture. Bergmann declares to have seen a number of O’Keeffe’s paintings, and happened to have a postcard of this particular piece

at home. In her poem, she wanted to recreate the feelings O’Keeffe might have experienced in developing the painting, but also wanted to listen to her own visceral reaction by diving into the image. The painting seems to Bergmann “a visual representation of the addictive qualities of aesthetics that cannot safely be brought into everyday life without consequences.” O’Keeffe knew that “those flowers / clustered in the hot labyrinth of obsession” (Bergmann 1-2) and the instinctive desire they provoked “to venture closer” (3) were also “a need to make [her] gender notorious” (4) especially for those people who intentionally ignored it. In a fitting synesthetic expression, Bergmann translates O’Keeffe’s wish to show her multiple sides and “dark anxieties” (6) in the urgency to claim her female identity faced with “nose-deaf crowds” (7).

Bergmann’s poem uses biological lexicon to explain the difficulties to render this identity clear, if not only “notorious” (5). Her education in psychology and science offers a particular cross section of O’Keeffe’s painting. Throughout the poem the following words stand out because they reconnect us to the principles through which O’Keeffe herself surgically and microscopically approached the natural world with her brush: “clustered” (2), “iridescent” (4), “gender” (5), “pheromones” (7), “foliage” (8), “buds” (9), “function” (12), “viscious” (16), “calyx” (16). Her lexicon is objective—it fully accomplishes O’Keeffe’s effort to reach the objective. Moreover, it is matched with a world of sensations and emotional states that express the “intentional duplicity of life” (19) which both Bergmann and O’Keeffe have profoundly felt. The result is a truly balanced poem whose equilibrium reflects O’Keeffe’s painting *Oriental Poppies* (App. I.2.—Fig. 4) that inspired it. The two flowers with their curled petals like the “curled lip” (10) described by Bergmann, are delicately pulled together. One flower never hides or presses the other, but they gently stand side by side, which Bergmann translates into “the intentional duplicity of life” (19). The absence of a background behind the two poppies, which O’Keeffe conceived as essential to artfully draw focus onto the flowers and

present them as pure abstractions, serves Bergmann to concentrate on the two elements that fill the whole canvas and forget about the intrusive “nose-deaf crowds” (7).

Thus, Bergmann and the poets analyzed above have re-opened and complicated the critical discourse around O’Keeffe’s work. They have also shown to accept and celebrate the characteristics of the painter that the world of fine arts criticism tended to ignore or disregard: her multiple voice in art expression, and her desire to experience her own plural identity. This way, O’Keeffe’s affiliated community of artists and intellectuals contribute to expand and maintain the painter’s objectives. O’Keeffe did not only wish to give voice to an art without classifications, but she also promoted and encouraged an unconfined and autonomous expression of the self, where differences in taste, style, but also gender, social and cultural background were essential to explore unknown forms of world representation.

## II.5. Flowers: *The Jimson Weeds*

[...] “Georgia,  
you are like the dogwood...  
a homely name for a goofy flower.  
There is just no potential...”

Cathy Song, “The White Trumpet  
Flower – Sun Prairie, Wisconsin”

*Jimson Weed* (App. I.2.—Fig. 5), also known as *The Miracle Flower*, is a large oil on linen painted in the autumn of September 1936. After a summer spent in the Southwest, O’Keeffe received the commission from the Elizabeth Arden Gymnasium Moderne in Fifth Avenue. The reward was the equivalent of a worker’s annual salary. Even without a real datura flower, O’Keeffe painted the four large blossoms drawing from her imagination and memories. The light and shade that hit the pin wheeled shape of the flowers allowed the painter to use a simple palette of colors that evoked the coolness and freshness of the evenings spent in New Mexico, where the plant naturally grew. Once settled in Abiquiu, O’Keeffe would let the flowers



flourish around her patio not troubled by the toxicity of its seeds. O’Keeffe’s passion for jimson weeds started in 1932 with her first painting of a white flower. O’Keeffe’s *Jimson Weed/White Flower No. 1* (App. I.2.—Fig. 6) is still one of the most expensive work of art ever painted by a woman and one of the most expensive works of American Art. The painting decorated the walls of the White House for six years at the request of former first lady Laura Bush, and is featured in nearly every retrospective on the artist. 1939’s painting *Bella Donna* (App. I.2.—Fig. 7) and 1932’s *The White Trumpet Flower* (App. I.2.—Fig. 8) bear a close resemblance to *Jimson Weed/White Flower No. 1* and the same highly tactile quality. Together with the desert mountain setting, synthetized in paintings like *Red Hills and White Flower* (App. I.2.—Fig. 9) and *Red Hills and White Flower II* (App. I.2.—Fig. 10), the flower has become an identifying symbol of her work.

A long list of poets have been moved by this flower and in this section, I consider a selection of poems inspired by the jimson weeds and O’Keeffe’s narrated relation with these flowers. The section opens again quoting from O’Keeffe’s autobiography. The excerpt is taken from the text appearing just opposite the reproduction of *Abstraction—White Rose III* (App. I.2.—Fig. 11):

Everyone has many associations with a flower—the idea of flowers. You put out your hand to touch the flower—lean forward to smell it—maybe touch it with your lips almost without thinking—or give it to someone to please them. Still—in a way—nobody sees a flower—really—it is so small—we haven’t time—and to see takes time, like to have a friend takes time.

I have already considered O’Keeffe’s allegory between seeing a flower and making true friends. The fact that poetry recognizes, observes, and translates this relation in verses confirms once again my interpretation of the influence of O’Keeffe as a radicant artist and validates Said’s theory about the existence of a strong system of affiliations among modernist, and post-

modernist artists. In his essay “Secular Criticism,” Said draws from Ian Watt the idea that the artists and writers of the twentieth century were in need of a different system of relationships that fell outside the frames of biological and *filiative* nature, as this no longer satisfied their urgency to transcend the imposed boundaries of lineage:

Writers like Lawrence, Joyce, and Pound, who present us with “the breaking of ties with family, home, class, country, and traditional beliefs as necessary stages in the achievement of spiritual and intellectual freedom [...] invite us to share the larger transcendental [*affiliative*] or private systems of order and value which they have adopted and invented. (quoted in Said 19)

The creation of this system of affiliations and relationships led by authoritative figures of artists like O’Keeffe in New Mexico, originated new networks that expanded and allowed its members to cross cultures. These relationships transformed the natural forms of authority of filiative systems into forms that went beyond the personal sphere. These communities became more consciously involved and wished for a mutual agreement, collegiality, and respect. As Said defines:

The *filiative* scheme belongs to the realms of nature and of life, [...] *affiliation* belongs exclusively to culture and society. (20)

For example, O’Keeffe established strong connections with the women and artists in New Mexico allowing them to live without conditioning but always aiming at personal accomplishments. O’Keeffe insisted on pursuing a personal and unique voice with them. Those who approached the artist were often hit by the disciplined conformity to the model of self-representation she had chosen. O’Keeffe was brutal with those who tried to imitate her. When friendships became a mere reproduction of a natural filiative continuity, O’Keeffe pedagogically interrupted any contact. Averse to this re-representation of her Self by some

artists, O’Keeffe reacted in a way that I suggest is synthetically captured by Said’s observation about representation:

The process of representation, by which filiation is reproduced in the *affiliative* structure and made to stand for what belongs to us (as we in turn belong to the family of our language and traditions), reinforces the known at the expense of the knowable. (22-23)

This, I would argue, is the principle around which O’Keeffe built her own artistic process, as clarified in her own words:

Making your unknown known is the important thing—and keeping the unknown always beyond you—catching—crystalizing your simpler clearer vision of life—only to see it turn stale compared to what you vaguely feel ahead—that you must always keep working to grasp.

O’Keeffe’s intention to realize an art that could democratically reach the widest audience is witnessed by her use of common subjects such as flowers, shells, or bones, which implied a desire to speak a common and shared language.

The poet Carolyn Kreiter-Foronda takes a close look at O’Keeffe’s interest in relations and friendship by looking at her paintings of flowers, at her letters, and written texts. In Foronda’s poems, “Red Poppy” and “Summering at Lake George,” flowers appear simply an excuse to speak about people. O’Keeffe’s art, and the garden so meticulously cultivated become the archetype of a small, operating society where planting, rooting, watering, and nurturing happen. Anthropic and natural elements blend as people and nature commit themselves to the creative process. The painter’s garden tells stories of friendship and sharing, such as the one Momaday narrates in his poem “Forms of the Earth at Abiquiu” illustrated in Chapter I, section 5.

Flowers are both real and virtual companions in O’Keeffe’s life as an artist. As she herself stated, “They are cheaper than models and they don’t move.” Moreover, I would like to add, the silence of flowers is at times an eloquent form of interlocution. I have found Derrida’s essay “This mad ‘truth:’ the just name of friendship” (49-74) helpful in clarifying O’Keeffe’s position towards friendship. Derrida speaks about the importance of silence in true friendship, as “friendship does not keep silence, it is preserved by silence” (53) through the just distance, and disproportion of its interlocutors. Distance and disproportion are two elements in friendship that appear in O’Keeffe’s work as well as in her relationships. The silent presence of a flower, its represented approach at a “just distance,” and its “disproportion” within the limits of a canvas are symbolic renderings in the law of relationship. O’Keeffe was renowned for keeping a certain distance from her friends which is often confirmed by her sudden, at times, disproportionate reactions to some incidents in her relationships, as in the case of her friendships with Anita Pollitzer and Maria Chabot documented respectively in *Lovingly, Georgia* (1990), curated by Clive Giboire, and *Maria Chabot – Georgia O’Keeffe* (2003), by Barbara Buhler Lynes and Ann Paden.

The various poets who have attempted to recreate O’Keeffe’s most intimate emotions through their ekphrastic poems inspired by flowers do not equally accomplish the same result. Buckley’s “Two Jimson Weeds” (35) inspired by O’Keeffe’s painting *Two Jimson Weeds with Green Leaves and Blue Sky* (App. I.2.—Fig. 12) is a beautiful lyric poem where Buckley insists on having O’Keeffe speak in first person about the effects of the jimson fragrance when the evening comes. In Buckley’s poem, the “singing shapes” previously analyzed skillfully turn into scenting shapes. Through Buckley’s description of the jimson weeds, we are invited to move out from our habitual incidents and perceive the coolness of the evening air, the sweet fragrance of a pending moon in the palpable familiar air that smells of homemade sherbets:

Self-assured as clouds

they bloom and come on  
at evening in the cool.  
Beneath the moon  
the sweet fragrance  
calls you from the house  
to take the air  
like a sherbet after meals. (Buckley 1-8)

Buckley's refined lines, rhythmically scanned by elegant internal rhymes and object-related colors are also worth citing for a further interesting reference to the Yaquis tribe. The jimson flowers have long been known for their toxic lethal seeds. Their "sweet fragrance" (Buckley 5) is so attractive that it "calls you from the house / to take air / like a sherbet after meals" (6-8). Bewitched by the "Long veins" that "hold the flower / open to look at you" (12-13), Buckley imagines O'Keeffe thinking back about a recent past of deaths and poisons that still "persist back / through the bones and sand" (14-15) of southwestern lands:

Long veins hold the flower  
open to look at you,  
but I found they are the death  
of horses and persist back  
through the bones and sand.  
Yaquis have some use of them,  
another fear half known. (Buckley 12-18)

The last two lines seem to show a certain familiarity with the Native American tribe of the Yaqui and their reverence for flowers, both carriers of life and death. From legends and old songs of the deer singers, we learn that flowers were treasured symbols in ancient times. Today Yaquis, after their forced conversion to Catholicism by Jesuits, associate flowers with the

Blessed Virgin. In both the original and the colonized culture, flowers play an important role in Yaqui rituals, as witnessed clearly by the belief that the blood of Jesus falling from the cross was by a miracle transformed into flowers that filled heaven and earth. Since then, flowers have become symbols of heavenly glory (*loria*) and divine grace. Heaven is pictured as being full of flowers. Flowers as spiritual blessings are the reward for the loss of sleep, fatigue, self-sacrifice, and harsh penance endured during the Ceremony of Easter, the paradigm of Life, Death, and Rebirth. This is carefully explained in Muriel Thayer Painter's book *A Yaqui Easter*. Thayer Painter describes the traditions of wearing masks and crowns with flowers freely used in decorations as "guards for good the year around against evil." (Muriel Thayer Painter) O'Keeffe painted "these flowers [...] think[ing] / of their delicate colognes / to feel the coolness / of evening pass over [her]" (Buckley 19-26). Jimson Weeds are not only the visible forms that dwell in the surrounding landscape, but permeate the air with their scented shapes, provoking "the feeling you could swim in" (Buckley 11).

Surrounded by the contradictions of such landscape, O'Keeffe must have repeatedly asked herself what the line that separated good from evil is, and who is to be named good or bad. Her experience in the tormented land she decided to live for more than forty years gave her the complexity that the answer to these questions require. The beautiful but poisoning presence of the radican jimson weeds, the lessons of the Genizaros,<sup>59</sup> the Native American slaves and servants, the Puebloan peoples who lived in the Spanish settlements such as Santa Fe, Santa Cruz, and Abiquiu, and Buckley's poem highlight one important point of O'Keeffe's learned parables: truth can be only "half-known" (Buckley 18).

Leaving Buckley's philosophical issue, Lavonne J. Adams's poem "Jimson Weed, 1932" approaches the painting from a historical point of view. Adams's long-term fascination

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<sup>59</sup> In reference to this, the book *The Genizaro & the Artist: Stories From New Mexico Villages* (Rio Grande Books, 2008) by the Genizaro artist Napoleon Garcia, who worked and lived next to O'Keeffe for more than forty years, provides an intriguing perspective of the life and strong relationships the painter established with the local Natives since her final settlement in New Mexico.

with historical-based themes affects also this poem inspired by O’Keeffe’s painting, and faces the emotional conflicts the painter experienced during its composition. After a start in which Adams directs and leads our sight in the viewing of the flower blooms, a brief but intense and pressing hint to their legendary poisonous skills, and a nightmarish scene of death, the poet pauses and, exactly in the middle of the composition, in her cinematographic way, she changes the scene. As if we were to follow her eyesight, Adams projects us “on the far side of the country” (Adams 15), and shows us Stieglitz “ravenous for adoration” (16) while he looks at “how Dorothy Norman’s eyes engage / his Graflex’s lens as she loosens / her slip’s strap” (Adams 17-19). Adams stops once again and breaks line 19 with one adverb, “Instead,” thus throwing us back into the former setting, *in the other place*, as in the etymological origin of the adverb itself. Adams invites us to “stay here with Georgia O’Keeffe /where porcelain roosters are perched / on the eaves, where the odor of roasting / chiles drift from the kitchen—as she counts /125 jimson blossoms” (Adams 20-24). These are still life pictures through which Adams—as it often happens in her poetry—imagines being O’Keeffe. By avoiding first person narratives, which Adams deems too presumptuous, the ekphrastic approach works not only as a connecting bridge between the poet’s happenings and the subject of her painting, but also with the poet’s personal events. Artwork and word work, enhanced by poetic leaps of imagination, are then fundamental documented elements to challenge the creative process.

With poet and visual artist Amin, author of four poems inspired by four different paintings by O’Keeffe, ekphrastic poetry returns to consider the philosophical issue of truth through artistic creation. Amin chooses an intimate and sensuous approach for her ekphrastic practice. Specialized in modern poetry in the subject of ekphrastic art and poetry at Warnborough College, in the United Kingdom, Amin establishes a virtual dialogue with the painter as if she were inviting O’Keeffe to confess the true meanings of her painted forms. Amin’s “Bella Donna, Debutante, on Georgia O’Keeffe’s *Bella Donna*” (see App. I.2.—Fig. 7) invites the

reader to look at O’Keeffe’s painted natural elements for their recognizable meanings, thus returning to a visible language of emotions.

The activist artist Amin, who perpetually claims the importance of working with art for telling and addressing the truth, seems to speak to O’Keeffe and invites the painter to stop being resistant to her true emotions disguising them through abstract singing shapes. Amin decides to sing O’Keeffe with her “lines,” leading the viewer to the most intimate value of her work, still trying to “say everything,” to tell all the truth, as in the intentions of ekphrasis. By 1939, O’Keeffe has chosen to live in New Mexico. The difficult decades between the 1920s and the 1940s have left evident marks on her artistic compositions. Amin does not fail to feel them in the 1939’s painting *Belladonna*, which O’Keeffe realized during her regular commuting between the free land of New Mexico and the dependence of a hypochondriac Stieglitz in New York. During these years, her floral macro natures have already become the emblem of her art: the giant petunias, irises, and the callas have eclipsed her abstract paintings by now. Named as “Our Lady of the Calla” by her friend, the Mexican artist Miguel Covarrubias, O’Keeffe is a successful brand, one of the most celebrated artists of the twentieth century, and one of the highest paid. The painting *Belladonna* was made during a period of economic independence and popularity for the artist. Differently, O’Keeffe’s personal relationship with Stieglitz had become problematic and unbalanced, compromised by the presence of Dorothy Norman, Stieglitz’s new protégé and lover. *Belladonna* belongs to this period of dense, bitter turmoil, loneliness, and yet economic fortune. In those years, Stieglitz was presenting annual exhibitions of his wife’s work as if he still wanted to impose his authority on his wife’s work and ignore her achieved complete independence. O’Keeffe was selling well. However, biographer Hunter Drohojowska-Philp points out, the artist is always on the verge of nervous breakdowns, torn between staying next to Stieglitz, bearing a useless sponsorship, or trying new and freer inspiration. Without knowing how detailed is Amin’s knowledge about



O’Keeffe’s life, I would nevertheless suggest that the poem, between the folds and colors, among seeds and secrets, leads to a voice that is seeking liberating energy. Strong and bold allusions to sensuality maybe once again suppressed or kept confined to the edges of a canvas that is no longer large enough, force the reading of Amin’s poem in one breath, without pause. Through this fast rhythm, I am arguing, Amin allows the reader and viewer to get even closer to O’Keeffe’s painting technique of close-ups. Art critic Michael Fallon writes that the approach to O’Keeffe’s work must be close, meticulous, detailed, and paradoxically surgical and microscopic. Clearly, Amin is captured by the wrenching and centralizing vortex of the painting: the inanimate *datura stramonium* flowers disappear, and luxuriant squids soaked in snow take their places. The petals become tentacles from soft cashmere fabric of tin white color, dotted by the green avocado of their starred stigma. In her transport within the painting, Amin mixes elements of her own land, as given by the presence of the Persian fabric pattern, and the Anglo-Saxon culture of her formation. The pattern that is usually defined with the word cashmere becomes in the poem, “paisley,” evoking the Scottish city that *par excellence* produces it. The starred stigma, the real flower gynoeceium scatters its mature spores mature and pour its pollen as grinded mustard from a secret place to another, just where turbid cloud-like petals gather over a turquoise sea of flowers:

Lush  
sloshed-snow,  
squid-like  
orchid-lilies  
  
with  
pewter paisley  
tentacles

and a misty  
avocado-green  
iris (Amin 1-10)

The pace of the poem increases, marked by strong alliterations, punctuated by a series of compound words that make up the entire verse, “crustacean pod-bearer, / pollen-seeker, / tendril-weaver” (Amin 22-24). Amin concretizes it. She makes her vision of the painting once again tangible, respecting O’Keeffe’s love for the things that distinguished her work. Amin revives O’Keeffe’s desire to reproduce a “visible language,” which much owes to her affection for Williams’s tradition, and his dictum “No ideas but in things.” Likewise, C. S. Merrill reports O’Keeffe’s admiration for Williams in several passages of her book *Weekends with O’Keeffe*: “Miss O’Keeffe liked a book by William Carlos Williams. The correct title is *In the American Grain*” (Merrill 84). O’Keeffe had surely met the poet in New York who frequently attended Stieglitz’s galleries and showed his deep interest in the works of the artists like Marsden Hartley, Charles Demuth, and O’Keeffe (Drohojowska-Philp 176). Amin, at ease, finds in O’Keeffe’s painting, a passion for poetry that comes from the objects, from the image that they bring along with them, the concreteness of their representation, the objective correlative of emotions otherwise barely conveyed if not expressed through their physical correspondence.

The poem ends with a series of images engaged in a fertile movement, where the land and the sea blend into a vast longed embrace that finally restores the strain of living. The longing for a “visible language,” which frees the emotions in their being, is realized in a perfect synthesis of the verb, the subject and the work of art. It also results in an audible voice, which amplifies the value of the artist or craftsperson whose work is always an issue of equilibria between the visible and the audible.

The poems written by Buckley, Adams, and Amin have shown to be able to support and nourish O’Keeffe’s wish to elicit from natural forms a visible language that could be seen,

heard, and somehow touched, satisfying her continuous research for those “singing shapes” she always chased. In addition, Buckley’s poetry has been able to expand this practice of the senses to the olfactory realm through what I defined “scenting shapes,” while Amin has rendered O’Keeffe’s canvasses palpable, thus giving materiality to O’Keeffe’s desire to realize “touching shapes.” This remarkable ekphrastic accomplishment underscores the radiant character of O’Keeffe and the community of artists affiliated with her, since touching is in itself a relational feeling.

## II.6. Flowers: Maps of Identities

*The world is a rose; smell it and pass it to your friends.*

Persian Proverb

If in Amin’s poem the hopeful nature of flowers recuperates and liberates both O’Keeffe’s life and work and her own artistic production to recuperate the collisions between the external world and the self, in Erinn Batykefer’s work, poetry widens its function to the scope of art in general. According to Batykefer’s book of poems *Allegheny, Monongahela*, art may heal or fail to heal the cracks of human relationships. Borrowing from the sharp-edge vocabulary of O’Keeffe’s painting, Batykefer’s poems “tangle with a grandfather’s murder, a family’s violence, the wildness of sex, love indulged or denied” (Shumaker). Batykefer uses the metaphorical image of the confluence of the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers in Pittsburgh to tell the story of a difficult relationship between two sisters and their childhood in Western Pennsylvania. Through a series of sonnets and ekphrastic meditations inspired by the paintings of Georgia O’Keeffe, Batykefer takes us to a multitude of places of the soul that become visible thanks to the recollections of O’Keeffe’s popular works, and audible through the words of the poet. The difficulty of growing up as a human being and as a free and original artist interweaves in Batykefer’s poetry by correlating diverse unutterable stories with diverse

expressive codes: beauty and violence, depression and joy are enhanced by the imaginary visions of O’Keeffe’s works that become an invisible visual map of the mind that transcode the unspeakable events of life. The media interrelate and the pallet of languages becomes richer. Registers and tones, mingled with an ekphrastic approach to the narrated story offer images of palpable emotions. The relationship between two sisters in an ordinary family is described with caustic words and images that try to control unbearable emotional tensions. The scene that portrays the narrating sister while she polishes her grandmother’s silver in “White Camellia”—in reference to O’Keeffe’s pastel on board *White Camellia* (App. I.2.—Fig. 13)—becomes the visual vehicle for reflecting the deep emotions of past tragic and soft memories. Batykefer picks the perfect time and season: January. The cardinal flies around, with its combination of familiarity, conspicuousness, and style; its shade of red captures our sight. It does not migrate and it does not molt into a dull plumage. It dwells in its breathtaking attire in winter’s snowy backyards. The sight of the cardinal from within a window evokes the tragic memory of the narrator of her grandfather’s murder:

In January my grandfather’s blood collects  
on the floor of Kroll Bros Tire Shop and flies away  
as a cardinal. I polish my grandmother’s silver, (Batykefer 1-3)

The running on line and the break of the stanza only pretend to stop the stream of thoughts. Not even the distance that separates the niece from her grandparents, “hundreds of miles from their graves” (Batykefer 4), diminishes the intensity of her memories which reverberates through the slow motioned action of polishing silver and the slant vision of a “cochlear—[...] camellia /curled in the birdbath’s mouthful of ice” (6-7) outside. White and red, filtered through the silvery glowing of platters, a ewer, a gravy boat, a tureen “glowing white as cream” (10) and “a quick flutter / of forties-red lipstick in a soft brush of light” (12-13) blend together, combining sweet recollections with harsh, violent, “hard as a bullet” (14) marking episodes.

Here, O’Keeffe’s painting functions as a fixed image, easily recognizable, an elegant example of unforgettable times—those “forties” recalled by the narrator when thinking about her grandmother’s red lipstick. O’Keeffe’s *White Camellia* becomes the common ground, the shared place where the narrator and her grandparents meet, respectively tenor and vehicles of past long forgotten times. Opposite feelings persist throughout the narration with what has been defined as a Blake-like ability to see the huge significance of ordinary things, such as in the lines of Batykefer’s poem “Apple Family” (19): “the livid frustration of things known— / the apples lined up just so, red against white—of things known but impossible to tell” (16-18). Through creative metaphoric passages, Batykefer’s “White Camellia” explores the interpenetrating realities of landscape and personality, hers and her grandmother’s. The petals of the camellia unfold and narrate the family history:

[...] I polish till I see a face  
in silver—my grandmother’s cheekbones curving  
along the sugar bowl like petals, [...] (10-12)

Batykefer’s poems, though part of a whole creative process, for the most possess a satisfying formal and emotional unity, and though most count as free verse, there is almost always a perceptible underlying rhythmical and figurative motif. This formal and emotional unit reconnects me to O’Keeffe’s work that always experimented innovative forms keeping the emotional research of the unknown clear and focal.

In Batykefer’s “Pink and Yellow Hollyhocks” (24), the poet debuts by quoting O’Keeffe’s words:

You put out your hand to touch the flower—lean forward to smell it—  
maybe touch it with your lips almost without thinking— (1-2)

The poem refers to a 1952 painting by O’Keeffe, *Pink and Yellow Hollyhocks* (App. I.2.—Fig. 14). At this time, O’Keeffe has definitively settled down in Santa Fe and Stieglitz has become

an illuminated memory—he died in 1946. The painting is so imbued with light that its edges have disappeared. Batykefer’s tercet renders it in all its peculiar nature:

Two flowers diffuse in soft focus, edgeless petals  
cupping warm light in a haze of beginning  
and ending like New Year’s Eve, where I am (1-3)

The painting fires and enlightens the narrator’s memory again. The dominance of golden hues and “powdered cheeks” (Batykefer 7) that clouds the scene revives the sister’s flashbacks. The hazy and glossy pictures created by the poet’s words and by having in mind O’Keeffe’s painting are nurtured by O’Keeffe’s true words quoted by the poet: the flower draws us “almost without thinking” (2) to touch it, to learn forward, to smell it. The blossoming flower becomes the narrator’s sister whose “girlhood unravels in her powdered cheeks” (Batykefer 7) and reminds her of golden days:

by aureate light, her face suddenly my face that summer  
when the air gleamed yellow – when the soft edges  
of things curled like petals, like old photographs (Batykefer 12-14)

The scene is eloquent and resonant. Shapes become sound conductors as in O’Keeffe’s idea of translating things into singing shapes:

and my grandmother’s voice echoed through  
the conductor of small bones in our ankles and wrists.  
Every day, I turned the family album’s crumbling pages,  
  
my bones buoyant with her humming, my skin  
made of gold. [...] (Batykefer 15-19)

Batykefer’s glimpses on O’Keeffe’s work are musical keys for awakening memories. The poet blends senses and history to display her knowledge of O’Keeffe’s art as if it were part of her

own artistic growth. At times, O’Keeffe can be read through the descriptions of the sisters’ grandmother, in the images of the family photo albums, in the cracks of memories, in the renderings of internal and external landscapes, in the objects she recalls throughout her poems. It is not a fictitious or artificial arrangement of things although aesthetically speaking Batykefer seems to have skillfully internalized O’Keeffe’s teachings about the essential coexistence of death and life in any beauty that surrounds us. *Allegheny, Monongahela* uses flowers, bones, sky, and photographs to offer an internalization of O’Keeffe’s art. This finds a unique parallel in May Swenson’s poem “O’Keeffe Retrospective” (26) that closes this study, and in Cathy Song’s book of poetry *Picture Bride* to which I am calling attention now.

*Picture Bride* won the 1982 Yale Younger Poets Prize. Themes of womanhood, motherhood, childhood, and family relationships appear throughout the collection, artfully woven in poems that invoke calmness and mobility. Song’s voice flows through her poems, and, similarly to Batykefer’s work, we are moved by and from one image to another. With grace and skill, designed themes and literary devices compose the settings, the backdrops and scenes of Song’s work. By arranging the collection into five sections, each named after a flower, Song shares with us her appreciation of O’Keeffe and Kitagawa Utamaro’s art. In fact, these flowers represent paintings by O’Keeffe and constitute one aspect of the visual imagery, the use of color, and sensual appeal that pervade Song’s work. With the same delicacy and lightness of a flower, Song approaches her subjects with a certain lightness. As in Batykefer’s poems, the scenes are recollections of past times, where grandmother and mother, daughters and fathers, sisters and places enchant, delight, and worry the reader through chromatic appeals to the senses. An example of this atmosphere is provided by the poem “Hotel Geneve” (Song 69):

The same blue tint  
of the hydrangea in glass,

here on the table,

now as I write. (Song 1-4)

Weaving color, delicacy, and lightness together, as in poem “January” (78), Song produces memorable images: “The light at each window/ becoming dimmer like a pulse/ beneath the thickening/ walls of ice, blue and iridescent” (23-26). By interlacing images that are easily ascribable to her style, original and unique, as in the case of O’Keeffe’s flower painting, Song creates poignant, unforgettable lyrical scenes.

Song’s identification with O’Keeffe is especially evident in two more poems: “Blue and White Lines After O’Keeffe” (43), inspired by the painter’s early series *Blue Lines* and *Black Lines* (App. I.2.—Fig. 15), which is delivered from the painter’s perspective, and “From the White Place” (72), inspired by *From the White Place* (App. I.2.—Fig. 16), which largely employs sensual imagery. Lines from each of these poems indicate how deeply Song understands the painter’s fascination with the barrenness of the deserts of the American Southwest, which is discussed in this chapter under the section “Still Natures of Skulls and Bones,” and the relevance of flowers in both North-American and Hawaiian-Chinese-Korean worlds, Song’s personal ethnic heritage.

Song often centers her verses on island themes and activities, and understated pastoral settings. These are characterizing elements of her poetry as much as colors and lines are characterizing features of O’Keeffe’s art. Praised for having lifted the mundane from homely backgrounds to produce a lyric strangeness offset by teasing and, at times, startling analogies, Song’s poetry seems to retrace the poet’s life. Born in Honolulu in 1955, to an airline pilot and a seamstress from a “picture bride” arrangement, and raised very close to her grandparents, Song has grown with traditional concepts of male-female relationships within a tri-generational home. The idea that her first book of poems comes in a marriage between images and promising words recoups the memory of her parents’ photograph and tells the important story of the slow



assimilation of women into society. This is comparable to what O’Keeffe did with her artistic career.

Drawing inspiration from O’Keeffe’s flower portraits, Song offers a further meditation on the meaning of flowers. The fact that Song alternates references to O’Keeffe’s work with the art of Kitagawa Utamaro reinforces the poet’s desire to voice her plural identity and proves the transnational influences that moved O’Keeffe’s art in her formation, and also the deep affection for Far East aesthetics that the American artist originally transcoded and transplanted in her own land. The attraction that draws Song to the painter’s language and idea of flower depiction is easily conceivable as a matter of hypersensitivity to O’Keeffe’s attention for Asian artscape. Flowers in New York City as well as in New Mexico represent an exotic presence, although for different reasons. They serve as an escape from everyday life in the city or, once O’Keeffe is settled in the Southwestern deserts, as the only connection to a virtual personal map of belonging to the world. In Song’s poetry, flowers are the figurative elements that help the poet visualize the cartography of her emotions and thus of her life. The same must be said of O’Keeffe’s work, especially when we look at the so-defined surrealist works of hers. Paintings like *Horse’s Skull with White Rose* (App. I.2.—Fig. 17), *Horse’s Skull with Pink Rose* (App. I.2.—Fig. 18), *From the Faraway Nearby* (App. I.2.—Fig. 19), where the painter puts disconnected elements together, are visible examples of O’Keeffe’s wish to draw her personal map of the Self. She described the process in these terms:

That first summer I spent in New Mexico I was a little surprised that there were so few flowers. There was no rain so the flowers didn’t come. Bones were easy to find so I began collecting bones...and finally decided that the thing I could do was to take with me a barrel of bones.

Song’s poetry shares one further communicative device with O’Keeffe. As in the painter’s writing, the poet often chimes between the use of “I” and “you,” which is recurrent in

O’Keeffe’s style.<sup>60</sup> The languorous diction that often pictures Song’s poem is easily comparable to the inswept sexual passions that emerge through the letters that O’Keeffe exchanged with Stieglitz and her many friends. Through the voice of female speakers, sensuality functions to study femininity itself as it happens in Song’s poem “The White Porch” (23) that reframes the patio door of O’Keeffe’s adobe in Abiquiu. The poem’s characters on one side and the shared images of O’Keeffe indulging on the sensual practices of combing and loosening their hair are highlighted in “Beauty and Sadness” (37-38) in which Song describes Utamaro’s ability to mass luxuriant images of sight, smell, and touch that transform women into “beautiful iridescent insects, / creatures from a floating world” (25-26).

Although Song dedicates her work to O’Keeffe and Utamaro, she clearly addresses all women, and asserts the plenitude of women’s voices. Song synthesizes both her belonging to Asian ethnic culture as well as to American mainstream culture by relying on the appeal of both ethnic elements such as flowers and exotic landscapes, or on the balanced authority of two exponents of her two worlds. In the words of Gayle K. Fujita-Sato, the synthesis—the critic defines it “Third World” to speak about a Third Dimension in our existence—corresponds to what O’Keeffe meant when she said she wished to paint her singing shapes. It refers exactly to the ability to juxtapose dissimilar objects that become mutually illuminated and transformed into “a fluid shaping and reshaping of energy” (Fujita-Sato 50). In parallel ways, Song’s technique of juxtaposing and transposing (or compressing) different segments of time, in the manner of a telescope, collapsing, expanding or zooming, so that memories of the past and the realities of the present blend one into another remind of O’Keeffe’s painting technique. If Song’s poetic attempt has long been to bridge a hiatus between her regional, ethnic, and private

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<sup>60</sup> A touching poetic reading of O’Keeffe’s writing style is given by Maxine Kumin’s poem “A Calling,” where the poet, drawing from the rules of baseball, creates a series of striking analogies with O’Keeffe’s art and life. The artist’s constant “Sashaying between / first base and shortstop” (8-9) is but a metaphor of O’Keeffe’s constant moving from personal and impersonal pronouns in her writings. “Syntax, like sex, is intimate. / One doesn’t lightly leap from person / to person,” (14-16)—adds up Kumin, in a virtual conversation with the painter. The poem is another example that suspends the issue about identity and the necessity of plurality in O’Keeffe.

experience as an Asian-born woman who was formed and educated in the American mainstream culture, the figure of O’Keeffe represents an authoritative affiliative model. O’Keeffe’s ability to transcend both her regionalism and exotic approach to art through an intimate aesthetic experience of emotions demonstrates the value of the painter’s intention to build a community of affiliative relationships around her that widened the importance of her artistic mission. Describing both a personal history and picturing a paradigm for analyzing multicultural writing, Fujita-Sato points out, the imaginary relationship that Song establishes with O’Keeffe becomes central “to reshape, to articulate [Song’s and O’Keeffe’s] sensibility and represent [their] experience” (42).

Said’s affiliative system of relationship is well envisaged by poet Diane Wakoski. Although “poetry books were very high on the shelves because [O’Keeffe] said with a laugh, [...] that she didn’t like poetry, that she couldn’t understand it,” Merrill narrates in *Weekends with O’Keeffe* (143), O’Keeffe’s resilient spirit showed a particular interest towards Wakoski’s work and in particular for her poem “I Have Had to Learn to Live With My Face” (*Four Young Lady Poets* 135-141). As Merrill reports, O’Keeffe “liked Diane Wakoski’s title about getting used to her face” (*Weekends with O’Keeffe* 143).

O’Keeffe was long fascinated by big poetry names as her correspondence with friend Anita Pollitzer witnesses in the book *Lovingly Georgia* (1990). However, the most recent reference to a contemporary poet is to Diane Wakoski in the early 1970s. In the tradition of 1960s counter cultural revolutions, Wakoski’s voice must have had a special radicant quality to provoke O’Keeffe’s reaction to her words. In a biographical note for the 1991 edition of the anthology *Contemporary Poets*, Estella Lauter has called Wakoski “one of America’s most important and controversial contemporary poets [...] a mythmaker [whose major achievement] has been to imagine a female self who is equal to the challenges of contemporary life” (quoted in Chevalier 1021).

Like O’Keeffe, Wakoski sees the deeper meanings and potential of small things as in the case of flowers. This is clear since the first lines of “Dawn Buds” (*Jason the Sailor* 168-169) in which the poet wonders how an artist like O’Keeffe can still be shut into the role of a mere decorative painter:

How could her paintings  
like a hundred butterfly silk scarves folded  
into a cedar drawer be anything  
but decoration? (Wakoski 1-4)

The close-fitting image of a cedar drawer, a scented cage where to put butterfly silk scarves away to preserve them from haunting moths, tells much about Wakoski’s position about the role of women in all arts. A long-time person who has refused to be framed within labels like O’Keeffe, Wakoski’s refusal to self-identify as a feminist, or woman writer as well as her strong opposition to the overtly political in poetry, has kept her from a feminist audience who likely would be her strongest follower. Not aligning herself with the feminist—or any movement—has only superficially kept her out of the Twentieth Century canon probably, but invisibility is just the harsh reality of women inside and outside the canon itself most of the times. Wakoski’s refusal to classify herself or to line up politically is in itself a position: her poetry has never hidden her rage, sexuality nor opinion. Wakoski has long dared to show her weaknesses and her passions in her poems, asserting that ideas, thus first words and then poems, are not simple decorations. The cast of mythological characters that Wakoski has created in her poetry to represent the things she has tried to confess is comparable to the things O’Keeffe painted to represent her own map of identity. Wakoski’s statement “Truth teller, I am / But I don’t disclose my secrets easily” reflects O’Keeffe’s idea to tell her truth through her painted things rather than with a misunderstandable circle of words. Structural layers and inventions in poetry as well as in painting make it difficult to find one’s way into the emotional

truths of the speakers. Wakoski and O’Keeffe share this ability to find the truth without telling their own biographical truths straight. Echoes of Emily Dickinson’s “Tell all the truth but tell it slant”? It is probably so. Both Wakoski and O’Keeffe partake of that rage and anger as subversive rebel writers and artists through which Adrienne Rich has seen and described Dickinson in her review on the *Washington Post* in 1972 (Langdell 80). Drawing parallels between contemporary women poets and Emily Dickinson, Rich pinpoints a double portrait of the female tradition in Anglo-American women’s literature where Dickinson in both cases represents the major source of inspiration and courage.

Wakoski’s portrait of O’Keeffe is unique and telling. Reading through her earliest poems included in the book *Four Young Lady Poets* (1962), the strong affiliation that connects the poet with O’Keeffe’s artistic expression is already evident. This happens especially when Wakoski speaks of flowers and other objective things as in “Largely Because of Coincidence And Partly Because Of Chance, I Have Taken Up A New Address At 47th Street And Avenue F” from section 3, “Dried Flower Under My Pillow:”

[...] and because the truth is trembling on the tip of every golden,  
green, purple, black, magenta stamen  
and even the wind touches it with its tongue, passing by,  
but I never do,  
and want to,  
but am forbidden.  
Is there anyone who understands?  
Surely one of you with all your iron masks  
can throw the dice and just once let them come flower-side up  
so that I can hold a daffodil in my hand and smile. (Wakoski 19-28)

These lines could have been written by the tip of O’Keeffe’s paintbrushes in her attempt to understand her own emotional flows. The simple gesture of picking up a flower, looking at it, and then painting it trying to see beyond the object, but rather examining the act of looking is but an enduring action.

In our conversations about her poems on Georgia O’Keeffe and about the sense of making poetry in contemporary times, Wakoski recalled a quarrel she had with a young woman painter who wished she “had been cool headed enough to try to guide her into thinking about the entire body of O’Keeffe’s work, rather than marginalizing it into flower pictures that could be reproduced on calendars.” Wakoski still thinks that O’Keeffe’s flowers are her greatest works. One of the reasons people love them and the painter so much is because they transcend the standard conception of serious art, which usually means something that average people do not care to look at. According to the poet, here lies the genius of O’Keeffe’s conflation between being disdained as a young woman painter and her refusal to give up the subject of flowers, although it mostly identified her with weak feminine prettiness, as Wakoski writes in “Dawn Buds” (168):

She moved to the desert  
and even there  
found flowers to be substantial,  
not just decoration. Especially there (Wakoski 29-32)

Especially in the desert, in fact, O’Keeffe’s flowers are transformed, “turned into / skulls of animals, like scarves /of cartilage, the desert itself a drawerful /of silky bones” (Wakoski 34-37).

The object-related language prompted by O’Keeffe’s natural and familiar elements in her paintings of flowers enters and defines the spaces of everyday life confirming that art may even reside in small things. To conclude this section, I propose a close reading of Gayle Elen

Harvey's poem "Orchideae Grege (after "An Orchid"—O'Keeffe—1944)." Throughout Harvey's entire production, life and art come together in a symbiotic relationship that the poet indicates as central to her work. Poems that were springboarded by renderings from such artists as O'Keeffe, Van Gogh, Fontana, Frankenthaler, and Chagall become vehicles by which she can reach the kind of language required by her deep emotional response to things. Tension and natural lyricism are the two keywords that fill Harvey's poetry. In "Orchideae Grege," the poet builds atmospheres and creates short scenes with images that appear in sequence, a sort of slide show that runs pressingly like a cinematographic voiced string. The poem appears irregular, with longer and shorter lines that tease and wind their way down, stretching the phrasing of the work. With a stress on the visual and on Harvey's personal way of digging into the portrayed scene, the poem refers to O'Keeffe's "An Orchid" (App. I.2.—Fig. 20) a bright oil on canvas dated 1941. Harvey addresses a final, complete vision of the painting, as if she were picking up where the picture has been left off. Then, she tries to go beyond the pure description of what she sees, and introduces us once again in a third dimension—a psychological one. The result is that the readers/listeners feel like they are looking through, rather than at, the canvas. By juxtaposing familiar, sharply delineated objects, like a room, memories, a shawl, to a palette of palpable colors, like the yellow of lemons, saffron or maize, Harvey evokes images of piercing solitude. The petals of the flower, "an ivory shawl or a tissue / of moth-wings (4-5) are chambers or "pools" (11) where the invisible becomes visible, the undefinable definable, the unknown at last known.

Robert Wynne shares Harvey's fascination with the painters' views of the world. Wynne's book *Museum of Parallel Art* (2008) particularly captured my attention as it collects a series of poems on paintings that do not exist. Following Hollander's idea of "notional ekphrasis," Wynne's poems have an unusual ploy. They are conceived as imaginary comments from one artist on the painting of another. These pairings are often apparent in the titles of the

composition. “O’Keeffe’s Irises” is conceived trying to imagine how Van Gogh’s painting “Irises” (App. I.2.—Fig. 21) might have looked if O’Keeffe had painted it. In doing so, Wynne has had to think about the most prominent elements of her work, which were, as I report from our conversations, “the petals of flowers, the desert landscapes and a deep undercurrent of sensuality.” Wynne’s poem “O’Keeffe’s ‘Irises’” deserves attention as it provides this study an interesting connection between the living and still nature imagery that characterizes O’Keeffe’s work and thus the motifs of poetic inspiration. The poem in fact merges the two elements together from the first stanza as the reader sees a vase “made from / a bull’s hollow skull, /splintered with fine cracks” (Wynne 1-3). In contrast with this still image, the flowers stand up right into the vase as “Each stem carries its petals up // like an offering to the sun” (4-5). Pregnant with life, “green leaves slick and slumping / under their own weight” (6-7), the flowers spend their whole time “passionately pressing themselves /deep into the soil” (10-11). Wynne may not have read O’Keeffe’s autobiographical book where the painter, next to her *Black Iris, 1926* (App. I.2.—Fig. 22), recalls the “several years [she] looked for the black iris at the time it should bloom. [She] could only find it in New York flower shops [...] never had a plant for the garden.” Actually, the turning point of Wynne’s poem is reached in line 11, unraveling the significance of O’Keeffe’s art with simplicity. The substantial image of the “sharp steel” that “sentence[s] them [the flowers] to a week-long wake” (Wynne 12-13) and the cynical attention of human beings that are attracted by the flowers’ withering are redeemed by the freezing of artistic creation that wins death through beauty:

These flowers, though, are still fresh  
and fragrant enough to question  
  
sheen over substance, beauty  
  
over life [...] (Wynne 15-18)



Wynne imagines O’Keeffe’s meditations around life and death that reveal the deep bond with the Earth she had been able to strengthen as she settled down in New Mexico, an arid and apparently inhospitable land. The idea provided with the “blossoms /exploding out of a skull /like death’s last dream” (Wynne 20-21) becomes a paradoxical but actually real vision of the cycle of life. Wynne highlights the power of nature over death and decay, an aspect that the poet underlines by using O’Keeffe’s artistic message. Wynne’s poem provides me with the best connection to the next section in which poems inspired by O’Keeffe’s still natures are analyzed.

## II.7. Still Natures of Skulls and Bones

*The world is full of resonances. It constitutes a cosmos of things exerting a spiritual action. The dead matter is a living spirit.*

Kandinsky, “On the question of the form”

When O’Keeffe visited New Mexico in the summer of 1929, the animal skulls and bones that were scattered throughout the land immediately affected her artistic production. The artist describes her first encounters with this still life in her book, next to her famous “American” painting *Cow’s Skull—Red, White and Blue, 1931* (App. I.2.—Fig. 23):

The first summer I spent in New Mexico I was a little surprised that there were so few flowers. There was no rain so the flowers didn’t come. Bones were easy to find so I began collecting bones. When I was returning East I was bothered about my work—the country had been so wonderful that by comparison what I had done with it looked very poor to me—although I knew it had been one of my best painting years.

So enthusiastic about the inspiring motifs that these elements were giving to her, O’Keeffe writes about bringing “a barrel of bones” back to New York. There are many photographs by

Stieglitz at Lake George that portray O’Keeffe with a content look holding and honoring between her hands the thing that had an entire life of its own.<sup>61</sup> In the works that feature these still Southwestern natural elements, O’Keeffe sought to translate the private feelings of someone who had collected the thing up from the soil and, while touching them, was building the first point of contact between her and the environment. The found objects represented a document of that physical contact with the Earth and her necessary mortality. Through her art, O’Keeffe re-established an illuminating marriage between life and death that was kept together by a global appreciation of beauty.

The American singer-songwriter, poet and visual artist Patti Smith interprets this marriage in her poem “georgia o’keeffe.” The poem is included in Patti Smith’s book *Early Work: 1970-1979* (1994). In Smith’s preface of the book, the author speaks about the spirit that moved her to collect the poems she had written, “when all [her] friends were alive” (Smith ix). The result is a book of “time bleeding into time” (ix), dense of experiences, where art, dreams and hope are interwoven with painful wounds. O’Keeffe is eighty-five when Smith writes the poem as this dates 1973-1974. The painter has just lived another moment of popularity and fame after the retrospective *Georgia O’Keeffe*, at the Whitney Museum of American Art in October 1970, the first exhibition of her work in New York since 1946, the year Stieglitz died. This exhibit revived her public career and brought her to the attention of a new generation of women in the era of the feminist movement.<sup>62</sup> Smith is about twenty-seven years old in 1973,

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<sup>61</sup> Alfred Stieglitz’s photograph *Georgia O’Keeffe, A Portrait with Cow’s Skull* (1931) shows the painter holding this cow’s skull she sent to New York to continue the creative process started in New Mexico.

<sup>62</sup> An example of the influence O’Keeffe was having on feminist movements and artists is given by the art installation of American feminist artist, art educator, and writer Judy Chicago. Known for her large collaborative art installation pieces that examine the role of women in history and culture, Chicago changed her name after the death of her father and her first husband, choosing to disconnect from the idea of male dominated naming conventions. O’Keeffe had partially done the same by rejecting to be called with her husband’s last name, and preferring to be named Miss O’Keeffe throughout her life. By the 1970s, Chicago had coined the term “feminist art” and had founded the first feminist art program in the United States. Chicago’s work incorporates stereotypical women’s artistic skills, such as needlework, counterbalanced with stereotypical male skills such as welding and pyrotechnics. Chicago’s masterpiece is *The Dinner Party*, which is in the permanent collection of the Brooklyn Museum. A symbolic history of women in Western civilization, *The Dinner Party* presents thirty-nine elaborate place settings arranged along a triangular table for thirty-nine mythical and historical famous women. Virginia

and she is struggling to earn a living in New York with photographer Robert Mapplethorpe at the notorious Chelsea Hotel.<sup>63</sup> O’Keeffe’s popularity must have moved Smith’s dream of self-fulfillment as she starts her poem celebrating the artist as in a prayer, “great lady painter” (Smith 1). Small letters characterize the whole poem; even O’Keeffe’s name comes in lowercase to indicate that her greatness would not come from her name but from what the artist accomplished to do.<sup>64</sup> Smith imagines the painter in her old age who “goes out with a stick / and kills snakes” (3-4). Smith’s short lines are sharp-edged, essential, with no frills. In an elegant and balanced use of alliterative sounds, repetitions and run-on-lines, the poet recalls O’Keeffe’s stripping and simplification to better focus on color, form, and emotion. Drawing from the visionary and mystic actor, writer, and artist Antonin Artaud (1896-1948), Smith believes that modernity needs to find new myths, as we no longer participate in the same mysteries as in the past. Art demands a powerful metaphysical experience that overcomes time

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Woolf, Susan B. Anthony, Sojourner Truth, Eleanor of Aquitaine, and Theodora of Byzantium are among the guests. Georgia O’Keeffe is included into the third wing that represents the Age from the American to the Women’s Revolution. Beginning with Anne Hutchinson, the protagonists move on through the twentieth century to the final place that pays tribute to O’Keeffe. Although widely acclaimed by several art critics, Mullarkey focused on several particular plates in her critique of the work, specifically Emily Dickinson, Virginia Woolf, and Georgia O’Keeffe, stating that Chicago had been disrespectful to the women they depicted. She affirmed in fact Dickinson’s “multi-tiered pink lace crotch” was opposite to the woman it was meant to symbolize because of Dickinson’s extreme privacy. In addition, Woolf’s inclusion ignored the English author’s frustration at the public’s curiosity about the gender of writers, and O’Keeffe had similar thoughts, denying that her work had any gendered or sexual meaning. Notwithstanding that, the installation was successful and confirmed the important role O’Keeffe had played in Chicago’s idea of feminist cooperative art, as Amelia Jones defined it in *The “Sexual Politics” of The Dinner Party*.

<sup>63</sup> A narration of those early years in New York is recorded in Patti Smith’s memoir *Just Kids* (2010). Winner of the National Book Award for Nonfiction, the book tells the story of a young, desperately poor poet, Patti Smith, from southern New Jersey, who heads to New York to seek her fortune, nothing in her purse. Her mother assumes she follows her into waitressing. Instead Patti, though practical and a survivor, has her sights set not on slinging hash but on searching for immortality and beauty and magic. She has already recognized a divine succession of mythical poets—Blake, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Genet and the Beats—and she wants to join them. She has no real friends when she arrives in New York and no job prospects. In July 1967, she is not yet 21, helped by other drifters and hippies to find food and shelter, she gets a job working in a bookshop, and meets the ambitious Robert Mapplethorpe, the same age and just as poor. They take a Brooklyn apartment together. Smith tells the struggle to reach their artistic perspectives, recalls her difficulties to come to terms with Mapplethorpe’s homosexuality, and describes all the elements that made New York so exciting in the 1970s—the danger and poverty, the artistic seriousness and optimism, the sense that one was still connected to a whole history of great artists in the past. The reader feels to be part of this small community carefully observed by the media that made New York the cultural capital of the western world.

<sup>64</sup> The poem was first published in the collection *Babel* (1978). As Paula Rabinowitz underlines in “Icons of Feminism, Modernism, and the Nation,” Smith “sweetly” misspelled the name of the artist in “georgia o’keefe” (195). In the later collection *Early Work 1970-1979* from which I have drawn the poem, the painter’s name is correctly spelled “georgia o’keeffe” (48-49).

and space, or the usual limits of life and death. In Smith's popular slogan, "Stars can't shine without darkness" stands her hunger for life, her cosmic rigor, her Blakean attraction for opposites, for desired good because of an evil act. The poem sets up a powerful dramatic tension by alternately scaring and eliciting praising words. The words are straight and material, like the painter's subjects. Smith thus stresses O'Keeffe's modernist attitude and determination to "start anew, to strip to strip away what [she] had been taught" since a very young age: "she's no fool /started out pretty / pretty pretty girl // georgia o'keeffe / until she had her fill" (Smith 11-15). Playing with the words "still" and "life," alternating hollow and full things, living and dead elements, youth and old age, moving around the desert as a Native would do, Smith celebrates the iconic lady:

great lady painter  
what she do now  
stir dust bowl  
go and beat the desert  
snake skin skull  
go and beat the desert  
all life still (Smith 23-30)

Smith depicts the forms of an ordinary myth who "has been around forever" (21). O'Keeffe has been able to realize her dream of becoming an American artist still embodying what being American had meant through its primordial origins. This is an idea she painted in her canvas *Cow's Skull—Red, White, and Blue* (App. I.2.—Fig. 23), an illuminated work where O'Keeffe teased her colleagues in New York and in the avant-garde Europe, as she reports in her volume:

When I arrived at Lake George I painted a horse's skull—then another horse's skull and then another horse's skull. After that came a cow's skull on blue. In

my Amarillo days<sup>65</sup> cows had been so much part of the country I couldn't think of it without them. As I was working I thought of the city men I had been seeing in the East. They talked so often of writing the Great American Novel – the Great American Play – the Great American Poetry. I am not sure they aspired to the Great American Painting. [...] I think the Great American Painting didn't even seem a possible dream. [...] I knew the cattle country—and I knew that our country was lush and rich. . [...] They didn't even want to live in New York—how was the Great American Painting going to happen? So I painted along on my cow's skull on blue I thought to myself, "I'll make it an American painting. They will not think it great with the red stripes down the sides—Red, White and Blue—but they will notice it.

Smith honors the person who presents the American dream to the highbrow artistic circles in an ironical way thereby arising to transnational visibility.

O'Keeffe's message in fact reaches also poet Sujata Bhatt who translates it into her own poem "Cow's Skull—Red, White and Blue" (*The Stinking Rose* 24) that identifies the painter's idea truthfully and brutally:

There's something very right about it.

It's truthful, direct,  
to the point—but also awkward,  
ugly, brutal.

Imperfectly perfect.

Red blood.

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<sup>65</sup> O'Keeffe moved to Amarillo, Texas, as supervisor of drawing and penmanship in public schools in 1912. She held position through spring 1914. She was profoundly touched by the landscape, as her letters to her friend Anita Pollitzer still show.

White bones.

Blue sky. (Bhatt 1-8)

Bhatt moved to the United States in 1968 with her family from Pune, India. After graduating at the University of Iowa and working at the University of Victoria, Canada, she currently lives in Bremen, Germany. As a poet of many different cultures, in an interview reported in *The Poetry Archive* website, Bhatt talks about her mobility and its influence on her writing. Bhatt lets the readers into the “private and inner world” of making poetry where Gujarati and Indian childhood have connected her to as “the deepest layer of [her] identity.”<sup>66</sup> However, English has become the language she has spoken every day and which she has chosen to write in. This dual heritage has affected her work, most explicitly in her poem “Search for My Tongue” (Bhatt 63) which alternates between the two languages.

Cecil Sandten in her essay “Interhistorical and Intertextual process in the poetry of Sujata Bhatt” explains the complexities of English, its beauty, but also its colonial implications, conveyed in the moving ironies of poems like “A Different History” (Bhatt 37) and “For Nanabhai Bhatt in Prison” (18). Bhatt questions our mental mappings of the world and demonstrates that it is possible to live on both sides of it, trying to mediate as her poem “How Far East is it Still East?” (Bhatt 10) demonstrates. Bhatt musically blends her voice with Indian and American inflections, employing what Sandten defines as “organic poetry” or even “organic form.” In a note of her essay, quoting M.H. Abrams from *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (67), Sandten defines “organic poetry” drawing from neoclassic criticism. Opposite to mechanic form, here intended as poetry, organic form “is innate; it shapes as it develops itself from within” (Sandten 51). An “organic” poem is “like a growing plant which evolves by an internal energy into the organic unity which constitutes its achieved form” (Sandten 51). In non-verbal worlds of animals and plants, Bhatt finds a source of unity denied to humans except for

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<sup>66</sup> The interview is recorded at [www.poetryarchive.org/interview/sujata-bhatt-interview](http://www.poetryarchive.org/interview/sujata-bhatt-interview).

the young, as in her poem “The Stare,” (13) from her book *Monkey Shadows*, or for the old, like O’Keeffe. Her longing for unity makes Bhatt’s writing sensual. Her poems are full of all senses: the smell of garlic, the touch of bodies, the vibrant plumage of parrots. By borrowing colors from O’Keeffe and other women artists, Bhatt acknowledges that expressive language can split us from experience, but through the physical intensity of art we are brought back closer to it, so that “the word / is the thing itself” (“The Stare” 59-60), which echoes Williams’s “no ideas but in things.”

This transnational language has worked well in Bhatt’s understanding of O’Keeffe’s painting. She has read the strong meaning of those three colors, a clear reference to the colors of the USA flag. Chapter II of Bhatt’s *The Stinking Rose* opens with a revealing title, “New World Dialogues” (21). On its first page, Bhatt brings together three different quotations from Sitting Bull, Georgia O’Keeffe, and Fred Wah.<sup>67</sup> Her Indian spirit conveyed by the English language mediates the voices of a Native American, of an American with European roots, and of an Asian-American. Bhatt’s poem “Cow’s Skull—Red, White and Blue” (24) translates O’Keeffe’s understanding of the New World:

She understood the land.  
  
And when she left that place of dry heat  
  
she took a barrel full of bone

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<sup>67</sup> Fred Wah is a Canadian poet and novelist. He was born in 1939 in Swift Current, Saskatchewan to parents of Swedish and Chinese origin. He grew up in the West Kootenays in rural British Columbia where his parents owned and ran several Chinese-Canadian cafés. Wah studied Music and English and took an MA in Linguistics and Literature at SUNY Buffalo in 1967. From 1967-1989, he taught at Selkirk College and David Thompson University Centre, Nelson, while living in South Slokan, raising a family and writing more than a dozen books of poetry. They moved to Calgary in 1989, where he taught English and Creative Writing until his retirement in 2003. Currently Professor Emeritus at the University of Calgary, his work often focuses on his mixed-race history (*Breathin’ My Name with a Sigh* and *Waiting for Saskatchewan*). His collection of critical essays, *Faking it: Poetis and Hybridity*, he elaborated his long-standing interest in mixed-genre texts and racialized poetics. Socially involved in many activities of volunteer work as an editor or contributing editor of small, grass-roots magazines and presses that are the life-blood of Canada’s thriving literary culture, he also served as President of the Writers Union of Canada (2001-02) and worked on its Racial Minorities and Social Justice Committees for several years. Widely anthologized, his recent publications include two collections of poetry, *Sentenced to Light* (2008) and *is a door* (2009). *Scree: The Collected Earlier Poems, 1962-1991*, edited by Jeff Derksen, was published by Talonbooks in the fall of 2015. An up-to-date edition of *Music at the Heart of Thinking* is planned for 2016.

back to New York. (Bhatt 24-27)

The poem shares many aspects of Bhatt's biography of departures and arrivals, which are made even more evident in her poem "Your Sorrow" (20) where the image of bones is repeated to indicate that memories, at times, have distorted and "crooked" (5) the way we see the world:

But what if you change  
and your sorrow becomes  
your memory, a broken bone,  
a finger that heals strangely  
forever crooked for the world to see  
so even your thoughts don't match up – (Bhatt 1-7)

Bones are the land's memory. They might be too "truthful, direct, / to the point [...] awkward, / ugly, brutal. // Imperfectly perfect" (Bhatt 2-5). In these lines written before 1995, Bhatt foresees Leela Gandhi's alternative reading of anti-colonial struggle, constructing the history of transnational lifestyles, and modes of self-work in her *Affective Communities* (2005). According to Gandhi, there is a "minor" intimate style of being global, which she draws from Derrida's theory of friendship and proposes a model for facing the political implication of being global based on friendship, which she defines as a crucial resource for anti-imperialism and transnational collaboration. Focusing on dissident practices of gender, sexuality, prayer, and art, which often take the form of "moral imperfectionism," as articulated in her most recent book *The Common Cause* (2014)—where one should make oneself less rather than more—Gandhi theorizes what Bhatt and O'Keeffe have expressed in their affiliative and affective relationship.<sup>68</sup> Gandhi's articulation of her philosophical theory by departing from a meditation

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<sup>68</sup>Leela Gandhi is the author of *The Common Cause: Postcolonial Ethics and the Practice of Democracy, 1900-1955* (2014). The scholar reframes the way we think about some of the most consequential political events of the time and their related literatures. Gandhi examines moral imperfectionism as the result of the lost tradition of global democratic thought. Such reading offers to us as a key to envision a possible future for democracy. Gandhi defends democracy as a shared art of living on the other side of perfection.



on the poetic encounter between the Indian anti-colonial leader M.K. Gandhi and the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa in the troubled early twentieth-century period made me think of Bhatt’s dialogue with O’Keeffe. Bhatt saw in O’Keeffe’s organic, elemental, and humble subjects of her works the painter’s disposition to question the imperfect world she was living in. In the chorus of her poem, which is repeated three times, Bhatt changes the order of the addends by exchanging adjectives with their nouns; however, she keeps one phrase intact—“Red blood:”

Red blood.	Red blood.	Red sky, blue sky,
White bones.	White sky.	red blood
Blue sky. (6-8)	Blue bones. (13-15)	white bones, white sky – (21-23)

The repeated, fixed phrase “Red blood” may have two meanings that blend if we keep in mind Bhatt’s and consequently O’Keeffe’s vision: it indicates the strong bond that the land has established with the Native people, the Red Skin. The Natives have become the red-blooded people, to denote the entire human kind whose blood flowing through their veins has the same color. By playing with colors, which are here translated into playing with defying adjectives, Bhatt tells the history of the New World in manners that recall O’Keeffe’s, because the provocative message results from the simple interchange between these adjectives with the words blood, sky, and bones. O’Keeffe studied the land by gathering the scattered evidence of colonizers’ intrusive violent manners, by perceiving the various stages the land had come through. She reviewed the times when the Natives were living under a blue sky and the white bones were the natural result of the circle of life. She meditated on the times when the Natives saw their sky got pale and their bones stained with blue, like the color of beaten limbs. At the end, she recognized that the sky has turned red, blue, and white again, while the Natives were still there, red blood with white bones. This is a story that O’Keeffe wished to tell again and

again, also by taking that “barrel full of bones / back to New York” (Bhatt 26-27) to “the young men in America [who] could only think of Europe” (Bhatt 9-10).

In Bhatt’s “organic” poem—recalling Sandten’s definition—there are obviously no references to a further element present in O’Keeffe’s painting: in the foregrounded image of the white skull, critics have seen the shape of a Christian cross. The cow’s horns displayed like Jesus Christ’s arms, the black pole half-viewed from behind the skull, the two small cavities just above the eyeholes resembling two nails, and finally the blue sky similar to a hanging cloth between the red stage curtains of the drama of life are elements that other poets have interpreted instead in a more lyrical or mystical way, showing respect for the cults and traditions of the Hispanic communities. In Buckley’s poem “Pelvis and Moon / Pelvis III / Cow’s Skull – Red, White and Blue” (45), the lyrical tone is balanced by the simple, objective vision of the natural truths. Bones are “useful as any heart [...] to keep our vision poised” (5-7). Looking through them, as O’Keeffe used to do reproducing that perspective in her paintings, the poem helps us understand that there is “a blue that outlives us all” (Buckley 9) and that “there’s more sky than earth to deal with” (4). Buckley’s lines recap O’Keeffe’s words when she states “A [...] bone has always been useful to any animal that has it – quite as useful as a head I suppose.”

Quoting herself from the introduction to the Exhibition catalogue *An American Place* (1944), O’Keeffe reports later in *Georgia O’Keeffe*:

—what I saw through them—particularly the blue holding them up in the sun  
against the sky as one is apt to do when one seems to have more sky than earth  
in one’s world.

Buckley’s collection *Flying Backbone* is largely affected by O’Keeffe’s visions of bones like skulls and pelvises. This is witnessed by the long list of poems inspired by the subject: “Summer Days / Ram’s Head with Hollyhock,” inspired respectively by *Summer Days* (App. I.2.—Fig. 24) and *Ram’s Head with Hollyhock* (App. I.2.—Fig. 25); “Pelvis with Shadows and

the Moon,” inspired by *Shadow with Pelvis and Moon* (App. I.2.—Fig. 26); “Pelvis IV, (Oval with Moon),” inspired by *Pelvis IV* (App. I.2.—Fig. 27); “Pelvis with the Distance,” on *Pelvis with the Distance* (App. I.2.—Fig. 28); “Flying Backbone,” on *Flying Backbone* (App. I.2.—Fig. 29); “From the Faraway Nearby,” inspired by *From the Faraway Nearby* (see App. I.2.—Fig. 19); “Red Hills and Bones,” inspired by *Red Hills and Bones* (App. I.2.—Fig. 30).

Buckley’s interest for the subject is sided by the works of poets like Susan Howe’s “*Summer Days, a Painting by Georgia O’Keeffe*,” on *Summer Days* (see App. I.2.—Fig. 26), Erinn Batykefer with her “Horizontal Horse’s or Mule’s Skull with Feather,” stirred by *Horizontal Horse’s or Mule’s Skull with Feather* (App. I.2.—Fig. 31), Karen Rigby’s “Horse Skull with White Rose,” inspired by *Horse’s Skull with White Rose* (see App. I.2.—Fig. 17), Joanne Barrie Lynn’s “Cow’s Skull with Calico Rose,” inspired by *Cow’s Skull with Calico Roses* (App. I.2.—Fig. 32), Lyn Lifshin’s “Horses Skull with Pink Rose,” inspired by *Horse’s Skull with Pink Rose*, (see App. I.2.—Fig. 18), and by a number of not directly ekphrastic poems written by Kate Braid, for example poem “84,” and by C. S. Merrill’s, as in the case of poem “66.” The list continues with poems inspired by the series of paintings whose main subject is the pelvis bone. Outstanding compositions are Sujata Bhatt’s “Pelvis with Moon” and Virgil Suarez’s “Summer Departure #3—after Georgia O’Keeffe’s *Pelvis with Moon*,” both inspired by *Pelvis with Moon* (App. I.2.—Fig. 33); Francine Sterle’s “Pelvis I” and Denise Duhamel’s “Reminded of my Biological Clock—While Looking at Georgia O’Keeffe’s *Pelvis I*,” both inspired by the Pelvis series with Blue; Laura Kasischke’s “Red Hills and Bones” (see App. I.2.—Fig. 30), and one last poem by Cathy Song, “*From the White Place—for Georgia O’Keeffe, 1. Blue Bones: Ghost Ranch*” (see App. I.2.—Fig. 16). The study must mention but postpone an accurate analysis of a biography of O’Keeffe in poetry by Jessica Jacobs, published in May 2015. For further references, please consult the list of creative ekphrastic and not

ekphrastic compositions in the section of Works Cited, Primary Sources with Biographies of the Poets.

Susan Howe's poem "Summer Days, A Painting by Georgia O'Keeffe" was first published in the literary journal *Kansas Quarterly* (24), in the issue with the title "Georgia O'Keeffe and Other Women Artists" (1987). The poem was later included in the 1989 anthology *Harvest: Contemporary Mormon Poems* (193) and in the collection *Stone Spirits* (22) in 1997. Howe's poem blends the ekphrastic practice with the poet's deep interest in theoretical underpinnings and her approach to history. Howe's poetry is known for the innovative verse that crosses genres and disciplines, for its deconstructionist attitude toward language, and a disregard for conventional literary formalities. Drawing from early American history and primary documents, Howe has often interwoven quotations and images into her poems owed to her interest in the visual possibilities of language and painting. She earned a degree from the Boston Museum School of Fine Arts in 1961, and enjoyed some success with gallery shows in New York. Howe's first success as a poet came in the early 1970s. She has sometimes placed her verse upside-down, or crossed out parts of it, or let the words overlap one another, characteristics that may have to do with her early training as a visual artist. Some critics have likened her poems to paintings on the page and the large gaps between words have provided white spaces that convey as much meaning as the words themselves.

It is substantial that Howe chose *Summer Days* by O'Keeffe for her poem, the same painting that O'Keeffe chose as the cover picture of her autobiographical *Georgia O'Keeffe*. The first words that introduce O'Keeffe's volume are also emblematic and it is worth recalling them once again:

The meaning of a word—to me—is not as exact as the meaning of a color.  
Colors and shapes make a more definite statement than words. [...] I am often

amazed at the spoken and written word telling me what I have painted. I make this effort because no one else can know how my paintings happen.

Howe's work with poetry, with the "tangible presence of language" underlined by Stephen Paul Martin, helps us to move away from the tendency of considering poetry in abstractions. Howe lets us enter into the motion and fabric of a verbal space that has not been reduced to a mere zone of representation. She asks us to see and hear the shapes and sounds of the words instead of reading through them to what they supposedly refer. Defined by Bruce Campbell as "a kind of post-structuralist visionary," Howe knows her ability to mediate through language, personal, and universal consciousness. She leads her reader to consider history and its problems as well as its possibilities. Much of her work centers on themes of existence, remembering, and the unique position of the female gender in relation to history, the written word, and in this particular place, the shaped world. Whose skull have both O'Keeffe and Howe thus decided to depict? And what are the "Summer Days" they both refer to? Apparently, according to Howe, the skull at the center of the painting (and poem) is that "of an elk [...]—parched, cleaned / of flesh, whorls of brown and white space /where eyes and nostrils used to" (Howe 1-3). The elk has been one of the most important animals in the cultural history of a number of Native American tribes, including the Kootenai, Cree, Blackfeet, Ojibwa, Pawnee, and especially the Lakota, for whom the elk played a spiritual role in their society. At birth, for instance, Lakota males were given an elk's tooth to promote a long life since that was seen as the last part of dead elk to rot away. Howe writes in her poem:

The skull floats in the vacant / Sky, a mirage as deep as life, antlers  
earth-brown, darker along the curves.

The skull broods over the living  
flowers, the rest of the mirage [...] (7-11)

The skull “point[s] out / where things are and what we do / and do not know” (Howe 5-7), it “broods over the living (10). A sort of symbolic historical landmark, the elk’s skull represents the past, the mirage, the utopia, in one phrase, the American Dream still somehow alive in people’s imagination, but yet a mirage, because “Behind the skull and the flowers, the horizon /marks the limits” (15-16).

A poem that can be read next to Susan Howe’s and Sujata Bhatt’s writings is the first part of Song’s “*From the White Place for Georgia O’Keeffe*” with the title “Blue Bones: Ghost Ranch” (*Picture Bride* 72). Song here faces the transnational theme linked to the Native cultural tradition and the nomadic attitude that even Bhatt has meant to highlight in O’Keeffe’s life and work. Song, echoing O’Keeffe’s voice, tells Indian stories of water and bones, when at the end of summer, a metaphor to indicate the end of adulthood and the beginning of the old age, “the Indians perform / the procedure-of-the-body [...] with bones / dry like a shepherd’s eyes /searching the horizon for water / they introduce you to your body” (Song 28-35).

For a while, Song, Howe and O’Keeffe have imagined a utopic, positive, affective community, using Gandhi’s idea, where to think “our best thoughts” (Howe 5). Although, as Howe underlines in her poem, “boundaries [still] hold” (19), these artists dream the dream as they felt to “belong / to the mirage” (20-21):

[...] We want to see forever into  
summer, but boundaries hold.  
  
Brought back to the center, we belong  
to the mirage: above a brief flowering  
heart, behind our own faces, we feel  
  
eyeless sockets and the silent, imminent silent. (Howe 18-23)

In the incipit of Bhatt’s poem “Pelvis with Moon” (35), the poet quotes O’Keeffe’s words from the painter’s autobiography:

A pelvis bone has always been useful  
to any animal that has it—  
quite as useful as a head I suppose. (Bhatt 1-3)

As Bhatt draws on her Indian traditional symbols, the poet makes O’Keeffe’s world once again able to cross and go beyond geographic and cultural boundaries. Two are the images around which Bhatt builds the narration: a cow’s pelvis bone and a woman. The poem about the still nature of a bone through which we look at the living world suggests a story of life, or rather missed life. It is the time of the day when the blue of the sky slides slowly into grey and as Bhatt narrates, people start looking at things through a different perspective, probably that of an aged person who begins to consider that death is not so far away:

The desert sky when it’s blue sliding into grey  
and when it’s seen through a cow’s pelvis bone— (Bhatt 1-2)

The bone becomes the lens through which we look at life, at the past and at the future that lies beyond and behind it. The bone of a cow, a meaningful symbol for an Indian poet, reminds of a living and life carrier:

That cow gave birth, gave milk  
gave birth, gave birth—how many times? (Bhatt 3-4)

By using a distinguishing feature in her poetry, Bhatt repeats the concept of giving birth more times. Is it a device Bhatt uses to evoke the repeated series of paintings of pelvis bones that O’Keeffe realized from 1943 to 1947? Maybe. At that time, O’Keeffe was fifty-six years old. Stieglitz was far in New York and he would pass away in July 1946. Bhatt draws a neat picture: the desert sky, the greyish blue, the pelvis bone, the indifferent desert moon, “And a woman drawn to this dry /indifference—full of desert heat and cold. // A woman walking for miles, for days / grateful for the strength / of her pelvis bone” (8-12). Bhatt cannot avoid asking herself a question as if she were hearing the artist’s inner turmoil during her walks:

Does she think of birth?

Of death? What does she want?

She who feels the meaning of the sky,  
of the moon behind the pelvis bone—

What does she think? (Bhatt 13-17)

Bhatt shows us a middle-aged O’Keeffe who is dealing with her own past and her resolutions. As a woman who stated that she was “the sort of child that ate around the raisin on the cookie and ate around the hole in the doughnut saving either the raisin or the hole for the last and best,” had O’Keeffe really saved the best for the last? There is enough literature about O’Keeffe and her denied maternity in O’Keeffe’s biographies. Sarah Greenough explains that Stieglitz repeatedly rejected the idea of a child from O’Keeffe, while the artist seemed to have expressed her desire of becoming a mother more than once.<sup>69</sup> Bhatt listens to O’Keeffe’s invitation and goes beyond her represented world. The poet follows the scene with her eyes, in the attempt to seize the mystery of the artist, her unsolved questions that led her live a life with no biological, filiative relationships. Said’s idea of affiliations among modernist intellectual and artists is confirmed and emphasized by O’Keeffe’s nomadic spirit that Bhatt symbolizes through picturing the painter in her long and daily walks. In my redefinition of radicant artist, O’Keeffe has been able to provide for her want, which she compensated building a thick net of relationships, an imperfect but affective community that the poets themselves have continued to expand.

One further interesting point of view about the strong relation O’Keeffe established with the Southwestern land, the bones, and especially with the local nomadic people is provided by the work of Cuban-American poet, novelist and academic Virgil Suárez. The poem

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<sup>69</sup> Although in different ways, poets Kate Braid, Lyn Lifshin, and Denise Duhamel face the question of O’Keeffe’s missed maternity in their poems.



“Summer Departure #3—after Georgia O’Keeffe’s *Pelvis with Moon*” (2000) belongs to a series of poems Suárez wrote about departures in summer time. By the time Suárez was twelve years old, his family had already moved across the ocean twice—first from Cuba to Spain and then in 1974 from Spain to the United States. His childhood experiences have long influenced the themes of his works: family, ties, immigration, and exile are sometimes supported by the work of other artists, like Serbian-American poet Charles Simic<sup>70</sup> and Georgia O’Keeffe in this specific case:

In the reading room, under the spotlight,  
where a moth flutters against the bulb,  
I am reading Charles Simic’s poem ‘Bones’,  
the one where he says his roof is covered  
with pigeon bones, and he thinks he hears  
them, “the little skulls cracking against  
the tin,” and in front of me is my wife’s  
favorite O’Keeffe painting: *Pelvis with Moon*. (Suárez 1-8)

The cracking of pigeon bones on a roof suggested by Simic’s lines blends with the reproduction of O’Keeffe’s *Pelvis with Moon*—the favorite of the poet’s wife—hung on an invisible wall. Suárez cannot avoid “ponder[ing]” about “this business of bones” (9-10) and the story they carry along with themselves. From Suárez’s Cuban memories, the figures of a cow and an

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<sup>70</sup> Charles Simic is a Serbian-American poet. He is the author of many books of poetry but he is also an essayist, translator, editor and professor emeritus of creative writing and literature at the University of New Hampshire, where he has taught for thirty-four years. Winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1990 for his book of prose poems *The World Doesn’t End* (1989), finalist for the National Book Award for Poetry in 1996 for his collection *Walking the Black Cat*, Simic was elected a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets in 2000. In his essay “Poetry and Experience,” Simic writes about the role of images in our lifelong experience and memories. Poetry must tell what we see and feel and we should never “never get tired of reiterating, [as it] is not something that already exists in the world, but something that needs to be rediscovered almost daily.” In the book *The Uncertain Uncertainty: The “Becoming,” “Rhizom[atic]” and Differan[t] Poetry of Charles Simic* (2003), Simic once again shares O’Keeffe’s rhizomatic and radican attitude that this study intends to underline in the global process of contemporary artistic and poetic production.

uncle, who is the protagonist of another poem about migrancy by Suárez, “The Stayer” (69), emerge. Suárez remembers the cow whose milk he used to drink the milk:

[...] A cow grazed  
here once, not any cow, but the one my  
uncle owned, the one whose milk we drank  
as children, its frothy kiss on our lips, bones  
of angels, bones left to the bereft, open  
wings, a tent risen in homage to solitude (Suárez 13-17)

The memory of this animal and of what remains of it, “this idea of bones, bones, hollow vessels” (Suárez 23), provides the key to understanding and explaining the bonds we establish with things in our mobility of body and relationships. Bones become symbols of rebirth, of life in death, as they “wait [...] for light / to fill them, with the intention of “tell[ing] their stories” (Suárez 24-25) when time allows.

## II.8. Radicant Connecting Emotions

Living and still natures merge in the temporality of poetry and in the space of painting. Quoting the words of American publisher of literature and art Egmont Arens, the affecting—and I add, recalling Gandhi—affective relationships between the visual artists and the poets have created “the hieroglyphics of a new speech between those of us who [have found] all the spoken languages too clumsy” (quoted in Dijkstra 160). This chapter has tried to show the extent of these relationships inspired by the visual elements produced by O’Keeffe and their renderings into poetic words. It also aimed at looking at the painter’s and poets’ works by means of multiple, radicant perspectives, by avoiding the focus on a purely literary or artistic study, and embracing instead the tradition begun by William Carlos Williams and his idea of “no ideas but in things.” Williams, who was deeply influenced by the visual artists in New

York in the 1910s and 1920s, insisted that poetry had to focus on objects rather than mere concepts, on actual things rather than abstract characteristics of things. The simple wording of any object creates a visualized idea in our minds—we form an image of the thing. This issue is further analyzed in chapter III “Painting Poems on Human Artifacts.” This new speech in poetry—Arens’s “hieroglyphics”—has extended artistic expression beyond the realm of painting and writing. The words as facts, the direct linguistic equivalents to the visual object, the clear “focusing on an element of reality, and stripping it of all inessential detail” (Dijkstra 168), have succeeded to “raise the place we inhabit to such an imaginative level that it shall have currency in the world of the mind” (Williams quoted in Dijkstra 128-129). The authoritarian affiliative system that Stieglitz had started in New York in the first decades of the twentieth century evolved into what I defined as O’Keeffe’s radicant system of relationships that the painter managed to create autonomously. O’Keeffe had known the ruling style of Stieglitz, as an interview to the *New York Times Magazine* reports on December 11, 1949: “he was the leader or he didn’t play. It was his game and we all played along or left the game” (quoted in Dijkstra 160). O’Keeffe had learned to appreciate the possibilities of expression offered in the creative progressive artistic circles of New York, but worked hard to create her own “truly American way of looking at things” (Dijkstra 160). In contrast to Stieglitz’s perfect domineering fixity, O’Keeffe proposed a model of imperfect nomadic attitude that allowed her to dismantle and dislocate her activities as well as her affections. This mobility, here defined with the expression radicant attitude, has touched and moved artists of diverse fields as well as different languages and nationalities. O’Keeffe’s “transnational” language made of essential, simple things functions as a point of contact that has made affective communities possible. The subject of these utopic communities, driven by affiliations, includes “affective singularity, anarchist relationality, and other-directness” (Gandhi 20) that O’Keeffe passionately encouraged.

The “subjective insufficiency” (Blanchot quoted in Gandhi 24) that O’Keeffe experienced everywhere she lived, in particular in New Mexico, inspired her “openness to the risky arrival of unknown, asymmetrical others and socialities that [were] outside the domain of her safety and security, such as home, nation, community, race, gender, sex, skin and species” (Ratti 45). This predisposition to the unknown and her plural visions led the painter to what Gandhi defines as “genuine cosmopolitanism”—that intellectual and aesthetic inclination to understand and participate in the other in the world in the context of friendship (31). Borrowing from the title and idea of Luisa Passerini’s essay’s “Connecting Emotions. Contributions from Cultural History” (2009), O’Keeffe and the poets I have discussed have established “unusual connections between different disciplines and between various objects [...]—including emotions—on the one hand, and texts and contexts on the other” (Passerini 117). At first attracted by the visual work of the painter and her represented nature, the poets have recognized a common area of work based on shared simple elements that have blurred the boundaries between the different media of expression. These connecting subjects have become “connecting emotions” that strengthened the collaboration among arts, and nourished the radicant spirit of O’Keeffe’s production.

## Chapter III

### Painting Poems on O’Keeffe’s Human Artifacts

*There is so much  
that matters in the world.  
She described a jade knife,  
curving blade handle  
that was something  
one remembered.  
It mattered.  
This special life  
in things  
O’Keeffe likened  
to wind.*

C. S. Merrill, “64”

#### III.1. O’Keeffe and the Poetry of Things

O’Keeffe characterized with a precise philosophy her abstract paintings, still-life paintings—of apples, leaves, flowers, shells, trees, rocks, and all those paintings on simple human Artifacts that surrounded her—ladders, crosses, churches, windows, barns, houses, and doors. She reinvented the still-life genre through a synthesis of Eastern thought and Western style of painting by using magnified objects and a new language of color. Elizabeth Hutton Turner’s essay published in the volume *The Poetry of Things* (1999) explores in depth O’Keeffe’s original contribution to still-life painting and provides an important definition of the artist’s work that is fundamental to the articulation of my own argument: O’Keeffe exercised a radicant influence on contemporary poetry. The leading motif of her own long career reminds of William Carlos Williams’ poetics, which was deeply involved in the new visual arts movements of the 1910s and 1920s. In *Cubism, Stieglitz, and the Early Poetry of William Carlos Williams* (1978), Bram Dijkstra reveals the intertwined relations between writers and painters in this revolutionary period, shows the role of art on Williams’s early writings, and in return, the influence of Williams’s work on painters like Georgia O’Keeffe, Charles Demuth,

and Marsden Hartley.<sup>71</sup> Artists often emulated Stieglitz's experimental lessons in focusing on the object itself, delineating it as precisely as possible and letting it represent by itself the moment of perception. O'Keeffe told Sue Davidson Lowe<sup>72</sup> that Dijkstra's volume was "the only book about Stieglitz worth reading" (Lowe ix).

Dijkstra speaks about poems as "canvas[es] of broken parts" (49) to underline the influence of Stieglitz's visual artists. For instance, the objective art produced by Demuth, Hartley, and O'Keeffe is affiliated with Williams's close identification with real life, as for example, in "January Morning: Suite" (Williams 100). In the poet's conversation with Edith Heal,<sup>73</sup> Williams reminds of "what Egmont Arens called, in reference to Stieglitz's photographs 'the hieroglyphics of a new speech, between those of us who find all the spoken languages too clumsy'" (Dijkstra 160). Williams wanted poetry to be a still life in words that spoke of life through the materials of the real world, Dijkstra suggests. This immediately resulted in a new way of looking at things, in which American artists found their own original expression. Williams, "attuned as he was to visual experience, [...] set out to adapt [these hieroglyphics] to his own purpose" (Dijkstra 160) and started a stream of object-related poetry whose echoes persist in the poems under analysis here.

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<sup>71</sup> Marsden Hartley is himself the author of a poem "Perhaps Macabre (to Georgia O'Keeffe)" inspired by O'Keeffe's *Cow's Skull, Red, White and Blue*. The poem is included in Hartley's large collection *Selected Poems* (1945).

<sup>72</sup> Sue Davidson Lowe is the author of *Stieglitz: A Memoir/Biography* published in 1983.

<sup>73</sup> William Carlos Williams and Edith Heal. *I Wanted to Write a Poem*, New York: New Directions Paperbook, 1977.

### III.2. A Ladder to the Moon

*There is a ladder:  
The ladder is always there  
hanging innocently  
close to the side of the schooner.  
We know what it is for,  
we who have used it.*

Adrienne Rich, "Diving into the Wreck"

O'Keeffe's painting *Ladder to the Moon* (App. I.3.—Fig.1) is among the artist's most surreal and dreamlike canvases. The twilight image of a ladder floating high above the Jemez Mountains<sup>74</sup> is based on the vision the artist put in the following words in her autobiography:

At the Ranch house there is a strong handmade ladder to the roof and when I first lived there I climbed it several times a day to look at the world all round. [...] One evening I was waiting for a friend and stood leaning against the ladder looking at the long dark line of the Pedernal. The sky was a pale greenish blue, the high moon looking white in the evening sky. [...] all ready to be put down the next day.

O'Keeffe pictures a large handmade wooden ladder leaned against an outer wall of the patio from where it rises up as if suspended in the turquoise sky. The pitch-black background is lit by a pearl colored half-moon. Some viewers, photographer John Loengard among them, see the painting as an objective representation of the painter's immediate surroundings at Ghost Ranch, thus trusting the artist's voice. Other viewers and critics, like Elizabeth Duvert, instead read the painting as a religious work, a transcendent vision that goes beyond sensory experience meant to underline the transitory moment in O'Keeffe's life at the age of seventy-one.

In Pueblo culture, ladders have long carried the symbolic step-by-step link between

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<sup>74</sup> The Jemez Mountains form the southernmost tip of the Rocky Mountains that stretch over 2,000 miles north into Canada. They are a large area of undisturbed forested wilderness, with rocky peaks, meadows, mountain streams, lakes and waterfalls, and only occasional houses and villages. Because of their past volcanic activity, there are hot springs, sulphurous vents and a caldera, which is a ring of hills comprising the remains of several long-extinct volcanoes. All the mountains form part of the 1.6 million acre Santa Fe National Forest.

Mother Earth and the cosmos, nature and heaven. Robinson supports this symbolic reading and describes *Ladder to the Moon* as a self-portrait of the artist in her later years:

The images are all of transition: the ladder itself implies passage from one level to another; the moon is cut neatly in half by the bold slicing light, halfway between full and new; and the evening sky is in flux, still pale along the line of the horizon, shading into deep azure night at the top of the canvas. (495)

In New Mexico, ladders take to flat adobe roofs, magical places that allow people to enjoy the sunrise and the sunset, and to see beyond conventional horizons. Poets seem to have climbed that specific stairway and contemplated O’Keeffe’s original views from this perspective.

*Ladder to the Moon* has inspired Iman Mersal’s “Ladder to the Moon” (2008), Karen Ethelsdatter’s “On Seeing a Print of Georgia O’Keeffe’s *Ladder to the Moon*” (2002) and Christopher Buckley’s “Ladder to the Moon” (2010). The three poems are connected by one single image but produce three different visions. Mersal’s poem opens to an intimate, private relationship where the agents are the poet, a painting, and a particular moment of the poet’s life. Ethelsdatter’s poem envisions a reflection of a familiar setting with a kitchen and a calendar hung on a wall showing O’Keeffe’s painting on the January page. Buckley’s poem is a deep meditation in O’Keeffe’s voice, while she is standing on the roof of the adobe looking at the world around her.

The Egyptian-Canadian poet Iman Mersal writes in Arabic. Immigrated to Boston in 1998, she moved to Edmonton, Canada, with her family in 1999 to teach Arabic literature and Middle Eastern and African Studies at the University of Alberta. Her poetry records with extreme openness the imperfections, the critical moments, but also the unexpected opportunities of our precarious lives. Her voice is that of an assertive, determined woman who takes the floor to show the critical and crucial times of her existence and the emotional struggle they cause by using a spare, austere style, a simple and clear lexicon, and a familiar tone



(Marchi 315).<sup>75</sup> Mersal's prose poem recalls O'Keeffe's style. The artist's line and the poet's voice are plural and movable, far from any sentimental form, attracted only by their own eccentric subjects. Mersal speaks of relocations, sense of belonging, and adjustment. In "A Ladder to the Moon," the speaking voice asserts to understand the whole painted scene: the green background, the floor, the walls, even the ladder resting on that surreal "green emptiness" (Mersal 2). She even understands "the courage to climb" (3) that ladder to confirm "that no one will survive the damage" (4) of this existence, implying that it is always better to dare rather than hesitate. However, according to that narrative voice, "Georgia O'Keeffe's moon" (5) unsettles the scene:

But, what is Georgia O'Keeffe's moon doing in her painting?

A meaningless moon,

it's not even fit to be a window facing a garden in an asylum. (Mersal 5-7)

In our conversation, Mersal narrated the intimate story behind this composition: it begins with a young woman in a hospital looking at a book, the gift of a doctor, in which some lines on the side of each painting tell the history of American art. The woman is not American. She speaks the language little. The doctor knows that images speak a universal language and gives the woman a book she can understand and help her overcome the limited horizons of her hospital room. The young woman realizes that the surreal ladder suspended in the green/turquoise void on one page symbolizes our common path to death. All the same, she cannot understand the reason for painting a moon, since she sees no hope in her future. This "meaningless moon" becomes "a window" that faces an inaccessible garden in an asylum. This is how Mersal throws us violently back into reality. She abandons the vision of a universal abstraction to ask an

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<sup>75</sup> Lisa Marchi discusses Mersal's poetry in her essay "Dis/Equilibri: il nodo genere-potere nella poesia araba diasporica" (2015). Marchi introduced Mersal at the poetry reading and discussion "Writing on the threshold: poètes migrants ou poètes errants?" at the University of Trento on May 28, 2014 during the series of seminars organized by Semper, Seminario Permanente di Poesia coordinated by Pietro Taravacci and Francesco Zambon.

intriguing question: has the moon slipped in without the painter's permission? The moon, like hope, is out of reach though its presence remains visible and continues to sneak into our lives. The mobile search for a better place, both on earth or on some faraway land after life reconnects the painter, the poet, and the viewer/reader.

Although Mersal does not use poetry for political purposes, she recognizes its pedagogical function. The ekphrastic practice extends this function also to art. Through a reciprocal recognition with the painter, the poet pierces the darkness and emptiness in the attempt to keep the courage to climb the precarious steps of existence. Mersal's private research of herself, after her displacement from her native country, where she was educated and grown, recalls Judith Butler's words:

[...] when we are dispossessed from a place, or a community, we may simply feel that we are undergoing something temporary, that mourning will be over and some restoration of prior order will be achieved. But maybe when we undergo what we do, something about who we are is revealed, something that delineates the ties we have to others, that shows us that these ties constitute what we are, ties or bonds that compose us. It is not as if an "I" exists independently over here and then simply loses a "you" over there, especially if the attachment to "you" is part of what composes who "I" am. (*Precarious Life* 22)

The doctor established a radicant, affective bond with his/her patient, the young woman by giving her the book, so that the aching person can restore her Self and the Other. The protagonist of the poem keeps climbing with courage, and establishes new relations and perspectives in her journey. There is no specific destination or goal, but a simple desire to continue moving on, recognizing cracks of hope and truth in a shared sense of related existential community.

Mersal's same urgency not to be afraid of climbing the rungs of the existential ladder

is shared by Karen Ethelsdatter's "On Seeing a Print of Georgia O'Keeffe's *Ladder to the Moon*." The setting here is domestic: a kitchen wall with the calendar of a new year, and a new millennium: "The January picture is Georgia O'Keeffe's *Ladder to the Moon*" (Ethelsdatter 4). These reproductions of famous paintings on calendars are among the most popular objects in the houses of average American families and O'Keeffe has long been a highly marketed artist, who has also served as a role model for feminists who admired her pursuit of an independent career at a time when it was not easy for a woman to have one.<sup>76</sup> According to Eisler, O'Keeffe "gloried in both the money and the publicity of commissions" (469), proposing one modern way to let her name resonate in the world of arts in order not to end in the oblivion of many past (and contemporaries) women artists (see Linda Nochlin's essay "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?").

If the question about why writing one more biography of O'Keeffe when others have been there before is natural, I have asked myself why so many poems may still nourish and add to the affection and influence of this artist. One answer is simple: as biographer Hogrefe underlined, we are all looking for "a slightly different point of view" (quoted in Glueck). Still commenting on the fascination with the painter, O'Keeffe's dealer in New York Robert Miller asserted, "Let them make calendars and postcards, what the hell. Let it all hang out. She was a unique national treasure, and she sent out a message over her long life, which was that she went her own way" (quoted in Glueck). I add that, in this precarious moment we still need to be inspired by women whose determination and strength are admirable and sought-after.

Ethelsdatter's perspective is similar to a propitiatory ceremony. The poet, faithful to her liturgical style, on the first day of the year, hangs the new calendar:

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<sup>76</sup> In 1987, one year after O'Keeffe's death, the affective community that the radicant artist had been able to establish, Callaway Arts & Entertainment was ready to launch their first series of calendars with Georgia O'Keeffe's "One Hundred Flowers." After unexpected, successful sales, Calendars have become a repeat business and figures still correspond to O'Keeffe's audience. The O'Keeffe estate, which is "a royalty participant" in the marketing ventures, participates with the constant publishing of books and biographies about the artist.

On the first of the first month of the new millennium,  
the year 2000, I hang the calendar for the new year,  
on my kitchen wall.

The January picture is Georgia O’Keeffe’s “Ladder to the Moon” (1-4)

The rite is simply accomplished. A quick look at the painted subject: “The sky is a field of deep green, / surely a field of growing things (5-6). Ethelsdatter focuses on a mystical vision that resides in the simple idea of spiritual nourishment for the human soul dwelling in heaven, in a marriage between the earth and the sky. A human artifact like a “ladder [...] suspended, floating vertically between earth & a half / moon” (Ethelsdatter 7-8) is the only means to reach the unknown recesses of the mind. Both the ground and the furthest sky dwell into “an uneven band of darkness” (10) between which the body struggles. Ethelsdatter’s next move is to reach that “that first rung of the ladder” (12). The question is how:

How to reach for that first rung of the ladder...

Then how to climb it...

Then how to stretch from the top rung

till I reach that half-hidden moon...

These are tasks of the dream. (12-16)

The oneiric setting of the painting meets with the early morning cocoon-like atmosphere of a New Year’s Day. With thoughts that sound like common New Year’s first resolutions, Ethelsdatter affectionately provokes us and, similarly to Mersal’s poem, uses her lines to give a lesson, a task. The unknown realm of dreams belonging to imagination allows further goals, or possibilities. Unlike Mersal, Ethelsdatter instead considers the presence of a “half / moon” (Ethelsdatter 7-8), whose image is reproduced by splitting the compound word in two lines. Furthermore, the “half-hidden moon” (9) that the poet wishes to reach suggests the painter’s wish to always chase the unknown to overcome our limits, and thus dare with courage to move

on, as in Mersal's message.

Buckley's "Ladder to the Moon" (33) uses the monologue—to "trust the artist first," as emphasized by Phil Leider—to synthesize the poetic array of things that O'Keeffe often used to celebrate the world and show the meditated exposure to O'Keeffe's works and thoughts as explained in *Flying Backbone* introduction:

I began to look at the work of Georgia O'Keeffe at the end of 1974. [...] After a while, her voice/vision began to seep into my mind, into that place that makes and orders images, that finds words, phrases and lines for them. There was an elemental correspondence between O'Keeffe's images and a view I sometimes had of the world, and I began to think about a poem that might take up, tangentially, her ideas and vision. [...] Finally, in the summer of 1979, [...] eleven poems came in a flash, like a dam breaking. (8-9)

The poet, "a little mysticall[y]" (Buckley 9) inspired, tells us he heard O'Keeffe speak to him and describes O'Keeffe's work from a distance through a monologue. As Buckley's poems easily found their ways on literary journals and books, the radicant effect of O'Keeffe's work continued to expand. A seven-year long process brought Buckley to publish *Blossoms and Bones: On the Life & Work of Georgia O'Keeffe* (1988), one year after the artist's death, and offer an immediate and powerful example of the influence he received from O'Keeffe. Buckley "wanted to avoid that kind of poem whose slim virtues resided only in esoteric information and detail. [He] wanted a truly human poem grounded in an accessible visual and thoughtful landscape" (Buckley 11); his "persona poems" (11) share Jan Garden Castro's idea about "O'Keeffe's determination to assert the real, as opposed to the symbolic nature of each object" (quoted in Buckley 12). However, Buckley is also exemplary of Mitchell's lesson, in that he teaches his readers and himself how to see beyond O'Keeffe's interest in things. He emphasizes O'Keeffe's interest in relations, "whatever force they might have in common" (Buckley 13) of

color, line, shape, light, life-force, or among human beings, and sharply differentiates between those who create art and those who are called to criticize it:

This approach is often true for artists—they have their antennae, their satellite dish, trained to receive information, while certain art critics or art historians who have already figured “it” out, are out to prove something. (13)

This twofold attention is evident in his “Ladder to the Moon.” The title reflects the attention for things and the entire first ten-line stanza proves evidence of this bond with elemental subjects in O’Keeffe’s painting. “The ragged peaks of the Pedernal” (Buckley 3), the roof, “horse skull, pelvis, shell—(8) are the shapes through which both artist and poet intend to describe the wonder and “the wideness” (10) of the surrounding world.

A shorter four-line stanza divides the composition. Intrusively, “half a moon hangs high and white” (Buckley 11). It is hard to say whether it looks more like a “blossom or hull beyond your feet” (12). It is “Always something glimmering above you.” (13) Buckley’s question, similarly posed by Etheldatter, is “how to touch it to be sure” (14) that this moon really exists. The answer, explained in the last ten-line stanza, comes with the image of fluent working hands, special tools through which the poet “make[s] something of the sky’s blue-green /neetle” (Buckley 16-17). With their “invisible bones” (17), the painter’s hands “get us from heart to mind” (18) allowing the human being to find ways to elevate themselves and catch sight of wider horizons.

One further striking image is where O’Keeffe envisions “a fitness of things” (Buckley 19) and anthropomorphic human artifacts in the shape of a ladder:

There is a fitness of things, and,  
as I see it, a lean body on two good arms,  
and tonight this ladder to the moon—(Buckley 19-21)

A ladder, a lean body of wood on two long, good arms can lead to explore and discover things

“out of this life” (Buckley 25) like the moon, “this pure saddle of light floating / down a breath-thin line” (22-23).

After fifty-two published poems about O’Keeffe that take into account the history of the artist’s body of work, and investigate on what she was thinking at the time of its creation, Buckley invites us to trust the artist: the objects she depicted “shine in [...] contexts” (Buckley 19). Buckley asserts his preference for “erring on the artist’s side, for that would at least force us back to the work itself instead of some posturing and postulating about the work which is at least once removed from the process and the actual object” (19). O’Keeffe spent time writing and talking about her art—many poems analyzed in this study are indebted to her own words. In Buckley’s opinion, it is nonsensical and preposterous to disregard her own remarks as critics and theorists often used to do. As James Craft pointed out “one easily finds in O’Keeffe what one needs and then formulates her art and self to the shape of one’s vision” (quoted in Buckley 17). This is exciting and dangerous at the same time and actually complicates the discourse that this study has had the intention to do.

O’Keeffe, who lived the revolutionary century of Freudian, and after that, Lacanian artistic and literary criticism, still represents a bottomless source of inspiration for academic and theoretical speculation. This study, indebted to Buckley’s observations, looks at O’Keeffe’s radicant influence in the world of art and literature from the artists’ points of view considering her art as art, with its own aesthetic goals and impulse. Not interested in advancing theories about her or/and their works, poets have written to engage with her perspective and build a relational aesthetics—what I have been calling a *radicant* quality—that they have wished to share.

### III.3. The Crosses of the *Penitentes*

*Nails, planks and type O blood are set  
upon wooden tables facing, it is decreed  
the sacred mountain range to the Southwest*

Religious architecture and symbols often captured O’Keeffe’s attention: she loved documenting the architecture of the surrounding landscape. Drohojowska-Philp’s biography recalls O’Keeffe’s wonder at the unsettling appearance of a *morada*, a chapel belonging to the *Penitente* Brotherhood, a lay confraternity of Spanish-American Roman Catholic men active in Northern and Central New Mexico and Colorado (Drohojowska-Philp 263). Behind the chapel, O’Keeffe saw a rough wood cross that was one meter and eighty centimeter high. Built by the *Penitentes* on the hills, the cross stood out against Taos Mountain profile, providing immediate inspiration to the painter. The paintings related to this vision are *Black Cross with Red Sky* (App. I.3.—Fig. 2), *Black Cross with Stars and Blue* (App. I.3.—Fig. 3), and *Grey Cross with Blue* (App. I.3.—Fig. 4). Instead, *Black Cross, New Mexico* (App. I.3.—Fig. 5) was painted after a cross on the hills of Cameron, in Arizona, that hit O’Keeffe for the majesty of the vast distance perception. The optical contrasts played by the different proportions of natural and human elements offered material for her work. These objects reflected the important role of Hispanic culture and of the Catholic Church in the country. She wrote in her autobiography: “I saw the crosses so often—and often in unexpected places—like a thin dark veil of the Catholic Church spread over the New Mexico landscape.”

O’Keeffe first displayed her crosses in February 1930 at Stieglitz’s gallery *An American Place*. This is the time when she was mourning her brother Alexis, died after pulmonary complications due to the effects of toxic gases inhaled during the war. The four painted wood crosses were thus charged with further meaning. She decided to share the symbolic implications of her subject, which she knew from her attendance of Catholic services in Madison (Drohojowska-Philp 276), and chose to place it in a mystical setting. The exhibition also revealed the impact that the Southwestern world had already left on O’Keeffe during the previous summer of 1929. Writer, friend, and civil rights activist Herbert J. Seligmann



immediately observed and recognized the profound impact that ancestral Native spirit was having on O’Keeffe over the Catholic mysticism that crosses originally inspired (Eldredge 180).

The analysis of the poems related to this artifact intends to focus on this double inspiration. The first poem is Buckley’s “Black Cross with Stars and Blue” (50), which bears the same title of the painting. The first stanza introduces the mystical aura of the setting evoked in O’Keeffe’s painting: “near planets,” “undistanced stars” and a bright corridor studded with “other worlds” (Buckley 2-4) overwhelm the spectator who observes the giant show from below. With eyes pointed up, interactive viewers send their secret wishes and count the stars imagining great animation in the celestial sphere:

And looking up,  
we secretly call out  
to four or five  
wishing with an absent mind,  
supposing an unfettered drifting off. (Buckley 6-10)

Lowering the gaze, we realize that the land is but “a parochial place” (Buckley 11). The Greek word *παροικία* means “sojourning in a foreign land.” The similar *πάροικος*, a compound of *παρά*, “beside, by, near” and *οἶκος* “house” means “dwelling beside, stranger, sojourner.” In Latin, *paroecia* means “close to the house, those who are not its dwellers” and indicates the stranger who happens to live among the local dwellers. At the time of Jesus, the Jewish formed a *paroikìa*, a community of errant, wandering people. The *New Testament*, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, uses this word to describe this wandering community of people: “For we have not here a lasting city, but we seek one that is to come” (Hebrews 13:14). Equally, the first Christian communities knew that their final homeland was not on this place: “Dear friends [...] as foreigners and exiles” (1 Peter 2:11). Buckley’s “parochial place” defines neither a community

of people living around a place of worship, nor a territorial unit. It rather better describes a community of people who are strangers in this world, wandering and longing for a different homeland, who are radicant rather than deeply rooted. This sense of community is emphasized by the poet's use of the possessive adjective "our" and the collective pronoun "us" (14-15). Introduced by the adversative "But" (11), Buckley imagines O'Keeffe's voice telling about the worldly nature of these dwellers who, in front of this wonder, could not but make conjectures about other worlds' realms:

But this is a parochial place  
where mountains halt  
before the azure reach  
of sky or thought, where our feet  
bring us to conjecture  
among the sand and sagging bones  
of earth. (Buckley 11-17)

The crosses that stud the skyline frame the visionary thoughts and remind us that "Clearly, this life is / staked to the body" (Buckley 18-19). These human artifacts, "these dark markers remind us / of all that's driven through / the simple fiber of our desire" (Buckley 20-22). The crossing of organic material, the "simple fiber," and incorporeal "desire" recreate the mystical blend O'Keeffe had made by juxtaposing her crosses against the mountains. Buckley's choice for the words "fiber" and "desire" has a particular catch for their sound as well as for their intrinsic meanings. Fiber means in fact both a thread-like structure forming part of the muscular, nervous, connective, or other tissue in the human or animal body, as well as the moral character of a person, its bloody temperament, thus the texture of their desires.

Buckley's last stanza again plays with words and relates to the word "cross" only at the end. First used in the title as a noun, Buckley uses derivatives of the word, as in the preposition

“across” (25) and the verb “cross” (27) forcing the reader not to forget the initial image he provided in the poem title. Similarly to O’Keeffe, the cross is seen in its diverse perspectives and meanings. Through an astronomic vision of the earth compared in the quotation below to “one bright mote blown / across the splintery plains of space” (24-25), Buckley voices O’Keeffe’s transcendental attitude to blend physical laws with supernatural thoughts:

And although we’ve seen the earth  
as one bright mote blown  
across the splintery plains of space,  
all our stars, and so much blue,  
still cross our hearts. (23-27)

Buckley’s “Black Cross, New Mexico” (34) is on *Black Cross, New Mexico*. The same painting has inspired Ellen Bryant Voigt’s poem “Wormwood: the Penitents” (1994). While Buckley’s monologue is a description of the painting from within its composition, Bryant Voigt’s interior monologue pronounced by a hypothetical penitent offers a historical and anthropological picture of New Mexico. O’Keeffe herself in her autobiographical volume created an ekphrastic self-translation of her work telling her reader about encountering these wood crosses during her late-night walks in the desert. As for all her subjects, the shapes are magnified, while simplified details underscore their essential beauty. O’Keeffe painted and wrote about the cross just as she saw it: “big and strong, put together with wooden pegs,” and behind it, “those hills . . . [that] go on and on—it was like looking at two miles of gray elephants. [...] Painting the crosses was a way of painting the country.” These words have inspired and provided narrative material for Buckley’s composition, whose second stanza reports the artist’s text slightly changed to fit metric feet and rhythm:

The cross is broad, strong,  
driven together by four pegs.

[...]

Painting it is a way  
of painting this country  
as I felt it

in its penitent glow – (Buckley 14-22)

Buckley perceives O’Keeffe’s concern for the past, present, and future of the land. The “penitent glow” (22) that pervades the painting is highlighted by the contrast between “the blue and ash-like / lift of the evening” (Buckley 2-3) against the blocking out “black” (1) of the cross on the hills. The hills themselves are “evenly shaped / as souls edged blue-grey / and bright as embers / while the flat flame / of the horizon holds” (Buckley 9-13). Images of “burned or burning” land (Buckley 23) capture the viewer’s eyes and mind. The country appears silent and bent under the weight of these crosses, helpless to change its history:

it’s long been too late  
to save this land  
for anything except  
what’s left of the light. (Buckley 24-27)

Bryant Voigt’s “Wormwood: The Penitents” is a dramatic monologue in the form of a sonnet, and offers a different example of ekphrastic composition. The poet does not make any direct reference to O’Keeffe’s *Black Cross, New Mexico*, but rather works on the feeling and overwhelming sense of isolation and heaviness that the painting provokes. The solid black cross that consumes almost the entire canvas is located on purpose on an overseeing landscape with hills. Darkness and an edged glare dominate the scene. Voigt’s perception of O’Keeffe’s vision is translated by using words like “bare” (6), “crude, rigid, nothing human” (8), and “dead” (9). The most evident correlation to the painting is the reference to “a cross” (8) as a “flat dead tree sitting on the hill” (9) that is all “you can see for miles” (10). The cross

apparently stands on the precipice of its surrounding, giving this piece of wood disproportionate significance. Religious symbols are scattered throughout the poem in the figure of a winged “angel” (1), of a “bare grave” (8), and in the end, of a “priest” (11). The reader perceives the continuous duality between light and dark: the picture of the angel is bright, “smooth white” (2) and it is opposed to the dark, grim vision of a “bare grave” (6) surrounded by a mourning family. They are crying for their girl, whose corpse is missing. The cross, described by the voice of the *penitente* who built it, is “crude, rigid, nothing / human in it, flat dead tree on the hill” (8-9). It is jabbed into the earth with pain. Only the priest sees it as “Symbol of hope” (11), but the *penitente* does not take into consideration this contradictory figure who “thinks that dusk is just like dawn” (13) and “forgot about the nails” (14). The simultaneous presence of contrasting settings is evident in the artwork as well. In the background, a light in the distant landscape can be seen as the sun either setting or rising, giving the painting a twofold sense of time. “Dusk” is undecipherable from “dawn,” which explains the priest’s confusion between evening and morning.

These strong correlations between the written and the visual exemplify the successful ekphrastic effort of the poem. Together with Buckley’s monologue, Voigt’s sonnet becomes an incisive instrument to represent the world O’Keeffe envisioned through her art. Voigt asserts that poetry is able of capturing some of those complications that make the human experience of this world extremely challenging. The form of poetry that forces the writer to slow down, to find the pace and the rhythm of its verse together with their choice of natural everyday subjects represent probably the most suitable means to translate the work which O’Keeffe developed through a long exposure and observation of things. The painter’s motto “it takes time to look” and her idea that “it is only by selection, by elimination, and by emphasis, that we get at the real meaning of things” draw poetry even closer to the visual experience of a painter. Thinking about Voigt’s idea of failure and alienation in life as well as in any artistic representation, we

understand the meaning of honing and reducing to the bare essence of things, and the sense of repetition both in poetry and painting that Williams had earlier pursued. Voigt says that failure is everything in the making of art: one always fails in the pursuit of what is glimmering out there, shapeless. Failure nourishes the desire to try again, to keep it going, since the meaning of life resides in trying repeatedly.

Always fascinated by the interplay and the conflict between the solitary nature of the individual soul and the larger collective voice, Voigt contributes to O’Keeffe’s idea of an original related community that pursues that expression of the complications of art and life. The ekphrastic example that Voigt offers goes beyond the mere description of a work of art and of its translation into words. It becomes a means to communicate, re-meditate and re-write the human experience of the world, also known as history or sociology. It has become especially urgent for writers and artists living in an age that seems to threaten the very ideas of time and space as everything has reached excessive speed, while Voigt invites us to find together a common s-pace.

#### III.4. Churches in New Mexico

*Sing!  
transparent to the light  
    through which the light  
shines, through the stone,  
    until  
the stone-light glows  
    pink jade  
that is the light and is  
    a stone  
and is a church – if the image  
    hold...  
as at a breath a face glows  
    and fades.*

W.C.Williams, “Choral: The Pink Church”

Churches are other human artifacts through which O’Keeffe expressed her contact with the materials objectively related to the environment. This section considers O’Keeffe’s

fascination for three different churches in New Mexico: San Francisco de Asis Mission Church in Taos, the Church of Hernandez in Rio Arriba County, and the Church in Cebolla. San Francisco de Asis Mission Church, located on the Plaza in Ranchos de Taos, is about four miles southwest of the town of Taos. Begun in 1772, the church was completed by Franciscan Fathers in 1815. Similar to many other Spanish missions in New Mexico, it was made of adobe, it rose at the center of the fortified Ranchos de Taos Plaza, and was meant to protect against *Comanche* attackers. It was the subject of a series of paintings by O'Keeffe, and of photographs by Ansel Adams, Paul Strand and Ned Scott. O'Keeffe described it as “one of the most beautiful buildings left in the United States by the early Spaniards” (Eldredge 198). To date, it remains one of the most photographed and painted churches in the world.

O'Keeffe's paintings of the round shaped edges of the church's adobe walls reveal the influence of indigenous architecture and its organic relation to the landscape on her work. The massive squared apse ideally suited O'Keeffe's reductive approach, since she chose to represent the church as a swelling form undifferentiated from the landscape, creating an image of timelessness and universality. She suggested a natural harmony between church and nature in Ranchos Church, where the rounded organic forms of the architecture merged into the earth's contours.<sup>77</sup> O'Keeffe's spare approach gave the church a forceful and dynamic quality by magnifying the contours of the building, eliminating extraneous detail, adjusting shapes and contours to suggest the relation of architecture and landscape, and by subtly varying the color in order to evoke the sensual gradations of light. In her own description of her work, O'Keeffe wrote:

The Ranchos de Taos Church is one of the most beautiful buildings left in the United States by the early Spaniards. Most artists who spend any time in Taos

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<sup>77</sup> In the painting, the church rises against a light blue sky, not trespassed by any breaking elements but surrounded by a silver aura and the softening brittle effect of the sky. The overall effect is that each element is meant to reconcile differences among themselves.

have to paint it, I suppose, just as they have to paint a self-portrait. [...] I often painted fragments of things because it seemed to make my statement as well as or better than the whole could.

The close reference to the fragment of things, which Williams affirmed “should be the basis of all scrutiny” (quoted in Dijkstra 128), the Church structure, or even one of its fragments “can represent fully the universal and autonomous significance of the object as a whole” (Dijkstra 152).

O’Keeffe observed microscopically and by enlarging it to its gigantic shape she deleted “all extraneous or secondary forms created, through color and line” (Dijkstra 153). The result is a visible world made tangible whose distilled function becomes the source of our most intense emotions. O’Keeffe’s use of sharply edged line, derived from Stieglitz’s lessons on photography, accustomed Williams’s idea that “facts are the fundamental emotional basis of all knowledge” (quoted in Dijkstra 129). In her autobiography, exactly placed between *Ranchos Church, 1930* (see App. I.3.—Fig. 6) and *A Fragment of the Ranchos de Taos Church, 1929* (App. I.3.—Fig. 7), O’Keeffe states:

I long ago came to the conclusions that even if I could put down accurately the thing that I saw and enjoyed, it would not give the observer the kind of feeling it gave me. I had to create an equivalent for what I felt about what I was looking at – not copy it. I was quite pleased with the painted fragment of the Ranchos de Taos Church.

Lavonne J. Adams and Christopher Buckley write of O’Keeffe’s representation of the Ranchos de Taos Church respectively in their poems “Ranchos Church, Taos” (Adams 44) and “Ranchos Church No. 1” (Buckley 49). While Buckley still makes us follow O’Keeffe’s monologue, Adams’s tone is domestic, familiar. Her simple and object-related lexicon helps us visualize everyday scenes of everyday life, though “no human forms, no debris / of everyday



life” (Adams 9-10) appear in the painting. Adams draws us straight into the painted scene by setting its elements:

It's the back of this building—windowless,  
unadorned—that fascinates O'Keeffe. The beauty  
of adobe is that it has no sharp angles—every corner

is a curve. (Adams 1-4)

Adams uses negation to create relation among speaker, listener, writer, reader, painter, and viewer. The painting is described by portraying the back of the building: no windows, no decorations, no angles to show that negation may act as a proposition understood as an unrealized state, event, thing, or existence. The painted church with no added information invites to infer both the intended meaning of a rear view and of a negated proposition that describes the church. A rare (a negated proposition) allows us to conceptualize the front view (a positive proposition) which is being denied. Adams's negative statements thus requires a cognitive approach. Her simple language provides the tools to examine how a writer, painter, and reader may cooperate to give meaning to the un-represented building. Therefore, I suggest that the radiant O'Keeffe in Adams's poem creates, through an un-realized church, an emotional rendering of the same. Colors materialize through the combinations of real things and abstract definitions. This is clear in the line that describes the “late afternoon light [that] glazes / walls the color of toast, lightly browned” (4-5). Normally we conceive shadows as black spots where light is blocked: here on the contrary they become bright images of checkered “picnic blankets tossed / to the ground” (Adams 6-7).

Once Adams indirectly refers to O'Keeffe with the possessive adjective “her” (7) to imply familiarity, and then continues with her use of negative propositions:

[...] But in her rendition,

there are no human forms, no detritus  
of everyday life. The building appears

to have risen unbidden from the ground (7-10)

Again, in this related cooperation between the poet and the painter, readers and viewers must infer the human presence and its remains through their absence. The Church itself seems “to have risen unbidden from the ground” (Adams 10), though we know it is a human artifact and truly a symbol of a certain humanity only. While the building “fills the canvas” (Adams 11) totally, the poem proposes the vision “of an empty stage” (Adams 12), in an invisible, unrealized world, “where we each will stand / alone beneath the gaze of God” (Adams 12-13).

Adams’s relational experience of O’Keeffe’s paintings also empowers my reading of Buckley’s poem whose verses follow the softened lines of O’Keeffe’s painting, with its blurred, rounded contours, by opening the poem with an emphasis on the “billowing” (1) shape of the nave. Continuing his accurate poetic research on O’Keeffe’s work, Buckley then describes the obtrusive cloud that peeks out from the right, giving even more roundness to the nave and “L-shaped wings” (4) that “sidle / up the air” (5-6). Natural elements and human artifacts challenge the canvas space in an “eternal / attrition” (12-13). Without ever mentioning the function of the building, as if we were already familiar with the painting, the poet—always in O’Keeffe’s voice—uses terms related to religious architecture and natural landscape blended with the artist’s vocabulary: the “nave” for example is compared to the “backbone of a cloud” (3); the “mountain’s edge” (10) competes with “the flat / abstraction, the eternal / attrition of that blue” (11-13) of a forthcoming evening. The use of the word “attrition” is interesting: a religious term to define repentance—the *penitente* returns—it is also used to mean friction or corrosion, to say controversial attitude. Buckley’s poem is built around forms in conflictual relationships that strive to find harmony:

These forms withstand  
the steady re-thinking  
of the wind, the old  
indifferences of earth. (Buckley 14-17)

Yet the thickness of the clay of the building is able to support the human spirit and elevate it above earthly matters. The striking combination of natural elements and human labor take “us gradually up / level upon level above / the dust, the sky’s sand / and streaks of loss” (Buckley 20-23). The closing recalls the role of light in Southwestern territories. As in “Black Cross, New Mexico,” Buckley insists on the importance of light in O’Keeffe. In praising the hard work of her hands, he speaks of them as “worn but undiminished / aspirations of line to light” (32-33) and makes the artist become one with the object represented. The building such transformed takes the shape of its creator—the swelling nave becomes the body and the L-shaped wings hunched forward to embrace an invisible community of people.

O’Keeffe’s *Another Church, New Mexico* (App. I.3.—Fig. 8) inspires Buckley’s “Hernandez Church, New Mexico” (71). Faithful to his style and to the painter’s brushstroke, Buckley here resumes the words he has used for “Ranchos Church No.1” (49) as if he were using the same techniques O’Keeffe employed for her series of churches. Again, speaking in O’Keeffe’s voice, the poet outlines the profile of this seemingly spontaneous building in the unincorporated community of Hernandez, five miles northwest of Espanola:

This too, just bones—  
just the pale earth pushed up  
in the shape of Hope, perhaps—  
holding off the grey weight of a sky  
the size of a God’s fist. (Buckley 1-5)

Through the repetition of words like “earth,” “praise,” “wind,” “flat,” “light,” “blue,” the recurrent object-related images of bones, sky, relics, and references to opposite feelings of weightiness and lightness, Buckley re-paints O’Keeffe’s picture. In a typical note of his poetry, after giving visual shape to the elements, Buckley visualizes the sounds coming from O’Keeffe’s “singing shapes.” These human artifacts raising from the pale earth, whose “slabs, stripped down, / dulled with gusts” (Buckley 6-7), in their alternate portions of full and empty spaces, remind O’Keeffe of “the thigh bone or rib [she] bring[s] back from the badlands” (Buckley 8-9). Here, borrowing partially from O’Keeffe’s autobiography and her series of paintings inspired by pelvis bones, the poet casts the image of the painter in the act of holding the collected bones “against the blue to see / what is left to praise” (Buckley 10-11) of this land. Like the scattered bones in the desert, the church walls look like “flat relics” (Buckley 12) and “still resonate /beyond everything we know / of vast and unknowable space” (Buckley 12-14). Untouchable like the light, Buckley voices the mute intimate sounds perceived in the building by O’Keeffe:

what essential notes might sing  
through the walls, untouchable  
as the one small source of light. (Buckley 15-17)

The presence of bones, previously only indirectly referred to, is visible in O’Keeffe’s *Cebolla Church* (App. I.3.—Fig. 9). Driving through the highlands near her home, O’Keeffe often passed by this church, attracted by its isolation and stark simplicity, with sagging, sun-washed walls and rusted roof to symbolize human endurance and aspiration. O’Keeffe does not squeeze this building into the rectangle of the canvas and yet the church does not fit completely: the eaves of the roof are clipped off, as in a snapshot that is too tightly focused. This severe cropping forbids Cebolla Church to belong to a specific place and turns the place into an object, not so different from a bone or a ladder. Indeed O’Keeffe is combining “the

study of the qualities of the place and the objects representing the universality of place” (183) as Dijkstra says about Williams’s poetry. She uses an architectural still life style, which much owed to her experience of painting New York buildings and the barns at Lake George in the late 1920s and early 1930s, in collaboration with Demuth and Marin. Her colleagues and friends supported the necessity of expressing elements of tension in the representation of such powerful subjects; they called it the need to “pull forces” (Dijkstra 156). As the artist is concentrated on smoothing and simplifying forms into broad shapes, the poets seem to become adjective-averse. However, although it is all spare and essential, O’Keeffe plays a trick and puts something strange and arresting in one on the windows. This must have been relevant to the artist to stop her honing instinct and keep that tiny element in the picture. Various conjectures have been made around that mysterious thing when instead O’Keeffe confessed she had no idea what it was while she was painting the church.

While visiting the North Carolina Museum of Art, the poet and academic Deborah Pope wrote “Plain-spoken—On Georgia O’Keeffe’s ‘Cebolla Church, 1937’.” Inspired by O’Keeffe’s eloquent sparseness in much of her work, which the poet underlines in the first stanza, “Again we are struck / as always in O’Keeffe / by absence” (Pope 1-3), Pope’s poem shares O’Keeffe’s essential and elemental style. Pope’s minimal lines are able to recreate “the absolute lack / of the need” (4-5) that O’Keeffe realized with her painting. Pope’s personal research of “the sublime sufficiency” (21), which she seemed to find an equivalent in O’Keeffe’s work, blends ordinary and extraordinary objects with a spirit of transfiguration and of the miraculous. Pope’s earthy, palpable, yet oddly scenes envision a church that is “more a barn than benefice” (7). Although the painting indicates that “there is no clear way / to enter here,” —no road, either broad or narrow, leading to a place that heals the pains of this life and helps us find the sacred gifts—although we are only welcomed by “two sightless, blue-back

windows / a shut side door” (31-32), the poet invites us to find our way by becoming one thing with the land that surrounds “Cebolla, meaning bulb / meaning onion” (41-42):

Come by way  
of the hard, flat field,  
come to the unmarked door,  
  
come barefoot and wait  
without intentions  
under the sun. (55-60)

The Church has no open doors except for that “unmarked door” (57). Faith likewise has no direct access unless one humbly and “without intentions” (59) waits for “the sacred to happens” (70). The power of the Church lies in its name, *cebolla*, onion, which, in the Spaniards’ expression “agarrar la cebolla” (48) indicates to seize and reach power:

to seize power, they say  
in the tongue of this place  
where layers of light,  
  
sand-wind and time  
know something  
of power. (49-54)

The poem ends with what I read as an argumentative final message towards the religious institution of the Church, which actually seized the land and gained its power disrespectful of its Native dwellers and their traditions.

*Cebolla Church* inspires also Karen Rigby’s poem with the same title in the collection *Chinoiserie* (2012), referring to a mixture of European and Chinese aesthetics in the design of porcelain and indicating poems that layer colors, languages, and images from different cultures.

Rigby's poems constitute a sensory flight that disrupts boundaries; they blend languages to drive us outside our linguistic frames and stereotyped visions. Her attraction for the magic of things shaped through languages, evoking all sensorial activities, stretches the readers' imagination and force them to engage deeper subconscious readings. This draws Rigby very close to visual culture.

"Cebolla Church" uses words to paint with few but meticulous brushstrokes the image of O'Keeffe's absolute independence. The radicant effect of O'Keeffe's work here provokes a further expanded expression of the human artifact, and adds Rigby among the painter's affiliated community of artists. In "Cebolla Church," the speaker is hit by the deceptive simplicity of the painting and the mysterious figure at the window, and wonders:

It could be any thumb-shaped blur  
against the window pane:

sexton. Thief.

[. . .] someone has to sweep.

Someone lights the long, pitched room (4-10).

The speaker is curious, as everybody would be because O'Keeffe plays with her viewers by bringing them in front of a puzzling, tiny object or subject. By connecting the speaker with a collective impression, by continuing to ask questions that remain open, by nonetheless yielding simultaneously personal and communal emotional responses, Rigby uses O'Keeffe's enigmatic church to relate to a tragic moment in history:

One month, news kept looping  
the same reel of the last wreck.

[. . .] I pictured walls radiating gold—  
the church with its slant door.

Someone listening / for a distant thundering. (18-25)

The poem could be read as a straightforward ekphrastic practice. Within a collection that puts pieces of lives together, it becomes an allusion to the tragedy on 9/11: “Men roamed like beekeepers / in their white suits” over the wreck (20-21). The crash of United Airlines Flight 93 in Pennsylvania creeps into the frame: “The act of questioning (Rigby’s fresh, constant curiosity), necessitated by the act of witnessing, compels response. The thing to understand about Rigby’s *Chinoiserie* is that nothing can be confined to privacy.”<sup>78</sup> Both when viewing a painting and reading a poem, our personal reactions must be shared in a collective dialogue.

Elizabeth Murawski’s “The Chapel that Tempted O’Keeffe to become a Catholic” (*Zorba’s Daughter* 60) draws us inside the church. O’Keeffe’s lines and colors move inside the building. Although no specific painting is mentioned, the images undoubtedly reconnect to the painter’s series of churches, “A white line thrown, homely / as black canvas” (1-2), “candle holders // curve like horns,” to which Murawski adds interpretations of the desert landscape through a simple but incisive line, “No hiding here / from the wilderness” (13-14), and the presence of windows lead me to think that Murawski has *Cebolla Church* painting in her mind.

A series of images puzzles the reader. The sound of raindrops “like fingertips // [that] tap in code” (12-13) on the “unstained” windowpanes (17) makes “the windows weep / and blur the red hills” (17-18). The church cannot protect us from the world’s lament outside. Inside, death and pain are instead evoked by the image of the white linen that “tops the altar square // large enough to pin down / Isaac (3-5). The speaker wonders if “the artist rejoice / in the weave? Did the woman // recall the child she lived / without?” (5-8) In the temple, Christ continues to die, “Christ dies again // in a sky-blue loin cloth” (14-15). These images provide

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<sup>78</sup> Tristan Beach, “Book Review: *Chinoiserie*,” *The Conium Review*, July 3 2012.



the title of the poem: “The Chapel [...] tempted O’Keeffe to become a Catholic” but did not succeed at converting her. The contradictory image of this woman artist weaving her “white linen” as “black canvas,” large enough to pin Isaac down, like a strong Penelope that weaves and unweaves her cloth, like Mary of Jesus, who was condemned to live without her child, may again recall biographical references to the controversial marriage and the absent motherhood in O’Keeffe’s life. The white and black canvas become the photographic negative of the artist’s life with Stieglitz. My personal readings of these lines are supported by Fryd’s close analysis of the difficult relationship between O’Keeffe and her husband in *Art and the Crisis of Marriage* (2003).<sup>79</sup> Who is that Isaac on that white linen? Is it the child O’Keeffe sacrificed weaving her canvases? Or is it Jesus Christ St Mary was forced to live without? Poetry complicates O’Keeffe’s reading but confirms the radicant influence she still exerts on her community of artists. By re-drawing utopian, mystical pictures of O’Keeffe’s churches, poets not only investigate the painter’s life and work but their own lives both individually and collectively.

### III.5. Patio and Doors

*Patio, channel of sky.  
The patio is the slope  
down which sky flows into the house.  
Serene,  
eternity waits at the crossroad of stars.  
It's pleasant to live in the friendly dark  
of entrance-way, arbour, and cistern.*

Jorge Luis Borges, “A Patio”

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<sup>79</sup> Fryd reports “O’Keeffe and Stieglitz also disagreed about children. [...] although O’Keeffe wanted children, Stieglitz would not allow it, arguing that they would interfere with her work” (35). According to Fryd, O’Keeffe decided to please Stieglitz and agreed it was hard to combine her work with motherhood, though friends recalled she often regretted that decision.

In 1945, Georgia O’Keeffe purchased and began to restore a 464.5-square-meter ruined Spanish Colonial residential compound in the small hilltop town of Abiquiu, New Mexico.<sup>80</sup> Abiquiu looked attractive to O’Keeffe for both practical and aesthetic reasons, as the house was located approximately eighty kilometers north of Santa Fe and ninety kilometers west of the bustling artist’s colony of Taos. Abiquiu was solitary and peaceful enough to guarantee O’Keeffe the ideal environment she needed in order to paint. It was also situated a short distance from O’Keeffe’s Ghost Ranch, a smaller and even more secluded building set on an desert plain. Ghost Ranch was too isolated and insufficiently weatherproofed to be habitable during the winter months. Abiquiu property instead could make living in New Mexico possible the all year-round. The property had also come with legal rights to the town’s communal water and irrigation system, an important consideration in the high desert environment, which confirms O’Keeffe’s deep concern with the land preservation.<sup>81</sup> O’Keeffe was thus able to grow and preserve her own food at Abiquiu, provisioning both her homes and maintaining a high degree of basic self-sufficiency.

In addition to these practical considerations, O’Keeffe also chose the Abiquiu property for the simple beauty of the Spanish Colonial adobe house, with its graceful mud walls and simple rectangular living spaces. Above all, she was drawn to the large enclosed patio at the heart of the Abiquiu complex, which was walled on all four sides but open to the sky as she described in her volume:

When I first saw the Abiquiu house it was a ruin with an adobe wall around the garden broken in a couple places by falling trees. As I climbed and walked about in the ruin I found a patio with a very pretty well house and bucket to draw up

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<sup>80</sup> The renovation process is accurately described in the book *Maria Chabot - Georgia O’Keeffe: Correspondence 1941-1949* curated and introduced by Barbara Buhler Lynes.

<sup>81</sup> For a study of O’Keeffe’s ecological and ecofeminist concern with the land see Jillian P. Cowley’s “Gender, Landscape, and Art: Georgia O’Keeffe’s Relationship with the Ghost Ranch Landscape,” in *Exploring the Boundaries of Historic Landscape Preservation* (2008), pp.123-137.

water. It was a good-sized patio with a long wall with a door on one side. The wall with a door in it was something I had to have. It took me ten years to get it—three more years to fix up the house so I could live in it—and after that the wall with a door was painted many times.

Between 1946 and 1956, O’Keeffe made a series of over twenty paintings and drawings of the patio and door in different sizes and color schemes, which are considered her most lyrical and abstract Southwestern works.

The same subjects have inspired the six poems I analyze here: Lawrence Fixel’s “The Door to Have [I and II],” Jessica Jacobs’ poems “In the Patio IV (Black Door)” and “In the Patio VIII (Green Door),” Elizabeth Perdomo’s “My Last Door, for Georgia O’Keeffe, 15 November 1887 ~ 6 March 1986,” Mark Elihu Hofstadter’s “In the Patio #1,” and Ann Fisher-Wirth’s “Patio with Black Door.” Patio and door references recur also in C. S. Merrill’s *O’Keeffe – Days in a Life* when the poet describes the daily routines and chores she experienced while living and working with the painter.

Fixel’s “The Door to Have [I and II]” in *Truth, War and the Dream-Game. Selected Prose Poems and Parables, 1966- 1990* follows the collection-leading theme of impossible questions. Fixel wonders if there is a difference between the reality we actually see and the reality we think to see outside ourselves. Using much of the visual artist’s methods of observation, the poet asks if what he sees changes by seeing it, confirming Mitchell’s idea on the importance of teaching oneself how to see a represented world. The poems/parables investigate worlds that exist within and outside ourselves, where the poet asks questions to the sentinel we all keep awake in our unslept nights or conscience, the same sentinel that O’Keeffe needed to keep attentive throughout her creative career.

The first part of Fixel’s poem is in prose, a parable that introduces the reader to the painter’s inner and outer worlds symbolized by the doors she repeatedly painted. Fixel

concentrates the essence of O’Keeffe’s art in a six-line paragraph: her desire to create a magnified, impossible to ignore landscape. The poet is attracted by the series of those paintings representing “that door” O’Keeffe long pursued to have, as she confessed in her autobiographical book on the left side of plate 82, *Patio with Black Door*: “That wall with a door in it was something I had to have.” Fixel paraphrases that sentence in the introduction to his poem: “When I saw that door, in that house, I knew I had to have it” (128). Through that door, Fixel teaches us to see what O’Keeffe “had to have: the precise marker in all that vast and void-like uncertainty...” (128). Fixel keeps asking himself and to the reader what that door meant for O’Keeffe, and proceeds with assumptions:

Assume that it kept in what she needed to enclose; kept out confusion,  
distraction; helped her to focus what she faced day after day: sun, sand, stone.  
Shadows spreading as she returned to the focus of arrival and departure. (128)

O’Keeffe’s attraction for that door is guided by three mental functions: intuition, will, and desire. O’Keeffe observes the door engaging “an intricate transaction between eye, mind, and hand—open[ing] the way between paint and brush and canvas” (Fixel 128). The door is her point of entrance to artistic expression, “a world not seen before” (128), but at the same time the way out of a confused and over repeated world.

Although O’Keeffe’s doors have no knob, Fixel’s vision, which is not necessarily the one O’Keeffe had decided to see, imagines the painter “as she touched the hard, cool knob” (128), an instrument through which she could reach “the threshold to inner space. [...] The knob itself is cool to the touch...” (128). By using suspension points, Fixel mimics the suspended moment on the door threshold when we decide to enter a third dimension, and leave the others behind us. This brings us to the lyrical poem written between 1986 and 1987, when O’Keeffe exactly died. O’Keeffe is seen in the act of asking “insistent questions” (Fixel 4) that lead the reader to the mystery of creation and to “the orbit of earthly terrors” (15) anticipating

the end of life. The poet envisions an aged O’Keeffe, whose skin and mind have been long “factored” (2) by the intense sun of the desert that left a deep “imprint” (3) like a “primary line waiting to find its further life in paint” (3-4). O’Keeffe is thinking about death and reviewing her life. She has long “survived / the light that swam through shadow: to create / the flower more predatory than prey” (7-9). She has fought her whole life in order not to become the prey of the art world, and that door, which she continuously opened and closed, is the “refraction of will and desire” through which she fulfilled her life of work. Fixel measures space as much as O’Keeffe did “calculate” (14) her fears and delights. That door, which is nothing but a hole in the walls that framed her life, has changed color exactly to “Measure her mood and motive with the dry clear / transit of the desert night” (16-17). That door is placed “at the exact meridian” (14) where the painter could read “how the fragrant stars /told her where the landscape ended: where the worlds conjoined” (17-18).

Fixel is seventy years old when he writes the poem and looks at O’Keeffe’s life as in a retrospective, which is in part also his own. Our presence at the door threshold marks our past and our future: what we leave behind us, and what expects us beyond the door. There are limits and fears to endure, solitude to accept, doors to have. Fixel establishes a strong connection with the painter and writes probably some of the best lines that portray the artist, which O’Keeffe would have probably valued:

[...] to create  
the flower more predatory than prey – something there  
frightens even while it reassures: refraction  
of will and desire upon hard-edged door  
closing upon the space that framed her eye and mind... (8-12)

O’Keeffe’s long meditations on the door find a reading also in Jessica Jacobs’s two poems, “In the Patio IV (Black Door)” and “In the Patio VIII (Green Door),” both included in

the poet's project of O'Keeffe's biography in poetry, *Pelvis with Distance* (2015). Jacobs wrote the poems for the most part in 2012 while living "alone in a primitive cabin tucked away in a canyon in Abiquiu, NM, the area in which O'Keeffe spent the final thirty years of her life" (Jacobs 117). "In the Patio IV (Black Door)" (94) views O'Keeffe in the courtyard at her Abiquiu house in 1950. Jacobs's intention is to narrate the origin of that painting dated 1948 (App. I.3.—Fig. 10). O'Keeffe is the speaking voice whose writing technique and style the poet echoes. O'Keeffe is sixty-three years old and recalls the memory of a door she drew in her childhood. In a clear-cut, austere style, Jacobs relates to the first pages of O'Keeffe's autobiography, when the painter recalls the brightness of daylight and of a quilt on the ground where she was sitting, eight or nine months old. Jacobs here envisions a third image, the drawing of a door:

Carried inside me  
long as I can remember,  
a child's drawing of a door.  
four lines, none plumb,  
pressed into an adobe wall  
of thumb-smudged pink. (1-6)

The door becomes the emblematic object that defines her theory, her idea of art:

Now here—after how many  
years of rendering interior  
exterior so that others  
might see—  
the world has made one  
for me. A door (7-12)

Jacobs words this idea by saying that “A door // is everything a painting / wants to be. Portal, promise” (12-14). Like Fixel, Jacobs expresses O’Keeffe’s fears: “I was afraid it was perfect // only so long as I did not / enter it” (15-17). Jacobs’s poem offers an answer to Fixel’s impossible question when in the voice of O’Keeffe, it states:

But in the painting  
I do not paint. I lie, knees propped  
  
to either side of the jamb,  
  
still bisecting me right  
  
as a spine— (17-21)

Jacobs highlights O’Keeffe’s long-lasting necessity to feel plural, to belong to “both worlds” (24), to feel “peripheral” (24), a necessity that also Charles Tomlinson wanted to underline in his poem “Abiquiu.” O’Keeffe discovered that belonging to the edge, living on the threshold was the key to render her interior world visible. That door represented the key and helped O’Keeffe to make her “unknown known” and to keep the unknown always beyond us. The act of crossing the door implies faith and courage, two aspects highlighted by Jacobs’s “In the Patio VIII (Green Door)” (96-97). O’Keeffe is speaking again from her house in Abiquiu and it is 1950, the same year in which *Green Patio Door* (App. I.3.—Fig. 11) was painted. Faith and courage played an important role in O’Keeffe’s life in New Mexico. The close contact with the pueblo people, their ancestral religion and the one imposed by the Spanish colonizers are present in many works by O’Keeffe: the churches, the crosses of the Penitents, and the *kachina* dolls, as well as the animal bones. Narrations of O’Keeffe and her interest in witnessing the numerous religious ceremonies are documented in the biographies from which I culled (see Drohojowska-Philp, Robinson, and Lisle’s works). “In the Patio VIII (Green Door)” pictures O’Keeffe absorbed by the sight of the sky and the earth around her.

Her wish to get in touch with the unknown and the infinity that this observation educed overcomes “any organized religion”—Jacobs says still quoting O’Keeffe (96).

The poem speaks about an indefinite Easter time, maybe evoked by the shades and shadows projected by the light of spring on the adobe walls. Patches of sky and “buckshot of clouds” (Jacobs 16), “russet—dirt /brick in thrall / to the maw // of a late shadow” (10-13) show “the door / half-devoured” (15)—a perspective that confirms O’Keeffe is standing on the roof, probably listening to the echoes of an Easter ceremony coming from the nearby village: “Every day this week / feels like Sunday./ From the roof, / I listen to Easter (Jacobs 1-4). The scenario is pregnant with anthropomorphic figures: walls have skins that are swallowed by a late-day shadow, the door is “half-devoured,” and the clouds proceed as in “church processions [...] singing / so loud the hills’ / echoes sing back” (17-21). Jacobs imagines a story behind the depicted scene, and envisions O’Keeffe speaking and painting the canvas from the dilated perspective offered by the roof. From that point, O’Keeffe is allowed to see beyond. The sound coming from a distance and transported by the clouds resonates and evokes the land’s history. Jacobs speaks of “Remnant of an old faith” (22), faith and costumes O’Keeffe had learnt to listen to and respect with her community.

The poem closes with an unexpected change of sight with O’Keeffe who “go[es] inside /to make mint tea” (23-24). I have read this turning point as the poet’s intention to recall the painter’s constant swinging between her desire of transcendence and the practical need of a cup of mint tea, between abstraction and contingency. Jacobs’s *Pelvis with Distance* refers to that door in the patio at Abiquiu house several other times. By originally using O’Keeffe’s style of titling her paintings, in “To Find You IV (O’Keeffe’s Abiquiu House)”(99), Jacobs remembers the time O’Keeffe decided to move permanently to New Mexico and follow the renovation works on the Abiquiu property helped by Chabot and the local women. O’Keeffe was seduced by the unbelievable ability of the poor, desert areas to provide for their necessary



life sustenance, which called for a complete reconstruction and readjustment of personal habits. She wrote to Chabot “one must learn to eat in a new way to live up there” (*Chabot—O’Keeffe* 150). The repeated attempts of planting vegetables in the sandy soil of Ghost Ranch, together with the food and fuel rationings due to the United States military intervention in World War II, had convinced O’Keeffe to reconstruct and readjust Abiquiu:

I’m a newcomer to Abiquiu, that’s one of the lower forms of life. The Spanish people have been here since the 18th century. The house was a pigpen when I got it...but it had a beautiful view. I wanted to make it my house, but I’ll tell you the dirt resists you. It is very hard to make earth your own...I grow everything I need for the year in Abiquiu. (Seiberling 45)

At the end of its renovation in 1945, the adobe much resembled O’Keeffe’s personality, revealing the painter’s ecofeminist attitude towards the land, as Cardona-Hire underlines: “The concordance between O’Keeffe’s rhythm and her low adobe buildings, the quietness of the black door, the placement of the garden, were a breath with her own being” (235).

Jacobs introduces the reader to the property with vivid, objective imagery. “To Find You IV” lets us enter O’Keeffe’s garden, among “Bushes of mulberry, rosemary, cherry; / trees of filbert, plum, and peach – all /useful” (1-3). Walking through the place, engaged in a virtual dialogue with the painter, Jacobs asks O’Keeffe a question: “How did you see // into this once—ruin of adobe / and mud, used by villagers as a sty / for the pigs, and know—both the vision / of what it could be and that your will / could make it so?” (13-18). Jacobs has surely read the letters between O’Keeffe and Chabot<sup>82</sup> that describe the attentive works of reconstruction, the meticulous replanting of the large garden in Abiquiu, and O’Keeffe’s desire to hire labor from the local people, men and women of the Hispanic and Native communities:

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<sup>82</sup> See *Maria Chabot and Georgia O’Keeffe – Correspondence 1941-1949*, edited by Lynes, Barbara Buhler and Ann Paden, 2003.

The San Juan Pueblo Indians will probably set up housekeeping in Abiquiu, and I will hire several of the wives to work along with the men in the house. This is the way they do it—men and women together. (Chabot - O’Keeffe 135)

Jacobs features the profitable exchange with the Natives’ expertise and highlights it in her poem. In a synesthetic total experience, while standing at O’Keeffe’s patio door, the poet writes:

You hired local women  
to daub and smooth; every surface  
leveled by a woman’s hands. I stood  
in the shadow of your patio door,  
breathing its coat of acrid shellac,  
dust eddying up in the afternoon light. (19-24)

This reference to the local women hired for work reconnects us to the specific historical time that hit New Mexico in the 1940s, of which O’Keeffe recurrently wrote in her letters to Stieglitz.<sup>83</sup> O’Keeffe saw the women’s husbands and sons being drafted into war, and others recruited because fluent in their Navajo language and trained as code talkers. Women and children needed to do the men’s work, and although it was difficult to find building materials, their knowledge and passionate work helped O’Keeffe in her project to revive the Tapia respecting the natural setting in which it was originally built. Reconstruction became a creative act that involved comparing, integrating, translating, and interpreting the spaces and place, as O’Keeffe wrote on December 29 1944, “It is as if in almost every way I am doing over and rebuilding my house—by my house meaning my own so-called mind” (*Chabot—O’Keeffe*

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<sup>83</sup> O’Keeffe recurrently described her long walks to explore the Navajo countries, close to the Bisti Badlands, northwest of her home in Ghost Ranch. She wrote about the heavy presence of war while scientists and military men on a mesa not far from her home were developing the atomic bomb. A large number of New Mexican men had left volunteering for military service. The country became the first to see combat during the war with the highest volunteer and casualty rate in the Union.

226). Jacobs's poem retraces the whole process in her wandering through O'Keeffe's garden plantation, and shows us the accurate work that followed the millennial tradition of the Navajo early settlers, whose name actually means "cultivated fields." The poem offers us an objective picture of how O'Keeffe was able to create an affective community that blended people and landscape. By following the lessons of the Native and Spanish-American people, she taught herself to observe and respect the slow rhythms of the Earth, and the space around her became the place where the magic of creation began to occur.

Jacobs's collection fittingly ends with the image of a door. In "May 6, 1986" (113),<sup>84</sup> Jacobs thinks of O'Keeffe's last day on earth as she hears the echoing chiming of the bells at St Thomas Church in Abiquiu. The whole landscape is "sun-flushed" (5) and "moon-glow" (7). O'Keeffe "is at her window" (11). In italics, the poet writes prophetic words allegedly pronounced by the painter: "*The canvas / is so much larger now, and I am // no longer separated from it by brushes*" (Jacobs 12-13). O'Keeffe is ready to leave the world of living, and she does it in her best way: "She paints herself a door and walks through" (14). Jacobs's words picture O'Keeffe entering the portal of eternity by means of her own hands and art. In my conversations with the poet, Jacobs affirms that O'Keeffe, besides painting this metaphorical door to enter into death, "paints herself [as] a door" that aligns with the feeling the poet has always had of artists as portals or instruments through which the world can move, make itself known, and I add, become radican.<sup>85</sup>

The door and the patio reappear in Merrill's poem "76" and offer a poetic cross-section of O'Keeffe's life through the eyes of the poet who observes directly the gestures and

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<sup>84</sup> The poem reveals a mistake in O'Keeffe's date of death that occurred on March 6, not on May 6 1986.

<sup>85</sup> The intimate, quiet museum in which Hofstadter's book of poetry *Visions: Paintings Seen Through the Optic of Poetry* (2006) projects his readers following the Chinese dictum, "paintings are silent poems," leads us to O'Keeffe's *In the Patio #1*. Hofstadter's short but intense poem with the same title is one additional rendering and voicing of O'Keeffe's art of patio and doors, which shares and enhances Fisher-Wirth's reading of the painting typified by its geometry and bursts of light.

movements of an aged painter in her elected framework. The poems offer portrayals of daily life from a privileged perspective, a sort of picture in the picture, a different form of ekphrasis that concentrates in itself a series of human objects and views that the reader may start to see from original angles. The poet is “sitting on top / of the patio well / in the sun /facing the black door” (Merrill 1-4). Four lines clearly cut the setting so repeatedly painted by O’Keeffe. Like a dream-like vision, the painter appears in the natural and handmade beauty she surrounded herself:

O’Keeffe came  
under the Japanese shell wind chimes  
back from the garden  
where she supervised  
two men from the village (5-10)

The essential Japanese décor realized with the shells that the artist often told to have collected in her walks during her trips, chimes with the sound of the desert winds. Merrill synthesizes O’Keeffe’s formation and aesthetics through an elegant synesthetic scene. O’Keeffe’s clothes empower the image of the artist supervising the work of the “two men from the village” (10) in

her black suit  
sturdy brown leather shoes  
rosewood cane and tan gloves (Merrill 11-13)

She moves forward with the “dignity of many years / if slightly uncertain step / past the black door / up the steps / down the passage toward the studio” (17-21). Unreal creature, image of the myth, O’Keeffe “stop[s] and muse[s] /over the damp patch /of mud in the wall” (22-24) suspending, or rather perpetuating the moment as in a cinematographic series of frames that repeat themselves. The painter speaks up wondering where the two men put “the Mayan face

[that]/ had been stuck / but fell out” (25-27), and disappears through the door, both refuge and escape.

Merrill’s poem offers fragments of the painter’s life, and at the same time, it echoes the artist’s determination to have her voice heard. Merrill herself is determined to have her own voice heard, which she learned to do from the long time she spent assisting O’Keeffe as librarian, secretary, cook, nurse, companion, confidante, reader, and caregiver from 1973 to 1979. The detailed journal she kept during those years, which produced two books, one in poetry *O’Keeffe, Days in a life* (1996), and one in prose *Weekends with O’Keeffe* (2010), clearly revealed the author’s desire to fulfil her dream to become a writer. Merrill fully dove into O’Keeffe’s world in the attempt to discover and seize the magic ingredients that created an artist, and O’Keeffe worked hard to let her understand that magic occurs within ourselves through determination and courage, the same determination the painter used the day she felt it was time to set Merrill free to face her own dreams.

The same image of a woman in a black dress standing “before the patio’s / black door” characterizes Fisher-Wirth’s “Patio with Black Door.” Through that dark hole on the adobe wall, this figure observes the natural world happenings. Either concentrated on studying the sunlight hitting the perpendicular flanks, or focused on the crooked-fingered woman sewing the blue lace dress of the Virgin Mary, the poet blends the manufactured world that surrounds her and the natural events that affect it. Animals abide the scene, observed by the observant woman, on the threshold, “before the patio’s / black door” (48-49). The door becomes here the painter’s prospect through which she seizes and measures the geometry of life.

The last poem I analyze in this section is Perdomo’s “My Last Door,” which is still unpublished but nonetheless exerted a particular interest in me. Spiritually driven like most of Perdomo’s compositions, the door seen by the poet in O’Keeffe’s *My Last Door* (App. I.3.— Fig.12) is “a step through this square world / of tinted darkness into clarity, a real sunrise [which

shows that] Humanity is moving. Death moves it in humble / journeys towards our true / Home” (Perdomo 20-26). These lines captured my attention for their powerful pictorial and metaphorical meanings. First, the idea of a door in a “square world” through which we move our uncertain steps seeking a better place where humanity reawakens and moves has reconnected me to Butler’s words in “Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street” (2015).<sup>86</sup> Butler writes, “when crowds move outside the square, to the side street or the back alley, to the neighborhoods where streets are not yet paved, then something more happens” (71). The image of this humanity that gets back on its feet, and moves its first steps out of darkness, after death humbly has made us reconcile with the others and ourselves has given me a further perspective of O’Keeffe’s and of the poet’s picture of the door reinforced also by the characteristics of the painted element. The door in fact has no door, no hinges, and no knob. It is “some entrance made / from shades of bright desert sunlight / into a blackened square end / made in dark, silent / earth” (Perdomo 2-6), an open though obscure place. The poet’s door, like death, is “mystery” (7), which is able to transform the darkest visions in scenting and reassuring feasts:

It is mystery,  
& not so, ever carrying  
a familiar scent, untasted, yet  
common as childhood recollections  
awaiting the Christmas  
feast. (7-12)

Death, like darkness, or the unknown, carries with itself “a familiar scent” (9) that, though it has not been experienced yet—Perdomo uses the word “untasted” (9)—is common and recognizable like the spirit that animates Christmas times. That door is “hope, / faith” (13-

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<sup>86</sup> Judith Butler’s essay “Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street” is included in *Notes Toward A Performative Theory of Assembly* (2015).

14), an open breach to a common acceptance that death is not only a step to eternity, but a step towards rebirth, even on earth.

### III.6. The Roads She Took: Aerial Views

*You air that serves me with breath to speak!  
You objects that call from diffusion my meanings, and give them  
shape!  
You light that wraps me and all things in delicate equable showers!  
You paths worn in the irregular hollows by the roadsides!  
I think you are latent with unseen existence – you are so dear to me.*

Walt Whitman, “Song of the Open Road”

In her movements, O’Keeffe definitely took many roads and her radicant spirit affected both space and time. When she stopped in New Mexico, the place embodied historical and anthropological experiences she wanted to trace back. In this last section, I concentrate on images of roads the artist often created through the abstraction of the aerial view of the road she could see from the hill where her home at Abiquiu is situated. These aerial perspectives have reconnected me to one of the characteristics Bourriaud applied to his idea of the radicant artist who set their roots in a more dilated space, where proportions and views change in favor of a more global, above ground sight.

I have here focused my attention on Buckley’s “Road Past the View” (*Flying Backbone* 47) and “On the Old Santa Fe Road” (*Flying Backbone* 82-83), and on Jane Cooper’s “The Winter Road” (*Green Notebook* 53-56). As the curatorial website of the Georgia O’Keeffe Museum in Santa Fe reports, *Winter Road I* (App. I.3.—Fig. 13) and *My Last Door* (App. I.3.—Fig. 12) share several elements. O’Keeffe painted objects from the real world but refined their shapes into abstractions focusing not on fine details, but on the forms of the objects as wholes. Here, she accomplished this by reproducing the lines and shapes that make up the road and the door in monochrome black. Both objects in the paintings are set on a contrasting white ground that removes the artifacts from their respective contexts in reality. O’Keeffe concentrates on

the shape of the object that becomes central on the canvas highlighted by the chromatic disparity from the ground it is placed on. The same scheme is repeated in many similar works. As the Museum curators point out, during these compositions, O’Keeffe eliminated grey from her palette and favored black and white to enhance her strategy of abstraction, which reminds of her early charcoals. This decision to remove grey fields of colors finds a parallel in the themes of the poems I have analyzed, where the poets have written about extreme subjects like life and death as in the chromatic juxtaposition of black and white. All poems deal in fact with the themes of life-death, present-past, of what has been left and what has been lost, and again, the aerial view of the road provides enough objective material to support this reflection.

Buckley’s poems explore the local to meditate upon the universal and reflect O’Keeffe’s concern about the land in universal terms, supporting my aim to see the painter’s philosophy beyond traditional modernist canons. Buckley’s “On the Old Road to Santa Fe,” inspired by *On the Old Santa Fe Road* (App. I.3.—Fig. 14) helps us visualize O’Keeffe while she observes the tenacious road that goes past the local hills and through the mesas. The view is obstructed by the hills, and “you see next to nothing from here—just one wing of sky brazing the foothills” (Buckley 1-6), but O’Keeffe is not interested in the view this time. She is thinking about the Santa Fe Trail that has long been a symbol of human conquest and trade since the Spaniards opened it at the end of the eighteenth century until the introduction of the railroad to Santa Fe in 1880. The route crossed *Comancheria*, the territory of the *Comanches*, who demanded compensation for granting passage to the trail. Americans routinely assaulted the *Comanches* along the trail, finding it unacceptable that they had to pay a fee for passage to Santa Fe. Soon afterwards, all *Comanches* left the area, allowing to American settlement. The Trail was also used by the United States during the Mexican-American War in 1846 for the invasion and acquisition of New Mexico. Is this what Buckley shows us to see in O’Keeffe’s paintings by using her speaking voice? “I’m interested / in how this stretch / made out,



abandoned / to the hard / hands of winds” (Buckley 19-22). O’Keeffe and Buckley seem intrigued by the confronting landscape and the human determination to find a way to get through. There are not specific historical references in the poem that confirm my assumption, but it is true that the land shows some graphic marks, “a trace” (31) of its past in what are the present “remains” (29): “[...] What ever was / lost, you can find / a trace of it here / if you look hard enough” (29-32).

Mitchell’s theories help here again in their attempt to teach us how to see, how to look at things in both visual and verbal terms, and find both in O’Keeffe and in Buckley two valid theorists. The road, like the door, stands as a metaphor of life or death, open to both directions, as “In any direction, / it’s just a matter of dust, / before we come back / to this old lost way...” (Buckley 33-36). The aerial view in Buckley’s “Road Past the View” inspired by *Road to the Ranch (Road past the view I)* (App. I.3.—Fig.15) provides another example. O’Keeffe is looking out from her window: “From my window / on the expanse, / the road goes out” (Buckley 1-3). By following its bends, angles, and corners, Buckley speaks about the importance of “shape / and direction of things [that] assist / the heart, and are vital signs / by which we reach for what / is just beyond our view” (Buckley 24-26). Shapes and directions of our thoughts seem to call for a deeper vision that goes beyond appearance and supposed reality. The image of the road, both anchored in the soil but intended to set us in motion, evokes the radican spirit that echoes in O’Keeffe’s work and in the poems she inspired.<sup>87</sup>

Jane Cooper’s “The Winter Road” closes this section, which, according to Robert Shaw, is still one of Cooper’s best-accomplished works.<sup>88</sup> In “The Winter Road,” the words in italics are direct quotations from two contemporary works: O’Keeffe’s autobiography (1976) and Eleanor Munro’s *Originals: American Women Painters* (1979). The poem opens with an

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<sup>87</sup> O’Keeffe’s *Winter Road* inspired also another poem by Hofstadter, “Winter Road I” (*Visions* 68).

<sup>88</sup> Robert Shaw, “Review of *Green Notebook, Winter Road*,” *Poetry*, 1995, p. 106.

epigraph from O’Keeffe’s volume where the painter discusses the objective things in her works that often critics confused with abstractions: “...they have passed into the world as / abstractions, no one seeing what they are.” Again Mitchell’s “showing seeing” helps us to understand the different visions of O’Keeffe’s painted things through the eyes of their viewers. Her represented things have become the mirror, projection, appearance, perception of each singular observer who has transformed them through graphic, optical, perceptual, mental or verbal transformations. In *The Truth about Painting*, Derrida teaches us that there will always be a surplus of meaning on our interpretations of the represented object, as well the represented object will always trap those who intend to understand it.

Cooper tries to see with the artist’s eyes, which eventually can be both hers and the painter’s. Directly addressing the artist, Cooper is seen in the act of lifting her own brush (her pen?), silent, in front of her blank canvas (her notebook?), probably standing next to a window that, through a “Late winter light” (1) brightens the scene. Cooper conjectures about light as if she were in O’Keeffe’s shoes studying the source of its power when it hits the surface of things. Cooper, in a virtual dialogue with O’Keeffe, suggests light may come “from the snow / blowing all day across your winter road” (2-3), or “from some energy farther away” (5) or maybe from “the last uncoupling of the galaxies” (9). In an age of media overload, it is hard to learn how to see. Marjorie P. Balge-Crozier, in her essay “Still-Life Defined,” underlines O’Keeffe’s wish to lead our eyes in the attempt to teach us that “to see takes time” because, as Matisse observed, “to see is itself a creative operation, requiring an effort. Everything we see in our daily life is more or less distorted by acquired habits. The effort needed to see things without distortion takes something very like courage” (Balge-Crozier 68). O’Keeffe never lacked that courage, or perseverance.

Poets like Cooper, with their sparse style, continue O’Keeffe’s lesson to teach the viewer how to see things, either through metaphors or simply by objective denominations of

the things represented, as for example in the case of color classification. By following O’Keeffe’s idea to show things “in color and light and line” (Cooper 18), “The Winter Road” is divided into four sections that work as a retrospective of O’Keeffe’s career, an ekphrastic experiment Cooper shares with May Swenson’s poem “O’Keeffe Retrospective” (1972) and with Marvin Bell’s “O’Keeffe Left to Herself” (1990). The first part of Cooper’s poem introduces us to the painter in the act of studying the light and the snowy road seen from her house. The second part sees the artist in her creative process, defining line, colors and light, choosing between the right angle and shade of color. In the attempt to enter O’Keeffe’s eye of the mind, Cooper uses O’Keeffe’s own words as if the poet were trying to learn the painter’s language, and follows O’Keeffe’s recalled references to her use of colors—for example of blues in “Fragment of the Ranchos de Taos Church” (25). The third part resumes the theme of blues, and makes precise references to paintings like “Black Rock with Blue / Sky Above Cloud” (31-32). Drawing from O’Keeffe’s quote “After all men’s destruction” (Cooper 33), Cooper synthesizes O’Keeffe’s concern with the land which will soon claim its rights to survive humanity, in a way or another. These powerful lines describe a world “honed away / by the winds that wrap the stars” (33-34) that soon “there will be blue” (35), and lead us to re-imagine “The last uncoupling of the galaxies” (9) with which Cooper had opened the poem.

Cooper does not flatter the artist, but silent and invisible observes the painter as “Half-blind [she goes] on painting / in a blue smock” (36). Colors, clear-cut lines and shapes design the scene. More references to paintings carefully picked in the painter’s garden of her production let us glide like liquid color on a canvas through O’Keeffe’s long and entwining artistic path. The lines like “the road past your house” (38) relate to *Road to the Ranch (Road past the view I)* (App. I.3.—Fig. 15), the “exaltation of a pear” (39) recalls O’Keeffe’s large series of *Alligator Pears* (App. I.3.—Fig. 16), while the carved out “socket / of a hill, then orbits clean off the canvas” (41-42) reminds of O’Keeffe’s *Pelvis Series*. The long road to self-

recognition as an artist leads to walk on a world that is “always there, always going away” (43), compared to a “tireless calligraphy / on snow” (44-45) well envisioned in those bellowing and sharp curves similar to the “rib cage of cliff” (15) on *The Winter Road* painting.

The fourth part of the poem draws the conclusion of an intense journey on the painter’s trail, and Cooper here avails herself of probably O’Keeffe’s most important and supportive quotation for my study of the painter as a radicant artist: “Where I was born and where and how I have lived is unimportant. It is what I have done with where I have been that should be of interest.” In this last section made up of four stanzas, Cooper expands O’Keeffe’s message. Aerial fragments of memories scattered in both time and space with exact references to those familiar objects that surrounded the artist complete the retrospective. Cooper sets O’Keeffe’s biography, artwork, and autobiography in motion again. The road has been an excuse to observe more closely, in detail, and with consistency the work of an artist as if only through careful observation, we can find the way to truth and thus to the implicit ethics that derives from it. Cooper’s ekphrastic poem does not only follow the lesson of trusting the artist first, shared by Buckley, but also draws from Marianne Moore’s idea that ekphrasis is “a way of practicing justice” (Loiseaux 123). Since the ekphrastic poet always responds and relates to someone else’s work, he/she opens out of lyric subjectivity into a social, affiliated world. It is the poets’ pleasure and duty to teach themselves to see, confirming Mitchell’s theory. Since O’Keeffe long suffered superficial observations and inferred meanings, as the epigraph in Cooper’s poem highlights, the poets feel compelled to “show us seeing” in order to offer multiple different perspectives and avoid misunderstandings, which would imply that they have not allowed themselves to look carefully enough.

### III.7. The Radicant Ethics of Things

The ekphrastic practice engaged by the poets I have analyzed here has shown the power of relating and connecting the local and the universal, the subjective and objective, the self and the other. According to Loiseaux, ekphrasis becomes a resource, a technique to show and install a sort of museum in words—as we have seen in Cooper’s retrospective. Each poetic effort establishes a radican relationship where the artist, the work of art, the reproduced object, the poet, and the audience connect and become mutually engaged in overcoming the sense of oppression and alienation. The opening of one art form to another provides a solution to the violence of given, stereotyped symbols. The combination of different materials, techniques, signifiers, and meanings represents Williams’s project to give the audience multiple, possible interpretations (or translations) of the things of the world—ideas that Bourriaud has restated in his view of the radican artist.

We are then able to see these things in a new way, without processes that imply re-making or imitating. Description becomes the means through which we continue to interpret the world without claiming appropriation. The relationship that exists within the poet who speaks, the audience that observes and listens, the work of art that signifies forces the system to look at the world with different eyes. At the same time, this relationship challenges the assumption that in all forms of relationship there is violence and oppression. O’Keeffe’s affiliative and affective community of poets I have here considered offers the example of an ethics in relationships that lies in the continuum of signs that observation and writing on the meaning of seen represented objects allow.

## Chapter IV

### Theorizing Photographs on the Artist

*No man has the right to dictate what other men should perceive, create or produce, but all should be encouraged to reveal themselves, their perceptions and emotions, and to build confidence in the creative spirit.*

Ansel Adams, *An Autobiography*

#### IV.1. A Photographic Portrait

This chapter focuses on the poems inspired by photographic portraits of Georgia O’Keeffe to underline the strong relationship between the visual medium of photography and the verbal one of poetry within the general context of the translations of O’Keeffe’s art. The painter becomes here a double inspirational source for the photographer and for the poet. Photography, almost as much as painting, has played a very important role in the construction of the artist’s identity and public figure. Paraphrasing photographer Yousuf Karsh (1908-2002), photography represents a human, social, and historical document of the artist’s time and life, and it can be considered a chapter of any artist’s biography. Similarly, Erinn Batykefer in her poem “Photo Album” (*Allegheny, Monongahela* x) writes:

And a picture is a document: digital clock face

in the corner marks the date and time,

stunned little girl face says, *I’m burning*. (10-13)

O’Keeffe represented a captivating and expressive muse for photography, and, as soon as the medium acquired the dignity of artistic expression in the first decades of the twentieth century, the painter immediately understood that she had to set up a profitable relationship with it. Photography worked for her as “a system of deals and trade-offs, tacitly agreed to and carried out, for the most part, without the exchange of a word” (Eisler 493). O’Keeffe understood that photography could help her to establish her role in the world of American art. As Hunter

Drohojowska affirms in the introduction of *Full Bloom: Life and Art of Georgia O'Keeffe* (2010), photography, being a relatively new expressive medium, offered any woman an opportunity to affirm herself, even economically. O'Keeffe's emotional creativity was soon conquered by Paul Strand's photographic style, focused on close-ups and cropping, whose graphic power consequently the painter introduced in her work providing her for an extraordinary, and without precedent, consideration in the close world of the fine arts. In return, O'Keeffe offered herself as a supportive subject of this rising art. Stieglitz shot over 350 portraits of the artist between the late 1910s and 1930s, and, as time progressed, O'Keeffe's strong features gained even more power, accented and framed with the signs of age. In the 1970s, Andy Warhol's Polaroid portrayed O'Keeffe alone or with her assistant Juan Hamilton showing that the iconic artist could render his popular artistic effort something serious and substantial.

Considering the power of photography in the creation of O'Keeffe's radiant myth as the American painter, this chapter shows the additional enhancement given by the reading and poetic wording of these photographs. Moreover, it also aims at challenging one of Ansel Adams's frequently repeated statements that says that a true photograph needs not be explained nor can it be contained in words. This is an idea Adams's friend O'Keeffe would surely agree, as she in turn repetitively asserted that colors and shapes were the media through which she could better express herself and better question her role as an artist, rather than any words. However, the poems I present here offer a different point from Adams's, as well as from O'Keeffe's observation. The poems do not mean to substitute the power of the visual media by which they were inspired: on the contrary, they show how the verbal medium can be an enhancement of what a silent image may communicate. Adams used to say that when words

and images become too unclear or inadequate, we shall be content with silence.<sup>89</sup> This silence itself, to which the viewer is exposed, triggers a reverse creative process that translates visual messages into verbal communication through actors who can differently express themselves by different means. Multiple artistic expression is again the result of a related system of creative actions that nourishes and enriches the work of each artist.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section “Additions and Subtractions: Poetry on Stieglitz’s Photographs” considers the poems that are inspired by the photographs that Stieglitz “made,” as Adams used to say, of O’Keeffe. It questions the power and weight that these photographs have had in the construction of O’Keeffe’s career, and the role they have had inspiring the poets under examination. The first example is provided by Kate Braid’s poem “13” (*Inward to the Bones* 23), poem “18” (28), and “53” (71), where the imposing power of Stieglitz’s camera pours out through clear, though indirect references. The impact of Stieglitz’s photographs directly occurs also in Merrill’s poem “60” (*O’Keeffe: Days in a Life*), poem “65” and “92,” while frequent mentions of Stieglitz’s work are scattered in other poets’ compositions. For example, the poems “Photo Album,” “Camera Oscura,” and “X-Ray” from Batykefer’s collection, even if they were impelled by multiple and different subjects, reconnect us to the role of photography in O’Keeffe’s time and life. Instead, Christopher Buckley’s silence over Stieglitz’s photographs is nonetheless a loud voice. Buckley is the only man poet, among the authors who have drawn inspiration from Stieglitz’s photographs of O’Keeffe, who decides not to intervene in O’Keeffe’s affair with Stieglitz, though he dedicates three poems about O’Keeffe and the photographs made by Philippe Halsman, Ansel Adams, and Juan Hamilton.

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<sup>89</sup> This sentence was attributed to Ansel Adams in *AB bookman's weekly: for the specialist book world* (1985), Vol. 76, Nr. 19-27; 1985.



The second section “Picturing Friendship: on Ansel Adams’s Photographs” focuses on the poems stirred by Adams’s photographs of O’Keeffe by Jeanine Stevens and Buckley. Biographical details, historical references and hints to the critical reviews received by O’Keeffe related to the period that the photographs portray offer further means of investigation in order to understand the role of O’Keeffe in contemporary culture. Stevens’s poem “Georgia O’Keeffe and Tree” (2008) is about a photograph made by Adams in 1938. Buckley instead is impressed by Adams’s photo “O’Keeffe and Orville Cox, Canyon de Chelly National Monument 1937.” Merrill and Braid, though they do not refer directly to Adams’s work, often recall details of the artist portrayed by the photographer in the late 1930s.

The third section “Constructing the Myth: on the Photographs of Philippe Halsman, Juan Hamilton, and Laura Gilpin” analyzes the poems moved by the photographs of these three photographers. The pictures here portray primarily an aged O’Keeffe whose identity is well established and recognized. Halsman’s pictures show a bold artist who has definitely learned how to project an image of herself, which she continues to use with *Life* photographer John Loengard and a host of other famous photographers including Irving Penn, Arnold Newman, Yousuf Karsh, Todd Webb, Eliot Porter and Andy Warhol. Their photographs are significantly different from Stieglitz’s earlier images of O’Keeffe. O’Keeffe intends to underline her desire to embody the popular growing American interest in art and celebrity, and each photographer brings their own styles for depicting her. Loengard and his photographs on *Life Magazine* emphasize his style as a reporter. Penn’s New York studio iconic cornered portrait, by using Elizabeth Broun’s words,<sup>90</sup> “influenced a generation to see photography differently, to see it as a medium that had the capacity to be as strong and as iconic as the finest paintings” (Gan). Although frequently put in a corner by male criticism, O’Keeffe pierces Penn’s lens. She

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<sup>90</sup> Elizabeth Broun is the director of the Smithsonian American Art Museum. She curated the 2008 exhibition *Georgia O’Keeffe and Ansel Adams: Natural Affinities*.

proved that through photography she was able to show the woman she wanted to be, and she wanted the other to see: lofty, distant, master of her own destiny. Newman's signature styles a back-to-back O'Keeffe and Stieglitz in 1944, and a more mature O'Keeffe in front of an easel with skull and horns, in what critics considered Newman's first examples of environmental portraiture.<sup>91</sup> Newman captured O'Keeffe in her most familiar surroundings with representative visual elements showing her profession and personality. Halsman instead caught the artist's stark profile in a series of shots where O'Keeffe wore a white scarf about her head surrounded by the adobe in Abiquiu.

O'Keeffe always appeared as an active collaborator in the creation of her own image. Being a celebrity whose life and face were famous became a way to attract people to her abstract art and to western landscapes. Sanford Schwartz<sup>92</sup> has frequently objected to some of the stagy photographs of that time, but admits that O'Keeffe was a figure nationally renowned, able to cut through art circles to reach the widest public, "a public that often had little or no interest in the art world. O'Keeffe's fame was special in that it was based equally, on what people knew of her work and of her life" (Schwartz 122). Barbara Rose, art history critic and professor, one year after O'Keeffe's death, reported that the painter's success in making her own myth had been one of her greatest creations. O'Keeffe's painting and her own persona "together provide a lasting drama of artistic and human interest. As Barbara Rose underlines, O'Keeffe "wanted to leave an indelible mark of her identity and vision of the world. She did it by understanding the concept of style and creating her own unforgettable personal version of it" ("The Self, the Style, the Art of Georgia O'Keeffe" 433). The multiple perspective O'Keeffe

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<sup>91</sup> Newman's photography was defined as environmental portraiture by the critics of his time. Although he frequently rejected the definition, Newman is credited with being the first photographer to use it placing the subject in a carefully controlled setting to capture the essence of the individual's life and work. In Mark Edward Harris's interview "ARNOLD NEWMAN: the stories behind some of the most famous portraits in the 20th century," Newman revealed: "I didn't just want to make a photograph with some things in the background ... The surroundings had to add to the composition and the understanding of the person. No matter who the subject was, it had to be an interesting photograph. Just to simply do a portrait of a famous person doesn't mean a thing" (37).

<sup>92</sup> Sanford Schwartz first published "Georgia O'Keeffe writes a Book" in the *New Yorker*, August 28, 1978: 87-93. The essay was later included in 1982 in Schwartz's book *The Art Presence*.

offered to her public are here multiplied by the poetic renderings of these images contributing to the radican feature that this study intends to highlight.

#### IV.2. Additions and Subtractions: Poetry on Stieglitz's Photographs

*I used to think that I could never lose anyone if I  
photographed them enough. In fact, my pictures  
show me how much I've lost.*

Nan Goldin

Past 1918, once O'Keeffe moved to New York City accepting Stieglitz's invitation to dedicate all of her energies to painting, leaving the teaching experience behind, O'Keeffe became a frequent subject in the photographer's work. She soon also became a newspaper personality, especially in connection with the fame she gained after Stieglitz's exhibition of her first charcoals, the *Specials* in 1917. Stieglitz himself earned even more fame and recognition when he decided to show many photographs of O'Keeffe. He presented her in the nude, or partially clothed, often positioned before one of her recently completed and innovative abstract works. Stieglitz's photographs of O'Keeffe have contributed both to construct a public image of the artist as a "highly sensual, seemingly naïve, and vulnerable force of nature," (*Georgia O'Keeffe and the Camera* 1), but also as a sexually liberated, modern woman. In fact, the power of Stieglitz's images function as "a visual equivalent" (Buhler Lynes 3) for Stieglitz's promotion of O'Keeffe's art, and as a manifestation of her sexuality. Although O'Keeffe seemed to be disturbed by this introduction, she was not in the position to challenge her patron and lover in the 1920s. She had just been introduced to the community of mainly male artists in New York of whom Stieglitz was one of its most prominent authorities. His support in the promotion of her work permitted her career to bloom and to increase their financial independence. By the end of the decade, her work commanded the highest prices, and her paintings were sold for the largest sum of money ever paid for a group of paintings by a

living American artist. This attracted a lot of media attention, especially because she was the only woman in Stieglitz's circle. Deeply in love with Stieglitz, and having lived with him, a married man almost twenty-four years her senior since 1918, O'Keeffe was aware that she could not oppose him. One strategy that she adopted to counterpoint him was her silence, as Buhler Lynes highlights:

Yet, O'Keeffe effected various silent strategies to counter what she considered misconceptions of herself and her work, such as shifting the emphasis in her imagery away from abstraction. She felt that her decidedly innovative abstract works, whose sources were indeterminate, had been responsible for generating Freudian interpretations. Although abstraction would remain the basis of her subsequent work, by the end of the 1920s, she had successfully identified herself as a painter of recognizable forms for which she remains best known today. (3)

Borrowing terms drawn from the vocabulary of photography, Stieglitz's *additions* and *subtractions* on O'Keeffe's artistic path and life do enhance again the duality of the painter's personal behavior and artistic expression, often divided between silent and mysterious abstraction and explicit representational art. Canadian poet Kate Braid refers to images of Stieglitz's photographic sessions of O'Keeffe's hands between the late 1910s and the late 1930s. As Buhler-Lynes points out, Stieglitz's photographs of O'Keeffe "raised O'Keeffe's visual consciousness" (90). More than once, the painter repeated that she was always amazed to find out what she looked like through the camera lenses: "You see, I had never known what I looked like or thought about it much. I was amazed to find my face was lean, and structured" (O'Keeffe quoted in Kotz 37).

Braid's poem "13" (*Inward to the Bones* 23), which lyrically much owes to the Canadian poetic tradition of drawing inspiration from distinct natural elements and from the power of physical work, opens with two images that distinctly remind of O'Keeffe's original

self-vision, before Stieglitz. O’Keeffe sees herself as a tall, ordinary, hardworking woman whose laborious hands have been capable of transforming the course of her life:

I was large, lean, and long like a birch trunk – my  
hands especially. I pushed into this world hands first,  
moved from one room to another, my hands  
outstretched. Hot. Cold. (1-4)

Poem “13” is included in “Solo,” the first of the five sessions that make up the fictional journal that gives voice to the early years of O’Keeffe’s life and artistic career. I remind the reader that the book has been inspired and guided by the painter’s autobiographical notes contained in *Georgia O’Keeffe* (1976), and by the poet’s research around the artist. It is worth to repeat that the book of poems is conceived as a fictional, imaginary journal that American painter O’Keeffe might have kept if she and British Columbia painter Emily Carr had ever taken a trip together to New Mexico and to British Columbia. By using the first person singular pronoun that functions as O’Keeffe’s voice, the journal-style is immediate effect. Mixing lyric and narrative poetry throughout the book, Braid conveys the changing moods and their translations into words of different days and situations that a journal should typically contain. The use of Braid’s “I” is compelling and has the power of the strong personal and character voice it embodies. Although the elaboration of images, similes, or metaphors may result difficult with the use of first person pronouns, as they tend to leave too short a distance from the identity of the speaker and her own representation, Braid overcomes the limit through her accurate research of the artist’s nature in her long process of self-determination, which is enhanced by her own statements in written and oral recorded literature.

Braid’s poems are a faithful, but at the same time, creative transliteration of O’Keeffe’s visual and written media. Although Braid’s poems are not direct ekphrastic translations of O’Keeffe’s works, references to the representational and abstract world of the painter’s

production are frequent and clear.<sup>93</sup> The artists and people who surrounded O’Keeffe and contributed to her artistic growth populate Braid’s poems. In poem “13,” the references to Stieglitz’s photographs of O’Keeffe’s hands (App. I.4.—Fig. 1) are explicit, though the poet does not specifically mention one particular shot.<sup>94</sup> Instead, poem “13” focuses on O’Keeffe’s ability to keep her hard-working hands always in the foreground, not merely symbolically, from the early years of her life, in her attempt to make room for her ordinary presence at home or at school, which the poet highlights in poem “2” (12) almost quoted entirely here, to the time of Stieglitz’s portraits:

When visitors came, Mama hid me  
in the back parlour, judged  
my pockmarked skin  
too ugly to be seen.

I was the unfavoured child,  
[...]  
It was all right – I amused myself,  
projecting lines against dusky white walls.  
Black on canvas, I dreamed  
in colour.

While O’Keeffe is playing with light, Braid anticipates the contrasts of the more mature artist, divided between her feeling plural, between blacks and whites, abstract and representational

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<sup>93</sup> Laura Shovan’s “Thinking about Georgia—after *Georgia O’Keeffe*, 1918, Alfred Stieglitz” (App. I.4.—Fig. 2) is instead an ekphrastic composition inspired by one of Stieglitz’s photographs taken in 1918. The photo that moves Shovan’s composition portrays the artist on her knees, while painting, probably just next to the basement of the studio Stieglitz had given to O’Keeffe in New York.

<sup>94</sup> Lavonne J. Adams is also the author of a poem inspired by O’Keeffe’s hands and body. In “Black and White” (2011), Adams explores the first moments O’Keeffe and Stieglitz spent exploring one another through their artistic media, painting and photograph. The poem keeps the reader in a suspenseful mood throughout the composition, where senses and sensuality dwell the walls and lines of the depicted spaces.

art, womanhood and humanhood, in her standing on the edge of everything, as O’Keeffe states in her autobiography: “I have lived on a razor’s edge. So what if you fall off—I’d rather be doing something I really wanted to do. I’d walk it again.” In poem “6” (16), Braid resumes O’Keeffe’s thought and tells the reader about the reason of this continuous research, which is supported by the idea of beauty all the time, wherever it may be found, recalling Bement’s lesson:

My teachers said, *A composition must be beautiful.*

It is one of the few rules I have never broken.

I worked without the usual feminine accoutrements,  
took the fiercer path of black and white.

[...]

the white glare of the paper –  
beautifully.

Returning to the second stanza of poem “13,” Braid visualizes O’Keeffe’s hands still inspired by the birch trunk simile: the “knobbly knuckles” (6) that she finds distant from what can be defined as beautiful are, on the contrary, appreciated by Stieglitz. Like “half-moons [they] shed light” (8). The hands are O’Keeffe’s main tool, using Braid’s objective lexicon linked to her past working experience as a carpenter:

We worked, my hands and I. I bound them together  
—thin sticks—a raft on which I set desire  
and floated downriver toward an unimaginable  
destination. (9-13)

Braid uses the incisive metaphor of hands whose fingers are bound together like “thin sticks” to build a “raft” on which the painter “set desire” (10), floating “toward an unimaginable destination” (11). The third stanza of the poem sets the central theme of Braid’s composition, both visually and in terms of content. The shift from the first singular pronoun to the plural “We,” immediately followed by the verb “worked”—besides the sounding alliteration—creates a series of consecutive graphic images that intersect at forming a symbolic raft. The visual alignment of the pronoun “I. I” in line 9 helps us visualize the image of the thin fingers/sticks joined together to form the raft. On that raft, O’Keeffe decides to save herself, drifting away from Stieglitz’s repeated callings in the fourth stanza:

Stieglitz stood on shore and called, *Come back! Come  
Back! Let me take your picture!* Yet he was always glad  
to see what we discovered, my hands and I. (14-16)

The echoed repetition of “*Come back! Come back!*” mentally pictures the vivid image of Stieglitz as a static standing man on a shore, trying to draw O’Keeffe closer, while she restlessly continues her mobile artistic research, floating downriver.

The last stanza envisions one further unusual, deviant image with O’Keeffe in the action of painting “each nail a different colour” (17), and “bent forward on all fours like an animal” (19) trying to find confidence “in this new balance, new gait” (21), trusting the “strength” (21) of her arms and her hands. The visualized picture outlines O’Keeffe’s artistic experimental path. The painting of small things, such as the synecdochical image of the nails for the hands here involved, the changed perspective from her position on hands and knees, and the satisfaction of relying only on her own strength are metaphors of the painter’s artistic process.<sup>95</sup> This insistence on O’Keeffe’s nails, which themselves represent the partial detailed

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<sup>95</sup> A similar image is provided by Gerald Locklin’s poem “Alfred Stieglitz: A Portrait: *Georgia O’Keeffe*, 1918, photograph” (2010), where the poet, inspired by Stieglitz’s work on O’Keeffe takes advantage of “This multiplicity of images” to speak about how the work of a young writer may be compared to poems written as he grows older. By creating a parallel with how the appearance of a camera subject changes as that person ages,



reproductions of O’Keeffe’s flowers or bones, reminds me also of Robert B. Shaw’s image of O’Keeffe related to Buckley’s collection when the critic states that O’Keeffe was not “as cozy an artist as many liked to think” (Shaw 287), meaning that the painter “as a woman, making her career among the avant-garde early in this century she would have needed to be tough as nails” (Shaw 287).

Braid’s orange floor described in poem “13” represents the new experimental ground, the new soil on which O’Keeffe sought source of inspiration, and, by kneeling down in front of it, she metaphorically tried to get in closer contact with the earth. In the end, the testing of her hands and knees as the supportive pillars of her figure in that animal-like position may refer to her intention to stand on her own in the construction of her life and career, needing nobody, but free as an untamed animal. This is a clear concept that O’Keeffe reports in her letters to Stieglitz and Anita Pollitzer, as well as in her volume *Georgia O’Keeffe*:

...and I said to myself, “I have things in my head that are not like what anyone has taught me—shapes and ideas so near to me – so natural to my way of being and thinking that it hasn’t occurred to me to put them down.” I decided to start anew – to strip away what I had been taught—to accept as true my own thinking. There was no one around to look at what I was doing—no one interested—no one to say anything about it one way or another. I was alone and singularly free, working into my own, unknown—no one to satisfy but myself.

Braid, in her successful attempt to make her fictional book of poems resemble a true journal where O’Keeffe records her memories and emotional experiences, inserts what the poet defines as “found poems” among the pages, excerpts of O’Keeffe’s autobiographical notes or passages of her copious correspondence. An example is given by poem “7:”

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Locklin gives voice to the “conflicting points of view” O’Keeffe (and Stieglitz himself) lived throughout her long career as an artist and human being, and supports the painter’s commitment to everlasting change and movement.

I had been taught to work like others  
and after careful thinking I decided  
I wasn't going to spend my life doing  
what had already been done.(1-4)

The first stanza of poem “7” reports in fact a passage of a letter O’Keeffe wrote to Stieglitz in 1917, while the painter was teaching Art in Amarillo, Texas. Faithful to the idea of the journal, Braid repeats O’Keeffe’s words, with her insisting “I,” which is a typical feature of the artist’s style. The second stanza instead quotes part of the excerpt that I have just cited above from *Georgia O’Keeffe* by transforming it into verses:

I decided to start anew—  
to strip away what I had been taught—  
to accept as true my own thinking.  
I was alone and singularly free  
working into my own unknown. (Braid “7” 5-9)

In a hazardous association that often occurs in my study, these lines draw me to recollect some of Thoreau’s thoughts in *Walden*: his wish for solitude when he says that he finds “it wholesome to be alone the greater part of the time. To be in company, even with the best, is soon wearisome and dissipating. [He loves] to be alone. . . . never found the companion that was so companionable as solitude” (Walden 180). In addition, Thoreau’s idea of research, experimentation, and discovery, contained for example in one short quotation, “Not till we are lost, in other words not till we have lost the world, do we begin to find ourselves, and realize where we are and the infinite extent of our relations” (Walden 217) reminds me of O’Keeffe’s desire of discovery and experimentation, as well as of wilderness, which is beautifully expressed by the poetic Canadian tradition embodied by Braid.

The theme of a cosmopolitan wilderness and the expression of an urgency to leave, even abandon the things one deeply loves in favor of a continuous search for emotional identities leads me to the generous work of Gerald Stern, and to his poem “Kissing Stieglitz Good-bye” (*Early Collected Poems: 1965-1992* 308). With his compelling chattiness and streetwise style, the poet narrates of his sorrowful departures in his lifetime, and of their linked memories: his childhood in Pittsburgh, his farewell to New York, which is here anthropomorphically embodied by the figure of a vital Stieglitz. Stern’s poem has hit my attention in its fifth and sixth stanzas when Stern pictures scenes of O’Keeffe’s nature:

[...] I said goodbye

to them both when I was 57. I’m reading

Joseph Wood Krutch again—the second time.

I love how he lived in the desert. I’m looking at the skull

of Georgia O’Keeffe. I’m kissing Stieglitz good-bye.

He was a city. Stieglitz was truly a city

in every sense of the word; he wore a library

across his chest; he had a church on his knees.

I’m kissing him good-bye; he was for me

the last true city; ... (16-25)

Though the poem records the sadness of a farewell, which I here associate to O’Keeffe’s taking her painful leave from the man and the city she nonetheless loved, Stern succeeds at making this emotional state not inimical of other intense emotions. It seems that the painter, photographing with her mind the last images before embarking on her independent adventure

of a solitary career cannot avoid being last captured by some final snap-shots of her life with Stieglitz in New York:

[...]Stieglitz is there

beside his famous number; there is smoke  
and fire above his head; some bowlegged painter  
is whispering in his ear; some lady-in-waiting  
is taking down his words. I'm kissing Stieglitz

good-bye, my arms are wrapped around him, his photos  
are making me cry; we're walking down Fifth Avenue; (39-45)

The image of “a girl standing against the wall” (Stern 47-48), whose vision makes the poet shake when thinking back of her, reminds of a young O’Keeffe as the one portrayed by Alicia Suskin Ostriker’s poem “O’Keeffe” analyzed in Chapter I, section 2:

And you are not yet unspooled,  
Girl, and the century is  
new enough—America has not yet shown her fist,  
it’s only 1916—her Midwestern vibrant fist. (9-12)

Stern’s similar image of two “walking down Fifth Avenue” (Stern 45) wrapped up in a last embrace, recalling touching past snap-shots of O’Keeffe and Stieglitz’s lives, returns also in C. S. Merrill’s poem “103:”

O’Keeffe remembered  
when Stieglitz  
first did  
photographs

of her hands.

They were walking

up Fifth Avenue,

there was a screen

with hands.

No one would have thought

of doing hands like that

before Stieglitz's

portraits of her hands. (1-13)

Merrill uses a language that may lack lively and strikingly evocative adjectives, but what counts here is the way the poem lays words as O'Keeffe would lay out her rocks and shells against white surfaces. Trailing behind these figures "walking up / Fifth Avenue" (Merrill 6-7) as Merrill similarly describes, Stern concludes his poem with his last bright, graphic images that confirm the sense of hope pervading most of his poems, the same hope O'Keeffe herself would never abandon in her search for the unknown, the unexperienced in her frequent coming and going:

[...] I'm shaking now,

when I think of her; there are two buildings, one is

in blackness, there is a dying poplar;

there is a light on the meadow; there is a man

on the sagging porch. I would have believed in everything. (Stern 48-52)

The contrasting image of darkness and light, where darkness stands in the background showing the past, whereas light lies in the foreground in the expectation of a hopeful future concludes

the poem, and reconnects us to Braid's vision of a maturing O'Keeffe in search of a brighter light as contemplated in poem "2" and "6."

This section ends with the same subject through which everything in O'Keeffe started when she met Stieglitz, and everything restarted without him: O'Keeffe's hands.<sup>96</sup> Poem "18" (28) by Braid again seals this photographic session with the photographer and husband. O'Keeffe is still in New York, among Stieglitz's men artists and critics.<sup>97</sup> The show in which Stieglitz presented several photographs of his newly discovered talent has turned the young painter into his own invention. The emancipated and liberal woman artist Stieglitz has portrayed next to her own art continues to receive public plaudit and criticism. However, Braid's O'Keeffe is bothered by the rising Freudian interpretations of her art, and the poet wants to give voice to these thoughts, which she already anticipated in poem "17" (27):

[...] When I painted the shapes I knew—  
round hills, dark spaces—  
suddenly it was all sex,  
*the female D. H. Lawrence, orgasmic fountain*  
*on paper at last.*

What else would interest the critics about women?

What made my paintings sell

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<sup>96</sup> A further interesting poem written by Richard Peabody, "On the Road to Georgia O'Keeffe" speaks of O'Keeffe's hands. The poem is included in the poet's collection *The Richard Peabody Reader* (2015). The composition is highly musical and rich in images that help the reader to trace the contours of the painter. The poem has been also included in Peabody's album *Nylon Soul* (2013), an original collection of recited poems by the author himself that add to the poetic musical features of their author.

<sup>97</sup> Poet and painter Basil King describes the excitement of that period in the section "Across and Back" of his prose book *Learning to Draw/A History* (2011). In King's experimental style, the reader enters the art history of the early decades of the twentieth century when everything seems to be happening for the first time: first photographs as artistic works, first nudes, first abstractions. We are called to witness this rapid change as if we were looking through a camera lens. King lets the reader peep into O'Keeffe's studio in New York, where Stieglitz visits her every day, with his camera. The book proceeds like a screenplay, documenting the century's lessons of modernity.

sickened me. (4-12)

The fact that this critical vision was a product of Stieglitz himself in his alleged statement “a woman on paper at last!” deeply bemused O’Keeffe, and in poem “18,” Braid gives graphic voice to the artist’s unbalanced state:

I had no hands. The men chopped them off when  
they saw nothing but sex in my pictures.

There is more to my sex than sex. (1-3)

The same hands that in poem “13” (23) Stieglitz “was always glad to see what [they] discovered” (15-6), now in poem “18” have been “chopped” off. It is thanks to O’Keeffe’s strict investment on herself and on her ability to support herself “on all fours like an animal” (Braid “13” 19-20) that the painter is able to capsize the situation and to reestablish her temporary lost equilibrium, as in Braid’s lines of poem “18”:

I once heard a story of miners who grew flowers  
underground. I wanted to grow them a garden,  
though they said it could not be done. Out of darkness,  
I would make light. (6-9)

It is time to move, having “killed off all sentiment. Did it for the pictures” (1-2)—poem “20” recites. O’Keeffe’s hands get ready to “pack the suitcase, trembling with excitement. And fear”—continues Braid in the first two lines of poem “28” (41). In the meantime, Stieglitz stands on the other side, “so fragile, so tragic. / His long white fingers play with my valise, / his eyes cast down in sorrow” (3-5).

### IV.3. Picturing Friendship: on Ansel Adams's Photographs

*You don't make a photograph just with a camera. You bring to the act of photography all the pictures you have seen, the books you have read, the music you have heard, the people you have loved.*

Ansel Adams, *An Autobiography*

After O'Keeffe's first summer of painting spent in New Mexico in 1929, on her return to New York, this time the painter successfully favored of Stieglitz's shots. In this occasion, she wanted to be seen as "self-assured, independent: anything but the vulnerable, sexual creature of his [Stieglitz's] earlier portraits" (Buhler Lynes 4), as it actually appears in Stieglitz's photograph "Georgia O'Keeffe—After Return from New Mexico, 1929" (App. I.4.—Fig. 3), which was taken at Lake George. O'Keeffe looks confident, assertive, and seems to have lost that vulnerable, sexual appeal of Stieglitz's early portraits. Hardened by her private vicissitudes, O'Keeffe had acquired more independence. The love affair between Stieglitz and the much younger Norman Dorothy, which was one of the reasons that determined O'Keeffe's leaving in the spring of 1929, and the recovered inspiration in New Mexico, had been highly formative experiences. While away, the artist discovered, benefiting from Adams's friendship and professionalism, the power of photography as a means of establishing her new self-identity. Such power became fundamental in 1949, three years after Stieglitz's death, once she decided to take up permanent residence in New Mexico. In the meantime, in this troubled period, the company of a community of new friends helped O'Keeffe conquer back again her hoped freedom. The true friendship with Adams was supported by their shared profound communion with New Mexico landscapes, and with their interests in the architectural religious buildings scattered in the region. They partook in their love for natural landscape, and in particular, for trees. Throughout their careers, trees have represented a frequent source of their subject matters. Adams's shots of American forests and trees are said to have changed the way people



considered their own places and the environment. He deeply advocated a radical change in the attention for the protection of natural landscapes, and with the sharp focus of his photography, its high contrasts and his carefully composed compositions, he was able to catch the raw untouched beauty of western landscape. Sharing with O’Keeffe’s the Natives’ idea that the place where you live shapes you, the two artists were both attracted by close up details as well as by vast images of landscape. When engaged in detail picking, they worked with texture and abstract imagery as if they wanted to “see beneath the surfaces and record the qualities of nature and humanity, which live or are latent in all things”—Adams writes in his *An Autobiography*. In the years spent at Lake George, O’Keeffe used to paint trees (and their leaves) as the most paradigmatic examples of seasonal changes. When she arrived in New Mexico, together with Adams, she started to see in both living and lifeless trees, the highest typification of the endless cycle of life.

With these principles in mind, I read the picture that Adams took in 1938. It portrays O’Keeffe leaning against a tree during one of their hiking in the area (App. I.4.—Fig. 4) and inspires Jeanine Stevens’s poem “Georgia O’Keeffe and Tree” (2008). The poet has often drawn inspiration from image-makers, and has frequently written about important characters, from Van Gogh to Miles Davis, from William Wordsworth to Ingmar Bergman, compelled by their own vivid imagery. Her ability is to create poems that are alive with language, filled with earthly color and naturalistic descriptions, which seem to me to suit a verbal translation of Adams’s photography.

The sixteen-line poem dedicated to Adams’s O’Keeffe offers a detailed observation of the painter in the late 1930s. Through Stevens’s trained anthropologist’s eye, the composition gives a concise, empathetic and historical perspective of O’Keeffe’s life in those years. Drawing from the botanic field, as most of her poems do in their attempt to excavate, dig down, peel away to reveal what might lie buried underneath a moment, Stevens captures the essence

of Adams's photograph and connects us to the complicated phase of O'Keeffe's life in 1938. The painter has in fact partially realized her desire of independence from Stieglitz's influence, and her stays in New Mexico have become a summer regular habit. Criticized for being away from New York and her husband, accused of running away from the harsh criticism that hits her as a human being and as an artist, O'Keeffe finds inspiration and room to express herself in the Southwest. The time O'Keeffe spends in New Mexico allows her to seek solace from her own personal turmoil and break from the male-dominated Stieglitz group. She starts to explore on her own the way in which to depict "American" culture by closely reexamining the nascent landscape and wildlife in the United States. It is worth remembering, in this occasion, Buckley's poem "Red Hills and Bones" (*Flying Backbone* 55) that highlights these same motifs with profound understanding:

No one takes the absence  
into account the way I do—  
this rind of backbone, the bridge  
and scale of its blank articulation,  
sustains some perfectly whole  
notes of light against the raw  
muscle of the land unbound,  
[...]

Put right, one part of loss  
counterpoints the next, leaves us  
much to see despite the frank  
abrasion of the air. Finally,  
this thighbone is every bit

the bright, hard stuff of stars  
and against the hills'  
rust and clay sets free  
a full, long silence here  
that as much as anything  
sings all my life to me.

Stevens, by carefully observing Adams's photograph, through a fitting metaphor, recreates the mood of those years in the opening lines of her poem:

The burned out stump, an obelisk filling  
the gray sky, magnifies visions of Calla's  
centering seeds, Canna's gaping throat.  
This high alpine forest suits you, wrapped  
in a dusky cloak, a diminutive form  
folding into sequoia's shattered bark. (1-6)

The image of a giant stump, though shriveled by atmospheric agents, stands majestic and imperious like a classic obelisk. O'Keeffe, in her apparently "diminutive form" (5) leans against it. She seems at ease with the tree, as if she wished to become part of it, squeezing and slipping into its shattered trunk to get magnificent portions of sky from within, as it is her usual way to view things through a framing object. O'Keeffe is far from the "wet lakes and yellow sun" (Stevens 7) of Lake George, far from the physical *jouissance* of that time spent bathing nude in the waters. Stevens addresses O'Keeffe directly as if she were having a conversation with the painter. O'Keeffe's eyes look at the viewer as if she herself wanted to establish that connection. Like Adams's photographs that never hide the limpid friendship and kinship between the two artists in order to transmit it to the viewers, getting them involved in the scene,

the poet draws us close to the painter, confirming and expanding Adams's idea that there are always two people in every picture, the photographer and the viewer, and now the poet and her reader as well.

The dialogue focuses on the understated idea known to the poet that O'Keeffe was said to have left New York and Stieglitz's circle for the pressing interpretations of her paintings. Looking at this photograph people may think she was just having a "rest" from the turmoil of the time in New Mexico, but the poem-turning point is soon set clear in line 9, when Stevens breaks up with an adversative "but" that gets us more deeply involved in the discourse. We understand that the painter has clearly set her mind on her new life in New Mexico. Witnessed by Adams's shots, O'Keeffe has found a new source of inspiration, a light that glows in every natural creation that the landscape provides. The communion she has been creating with what surrounds her is exemplified by the way she carries her dusted hems along in a touching image of the poem:

You don't brush off the earth that clings  
to your hem—matter out of place, but keep  
it with you, like the Austrian copper rose  
that blooms on stark and woody stems. (13-16)

The lexicon choice that Stevens enacts is made of concrete images and actions that remind of the artist's working habits: the magnified Calla, the folding form, the brushing, the matter, the place and, in the end, the substantial simile to the Austrian copper rose. The image is particularly interesting, as it includes in one figure of speech, multiple images of the artist. The poet picks up a rose whose origin is not accidentally from the Caucasian Mountains in Georgia. The rose is named *foetida* in Latin, for its smell, which is reminiscent of boiled linseed oil, a smell that can be found objectable, and that recalls the linseed oil used to thin oil color. O'Keeffe must have been familiar with this scent as she was probably used to carry it along

with herself, like the dust on the hems of her clothes. Furthermore, the early blossoming rose, which is bicolor, showing petals that are red or orange on the upper interior, but yellow on the lower exterior surface, evokes again O’Keeffe’s idea of *feeling plural*, in her showing different hues to those who get close to her. The early-spring blooming, soon to be forgotten and replaced by more striking flowering in the season, recalls the painter’s groundbreaking role in American art, an aspect of her professional career that has been too early overshadowed by criticism and by the single-minded readings of her most popular flower production. Botanist Rex Wolf says that the Austrian copper rose is a spindly bush, though not terribly vigorous, and it usually requires a stake or a wall for growing. The image revives the artist’s fragility of her early career, when she was not yet liberated by Stieglitz’s influence, and had to seek new inspirational ground in New Mexico.

Adams’s photograph “Georgia O’Keeffe and Orville Cox, Canyon de Chelly National Monument 1937” (App. I.4.—Fig. 5) inspires Buckley’s poem bearing the same title that appeared in his collection *Blossoms and Bones* in 1988. The photograph was taken in September 1937 during a month-long camping trip throughout the Southwest organized by David Hunter McAlpin III (1897- 1989), a philanthropist and investment banker, friend both of O’Keeffe and Adams.<sup>98</sup> The result of this camping trip organized by McAlpin was a set of photographs made by Adams that the photographer later donated to McAlpin himself. The camping group included McAlpin’s cousins, Godfrey and Helen Rockefeller, and Ghost Ranch

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<sup>98</sup> In regards to this friendship, C. S. Merrill writes poem “70” (*O’Keeffe: Days in a Life*):

O’Keeffe said a very old friend  
of hers – Dave – was one of the few  
people she could stand with  
in a beautiful place  
and feel alone.

Those people are pretty rare  
she said, she once stood  
with him on the rim  
of the Grand Canyon  
and felt alone.

January 1978

head wrangler Orville Cox, who was to be the group's interpreter and guide. Heide Fernandez-Llamazares, assistant Museum educator and docent coordinator at Tacoma Art Museum in Washington, in her review of the 2003's *Adams and O'Keeffe On The Road* exhibition at the Fitchburg Art Museum, Massachusetts, reports that Adams brought three cameras, two view cameras and a 35mm Contax, while O'Keeffe filled a station wagon with painting supplies. Delayed for two weeks in Abiquiu, at the Ghost Ranch while O'Keeffe had to finish some work, they at last started their trip. There are many group shots of the travelling party, looking rested and relaxed, and photographs of O'Keeffe. Though Adams does not appear in any of the pictures, his shadow can be often distinguished.

The poem written by Buckley on Adams's photo of O'Keeffe and Orville Cox translates the friendly atmosphere of that camping trip as well as the need of a break from the artist's heavy chores. O'Keeffe speaks in first person, as in all poems by Buckley, but the opening lines of this composition, with the use of "we," throw us in the middle of the lively action of the group of friends. Buckley's irregular meter suits the joyful atmosphere of the pictured moment. A longer initial stanza of eight lines introduces the image with clear references to the shot. Orville Cox, the wrangler, is directly addressed by the voice of the painter while he is buttoning up his jacket, "You buttoned your jacket and leaned to the wind" (6). In the first five lines, Buckley evokes the surrounding landscape, which Adams intentionally left out to focus on the two characters, O'Keeffe and Orville Cox, notched against a threatening cloudy sky. Buckley opens up with a simile that sets the tone of the poem:

Surrounded by so little  
we were unmindful as the clouds  
sifting into that long wash,  
that slow cut of time, as it sloughed  
another of its half-bright skins. (1-5)

Like clouds, the friends overlook the place, and by getting so close to the “long wash” (3) of canyons, retracing their eternal “cut of time” (4), they renovate themselves as if they were changing their old skins into a new one. The trip is more than a simple journey through the Western tracks, almost forgotten “except / in films where cowboys in black and white / are as humble as their hats” (14-16). In perfect “agreement” (10), the group undertakes a spiritual journey of renovation and rediscovery, and leaves the ghost riders of their past behind. Humbly, as old-time cowboys riding the space “before a far and still horizon” (17), O’Keeffe and her friend(s) seem fully aware of the length and hardness of their trip:

And given these long ropes of clouds,  
their knots of loss largely overlooked,  
that might well be all of this earth  
we’ll recall before we’re ridden out  
on the spare and uncoaxed focus of the light. (18-22)

The life journey that Buckley implies must be undertaken with irony and humbleness. The actors of this western film remind of O’Keeffe’s memories of her childhood of which she narrates in her autobiography:

When we were children, my mother read to us every evening and on Sunday afternoon. It was particularly for my elder brother, whose eyes were not good. I had listened for many hours to boys’ stories—Stanley’s adventures in Africa, Hannibal crossing the Alps, Julius Caesar, “Pilgrims’ Progress,” all the Leather stocking tales, stories of the Wild West, of Texas, Kit Carson and Billy the Kid. It had always seemed to me that the West must be wonderful—

It is 1937 and O’Keeffe keeps working on herself. She is filling her new life in New Mexico with the beauty of new friendships, and new landscapes. It is a moment of radical change for

the artist, and her relationship with the local people help her overcome these engaging times. Ghost Ranch gathers different personalities and artists who play an important role in O’Keeffe’s artistic and social development. O’Keeffe’s *inner necessity* to change her family again is voiced by Braid’s poem “24” (34):

I must find another family. My own will not do.  
Mother lived for Father and the children, Father for  
Himself. I was caretaker to them all. I thought Stieglitz  
was different but he takes care of me whether I wish it  
or not. He saps and feeds my spirit, both.  
I understood this on Friday, sitting in the restaurant  
with the men, Stieglitz at the table’s head. There was  
a moment when he stood and raised his glass and for  
one snapshot moment we all adored him, mouths  
open, eyes wide take him in, Alfred Stieglitz, the  
wise, the great photographer. And suddenly I knew.  
I had found my own family again.

I need another—one that is fatherless. Perhaps a  
mother, a woman painter, some kind of kith and kin.

Braid translates into poetry one of the main ideas that this study intends to highlight: O’Keeffe’s radicant idea to create a related system of cultural and artistic affiliations in her houses in New Mexico. Merrill helps me visualize and verbalize this idea when, in *Weekends with O’Keeffe*, she speaks of the two chairs in O’Keeffe’s library in Abiquiu. Again I am here reminded of Thoreau’s quote “I had three chairs in my house; one for solitude, two for friendship, three for society” (*Walden* 185). O’Keeffe’s houses in New Mexico are lively



theaters of animated dialogues and convivial meetings that frequently refer to the transcendentalist author's atmospheres. Although Merrill's poem "63" seems to show O'Keeffe's detachment—though not denial—from this vision, it is hard to think O'Keeffe did not share Thoreau's philosophy:

[...]

Talking about a critic

who said she was influenced

by Thoreau and Emerson.

"I'm supposed to have read

Thoreau as a child.

I don't remember that.

I don't remember anything

about him.

I have found

when something is written

which is untrue,

it is best not to comment because that only draws attention to it.

Otherwise it disappears and fewer people notice it. (10-23)

Truly, O'Keeffe does not either deny or confirm her interest in Thoreau's narrative, as it would draw excessive attention over matters external her artistic production. Again, O'Keeffe shows her gained ability to handle criticism, a technique she has skillfully learned after leaving New York and Stieglitz's circle. It shows even in this case, the artist's skill to conform to the identity she has planned to create, that is one of an independent and original artist.

Going back to Buckley's poem on Adams's photograph, O'Keeffe's ghosts of the past, from Stieglitz's pressing influence to the harsh criticism of the world of art in New York, are

being almost left behind, supported by this new family of friends that Braid has equally underlined in her poems. Buckley writes:

And so our plain features  
just fell into agreement  
with a fading world of clouds—  
and behind us, the ghost riders,  
our hearts' white horses turning grey.

(Buckley 9-13)

The artist has settled down in the Southwest with awe, probably touched by the vastness of the territory and by the high respect that the local inhabitants still pay to the land. O'Keeffe's transpiring happiness from Adams's photo is translated by Buckley's lively words. O'Keeffe is ready to change, though weakened by her past memories of harsh criticism of the late years in New York, and the cumbersome presence of Stieglitz's authority. The vastness of the territory, the unmindful nature of the clouds and skies, the kindred spirits with whom she is travelling, the humble essence that animates the local people and the land are elements that help the artist to renovate her "skin"—using Buckley's word. The image of the pale wrist bent like a flower towards this new community of people, this new family of hers, much tells about O'Keeffe's desire to move on, to change. The childhood memories of western stories narrated by her mother have become an adventurous present. A new and still, though far horizon lies before her, and she seems ready to ride towards it with a humble spirit, animated by the love for the place, and her desire to be part of it.

#### IV.4. Constructing the Myth: on Philippe Halsman's, Juan Hamilton's, and Laura Gilpin's

##### Photographs

*We are, I am, you are  
by cowardice or courage  
the one who find our way  
back to this scene  
carrying a knife, a camera  
a book of myths  
in which  
our names do not appear.*

Adrienne Rich, "Diving into the Wreck"

After O'Keeffe took permanent residence in New Mexico and from then until her death in 1986, she was an attractive subject for numerous professional photographers. The increasing trust on photography to construct an image of herself based on her ideas about who she was and what she had accomplished, as seen in Yosuf Karsh's portrait of her in 1956, was complemented by the meticulous care that she devoted to the organization of her work exhibitions, and to the attention she gave to any pronounced word in interviews, video recordings, as well as in the writing of her autobiography in 1976. O'Keeffe's image had evolved into a severe, uncompromising individualist—using Buhler-Lynes's words in her essay "Georgia O'Keeffe and Photography: A Refined Regard" (2011). She appeared on a wide number of newspapers and magazines with many portraits by as much famous photographers. O'Keeffe persisted with determination in constructing a public image that conveyed her self-conception as a serious, strong-willed individual. She believed that through her strong commitment to work and life as an artist, she had succeeded at achieving the American dream of self-fulfillment through self-discipline and self-determination. The great success of O'Keeffe's public image in her late career, which in my conversations with the poets profoundly affected their works, has been mainly constructed through photography. She defined herself in her own way and on her own terms and she was able to replace the early portraits made by Stieglitz.

Buckley's poem "Philippe Halsman's Photo of Georgia O'Keeffe at Abiquiu, New Mexico, 1948" (*Flying Backbone* 51) is on Philippe Halsman's photograph of Georgia O'Keeffe at Abiquiu in 1948. The poem leads us to a decade later past Adams's shot. The theme of death perspires throughout the photograph and the poem as well, since they both try to translate the artist's inner turmoil after Stieglitz's death on July 13, 1946. O'Keeffe once again establishes here a direct dialogue with Halsman, who in return, translates the painter's *inner necessity* to reveal her emotional state through her physicality, and an indirect related one with the poet, who transliterates the visual document and the written records about O'Keeffe and her time into poetry. After Stieglitz's death, O'Keeffe felt the necessity to give her husband the right tribute and worked hard to settle all his estate. She remained in New York until 1949 distributing Stieglitz's art collection to numerous public institutions and collecting all their private correspondence. The summers were still spent in New Mexico, at the house in Abiquiu, whose works of rebuilding and restoration were at last concluded thanks to the directions of Maria Chabot, who never failed to remind O'Keeffe—while she was in New York—that "Everyone ask[ed] very kindly of [her]. It proves something to them, I think, that you prefer their land" (*Maria Chabot-Georgia O'Keeffe* 377).

This reciprocal affection with the Southwestern land is palpable in Philippe Halsman's photographs of "Georgia O'Keeffe at Abiquiu in 1948" (App. I.4.—Fig.6). Buckley's poem confirms the fondness and comfort coming from the New Mexican landscapes, and it is able to communicate O'Keeffe's desire to be among the things and places she loves. However, the presence of death and its ghosts pervades the composition under the shapes of desert images and changing clouds to mean the absolute certainty that in life there is no winner or loser, "that loss and gain are nothing" (Buckley 6), that life or death "are much the same" (7). As in all poems of Buckley's collection, the speaking voice is O'Keeffe. Throughout the composition, the artist refers to herself and to the worlds that surround her. Buckley relies on the strength

and effectiveness of his poem's concrete imagery combined with the eternal abstract questions of life and death, translating the way O'Keeffe herself envisioned her art process always edging between abstraction and representational art. As a definition, imagery becomes effective using vivid descriptions, usually rich in sensory words that are able to recreate pictures in the reader's mind, and Buckley is able to translate the visual world of Halsman and O'Keeffe into words. Furthermore, he creates new pictures, avoiding direct *clichéd* descriptions. As Mitchell would say, Buckley shows us to see the photograph of Halsman's O'Keeffe, he does not tell it. He shows us to see what both the photographer and the painter meant to say. Through his verbal images, Buckley pushes us to visualize the theme of life and death, juxtaposing it to abstract and concrete images, such as the ones of loss and gain, flowers and bones. Halsman's photograph remains in the background in Buckley's poem. Echoing O'Keeffe's voice in Perry Miller Adato's video biography of the artist (1977), Buckley's poem offers the scenario for O'Keeffe's thoughts that become aloud especially in the third stanza:

Despite them, I know some small thing—  
you choose a place and begin to work;  
the sun divides everything into equal parts  
and you adjust your eye, your heart,  
and one more piece of this light,  
praise these bright, diminished reaches. (18-23)

Particularly with this poem, Buckley overcomes one of the critical points Shaw has highlighted in his essay "Blossoms and Bones" (1990) when he speaks about the risk Buckley runs having all the poems of his collection "couched in O'Keeffe's voice" (Shaw 287). Shaw, who praises the "agreeable sequence based on Georgia O'Keeffe's *oeuvre*" (287), feels Buckley's use of the monologue a "further complication to an already problematic form," that of ekphrastic poetry. In addition, Shaw thinks that Buckley, though the latter openly states it was in his writing

intentions, “tends to soften the edges of both the art and the painter’s character” (287) showing a “reverential approach” (288) to the artist and her work. This critical move to Buckley’s work does not however diminish the human appeal of his poems. On the contrary, probably due to the poet’s more optimistic view compared to that of O’Keeffe, and for his anthropologic outlook, Buckley’s verbal portrayed landscapes result as inviting as the stern and troubling suggestions deriving from some of O’Keeffe’s works. The intermediary role played by the photographs, in which Buckley may probably feel less indebted to respect Phil Leider’s concept of “trust the artist first” (Buckley 8),<sup>99</sup> the poet yields to a more external objective view of the artist and reveals in the poem the emotional austerities of a hardened O’Keeffe.

The quintain of varying meter, though it does not quote any of O’Keeffe’s direct words, recreates the tones of the artist’s speech, in its simple and straightforward lexicon. Work, place, routine, and the course of nature, with its dark and bright sides, give back to O’Keeffe the human dimension that celebrity has changed into a lionized personality. The monologue follows the matter-of-fact philosophy of the artist, “without airs” (Shaw 287), and adds up to the human part of the painter that O’Keeffe tended to hide until her death. As the poem confronts with the theme of death, Buckley’s O’Keeffe seems to lose her reticence, and though she keeps her ladder to the moon in the attempt to get closer to the vastness infinity of the sky, “I have a ladder set to my roof from where / I can paint the moon” (Buckley 30-31), she realizes that none of us has any power when we deal with death: “God, I suppose, leaves us to our own designs / until we too are only remnants of this place” (Buckley” 34-35).

Buckley’s last poem on a photograph of O’Keeffe takes inspiration from a mid-1970s’ picture by Juan Hamilton, which was later used as the back cover of Viking-Penguin 1976 autobiography *Georgia O’Keeffe* (App. I.4.—Fig.7). Though Schwartz perceives it as a very

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<sup>99</sup> Art critic Phil Leider was editor-in-chief of *Artforum*, an international monthly magazine specializing in contemporary art from June 1962 to December 1971.

stagnant photograph, he admits “we can’t help feeling a dramatic nobility in the moment” (128). Reminding of Caspar David Friedrich’s famous Romantic masterpiece “The Wanderer above the Sea of Fog,”<sup>100</sup> Hamilton’s photograph portrays an aged O’Keeffe in one of her habitual hiking routines with her walking stick and dog. Hamilton’s shot suggests here the projection of O’Keeffe’s acquired equilibrium between the majesty of the landscape and the significance of the individual within it. O’Keeffe’s face is invisible to the eye, so that it apparently shows the impossibility to investigate the artist’s human emotional involvement of the moment as she faces such scenario. Buckley’s poem seems to find the words to solve our imaginary question. O’Keeffe’s invisible gaze seems to be looking for an answer, the solution to the eternal quest solving “that first enigma” (Buckley 10) of creation that puzzles the artist’s mind, which Buckley already investigated in “Philippe Halsman’s Georgia O’Keeffe.”

Translating Hamilton’s intention to provoke imaginary reflections on the state of the artist with a view of O’Keeffe’s back, Buckley opens his composition “Juan Hamilton’s Black & White Photo on the Back of the Penguin Edition of the Paintings” (*Flying Backbone* 56) with a question, “Can this be the earth?” (1). Despite the impossibility to see the painter’s look at the edge of the horizon, or hear the real voice of the artist, Buckley’s determined lead takes us to look at the world before her and to share the absolute views she is confronting. Abandoning the optimistic view of Buckley’s many translations of O’Keeffe’s art, the poet here faces O’Keeffe’s acceptance of being part of a world of things that wear down “against their own life” (24) but that we can nevertheless shape according to our desires. The strong

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<sup>100</sup> In contrast to modernists whose fractured forms and impasto brushstrokes recorded a restless, fragmented world, O’Keeffe’s smooth surfaces and gently pulsing organic forms suggested the soothing movements of the natural world. Rather than depicting the outward, tangible forms of nature, she depicted the experience of being in nature, enveloped by an infinity, which was beyond rational comprehension. The experience she recorded was of the Sublime, a term the British philosopher Edmund Burke had defined in 1757 as the feeling of being so overwhelmed by an all-encompassing wonder and awe that awareness of everything else is suspended. However, whereas Burke had claimed terror as a prerequisite for sublimity, O’Keeffe’s sprang from her rapturous experience of nature’s inexplicability and immensity. To communicate this feeling, she closely cropped her motifs so that they seemed to extend beyond their frames as if without measurable boundaries. The resulting images are not symbols or metaphors, but records of her empathy with nature’s fluid rhythms.

nature of the painter is here reinforced by the gained awareness of a life of accomplishments, the most important of which is the perception of having become, even physically, part of this world:

My world was not all here before  
I shaped it, pared it  
subtly as a cloud does  
bringing weather, suggesting to wind,  
moving bracelets of sand here,  
raising the red hill's hands there,  
accepting the world insofar  
as a cloud accepts light  
passing through it...(5-13)

The poem consists of three stanzas for the most part in anapestic or antidactylus meter. The image of the cloud, which is recurrent throughout Buckley's poetry on O'Keeffe, is a metaphor for the unending cycle of nature that the poet, as in Shelleyan highest romantic moods, endows with sentient traits that personify the forces of nature. Recalling here Shelley's imagery in "The Cloud" (1819), Buckley relies on pictures of transformation, where eternal cycles of birth, death, and rebirth in the world translate mutability or change in a simple fact of physical nature. Line 76 of Shelley's poem recites: "I change, but I cannot die." Buckley, in the voice of O'Keeffe, speaks of shaping, paring, blooming, and wearing, waiting for the evening call that will make "our souls fly out / like fireflies to the night" (38-39). Looking at the photograph, Buckley can only imagine, as Hamilton must have been doing when shooting the picture, O'Keeffe in wait for that evening song:

We stand here and prepare,  
staring flatly out at a future



where our bones will fall or rise  
behind us like any fish or flower  
and our soul fly out  
like fireflies to the night. (33-39)

The artist is preparing herself to become a part of the whole. As Shelley would say, always in the voice of his cloud:

I am the daughter of Earth and Water,  
And the nursling of the Sky;  
I pass through the pores of the ocean and shores;  
I change, but I cannot die. (Shelley 73-76)

O’Keeffe accepted the way the world changes, surrendering to the universal laws, “as a cloud accepts light passing through it...” (Buckley 12-13). Buckley is captured by her invisible stare, and through his lines, he seemingly reviews the whole life of the artist as she herself would be doing on the top of the hill where Hamilton frames her. The poet’s imagery throws the reader in a vortex of memories that recalls objects and works of the artist: the early charcoals in the first stanza evoked by the “moving bracelets of sand” (Buckley 9), the red hills paintings in line 10, the flowers, the bones, the shells, “the deep rose of space” (40), and the clouds themselves. Engaged in a conversation with the world before her, the artist offers her own created world back to the earth, in all its forms, showing her fully awareness of the “wearing down of things / against their own life” (23-24) in a way

that you might see how  
the honing, the spareness  
of their essential light  
is that beauty we are  
always looking forward. (25-29)

As the cloud is a personification and a metaphor for the perpetual cycle of transformation and change in nature, beauty is the shape that renovates everything. All life and matter are interconnected and undergo unending change and metamorphosis, even “against their own life” (24), but it is in everyone’s eye the mind of finding the beauty of each stage, shaping, paring and “honing” (26). Action becomes the means to blend and complete the life cycle summarized by Buckley’s last line “I made this, lived here, and more” (44), which recalls O’Keeffe’s famous statement, which is once again worth recalling: “Where I was born and where and how I have lived is unimportant. It is what I have done with where I have been that should be of interest.”

Merrill’s poem “52” ends this series of poems inspired by photographic portraits of O’Keeffe. It is June 26, 1976 when Laura Gilpin (1891-1979), who is considered an authority figure in landscape photography, visits O’Keeffe to do her a portrait (App. I.4.—Fig. 8). The art generated by the relationship between the two artists confirms what this study aims to highlight, that is, the painter’s lifelong aim to create a related system of cultural affiliations that author new and original artistic productions. Gilpin’s approach to landscape photography sets her apart from the men who documented the same subject, as much as O’Keeffe’s painting distinguished itself from that of her contemporary men artists. As Martha A. Sandweiss writes, Gilpin’s shooting of the land derives from her interest to see it as an environment that shapes human activity, a vision that O’Keeffe deeply shares.<sup>101</sup> Slightly far from Adams’ view of the West as a place of inviolate, uncontaminated beauty, Gilpin’s southwestern landscape is a peopled landscape with a rich history and tradition of its own, an environment that shaped and molded the lives of its inhabitants, a concept that O’Keeffe embodied in the last decades of her life. In a field dominated by men, like professional artistic painting for O’Keeffe, Gilpin’s

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<sup>101</sup> Martha Sandweiss teaches History at Princeton University. Her work focuses on photography, the American West, public history and the history of race in American life. In her essay “The Historical Landscape: Laura Gilpin and the Tradition of American Landscape Photography,” included in *The Desert Is No Lady: Southwestern Landscapes in Women’s Writing and Art* (1987), she offers a meaningful study of Gilpin’s career.

approach to landscape photography has analogies in the work of women writers who, far more than their male counterparts, have traditionally described the southwestern landscape in terms of its potential to sustain domestic life. Similarly to O’Keeffe’s artistic engagement, Gilpin’s pictures suggest new ways to look at the landscape photography done by contemporary women photographers.

Western American landscape photography grows out of a male tradition, pioneered by the photographers attached to the government survey teams that went west in the 1860s and 1870s. It was intensely physical work—photographers had to haul hundreds of pounds of equipment, chemicals, fresh water, and fragile glass plates up steep mountains and across dry deserts. Photography meant also loneliness that required them to spend long periods away from their families. A condition that neither Gilpin nor O’Keeffe were afraid to face. Neither Gilpin nor O’Keeffe ever thought of themselves as female artists and eschewed any discussion of gender as it related to their work. In both cases, while critics of the 1960s and 1970s speculated about the existence of a uniquely feminine artistic sensibility, they maintained little interest in the possible existence of a particular “woman’s eye”—quoting Anne Tucker’s words. They both stated that their works were to be judged on their own merits, apart from any consideration of their makers. Gilpin’s landscape pictures and O’Keeffe’s objective abstractions, vast yet intimate, though not overtly feminist or political, represent a new humanistic strain in art that involves the people and the physical landscape as an integral whole, an approach offering great possibilities to all artists, men and women alike.

Merrill witnesses Gilpin’s photographic sessions of Miss O’Keeffe’s portraits aware of the artists’ high levels, and though poem “52” prefers indulging on the process making of the portraits themselves, it reveals some interesting points of Gilpin and O’Keeffe’s friendship, which confirms the aim of my study focused on Bourriaud’s context of aesthetic relational theories. The pivotal point of the poem occurs in Merrill’s lines 6-7: “All those grinning

Americans. / You would think all we had was funny.” Both artists knew the energy and strain that took them to be what they had become. Both come from families who could not guarantee them secure livings, as both fathers had difficulty at providing for them. As they soon realized it, they boldly focused on securing their own futures, working hard and accepting hard rejections that they were able to transform into new forms of engagement and freedom of research. Being women in professional worlds ruled by men was not “funny” at all. In the 1930s, Stieglitz himself rejected Gilpin’s work, and Strand wrote her a hard note. However, Gilpin continued to work hard showing versatile skills. Her photography, frequently referred as “visual poetry,”<sup>102</sup> is still able to capture what other photographers of the time were not yet ready to see. Merrill’s transliteration of Gilpin’s photographs is effective in the way it lingers on the slow moments that characterize the actions happening between the two artists. She introduces the scene with a pragmatic gerund and two numbers, referring to the women’s ages: “Laura Gilpin doing a portrait of O’Keeffe / Laura 85 and O’Keeffe 89” (Merrill 1-2). The poem follows a segmented phrasing that is meant to reflect the bouncing dialogue of the two friends exchanging stories of their lives, each one running after her own memories of the past. The use of verbs like “asked” (5) and the three-time repeated “said” (9-14-17) shows Merrill’s careful, observing eye that describes each protagonist’s movement, as if she wanted to freeze those moment for the eternity. In her simple, sparse lexicon and style, Merrill succeeds at picturing Gilpin’s and O’Keeffe’s enduring spirits, and depicts a truly lively scene of the artists’ lives in Abiquiu.

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<sup>102</sup> James Enyeart, Director of Marion Center for Photographic Art, College of Santa Fe, New Mexico, highlights Gilpin’s ability to capture the soul of her shot subjects in the film “Laura Gilpin: the Enduring Photographer” produced by ¡COLORES!, a weekly art series on New Mexico PBS/KNME-TV.

#### IV.5. Poetry as a *Tertium Quid*

*The camera is an instrument that teaches people  
how to see without a camera.*

Dorothea Lange, *A Photographer's Life*

This chapter has aimed to show how photography works as a *tertium quid* in the extension of O’Keeffe’s art, together with painting and poetry. Starting from the long-term debate about the autonomy and value of painting and poetry, the mechanic translations operated here by photography work as a third balancing medium in the ekphrastic discussion. As this study intends to show, O’Keeffe’s attitude towards photography as a productive relationship with painting in American art and the poetic creation of the same photographic process affirm the valuable contribution to the nourishment and expansion of the artist’s radiant legacy as well. The entire work of translation and transliteration from the work of the artist, the determination of her identity, the photographic process, and the poetic creative process result in a mutual development in all the three forms of art. As O’Keeffe’s painting initially allowed the early struggling proponents of photography to secure their own place among the fine arts, and the leading painters to use the camera in their work to expand their artistic expression, poetry becomes a third vehicle in this related artistic system supported by O’Keeffe, which works as a dynamic steppingstone for further artistic creations. As “the freezing, flattening, enlarging and cropping techniques of photography began to affect the eyes of artists’ visual representations”—Buhler-Lynes points out in her essay “Georgia O’Keeffe and Photography: A Refined Regard” (92)—the literary devices of poetry, in their studied staging made of pauses, researched qualifying and quantifying lexicon, sound patterning and visual layouts, become further magnifying lenses which show us how to see—by repeating Mitchell’s words—the artists’ works. Such processes, which deeply affected both the careers of O’Keeffe and Stieglitz and initiated the idea that painting from a photograph is not a sort of failure of imagination or techniques, but a way of enriching the two media themselves, show that poetry,

either purely ekphrastic or simply stirred by the artist's work, can contribute to the arts. In present days, we no longer question the idea that photography has supplanted painting's position in the hierarchy of the art world. Similarly, we cannot imagine contemporary artists unaffected by the photographic reproductions of their art. Poetic translations of visual works frequently arise from a faraway contact with the original visual work of art. Contemporary ekphrastic poetry mostly originates from visions of photographic and digital reproductions made globally possible by contemporary electronic devices. This allows a radical expansion of the knowledge of the original artistic creation that complements the entire artistic process advocated by the artist. The roles of artists have intermingled and no longer suffer the superiority or complete autonomy of one medium over the other. On the contrary, arts have intersected and frequently spilled into each other. Painting has used the camera to reinvigorate itself, and long-lasting dialogues with painting have enriched photography.

This study argues that the expansion of such conversation to one further media of expression, poetry, has given breath to original and emotional artistic production that makes O'Keeffe's creative project even more meaningful. She herself recognized that photography provided her "with a source for her imagery that was simultaneously independent of but related to painting" (Buhler Lynes 95). Poets, though at times still to reverential before such an iconic artist, have been able to re-create original readings of the photographs that O'Keeffe inspired, confuting Adams's idea that when words and images become too unclear or inadequate, we shall be content with silence. Eventually, this silence has successfully triggered an urgent need to translate visual communication into verbal one through the action of artists who can differently express themselves better in other means, demonstrating that multiple artistic expression is again the result of a related system of creative actions that nourishes and enriches the work of any artist.



## The Radicant Lyrical O’Keeffe: Conclusions

*Think before you speak is criticism’s motto;  
speak before you think is creation’s.*

E.M. Foster, “The Raison d’Être of Criticism in Art”

I have built my argument on the term *radicant*, which refers to the figure of the artist who, as a living organism, has decided to set their artistic roots in motion and to grow adding new ones as they advance in their professional course. I have offered the definition of O’Keeffe as a radicant artist to underscore how persistently she set her own expressive sources in motion and staged them in heterogeneous contexts and formats with an attitude of open exchange. O’Keeffe’s diverse approaches to art have shown her generosity in the translation of ideas, transcodification of images, and transplanting of new behaviors. She shared her openhandedness with the community of artists she affiliated with, and which, eventually, became itself radicant, in the sense that it reflected a comparable urgency to create new ways of making art or writing about art.

The numerous examples of ekphrastic poems I have examined have offered me the opportunity to reflect on the experience first described by Samuel Taylor Coleridge of a poem that has grown “organically” from its contact with a represented object. The unconscious and instinctive attraction exerted by the aesthetic and metaphorical properties of a given image needs to be long re-worked in the poetic process of interaction among memory, space and time. During this creative process, it is necessary to discover, rather re-discover the catching hook that triggered the activity, which may have little or no relation with personal aesthetic or stylistic preferences, yet it had a certain something to say that is hard not to stop and consider.

It is from this perspective that I have observed the writing processes of the poets confronting O’Keeffe’s works or facts of her life. Poets have spoken of an image because they found it could help them say what they had not yet been able to express any other way or time.



This reconnected me to what O’Keeffe used to repeat about finding the best tools to express the inexplicable or the unknown in her own creative effort. The images chosen by the poets, or by which the poets were chosen—as Emma Kimberley poignantly affirms, have become part of the vocabulary from which they have shaped their own metaphors or their structural foundation to explore their personal ways of expression.

This study has limited itself to show the influence played by O’Keeffe on this large community of Anglophone contemporary poets. The analysis has been on purpose focused only on the direct relation of their poems with the painter’s work, and consequently with the network of poets who have written on the same object. However, it has unveiled the currents or motifs that run beneath and through the entire body of the poets’ writings, and it has exposed the weight that certain images play: “ekphrasis enables the poet to make forays into the most difficult and sensitive areas of thought without the pressure of direct expression” (Kimberley 2). This statement supports my recurrent turning to Emily Dickinson’s poetics defined as the telling of “all the truth” and yet telling it slantly—this approach has helped me understand the material practice of ekphrastic writing. O’Keeffe’s paintings as well as the objects they represent have surely become the epiphany, the objective correlative of an idea or an emotion that was already within the poet’s mind or intention and just needed to be brought forward in order to be better canvassed.

I have bypassed the argument about the “paragonal” relationship between visual art and poetry: a decision supported by Mitchell who states that “all media are mixed media, and all representations are heterogeneous [where] there are no purely visual or verbal arts” (*Picture Theory* 5). I have tried instead to decode the diverse re-representations of O’Keeffe’s objects that unquestionably carry the mark of the radican presence of the artist. This explains and justifies the recurrent leaning by the poets onto O’Keeffe who is thus turned into a figure. Certainly, in this dependency we can see the risk of that “ekphrastic fear” described by

Mitchell, that the image might limit the verbum leading it to a form of worshipping or idolatry of the artist. In addition, the rejection of any division into opposite or subordinate qualities in the visual and verbal arts can also be extended to the academic and critical fields,<sup>103</sup> the awareness of which has supported my transdisciplinary approach to both O’Keeffe’s visual and the poets’ verbal work. Indeed, the real or virtual interaction between the artist and the poets expands both works, and stimulates plural perspectives of observation and reading. The viewer and the reader are encouraged to trespass conventional reading patterns, and the critic is challenged to use combined and integrated theories for a deeper understanding.

In Chapter I “Painting Poems on O’Keeffe’s Places,” I have examined the connections between O’Keeffe’s experiences with particular landscapes and the poets’ related perceptions and expressions, which confirmed the particular importance of the American background O’Keeffe wanted to embody in her art. Through the voices of Lavonne J. Adams, Christopher Buckley, Edward Hirsch, and Shurooq Amin, I have understood that defining the relationship with the landscape is a cultural, humanist experience, as Dijkstra points out in his *Georgia O’Keeffe and the Eros of Place* (1998). In addition, this body of paintings and poems about landscape has become a gendering experience: the way O’Keeffe likens land shapes and colors to human anatomy, and the way the poets use language associated with feminine and masculine characteristics have made it impossible for me not to pursue a gendered reading. In order to contrast the risk of reinforcing gender stereotypes (Cowley 125), I have juxtaposed an interactive perspective that engages the painter, the poet and the viewer/reader who respond to the landscape by sensory, impulsive, personal inspirations, not only by cognitive understanding. The analysis of the different and multiple experiences with the landscape have allowed me to observe both the work of the painter and that of the poets through an intimate,

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<sup>103</sup> In *Picture Theory*, Mitchell affirms that “the clear separation of faculties (corporeal and collegial), on the basis of sensory and semiotic divisions is becoming obsolete and is now being replaced with a notion of humanistic or liberal education as centrally concerned with the whole field of representations and representational activity” (6).

affective perspective.<sup>104</sup> One of these emotional views is provided by ecofeminism through which O’Keeffe as well as the poets both female and male help us redefine the relationships between nature and humans through intuitive approaches and collaboration. The cultural environment of O’Keeffe’s childhood, her early education in art, and then her commitment and intimacy with the Southwest powerfully resurface through the poems. Since these are enhanced by the poets’ personal experience, they contribute to what Dijkstra defines as “organic modernism” (203). I suggest that they could also be called instances of organic humanism, to adapt Dijkstra and Sandten’s definition to Cowley’s reading of O’Keeffe’s ecofeminist experience with the land. Since the end of the 1920s, O’Keeffe recognized how Native people, women, and minorities were treated, and how the natural environment was likewise being treated. The identification with the earth, with the ways both nature and women were regarded by male-centered systems, soon became apparent to O’Keeffe, who understood the effects of the domination of such power categories on social norms and gender roles. Poets have contributed to underline how these norms have led to an imperfect view of the world. With and through O’Keeffe’s artistic vision, they have advocated “an alternative worldview that values the earth as sacred, recognizes humanity’s dependency on the natural world, and embraces all life as valuable” (Miles).

The poems studied in Chapter II “Painting Poems on O’Keeffe’s Living and Still Natures” have strengthened the possibility to merge the temporality of poetry and the space of painting. The thick network of affective relationships between the visual artist and the poets have created multiple, radicate perspectives of the same represented object. By embracing both literary and visual points of view, following a tradition begun by William Carlos Williams

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<sup>104</sup> I have here applied the adjective *affective* after Leela Gandhi’s declination of the same term in *Affective Communities*, which focuses on the power of relationships and on the ability to mutually interact and affect the other, even in contrasting environments. Leela Gandhi’s *Affective Communities* examines the politics of friendship as a vehicle for breaking and constructing that ruptures and bridges typical modes of associations, insisting that “affective gestures... refuse alignment along secure axes of filiation to seek expression outside, if not against, possessive communities of belong” (10).

who focused on the thought of “no ideas but in things,” on organic objects rather than on the abstract characteristics of things, I have underlined the potentiality that selected wording is able to create visualized ideas in our minds. O’Keeffe autonomously evolved the authoritarian affiliative system led by Stieglitz in New York in the first decades of the twentieth century into a radicant system of relationships. In turn, the affective community of poets stimulated by O’Keeffe’s artwork helped her not only to create a “truly American way of looking at things” (Dijkstra 160), but also to overpass the synecdochical denomination of America and reconnect to the primitive original world. Her openness to a global view of the world in continuous organic movement was instrumental in contrasting Stieglitz’s perfect domineering fixity. The model of an imperfect nomadic figure allowed O’Keeffe to dismantle and dislocate her activities as well as her affections. For its very nature, it has affected the artistic awareness of Shurooq Amin, Iman Mersal, Sujata Bhatt, among others, who contributed with their poetry to the breaking of expressive boundaries by trespassing cultural and geographical limits. O’Keeffe’s cross-sectional language made of essentialized things has functioned as a point of contact for diverse communities of artists driven by a similar utopic vision. Leela Gandhi helps me interpret this drive in terms of “affective singularity, anarchist relationality, and other-directness” (Gandhi 20) especially when she quotes Blanchot’s “subjective insufficiency” (Gandhi 24), which I claim is what O’Keeffe experienced where she lived, in particular in New Mexico, and which inspired her “openness to the risky arrival of unknown, asymmetrical others and socialities that [were] outside the domain of her safety and security, such as home, nation, community, race, gender, sex, skin and species” (Ratti 45).

This predisposition to the unknown—a feature of modernist (and postmodernist) artists and intellectuals emphasized by Said, and her own plural visions in my view, make O’Keeffe into an exemplary representative of what Gandhi defines as “genuine cosmopolitanism,” that is an intellectual and aesthetic opening and willingness to understand and engage with the other

in the world in the context of friendship (31). Borrowing from the idea of Passerini's essay's "Connecting Emotions. Contributions from Cultural History" (2009), I have discussed O'Keeffe and the poets by establishing "unusual connections between different disciplines and between various objects [...]—including emotions—on the one hand, and texts and contexts on the other" (Passerini 117). This method has allowed me to give substance to Bourriaud's definition of *radicant* art. As a result, I have argued that at first attracted by the visual work of the painter and her represented nature, the poets have recognized a common area of work based on shared simple elements that have blurred the boundaries between the different media of expression. These connecting subjects have indeed become "connecting emotions" that strengthen the collaboration among arts, and nourish the *radicant* spirit of O'Keeffe's production.

Chapter III "Painting Poems on O'Keeffe's Human Artifacts" has analyzed the poetry from the view of Dijkstra's postmodernist reading of O'Keeffe's art and life, prematurely buried in the history of art by Stieglitz's narrative. Dijkstra's perspective finally disclosed the infusion of American culture in O'Keeffe's creative process. Dijkstra claims that places, nature, and "the objects we grow up with become the furniture of the innermost rooms of our imagination. They shape our material being" (3). I underscored that O'Keeffe soon understood that local and small things speak a universal language and that the poets emphasize her confidence in the material reality she drew from the local, and the extent to which her visual sources are expressive vehicles also for their own emotions. I have argued that poetry, unlike literary and art criticism, is capable of illuminating and expanding the beauty of the silent painting through its rhythms and pauses, and its material signifiers.

In "The *Radican* Lyrica O'Keeffe," I wish to conclude with May Swenson's "O'Keeffe Retrospective," a poetic gallery which does not only celebrate the thingness of things O'Keeffe represented in her works, but makes readers also see what they have simply looked at, or not

even viewed yet. In her essay “The Poet as Antispecialist,”<sup>105</sup> Swenson writes that the experience of poetry is “based in a craving to get through the curtains of things as they appear to things as they are and then into the larger, wilder space of things as they are becoming” (16). The lines of the poem literally scan most of O’Keeffe’s artistic production and make readers feel like walking through the galleries of a museum. Moreover, Swenson makes us feel the paintings, rather than simply look at them: lines and visual references blend and often one painted motif or subject sensually penetrates another—we might say, it “Swensonally” transforms into another painting. In the silence of the visual work, Swenson embeds, implants, and adds further images and meanings giving body to the radiant lyrical O’Keeffe I have meant to capture through my interpretation:

Opposite, the thousand labia of a gray rose puff apart,  
like smoke, yet they have a fixed, or nearly fixed, union,  
skeletal, innominate, but potent to implode, flush red,  
tighten to a first bud-knot, single, sacral.  
Not quite closed, the cruciform fissure in the deer’s  
nose bone, symphysis of the pubis. (Swenson 26-31)

Here Swenson has O’Keeffe’s *Abstraction White Rose* (App. I.2. fig. 11) in mind. While the painting triggers a series of additional images, recurrent motifs in O’Keeffe’s visual vocabulary that the poet intertwines with her words—“skeletal” elements, “flush red” colors, a “bud-knot,” “cruciform” shapes, “deer’s nose bone,” “symphysis of the pubis”—materialize as “the thousand labia of [the] gray rose puff apart, / like smoke.” This way O’Keeffe’s painting unfolds, unfurls, and opens up to multiple further visions.

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<sup>105</sup> May Swenson, “The Poet as Anti-Specialist,” *The Saturday Review*, January 30, 1965, pp. 16-18.

This happens in each of the poem's seven stanzas. Swenson is not intimidated by translating abstract paintings, and she proves that ekphrastic practice on them can convey a whirlwind of emotions all the same:

Where a white bead rolls at the fulcrum of widening knees,  
black dawn evolves, a circular saw of polished speed;  
its bud, like Mercury, mad in its whiz, shines, although  
stone jaws of the same delta, opposite, lock agape—  
blunt monolithic hinge, stranded, grand, tide gone out. (Swenson 6-10)

Ranging between *Black Abstraction* (App. I.5.—Fig. 1) and *Series I - From the Plains* (App. I.1.—Fig.1), I see Swenson hinting at O'Keeffe's aerial views in series like *From the River* (App. I.5.—Fig. 2), *Chama River Ghost Ranch* (App. I.5.—Fig. 3), and also *Mesa and Road East* (App.1.5.—Fig. 4). The vocabulary is always sensual, as nature and sexuality in Swenson's poetry cannot be separate categories, since a part of nature joins us to a common sexual energy. Praised for its linguistic density, sonic intensity and erotic charge, Swenson can be straightforward and accessible like O'Keeffe. Her language has made her poetry popular in a century that has disregarded lyrical expression and yet it presents an underlying complexity made of metaphors, double meanings, formal and lexical variations. "O'Keeffe Retrospective" pinpoints words that unveil themselves to careful readers as petals do in O'Keeffe's opening blossoms. By opposing the compartmentalized, almost scientifically organized rooms of a museum, Swenson overwhelms the reader with the senses, exquisite tools for personal and global investigation. Her poetry shows humanity how to stay human, in all our possible radiant ramifications. It does so by echoing O'Keeffe's sensual, scientific observation of nature through her art.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> An equivalent to Swenson's poem is Marvin Bell's "O'Keeffe Left to Herself," a magnetic poem that intersects O'Keeffe's biography and her artistic production. By directly and indirectly hinting at thirty-five paintings of the artist, Bell weds the intentional plural poles of O'Keeffe's work in order to give birth to a new world where

This has also been the case of the poems inspired by photographic portraits of the artist, analyzed in Chapter IV “Theorizing Photographs of the Artist.” The silent “equivalents” of O’Keeffe’s body in Stieglitz’s nude photographs “corresponded to the music of her own experience” (Dijkstra 183). Dijkstra observes that “what his camera saw in the lines and volumes of her body made her feel clear and bright and wonderful” (183) and indeed O’Keeffe was comfortable with her body, which she “regarded ... as a friend” (183) and whose “material being” she “was not afraid to express” (201). She also understood and accepted Stieglitz’s appropriation of her body in his photographs, as it was “a form of artistic self-expression” (183) she herself was trying to achieve through a profound physical relationship to what objectively surrounded her. Stieglitz’s photographs, and later all the photographs of which she became the subject, have become a radicant medium through which O’Keeffe translated her art by using her body. The poems inspired by the photographs of the artist that I have analyzed have underlined this strong bond between her own body and the art of photography, thus widening the definition I am suggesting of a radicant lyrical O’Keeffe.

Her paintings and her photographed body nourish the expression of her inner and outer world and give life to rhizomatic offsprings. O’Keeffe’s ongoing radicant impact on such a large number of poets transcends categorizations of gender, culture, race, and nationality. Her aerial roots wander spatially and temporally link the creations of a global, boundary-less

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distance and reconciliation with herself and the Other, whether in the shape of thing or human, have become fundamental:

I do not say that she was a woman of regret,  
for everyone must regret something—an empty  
patio, a door with nothing but night behind it—  
but still she whitened the patio and reddened  
the door, and when she remembered the conjunction  
of earth and sky, it was likely in the shape  
of loving forms, lying together, crevasse to crevasse, (94-100)

Bell’s attention to nature has always been an integral part of his life as he grew up in rural contexts, among farmers. However, his interest “in what language could make all by itself [and his concern for] relationships between people” have always been his central focus, and similarly to O’Keeffe, natural and human worlds merge in a network of radicant connections.



community of artists who share comparable desires. Indeed this large, growing community is clear evidence that her radiant lyrical message has gone far: “when you take a flower in your hand and really look at it, it's your world for the moment. I want to give that world to someone else.”

## Appendices

### Appendix I: Visual References

This Appendix includes the paintings that specifically inspired the poems analyzed in this study. The visual references are based on Barbara Buhler-Lynes's catalogue raisonné *Georgia O'Keeffe* (1999). The Appendix is divided into four sections each related to the four Chapters of my dissertation.



I.1. Paintings by Georgia O’Keeffe Referred to in Chapter I “Painting Poems on O’Keeffe’s  
Places”



Fig. 1. Georgia O’Keeffe, *Series I - From the Plains*, 1919, oil on canvas, 27 x 23 in., Private Foundation, 1998, extended loan, Georgia O’Keeffe Museum, Gift of the Burnett Foundation (Lynes 155).



Fig. 2. Georgia O’Keeffe, *Evening Star III*, 1917, watercolor on moderately thick, cream, slightly textured wove paper, 8 7/8 x 11 7/8 in., The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Mr. and Mrs. Donald B. Straus Fund (Lynes 116).



Georgia O'Keeffe  
*Light Coming on the Plains No. I*  
 1917, watercolor on paper, 11 7/8 X 8 7/8 inches  
 © Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas, 1966.30

Fig. 3. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Light Coming on the Plains No. I*, 1917, watercolor on thin, beige, smooth wove paper, 11 7/8 x 8 7/8 in., Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Fort Worth, Texas (Lynes 119).



Fig. 4. Georgia O'Keeffe, *The Shelton with Sunspots N.Y.*, 1926, oil on canvas, 48 ½ x 30 ¼ in., The Art Institute of Chicago, Gift of Leigh B. Block (Lynes 296);

*New York City with Moon*, 1925, oil on canvas, mounted to Masonite, 48 x 30 in., Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, Lugano, Switzerland, 1981 (Lynes 269);

*Radiator Bldg –Night, New York*, 1927, oil on canvas, 48 x 30 in., The Carl Vechten Gallery of Fine Arts, Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee, The Alfred Stieglitz Collection, Gift of Georgia O'Keeffe, 1957 (Lynes 333).



Fig. 5. Georgia O'Keeffe, *East River No 1 (East river from Shelton 30<sup>th</sup>)*, 1927/1928, oil on canvas, 12 x 32 in., New Jersey State Museum. Purchased by Association for the Arts of the New Jersey State Museum with a gift from Mary Lea Johnson (Lynes 359).



Fig. 6. Georgia O'Keeffe, *59<sup>th</sup> St. Studio*, 1919, oil on canvas, 35 x 29 in., Private Collection, New York, 1974 (Lynes 159).



Fig. 7. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Starlight Night, Lake George*, 1922, oil on canvas, 16 x 24 in., Private Collection, Los Angeles, California, 1990 (Lynes 212).

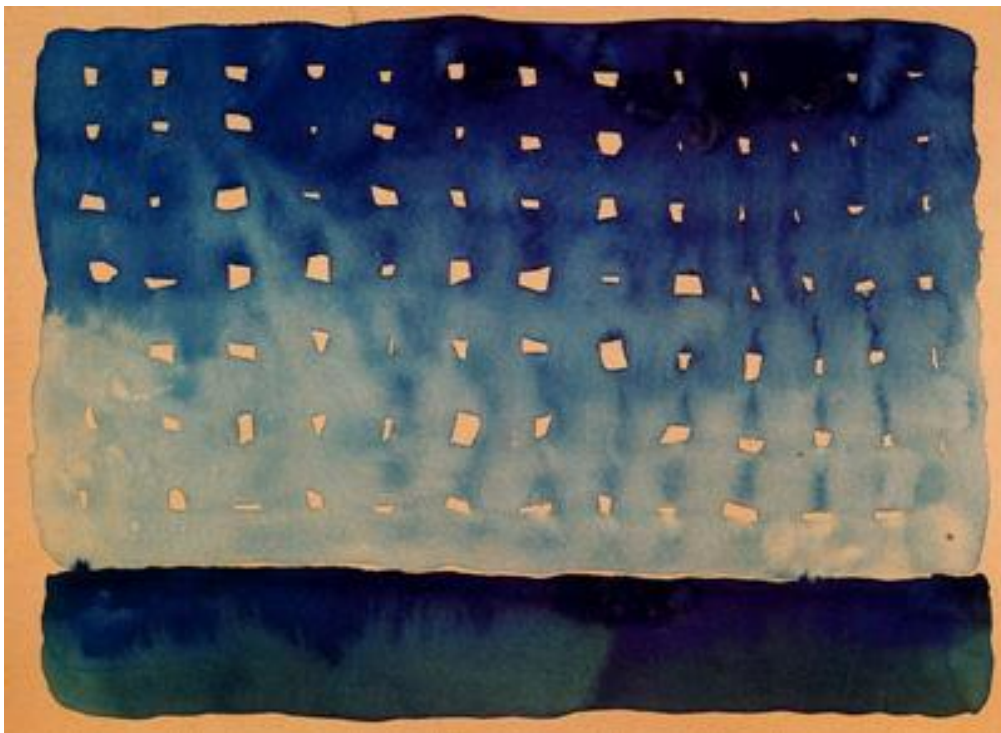


Fig. 8. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Starlight Night*, 1917, watercolor and graphite on thin, beige, smooth wove print, 8  $\frac{7}{8}$  x 11  $\frac{3}{4}$  in., Private Collection, 1987 (Lynes 118).



Fig. 9. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Lake George with Crows*, 1921, oil on canvas, 28 ½ x 25 in., National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Gift of The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation, Abiquiu, New Mexico, 1995 (Lynes 193).



Fig. 10. Georgia O'Keeffe, *The Red Hills with Sun (The Red Hills & The Sun, Lake George)*, 1927, oil on canvas, 27 x 32 in., The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C., 1945 (Lynes 355).





Fig. 11. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Lake George, formerly Reflection Seascape*, 1922, oil on canvas, 16 x 22 in., San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Gift of Charlotte Mack (Lynes 212).



Fig. 12. Georgia O'Keeffe, *From the Lake No.3*, 1924, oil on canvas, 36 x 30 in., Philadelphia Museum of Art: Bequest of Georgia O'Keeffe for the Alfred Stieglitz Collection (Lynes 259).



Fig. 13. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Black Hills with Cedar (Black Hills & Cedar, New Mexico)*, 1941, oil on canvas, 16 x 30 in., Hirschhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Bequest of Joseph Hirshhorn, 1986 (Lynes 653).



I.2. Paintings Referred to in Chapter II “Painting Poems on O’Keeffe’s Living and Still  
Natures”



Fig. 1. Georgia O’Keeffe, *Petunia II*, 1924, oil on canvas, 36 x 30 in., Georgia O’Keeffe Museum, Gift of the Burnett Foundation and Gerald and Kathleen Peters (Lynes 251).



Fig. 2. Georgia O’Keeffe, *D. H. Lawrence Pine Tree*, 1929, oil on canvas, 31 x 39 1/8 in., Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund (Lynes 413).



Fig. 3. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Red Poppy*, 1927, oil on canvas, 7 x 9 in., Private Collection, New York, 1979 (Lynes 343).



Fig. 4. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Oriental Poppies*, 1928, oil on canvas, 40 x 30 in., Collection Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Museum Purchase (Lynes 344).



Fig. 5. Georgia O’Keeffe, *Jimson Weed* (Jimson Weed- *Datura Stramonium*), 1936, oil on canvas, 70 x 83 ½ in., Indianapolis Museum of Art, Gift of Eli Lilly and Company (Lynes 553).



Fig. 6. Georgia O’Keeffe, *Jimson Weed (White Flower No 1)*, 1932, oil on canvas, 48 x 40 in., Georgia O’Keeffe Museum, Gift of The Burnett Foundation (Lynes 505).



Fig. 7. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Belladonna—Hāna* (*Datura—Hawaii*), 1939, oil on canvas, 36 1/4 x 30 1/8 in., Private Collection 1987, extended loan (Lynes 610).



Fig. 8. Georgia O'Keeffe, *The White Flower (White Trumpet Flower)*, 1932, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 in., San Diego Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs Inez Grant Parker, in memory of Earle W. Grant (Lynes 506).



Fig. 9. Georgia O’Keeffe, *Red Hills and White Flower*, 1937, pastel on very rough wove paper mounted to grey cardboard, 19 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 25 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub>, in., Georgia O’Keeffe Museum, Gift of the Burnett Foundation (Lynes 576).



Fig. 10. Georgia O’Keeffe, *Datura and Pedernal (Jimson Weed, Pink Hills, Pedernal)*, 1940, oil on board, 11 x 16 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in., Collection of the Orlando Museum of Art, Orlando, Florida, Gift of the Dorothy Meigs Eidlitz Foundation, 1969 (Lynes 627).





Fig. 11. Georgia O’Keeffe, *Abstraction—White Rose II*, 1927, oil on canvas, 36 x 30 in., Georgia O’Keeffe Museum, Gift of the Burnett Foundation and The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation (Lynes 348).



Fig. 12. Georgia O’Keeffe, *Two Jimson Weeds with Green Leaves and Blue Sky*, 1938, oil on canvas, 48 x 40 in., Collection of Françoise & Harvey Rambach, New Jersey, exchange, 1986 (Lynes 593).



Fig. 13. Georgia O’Keeffe, *White Camellia*, 1938, pastel on moderately thick, cream, rough paper mounted to a thick grey cardboard, commercially prepared pastel board with a sand textured surface, 21 ½ x 27 ½ in., private collection, 1992 (Lynes 592).



Fig. 14. Georgia O’Keeffe, *Pink and Yellow Hollyhocks*, 1952, oil on canvas, 40 x 24 in., Collection of the McNay Art Museum, Bequest of Helen Miller Jones (Lynes 767).



Fig. 15. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Blue Lines X*, 1916, watercolor and graphite on moderately thick, cream, slightly textured laid paper, 25 x 19 in., The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 1969 [gift of the artist] (Lynes 61).

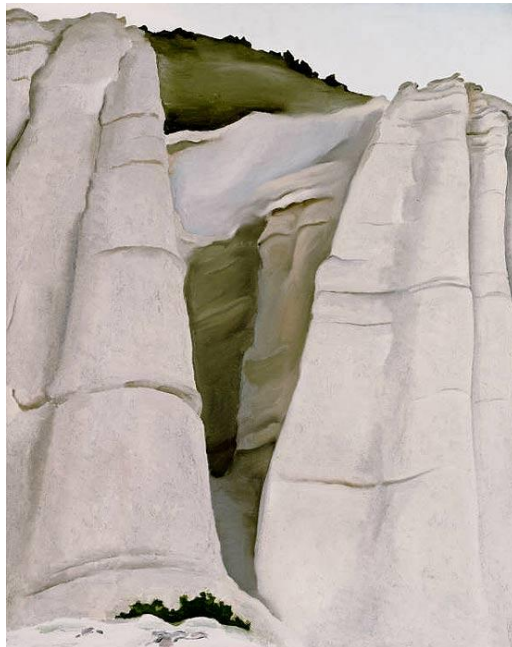


Fig. 16. Georgia O'Keeffe, *From the White Place (White Place in Shadow)*, 1940, oil on canvas, 30 x 24 in., The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C., 1941 (Lynes 629).



Fig. 17. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Horse's Skull with White Rose*, 1931, oil on canvas, 30 x 16 1/8 in., Private collection, 1980, extended loan, Georgia O'Keeffe Museum (Lynes 473).



Fig. 18. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Horse's Skull with Pink Rose*, 1931, oil on canvas 40 × 30 in., Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Gift of the Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation (Lynes 471).



Fig. 19. Georgia O'Keeffe, *From the Faraway Nearby (Deer's Horns, near Cameron)*, 1937, oil on canvas, 36 x 40  $\frac{1}{8}$  in., The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 1959 (Lynes 569).



Fig. 20. Georgia O'Keeffe, *An Orchid*, 1941, pastel on moderately thick, brown wove paper mounted to a thick gray cardboard, 27  $\frac{5}{8}$  x 21  $\frac{3}{4}$  in., The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Bequest of Georgia O'Keeffe (Lynes 640).



Fig. 21. Vincent Van Gogh, *Iris*, 1889, oil on canvas, 28 x 36  $\frac{5}{8}$  in., The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, California (<http://www.getty.edu/art/collection/objects/826/vincent-van-gogh-irises-dutch-1889/>).



Fig. 22. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Black Iris (The Dark Iris No III)*, 1926, oil on canvas 36 x 29  $\frac{7}{8}$  in., The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Alfred Stieglitz Collection (Lynes 316).



Fig. 23. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Cow's Skull—Red White and Blue*, 1931, oil on canvas 39 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 35 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in., The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 1952 [gift of the artist] (Lynes 469).



Fig. 24. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Summer Days*, 1936, oil on canvas, 36 x 30 in., Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, Gift of Calvin Klein [1994] (Lynes 547).



Fig. 25. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Ram's Head, White Hollyhock – Hills*, 1935, oil on canvas, 30 x 36 in., Brooklyn Museum of Art, Bequest of Edith & Milton Lowenthal (Lynes 528).

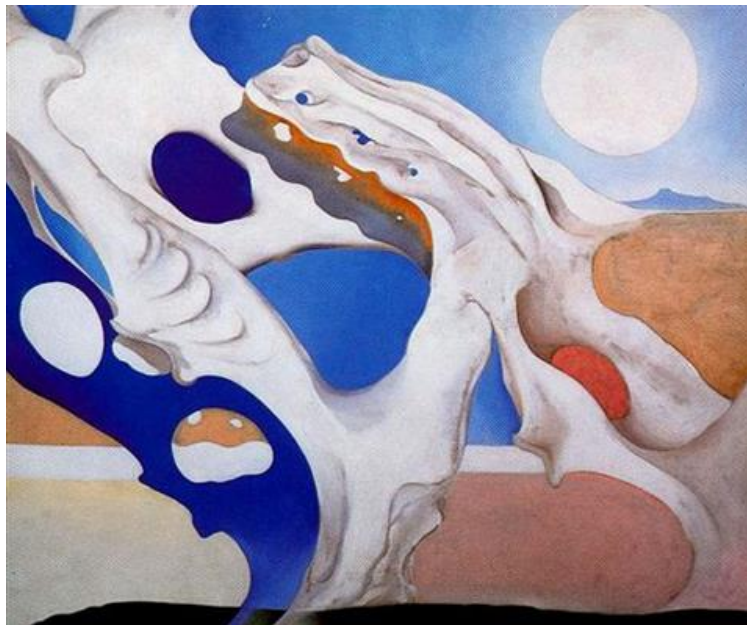


Fig. 26. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Pelvis with Shadows and Moon*, 1943, oil on canvas, 40 x 48 in., Private Collection, Los Angeles, California, 1994 (Lynes 661).





Fig. 27. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Pelvis IV*, 1944, oil on Masonite, 36 x 40 in., Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Gift of the Burnett Foundation (Lynes 680).



Fig. 28. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Pelvis with Distance (Pelvis with the Distance)*, 1943, oil on canvas, 23  $\frac{7}{8}$  x 29  $\frac{3}{4}$  in., Indianapolis Museum of Art, Gift of Ann Marmon Greenleaf in memory of Caroline Marmon Fesler [1977] (Lynes 658).



Fig. 29. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Flying Backbone*, 1944, oil on canvas, 12 x 26 in., The Carl van Vechten Gallery of Fine Arts, Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee, The Alfred Stieglitz Collection of Modern Art, Gift of Georgia O'Keeffe, 1950 (Lynes 681).



Fig. 30. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Red Hills and Bones*, 1941, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 in., Philadelphia Museum of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection [gift of the artist, 1949] (Lynes 644).



Fig. 31. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Horizontal Horse's or Mule's Skull with Feather*, 1936, oil on canvas, 16 x 30 in., Milwaukee Art Museum, Gift of Jane and Lloyd Pettit Foundation and The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation, 1998 (Lynes 545).

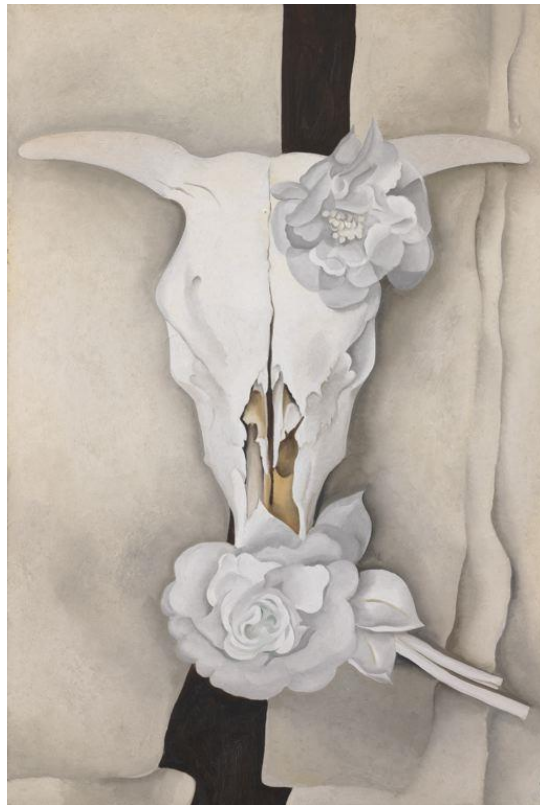


Fig. 32. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Cow's Skull with Calico Roses*, 1931, oil on canvas, 36 x 24 in., The Art Institute of Chicago, Gift of Georgia O'Keeffe (Lynes 468).

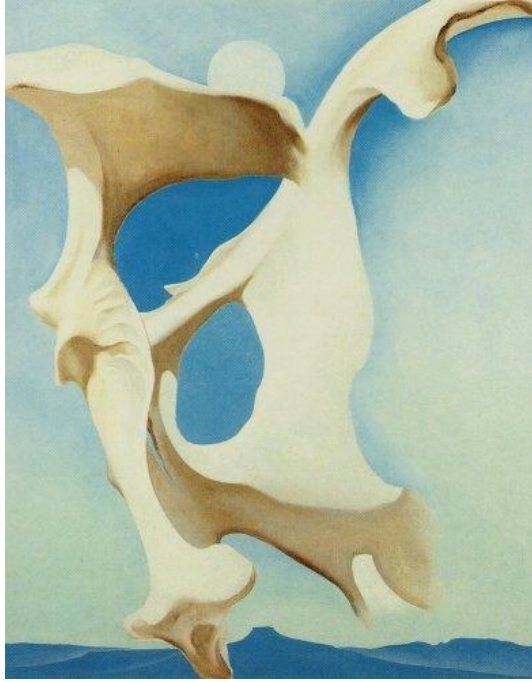


Fig. 33. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Pelvis with Moon*, 1943, oil on canvas, 30 x 24 in., Collection of the Norton Museum of art, West Palm Beach, Florida [1958] (Lynes 659).



I.3. Paintings by Georgia O’Keeffe Referred to in Chapter III “Painting Poems on O’Keeffe’s  
Human Artifacts”



Fig. 1. Georgia O’Keeffe, *Ladder to the Moon*, 1958, oil on canvas, 40 x 30 in., Collection Emily Fisher Landau, New Mexico, Purchase, 1984 (Lynes 838).

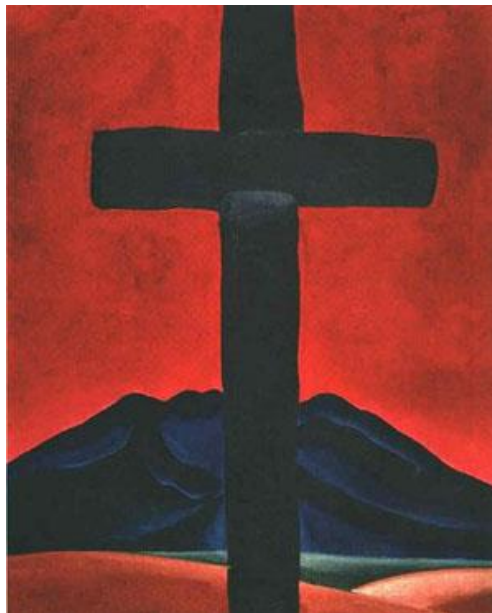


Fig. 2. Georgia O’Keeffe, *Black Cross with Red Sky*, 1929, oil on canvas, 40 x 32 in., Gerald and Kathleen Peters, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 1941 (Lynes 401).

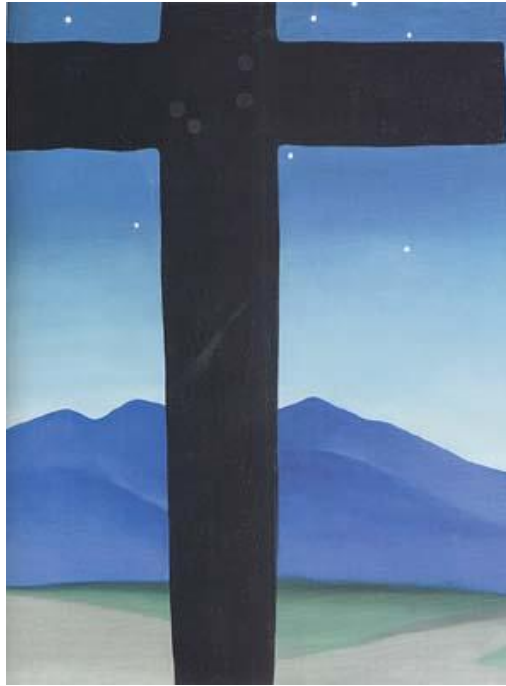


Fig. 3. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Black Cross with Stars and Blue*, 1929, oil on canvas, 40 x 30 in., Private Collection, Chicago, Illinois, 1979 (Lynes 400).



Fig. 4. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Grey Cross with Blue*, 1929, oil on canvas, 36 x 24 in., The Albuquerque Museum, Museum Purchase, 1983 and 1985 General Obligation Bonds, Albuquerque Museum Foundation, Ovenwest Corporation, Frederick R. Weisman Foundation [1985] (Lynes 402).

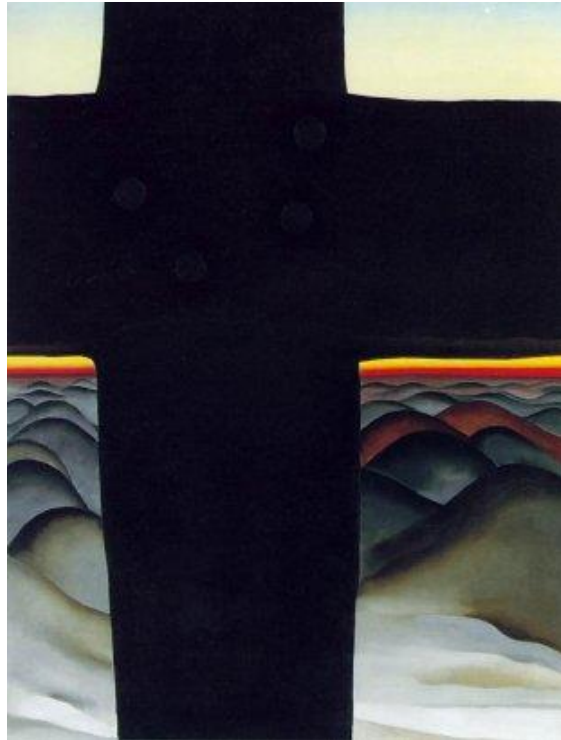


Fig. 5. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Black Cross, New Mexico*, 1929, oil on canvas, 39 x 30 in., The Art Institute of Chicago, Art Institute Purchase Fund (Lynes 399).



Fig. 6. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Ranchos Church No I*, 1929, oil on canvas, 18 ¾ x 24 in., Collection of the Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach, Florida [1953] (Lynes 397).





Fig. 7. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Ranchos Church, No 3 (Ranchos Church, III, N.M.)*, 1929, oil on canvas, mounted to Masonite, 15 x 11 in., Private Collection, New York, 1986 (Lynes 398).

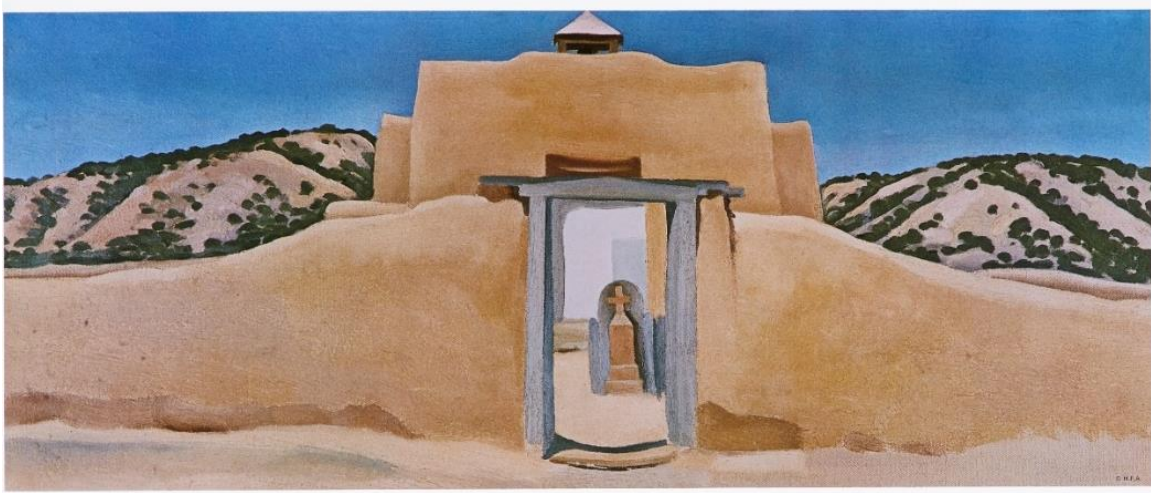


Fig. 8. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Another Church, New Mexico*, 1931, oil on canvas, 10 x 24 in., The Anschutz Collection, Denver, Colorado, 1973 (Lynes 467).



Fig. 9. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Cebolla Church*, 1945, oil on canvas, 20 x 36 ¼ in., North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, Purchased with funds from the North Carolina Art Society (Robert F. Phifer Bequest) in honor of Dr. Joseph C. Sloane [1972] (Lynes 694).



Fig. 10. Georgia O'Keeffe, *In the Patio IV*, 1948, oil on canvas, 14 x 30 in., Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Gift of the William H. Lane Foundation (Lynes 724).



Fig. 11. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Green Patio Door*, 1955, oil on canvas, 29 ¾ x 20 in., Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York, Gift of Seymour H. Knox, 1958 (Lynes 807).

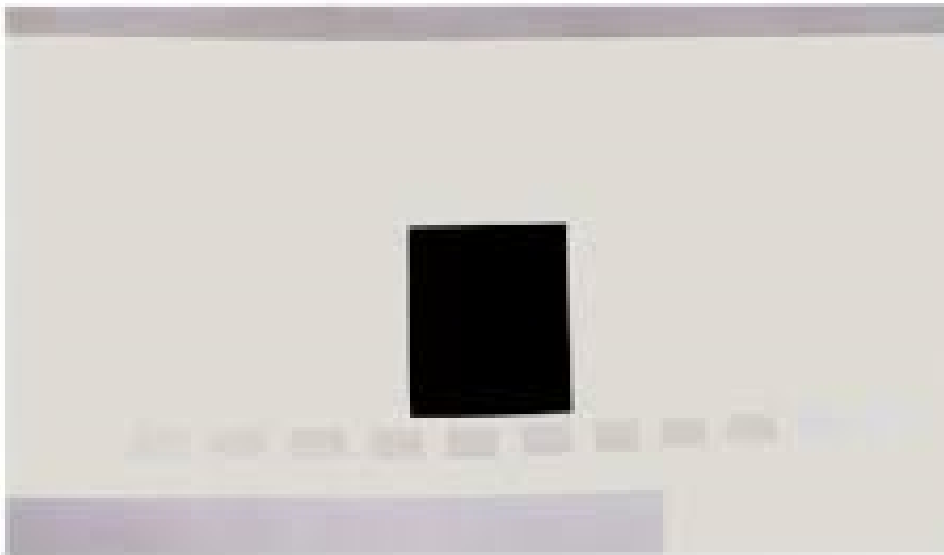


Fig. 12. Georgia O'Keeffe, *My Last Door*, 1952/1954, oil on canvas, 48 x 84 in., Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Gift of the Burnett Foundation (Lynes 786).



Fig. 13. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Winter Road I*, 1963, oil on canvas, 22 x 18 in., National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., Gift of the Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation (Lynes 907).



Fig. 14. Georgia O'Keeffe, *On the Old Santa Fe Road*, 1930/1931, oil canvas, 16 x 30 in., Private collection, N.Y. 1970 (Lynes 457).



Fig. 15. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Road to the Ranch (Road past the view I)*, 1964, oil on canvas, 24 x 29 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in., Bedford Family Collection, 1989 (Lynes 918).

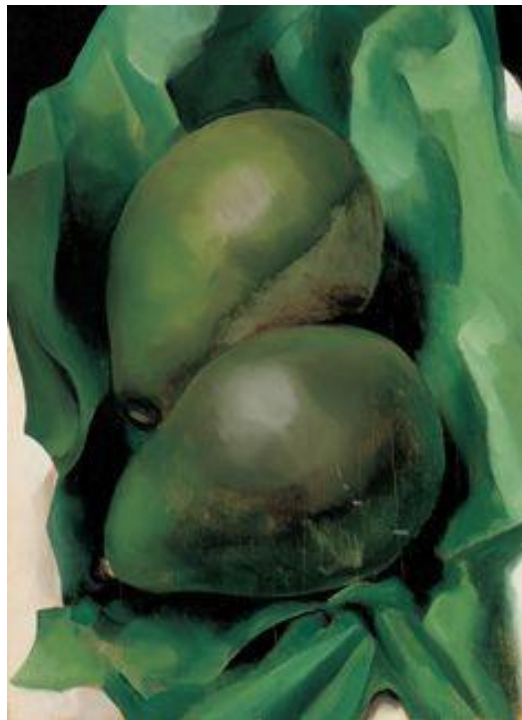


Fig. 16. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Alligator Pears*, 1923, oil on board, 13 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 9 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in., The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation, Abiquiu, New Mexico, 1993 (Lynes 225).

I.4. Photographs of Georgia O’Keeffe Referred to in Chapter IV “Theorizing Photographs on the Artist”



Fig. 1. Alfred Stieglitz, *Georgia O’Keeffe*, 1920, Gelatin silver print. Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, Gift of Georgia O’Keeffe. <http://www.sfmoma.org/explore/collection/artwork/18502#ixzz2omOaDUA7>



Fig. 2. Alfred Stieglitz, *Georgia O’Keeffe: A Portrait—With Watercolor Box*, silver gelatin print, 1918, 3 9/16 X 4 9/16 in., Collection San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, Gift of Georgia O’Keeffe. <http://www.sfmoma.org/explore/collection/artwork/13804#ixzz2bxg4pOAX> San Francisco Museum of Modern Art



Fig. 3. Alfred Stieglitz, *Georgia O'Keeffe—With car after her return from New Mexico, 1929*, Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Stieglitz Collection, Gift of Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation.



Fig. 4. Ansel Adams, *Georgia O'Keeffe and Tree*, black and white silver gelatin photograph, 1938, 7 1/8 x 4 3/8 in., Gift of the Sarah S. McAlpin Family, W2000.127.006.  
<https://www.wildlifeart.org/collection/artists/artist-ansel-adams-346/artwork-untitled-georgia-okeeffe-and-tree-580/>



Fig. 5. Ansel Adams, *Georgia O'Keeffe and Orville Cox Canyon de Chelly National Monument 1937*. <http://www.anseladams.com/picture-desk-the-faraway/>



Fig. 6. Philippe Halsman, *Georgia O'Keeffe at her Ranch in Abiquiu, 1948*. <http://philippehalsman.com/?image=artist>





Fig. 7. Juan Hamilton, *Georgia O'Keeffe*, 1976, back cover photo, *Georgia O'Keeffe*, New York: Viking/Penguin Editions.

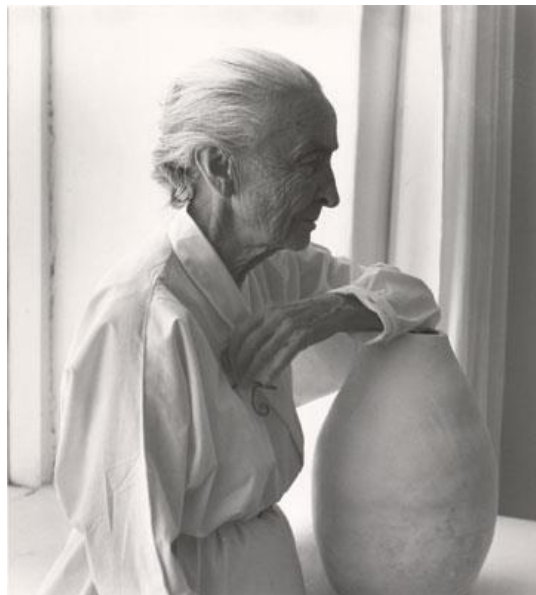


Fig. 8. Laura Gilpin, *Georgia O'Keeffe*, gelatin silver print, 1974, 8 ¼ x 7 ½ in.  
<http://www.artnet.com/artists/laura-gilpin/georgia-okeeffe-0HHDSNXHaO0DGub24Ldf2w2>

I.5. Paintings by Georgia O’Keeffe Referred to in “The Radicant Lyrical O’Keeffe:  
Conclusions”



Fig. 1. Georgia O’Keeffe, *Black Abstraction*, 1927, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 ¼ in., The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 1969 [gift of the artist] (Lynes 330).



Fig. 2. Georgia O’Keeffe, *From the River—Pale*, 1959, oil on canvas, 41 ½ x 31 ⅜ in., the Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation, Abiquiu, New Mexico, 1993 (Lynes 852).

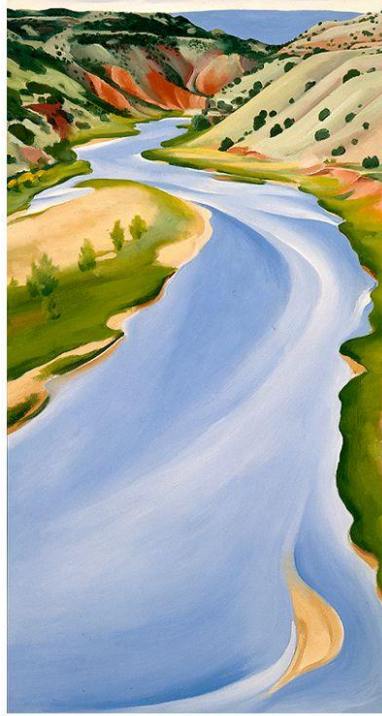


Fig. 3. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Chama River Ghost Ranch*, 1937, oil on canvas, 30 ¼ x 16 in., Museum of Fine Arts, Museum of New Mexico, Santa Fe, Gift of the estate of Georgia O'Keeffe, 1998 (Lynes 581).



Fig. 4. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Mesa and Road East*, 1952, oil on canvas, 26 x 36 in., The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation, Abiquiu, New Mexico, 1993 (Lynes 769).

Appendix II: Translations into Italian of a Selection of Poems Analyzed in Chapter I and II

II.1. Rebekah Banks: “In Window, From Within, after Georgia O’Keeffe’s *New York, Night*.”

*Poets on Painters*. Sheldon Museum of Art, 2008. Print.

II.2. Sujata Bhatt: “Cow’s Skull—Red, White and Blue” *The Stinking Rose*. Manchester,

England: Carcanet, 1995. Print.

II.3. Janine Pommy Vega: “The Red Poppy of Georgia O’Keeffe.” *The Green Piano: Poems*.

Jaffrey, NH: Black Sparrow Books, 2005, 64. Print.



II.1. Chapter I: Rebekah Banks, “In Window, From Within, after Georgia O’Keeffe’s *New York, Night*”

In Window, From Within, after Georgia O’Keeffe’s *New York, Night*

When I reach to touch you I find instead  
my own wavering reflection caught  
in coldness of night-time window.  
Glass entraps an almost image  
of my face and the blurred face  
laid over it, of the clock  
buried in the next building’s brick  
and the facelessness  
of bodies, lampshade, an armchair framed in hotel window, rectangles  
of yellow offices, illumination of the over-worked, avoiding homes  
of those at home behind burgundy and blue curtains, ignoring the noise  
of a thousand glittering cat-eye marbles rolling down the street, no –  
creeping down the street nearly rolling into one another, braking  
in a breath of steam and tuneless idling nearing and imperceptible  
touch going the same direction, the road diminishes to darkness.  
Never arriving (destination irrelevant anyway) surface everywhere  
a whole city lives behind glass, between us a precipice of air  
and it is this, the never quite touching, the always almost.

Alla Finestra, dall’Interno, da *New York, Night* di Georgia O’Keeffe”

Quando mi allungo per toccarti trovo invece  
il mio stesso vacillante riflesso catturato  
nel freddo di una finestra notturna.  
Il vetro intrappola una quasi immagine  
del mio viso e della confusa faccia  
sovrapposta, dell’orologio  
sepolto tra i mattoni del palazzo a fianco  
e le facce senza viso  
di corpi, paralume, una poltrona incorniciata dalla finestra di un hotel, rettangoli  
di uffici gialli, illuminazioni di stressati, che evitano casa  
e chi è a casa dietro tende bordeaux e blu, a ignorare il rumore  
di un migliaio di biglie luccicanti con occhi di gatto che rotolano giù per la strada, no –  
striscianti giù per strada quasi a rotolarsi una sull’altra, che frenano  
in un alito di vapore e stonate girando al minimo si avvicinano e impercettibili  
toccano andando nella stessa direzione, la strada che declina nell’oscurità.  
Superficie che mai arriva (irrilevante la destinazione) ovunque  
una città intera vive dietro al vetro, tra noi un precipizio d’aria  
ed è questo, il quasi mai che si tocca, il pressoché sempre.



## II.2. Chapter II: Sujata Bhatt, “Cow’s Skull—Red, White and Blue”

Cow’s Skull—Red, White and Blue

There’s something very right about it.

It’s truthful, direct,  
to the point—but also awkward,  
ugly, brutal.

Imperfectly perfect.

Red blood.  
White bones.  
Blue sky.

When all the young men in America  
could only think of Europe,

she walked through New Mexico  
collecting bones.

Red blood.  
White sky.  
Blue Bones.

Those days she gathered horses’ skulls  
and cows’ skulls instead of flowers.

I see her staring at the skulls,  
looking through the eye-holes—  
for hours.

Red sky, blue sky,  
red blood  
white bones, white sky—

She understood the land.  
And when she left that place of dry heat  
she took a barrel full of bones  
back to New York.

Teschio di Vacca—Rosso, Bianco e Blu

C’è qualcosa di giusto davvero in questo.

È sincero, diretto,  
pertinente—ma anche impacciato,  
orrendo, violento.

Imperfettamente perfetto.

Rosso sangue.  
Ossa bianche.  
Cielo blu.

Quando tutti i giovani uomini in America  
riuscivano a pensare solo all’Europa,

lei attraversava il New Mexico  
raccolgendo ossa.

Sangue rosso.  
Cielo bianco.  
Ossa blu.

In quei giorni radunava teschi di cavallo  
e teschi di vacca invece che fiori.

La vedo fissare i teschi,  
guardare attraverso le cavità oculari—  
per ore.

Cielo rosso, cielo blu,  
rosso sangue  
bianco ossa, cielo bianco—

Ha compreso la terra.  
E lasciando quel luogo di arsura  
ha portato una cassa piena di ossa  
con sé a New York.





### II.3. Chapter II: Janine Pommy Vega, “The Poppy of Georgia O’Keeffe”

#### The Poppy of Georgia O’Keeffe

In a carmine extravagance  
The skirts of a Spanish dancer swirl  
flamenco rhythms, castanets,  
exuberant dancer drumming her heels on a  
wooden floor  
staccato barks, deep intricate guitars  
the energy pulsing up from the dark  
surrounds and enters.

The poppy is wide open  
her petals curve  
like the skirts of a mountain  
filled with the morning sun  
we climb  
and reaching the pinnacles shout  
like the flower  
in strict discipline, in eloquent *satori*  
in the wild grace of black and red.

Mount Morris, New York, September 1999

#### Il Papavero di Georgia O’Keeffe

Di uno stravagante carminio  
le gonne della ballerina spagnola vorticano  
ritmi di flamenco, nacchere,  
ballerina esuberante che batte i tacchi su  
pavimento di legno  
uno staccato batte, chitarre intricate e profonde  
l’energia che pulsa dal buio  
circonda ed entra.

Il papavero è tutto aperto  
i petali curvano  
come le gonne di una montagna  
pregne del sole del mattino  
ci arrampichiamo  
e mentre tocchiamo i pinnacoli urliamo  
come il fiore  
in severa disciplina, in eloquente *satori*  
nella grazia selvatica del nero e rosso.

Mount Morris, New York, Settembre 1999



## Works Cited

### Primary Sources with Biographies of the Poets

Lavonne J. Adams

Born in Wilmington, North Carolina, Adams grew up in Norfolk, Virginia. Philip Levine's alumna, Adams is a published poet, writer, lecturer, and currently teaches and directs the Department of Creative Writing at the University of North Carolina Wilmington. Adams was awarded Artist-in-Residence at the Helene Wurlitzer Foundation Residency, in Taos, New Mexico in summer 2009 and received a fellowship from the Vermont Studio in 2009. Her most recently published collection is *Through the Glorieta Pass*, winner of the 2007 Pearl Poetry Prize.

"Closeup." *Poet Lore* 103 (Spring/Summer 2008): 28. Print.

"Lake George." *Southern Poetry Review* 45.2 (2007): 14. Print.

"Jimson Weed, 1932." *Southern Poetry Review* 45.2 (2007): 14. Print.

"At the Magnolia Hotel"

"Retreat into Night (*Wave, Night*, 1928)"

"Ranchos Church, Taos, 1929"

"Black and White"

*Prairie Schooner* Vol. 85, n° 3 (Fall 2011): 44-47. Print.

Shurooq Amin

Born in Kuwait to a Kuwaiti father and a Syrian mother, Shurooq Amin is a mixed-media interdisciplinary artist and an Anglophone poet whose purpose is to instigate change in society. She holds an MA in English Literature and a PhD in Ekphrasis. She has been widely published and anthologized internationally. She is the first Kuwaiti to be nominated for a Pushcart Prize for her poetry in 2007. Her books of poetry are *Kuwaiti Butterfly Unveiled*

(1997), *The Hanging of the Wind* (2009), and some of her poems are included in *Gathering the Tide: An Anthology of Arabian Gulf Poetry* (2011). In 2015, Amin was one of the artists at La Biennale d'Arte in Venice to represent the Arab-Asian world. Amin lives in Kuwait City with her four children.

“Georgia’s Plains—on Georgia O’Keeffe’s *Series I—from the Plains*.” *Beauty/Truth: A Journal of Ekphrastic Poetry* Vol. 1, issue 1 (Fall- Winter 2006):26. Print.

“Bella Donna, Debutante—on Georgia O’Keeffe’s *Bella Donna*.” *Ekphrasis: A Poetry Journal* Vol. 4, no. 3. Print.

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“Love on the Lake—on Georgia O’Keeffe’s *Lake George* (formerly *Reflection Seascape*).” “Pistachios and Braids.” Diss. Warnborough College, 2007.

Pamela A. Babusci

Pamela Babusci was born in Rochester, New York, into an Italian-American family surrounded by opera and classical music, art, and literature. She started writing poetry and painting in her early teens. She became interested in writing haiku in 1994. In 1995, through her friendship with Kenneth Tanemura, editor of *Five Lines Down*, she was introduced to tanka, a poetry form she has been using ever since. Babusci has won international awards for her haiku as a tanka poet and haiga artist. She has illustrated several books, including: *Full Moon Tide: The Best of Tanka Splendor Awards*, *Taboo Haiku*, *Chasing the Sun*, *Take Five: Best Contemporary Tanka*, and *A Thousand Reasons*. She was the logo artist for Haiku North America in New York in 2003 and Haiku North America in Winston-Salem, North Carolina in 2007. Her first tanka book *A Thousand Reasons* was published in 2009. Babusci is also the founder and now solo editor of *Moonbathing: a journal of women’s tanka*, the first all-women’s tanka journal in the United States.

3 Tanka. *A Solitary Woman*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013.

#### Rebekah Banks

Rebekah Banks was born in Lincoln, Nebraska. With her poem "In Window, From Within (after Georgia O'Keeffe's *New York, Night*)" she won The Nebraska Poets on Sheldon Paintings Poetry Contest in 2008 organized by the Sheldon Museum of Art.

"In Window, from Within (after Georgia O'Keeffe's *New York, Night*)," *Poets on Painters*, Sheldon Museum of Art, 2008. Print.

#### Susan J. Barbour

Susan Barbour grew up in Champaign, Illinois. She obtained a BA in English Literature from Dartmouth College and an MA from The Johns Hopkins University. She recently completed her PhD at Oxford University where she was a Clarendon Scholar. Her poems have appeared in the United States and in the United Kingdom in *Oxford Poetry* and *The Paris Review*. In 2010, she was included in the anthology *Joining Music with Reason*. Her criticism has appeared in *Textual Practice* and *The Review of English Studies* where she was short-listed for the *RES* Essay Prize. Her translations from French includes Herve Tullet's *Doodle Cook*. She is currently a Visiting Scholar at Columbia and divides her time between Paris, Oxford, and New York City.

"O'Keeffe's *Music—Pink and Blue*." *Joining Music with Reason—34 Poets, British and American, Oxford 2004-2009*. Ed. by Christopher Ricks, Chipping Norton, UK: The Waywiser Press, 2011. Print.

Erinn Batykefer

Erinn Batykefer, a native of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, is a young writer and librarian. She graduated at the University of Wisconsin-Madison's School of Library and Information Studies in 2012. She is one of the three founders of the Library as Incubator Project that promotes and facilitates creative collaboration between libraries and artists of all types. Her first poetry collection *Allegheny, Monongahela* has won the Benjamin Saltman Poetry Prize.

*Allegheny, Monongahela*. Pasadena, CA: Red Hen Press, 2009. Print.

"Georgia O'Keeffe Sews her Husband a Garment to Burn In." *Poetry East* Number 63 (Fall 2008): 24-26.

"Clam Shell." *Passages North* 30th Anniversary Issue, Vol. 30.1 (Winter/Spring 2009): 243. Print.

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"Georgia O'Keeffe in Black and White." *Salt Hill No. 20* (Winter 2008): 22. Print.

Marvin Bell

Marvin Bell was born in New York City. He holds a BA from Alfred University, an MA from the University of Chicago, and an MFA from the University of Iowa. His first collection of poetry *Things We Dreamt We Died For* was published in 1966, followed by *A Probable Volume of Dreams* in 1969, and *Stars Which See, Stars Which Do Not See* (1977), finalist for the National Book Award. His most recent book is *Vertigo: The Living Dead Man*

*Poems* (2011). In *7 Poets, 4 Days, 1 Book* (2009), Bell worked with six other poets, including Tomaz Salamun, Dean Young, and Christopher Merrill. *Mars Being Red* (2007) was a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Award. Bell's other collections include *Rampant* (2004), *Nightworks: Poems, 1962-2000* (2000), *Ardor: The Book of the Dead Man, Volume 2* (1997), *A Marvin Bell Reader: Selected Poetry and Prose* (1994), *The Book of the Dead Man* (1994), *Iris of Creation* (1990), *New and Selected Poems* (1987). He has also published *Old Snow Just Melting: Essays and Interviews* (1983), as well as *Segues: A Correspondence in Poetry with William Stafford* (1983). He served two terms as Iowa's first Poet Laureate. His other honors include awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, The American Poetry Review, fellowships from the Guggenheim and National Endowment for the Arts, and Senior Fulbright appointments to Yugoslavia and Australia. Bell taught for forty years for the Iowa Writers' Workshop, retiring in 2005 as Flannery O'Connor Professor of Letters. Currently he serves on the Faculty of Pacific University's low-residency MFA program. He has also taught at Goddard College, the University of Hawaii, the University of Washington and Portland State University.

"O'Keefe Left to Herself." *Gettysburg Review* 3, n°2, (Spring 1990): 329. Print.

Carol L. Berg

Carol Berg's poems have been published in literary journals like *The Bakery*, *Fifth Wednesday Journal*, *blossombones*, and *Spillway*. She has recently published three chapbooks, *The Ornithologist Poems*, *Ophelia Unraveling*, and *Her Vena Amoris*.

"Pink Camillia." *The Quarterly* 5 n°3, 1988.



## Jeannie Bergmann

Jeannie Bergmann is a poet, science-fiction writer, artist, and web designer. She maintains a number of public-service websites such as madpoetry.org, a poetry site in Madison, Wisconsin, the wfop.org, Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets site, and the sfpoetry.com, the Science Fiction Poetry Association. She has appeared in journals like *Alimentum*, *Asimov's Science Fiction*, *Diagram*, *Margie*, *Opium*, *Right Hand Pointing*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Strange Horizons*, *Tattoo Highway*, *Beauty/Truth*, and *Weird Tales*. Among the numerous awards, she won the 2015 Science Fiction Poetry Association's Rhysling Award for the Long Poem, the WFOP 65th Anniversary Poetry Contest, and the 2013 SFPA Elgin Chapbook Award. She won the 2009 Tapestry of Bronze contest and the 2008 SFPA Rhysling Award for the Short Poem. She is the editor of *Star\*Line*, the journal of the Science Fiction Poetry Association, and the poetry section editor of *Mobius: The Journal of Social Change*.

“The Culture of the Impractical—for Georgia O’Keeffe’s *Oriental Poppies*, 1928.”  
*Beauty/Truth: A Journal for Ekphrastic Poetry* 1 n° 1 (Fall–Winter 2006):16. Print.

## Sujata Bhatt

Sujata Bhatt is an Indian poet, a native speaker of Gujarati. Born in Ahmedabad, former capital of the Indian state of Gujarat, and brought up in the big city of Pune, in the Indian state of Maharashtra, her family moved to the United States in 1968. She attended the University of Iowa for her MFA, and for a time she was writer-in-residence at the University of Victoria, Canada. Writer and translator from the German language, and from Gujarati into English, Bhatt writes Indian-English rather than Anglo-Indian poetry—as she often asserts. Her widely published poetry has been recognized as a distinctive voice in contemporary poetry and has received numerous awards. She lives now in Bremen, Germany, with her husband, German writer Michael Augustin, and their daughter.

“The Light Teased Me”

“Cow’s Skull—Red, White and Blue”

“Pelvis with Moon.”

*The Stinking Rose*. Manchester, UK: Carcanet, 1995. Print.

#### Kate Braid

Kate Braid is a Canadian poet, born in Calgary, Alberta, and raised in Montreal, Quebec. After having worked as a laborer, apprentice and journey carpenter building houses, high rises and bridges and doing renovations as a non-union, union and self-employed carpenter, in 1995 she started teaching Creative Writing at the University of British Columbia, Simon Fraser University and for ten years at Malaspina University-College (now Vancouver Island University). Her poetry has won several awards including the Pat Lowther Award for the best book of poetry by a Canadian woman and the Vancity Book Prize.

*Inward to the Bones, Georgia O’Keeffe’s Journey with Emily Carr*. Victoria, British Columbia: Polestar, 1998. Second edition, Halfmoon Bay, BC: Caitlin Press, 2010. Print.

#### Ellen Bryant Voigt

Voigt grew up in Virginia, graduated from Converse College, and received an MFA from the University of Iowa. She has taught at M.I.T. and Goddard College where in 1976 she developed and directed the nation's first low-residency MFA in Creative Writing program. Since 1981, she has taught in the Warren Wilson College MFA Program for Writers. She resides in Cabot, Vermont. She served as the Poet Laureate of Vermont for four years and in 2003 was elected Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets.

“Wormwood: The Penitents.” Ed. Edward Hirsch, *Transforming Vision: Writers on Art*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1994. Print.

### Christopher Buckley

Christopher Buckley was born in Arcata, California. He holds a BA from St. Mary’s College, an MA from San Diego State University, and an MFA from the University of California. He has received a Fulbright Award in Creative Writing, four Pushcart Prizes, and many other awards. He was a Guggenheim Fellow in Poetry in 2007-2008. He taught at several different United States Universities. He has recently retired from the University of California, Riverside. He is married to the painter Nadya Brown.

*Flying Backbone, The Georgia O’Keeffe Poems*. Fairfield, Iowa: Blue Light Press 1<sup>st</sup> World Publishing, 2008. Print.

### Mathieu Cailler

Mathieu Cailler is a writer of poetry and prose. A graduate of Vermont College of Fine Arts, his work has been published in numerous national and international literary journals, such as *Ardor*, *Epiphany*, and *The Saturday Evening Post*. He has been a finalist for the Glimmer Train New Writers Award, the New Rivers Press American Fiction Prize, and the Carve Magazine Raymond Carver Short Story Contest. He is the recipient of a Short Story America Prize for Short Fiction and a Shakespeare Award for Poetry. He is the author of *CLOTHESLINES* and the short-story collection, *LOSS ANGELES*.

“Days in Oil, for Susan.” in press.

## Alan Catlin

Alan Catlin was born on Long Island, in the State of New York. He graduated in English from Syracuse University. He is a published poet and writer with over sixty chapbooks and full-length books of prose and poetry. He has received seventeen Pushcart nominations. After thirty-four years working in his unchosen profession as a bartender, he is now dedicating his retired life to literature. He is presently working on his fictional memoirs.

*O'Keeffe Equivalents: A Collection of Poems.* Origami Condom website, 2007.  
<http://www.origamicondom.org/Chapbooks/ACatlin.01.pdf>.

*Alan Catlin Greatest Hits #120.* Johnstown, Ohio: Pudding House Publications, 2002.  
Print.

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"Georgia O'Keeffe's Desert Solitaire." *Iodine Poetry Journal* Volume XIII, No. 1, Spring/Summer 2012. Print.

"O'Keeffe Requirements." *Chronogram Magazine, Arts, Culture, Spirit*, Hudson Valley, 2007. Print.

<http://www.chronogram.com/hudsonvalley/poetry-alan-catlin/Content?oid=2167746>

## Gillian Clarke

Gillian Clarke was born in Cardiff, Wales. She is a poet, playwright, editor, broadcaster, lecturer and translator. Although her parents were Welsh speakers, she grew up speaking only English and learnt to speak Welsh as an adult, partly as a form of rebellion. She graduated in English from Cardiff University. Afterwards, she spent a year working for the BBC in London. Back to Cardiff, she worked as an English teacher, first at the Reardon-Smith Nautical College and later at Newport College of Art. In the mid-1980s, she moved to rural Ceredigion, West

Wales, where she spent some years as a creative writing tutor at the University of Glamorgan. In 1990, she was a co-founder of Ty Newydd, a writers' center in North Wales. She has given poetry readings and lectures in Europe and the United States, and her work has been translated into ten languages. A considerable number of her poems are used in British School anthologies. Clarke has published numerous collections of poetry for adults and children, as well as dramatic commissions and numerous articles on a wide range of topics. She was a former editor of *The Anglo-Welsh Review* (1975–84) and the current president of *Tŷ Newydd*. Several of her books have received the Poetry Book Society Recommendation. In 2008, Gillian Clarke became the third National Poet of Wales. In 2010, she was awarded the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry and became the second Welsh person to receive the honor.

“Red Poppy: From a Painting by Georgia O’Keeffe.” *Gillian Clarke: Collected Poems*. Manchester, UK: Carcanet 1997, 107-108. Print.

#### Maxine Chernoff

Maxine Chernoff was born and raised in Chicago where she earned a BA and an MA from the University of Illinois. Winner of the PIP Gertrude Stein Award for Innovative Poetry in 2006, her original, post-modern writing often utilizes prose forms. Her collections of poetry include *A Vegetable Emergency* (1977), *Utopia TV Store: prose poems* (1979), *New Faces of 1952* (1985), winner of the Carl Sandburg Award, *Leap Year Day: New and Selected Poems* (1990), and *World: Poems 1991–2001* (2001). Chernoff has also written fiction and her short story collection *Signs of Devotion* was a *New York Times* Notable Book in 1993. Her translations with Paul Hoover of the work of Friedrich Hölderlin won the PEN Center USA Translation Award. She is an editor of the journal *New American Writing* and a professor at San Francisco State University.

“World.” *World: Poems 1991–2001*. Cromer, UK: Salt Modern Poets, 2001. Print.

Jane Cooper

Jane Cooper was an American poet. Born in Atlantic City, New Jersey, she spent her early childhood in Jacksonville, Florida, and then moved with her family to Princeton in the mid-1930s. She attended Vassar College, earned a BA from the University of Wisconsin in 1946, and an MA at the University of Iowa, where she studied with Robert Lowell and John Berryman in the Iowa Writers' Workshop. She joined the faculty of Sarah Lawrence College, and remained as a teacher and poet in residence until her retirement in 1987. She held the post of New York State Poet from 1995 to 1997. She published and edited many books among which *The Weather of Six Mornings* (1969), *Maps and Windows* (1974), *Scaffolding: Selected Poems* (1993), *Green Notebook, Winter Road* (1994), which was a finalist for the Lenore Marshall Poetry Prize, and *Flashboat: Poems Collected and Reclaimed* (1999).

“The Winter Road.” *Green Notebook, Winter Road*, Thomaston, Me: Tilbury House, 1994, 53. Print.

Sally Croft

“Georgia O’Keeffe’s ‘The Shanty.’” *Ekphrasis* 1, n° 2 (Fall-Winter 1997-1998): 34. Print.

Brian Cronwall

Brian Cronwall is a writer, teacher, and political activist living in St. Paul, Minnesota. His poetry has appeared in many small press publications in the United States as well as in the United Kingdom, Australia, and Japan.

“Looking at Georgia O’Keeffe’s ‘Black Place I.’” *Ekphrasis* 2, n° 4 (Fall-Winter 2001): 20. Print.

Denise Duhamel

Denise Duhamel was born in Woonsocket, Rhode Island. Duhamel received her BFA from Emerson College and her MFA from Sarah Lawrence College. She has been a New York Foundation for the Arts recipient and resident poet at Bucknell University. Her most popular book to date *Kinky* (1997) marries her bent for satire, humor, and feminism in portraying an icon of popular culture, the Barbie doll, through an extended series of satirical postures (“Beatnik Barbie,” “Buddhist Barbie,” etc.). The collections *The Star Spangled Banner* (1998) and *Queen for a Day* (2001) have moved broadly into American culture to display the same satire through the lens of absurdity. Her poetry has been widely anthologized, and has appeared in *The Best American Poetry* annuals. Duhamel lives in Hollywood, Florida, and teaches Creative Writing and Literature at Florida International University, and in the Low-Residency MFA at Converse College in Spartanburg, South Carolina.

“Reminded of My Biological Clock—While Looking at Georgia O’Keeffe’s *Pelvis One*.” *Queen from a Day, Selected and New Poems*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh, 2001, 6-7. Print.

Karen Ethelsdatter

Karen Ethelsdattar is a poet and liturgist whose poems particularly affirm women and the feminine presence of God. She lives in Union City, New Jersey. She is the author of three collections of poems: *Earthwalking & Other Poems* (2002), *Thou Art a Woman* (2003), *Steam Rising Up from the Soul*, and many chapbooks. Many poems have been included in anthologies and published on journals.

“Georgia O’Keeffe.” *Earthwalking & Other Poems*. Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Corporation, 2002, 16. Print.

“What leads me on.” *Thou Art a Woman and Other Poems*. Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Corporation, 2003, 44. Print.

“On seeing a print of Georgia O’Keeffe’s Ladder to the Moon.” *Thou Art a Woman and Other Poems*. Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Corporation, 2003, 60. Print.

“The Lawrence Tree by Georgia O’Keeffe.” *Thou Art a Woman and Other Poems*. Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Corporation, 2003, 61-62. Print.

“These Red Hills.” *Thou Art a Woman and Other Poems*, Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Corporation, 2003, p. 63. Print.

#### Ann Fisher-Wirth

Ann Fisher-Wirth holds a BA in English from Pomona College, an MA, and a PhD in English and American Culture from Claremont Graduate School. She teaches poetry workshops and seminars, 20th-century American literature, and a wide range of courses in environmental literature. She has held a senior Fulbright at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland, and the Fulbright Distinguished Chair of American Studies at Uppsala University, Sweden. In 2006, she was President of the 1000-member Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE), Mississippi Humanities Teacher of the Year, and College of Liberal Arts Teacher of the Year. She has received numerous awards for her work, which appears widely in journals and anthologies. She has taught at the University of Mississippi for twenty-five years. Her most recent works are *The Ecopoetry Anthology*, coedited with Laura-Gray Street (2013), *Dream Cabinet (poems)* (2012), *Carta Marina* (2009), *Slide Shows* (2009), *Five Terraces* (2005), *Walking Wu Wei’s Scroll* (2005), *The Trinket Poems* (2003), and *Blue Window (poems)* (2003). She is also the author of essays such as “The Authority of Poetry,” in *Authority Matters: Rethinking the Theory and Practice of Authorship* (2008), “William Faulkner, Peter Matthiessen, and the Environmental Imagination” in *Faulkner and Ecology*



(2005), "El Otro Sud: Willa Cather and Cormac McCarthy" in *Value and Vision in American Literature: Literary Essays in Honor of Ray Lewis White* (2000).

"Patio with Black Door." *Ekphrasis* 1, n° 6 (Fall-Winter 1999): 36-37. Print.

Lawrence Fixel

Lawrence Fixel was born in Brooklyn and raised in White Plains, New York. After working with the Federal Writers Project, he served the merchant marine for three years and moved to San Francisco in 1950. He soon fell in with the writers of the time, including Langston Hughes, Dylan Thomas and George Hitchcock. A very prolific writer, his first collection of poems was published in 1970. His poetry has been praised for its lyrical writing and vivid imagery. Fixel died in San Francisco in 2003.

"The Door to Have [I and II] Georgia O'Keeffe." *Truth, War and the Dream Game*. Minneapolis, MN: Coffee House Press, 1991, 128-129. Print.

Philip Gross

Philip Gross is a poet, novelist, playwright and academic, based in Great Britain. Educated in Plymouth, he started to write stories and poems in junior school. After his BA in English at Sussex University and his diploma in librarianship, he joined Bath Spa University to teach Creative Studies. In 2004, he was appointed Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Glamorgan, a position he still holds. In 2009, he won the T.S. Eliot Prize for his collection of poems, *The Water Table* and other awards. He was a judge for the 2014 *Hippocrates Prize for Poetry and Medicine*.

"Ghost Ranch: Georgia O'Keeffe." *Mappa Mundi*. Tarsset, UK: Bloodaxe Books, 2003, 49. Print.

## Marsden Hartley

Marsden Hartley was born in Lewiston, Maine, as Edmund Hartley in 1877. He spent his youth in the care of an aunt. In 1893, he moved to Cleveland to join his father and stepmother, Martha Marsden, whose last name he adopted as his first name. Hartley received a scholarship to the Cleveland School of Art in 1898 and was awarded a five-year stipend to study art in New York. From 1899 to 1900, he took classes at William Merritt Chase's New York School of Art, and he attended the National Academy of Design from 1900 to 1904, painting Maine landscapes during the summers that reflected the influence of Cezanne, Matisse and Picasso, artists with whom he became familiar through his studies and contacts in avant-garde circles in New York. He was one of the American artists in Stieglitz's circle that included Georgia O'Keeffe, John Marin, Arthur Dove, and Charles Demuth, all artists collected by Duncan Phillips. Hartley travelled widely to Europe, Mexico, Bermuda, and Nova Scotia. Stieglitz gave Hartley his first New York solo exhibition at the 291 Gallery in 1909 and a second successful show in 1912. During this time, Hartley also wrote critical essays, which were published in his book *Adventures in the Arts* (1921). Eventually, Maine became Hartley's permanent home. There he wrote poetry and created powerful landscapes and figure paintings inspired by the local people and rugged coast and mountains. Even at the end of his life, ill and poor, he continued to work in the remoteness of the region preserving his formal power and uncompromising sense of realism. He died in Ellsworth, Maine in 1943.

“Perhaps Macabre (to Georgia O’Keeffe) on *Cow’s Skull, Red, White, and Blue.*”  
*Selected Poems*. New York: Viking, 1945. 94-95. Print.

## Gayle Elen Harvey

Gayle Elen Harvey lived in Utica, New York. She published several chapbooks and won numerous awards. Her chapbooks are *Among the Fierce Eves* (2009), *Vanishing Points*

(2004), which won the Sow's Ear Poetry Review Chapbook Contest in 2004, *Scheduled, Unscheduled Appointments* (2003), *White Light of Trees* (1995), *Flower-of-Turning-Away* (1992), *Working the Air* (1991). Her poems are also included in the anthology *Claiming the Spirit Within* (1996).

“Black Bird with Snow Covered Red Hills.” *Ekphrasis* 1, no.4 (Fall-Winter 1998): 23. Print.

“Orchideae Grege.” *Ekphrasis* 5, no.2 (Fall-Winter 2009): 17. Print.

### Edward Hirsch

Born in Chicago, Edward Hirsch is an American poet, critic, and author of the national bestseller about reading poetry *How to Read a Poem and Fall in Love with Poetry* (1999). He has published eight books of poems, including *The Living Fire: New and Selected Poems* (2010), which brings together thirty-five years of his work. He has been the president of the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation in New York City since 2002. He holds seven honorary degrees. Since his childhood, he was involved with poetry, which he later explored at Grinnell College and the University of Pennsylvania, where he received a PhD in folklore. Hirsch was a professor of English at Wayne State University. In 1985, he joined the faculty at the University of Houston, where he spent almost two decades as a professor in the Creative Writing Program and Department of English. Hirsch is a well-known advocate for poetry whose essays have been published in the *American Poetry Review*, *The New York Times Book Review*, *The New York Review of Books*. He has been the receiver of numerous awards and fellowships. He is a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets.

“Homage to O’Keeffe—*Evening Star*” (Georgia O’Keeffe in Canyon, Texas, 1917). *The Night Parade: Poems*. New York: Knopf, 1989, 10-11. Print.

Marc Elihu Hofstadter

Marc Elihu Hofstadter was born in New York City in 1945. He received his BA degree from Swarthmore College in 1967, and his PhD in Literature from the University of California at Santa Cruz in 1975 on the late poetry and poetics of William Carlos Williams. He received a second Master's degree in Library and Information Studies from the University of California at Berkeley, and for twenty-three years worked as the librarian of the San Francisco Municipal Railway. From 1977 to 1978, Hofstadter was Fulbright Lecturer in American Literature at the Université d'Orléans, and in 1978-1979, he taught American literature at Tel Aviv University. He has published five volumes of poetry, *House of Peace*, *Visions: Painting Seen through the Optic of Poetry*, *Shark's Tooth*, *Luck*, and *Rising at 5 a.m.* Several other poems, translations, and essays have appeared in over sixty journals. Hofstadter lives in Walnut Creek, California.

“Brown and Tan Leaves”

“Dark and Lavender Leaf”

“From a Shell”

“In the Patio #1”

“It Was Yellow and Pink II”

“Lawrence Tree, The”

“Leaf Motif #2”

“Morning Glory with Black”

“Oriental Poppies”

“Pelvis Series, Red with Yellow” “Pelvis with Blue (Pelvis I)”

“Pelvis with Pedernal”

“Petunia II”

“Summer Days”

“Winter Road I”

“Untitled (Violet, Black, Orange, and Gray), 1953”

“Untitled (White, Blacks, Grays on Maroon), 1963”

“White Center (Yellow, Pink and Lavender on Rose), 1950”

“White, Orange and Yellow, 1953”

“Yellow and Blue (Yellow, Blue on Orange), 1955.”

*Visions: Painting Seen through the Optic of Poetry*. Oakland, CA: Scarlet Tanager Books, 2001. Print.

### Susan Howe

Susan Howe was born in Boston, Massachusetts. She is the author of several books of poems and two volumes of criticism. Her poetry collections are *That This* (2010), *The Midnight* (2003), *Kidnapped* (2002), *The Europe of Trusts* (2002), *Pierce-Arrow* (1999), *Frame Structures: Early Poems 1974-1979* (1996), *The Nonconformist's Memorial* (1993), *The Europe of Trusts: Selected Poems* (1990), and *Singularities* (1990). Her books of criticism are *The Birth-Mark: Unsettling the Wilderness in American Literary History* (1993), which was named “International Book of the Year” by the *Times Literary Supplement*, and *My Emily Dickinson* (1985). Her work has also appeared in *Anthology of American Poetry*, edited by Cary Nelson (1999), *The Norton Anthology of Contemporary American Poetry* (2003), and *Poems for the Millennium*, Vol. 2, edited by Pierre Joris and Jerome Rotherberg (1998). She has received two American Book Awards from the Before Columbus Foundation and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1999. She was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship and a distinguished fellow at the Stanford Institute of the Humanities. In 2011, Howe received Yale University's Bollingen Prize in American Poetry. She was a longtime professor of English at the State University of New York at Buffalo and held the Samuel P. Capen Chair of Poetry

and the Humanities. She was elected a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets in 2000. She lives in Guilford, Connecticut.

“*Summer Days*, a Painting by Georgia O’Keeffe.” “Georgia O’Keeffe and Other Women Artists.” *Kansas Quarterly* Vol. 19, n°4, (1987): 24; *Harvest: Contemporary Mormon Poems*. Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 1989, 193; *Stone Spirits*. Brigham Young University: Charles Redd Center for Western Studies, 1997, 22. Print.

Jessica Jacobs

Jessica Jacobs grew up in Central Florida and has lived in San Francisco and New York, with stints in Greece, Indiana, and Arkansas along the way. Her work has appeared in *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Cave Wall*, *Iron Horse*, *The Missouri Review*, *Poet Lore*, and *Rattle*, among other journals and anthologies. She holds a BA from Smith College and an MFA from Purdue University. She is Editor-in-Chief of *Sycamore Review*. Jessica is on the faculty of the Sewanee Young Writers Conference and, in spring 2016, she participates to the Hendrix-Murphy Writer-in-Residence at Hendrix. She lives in Little Rock, Arizona, with her wife, the poet Nickole Brown. *Pelvis With Distance* (2015) is her debut collection and winner of the 2015 New Mexico Book Award in Poetry.

*Pelvis with Distance*. Buffalo, NY: White Pine Press, 2015. Print.

Laura Kasischke

Laura Kasischke is an American fiction writer and poet. She was born at Grand Rapids, Michigan. Kasischke attended the University of Michigan for her MFA and the Columbia University. She is Allan Seager Collegiate Professor of English Language and Literature at the University of Michigan. Her novel *The Life Before Her Eyes* is the basis for the film of the same name, directed by Vadim Perelman. Her work has been particularly well received in

France where she is widely read in translation. Kasischke was awarded the 2011 National Book Critics Circle Award in poetry for *Space, In Chains*. Her work has received the Juniper Prize, the Alice Fay di Castagnola Award from the Poetry Society of America, the Pushcart Prize, the Elmer Holmes Bobst Award for Emerging Writers, and the Beatrice Hawley Award. She is the recipient of two fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts. In 2005, she was The Frost Place poet in residence and was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in Creative Arts—Poetry in 2009.

“Red Hills and Bones.” *Heart to Heart, New Poems inspired by Twentieth century American Art*. Ed. Jan Greenberg, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001, 37. Print.

### Basil King

Basil King was born in London, England and moved to Detroit, Michigan in 1947 with his parents, who changed their last name from Cohen to King. In 1951-1956, he attended the Black Mountain College where he studied with Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, and Robert Creeley. Both writer and painter, he has worked with artists like Esteban Vicente and Joseph Fiore. He lives in Brooklyn engaged in continuous research and project making. His works *77 Beasts: Basil King's Bestiary* (2007) and *Learning to Draw/A History* (2011) are two of his most relevant collections of poetry and prose writing.

“Georgia O’Keeffe—*Sky above Clouds III, 1963*.” *77 Beasts: Basil King's Bestiary*. East Rockaway, New York: Marsh Hawk Press, 2007, 10. Print.

“Across and Back.” *Learning to Draw / A History*. Ed. Daniel Staniforth. Cheltenham, UK: Skylight Press, 2011, 18-20. Print.

Robert Kirschten

Robert Kirschten holds a BA in English and Philosophy from DePaul University, a MA and a PhD in Poetics, Rhetoric, and Poetry from the University of Chicago. He taught film, composition, American literature at Ohio State University, Newark, and at present, teaches technical writing, American literature, creative writing, and screenwriting at Prairie View A&M University, Texas. Kirschten is the author of *Nighthawks & Irises: Poetry Video on Paintings* (2010), *Chicago Poems: Poetry Video* (2009), *Old Family Movies: Poetry Video* (2008), and *Fribble and Wheeze: A Post Postmodern Book of Poems* (2006).

“Georgia O’Keeffe’s painting ‘Music – Pink and Blue, II,’ 1919.” *Nighthawks and Irises: Poems about Paintings*. Lewiston, NY: Edward Mellen Press, 2000. Print.

Carolyn Kreiter-Foronda

Named Poet Laureate of Virginia in 2006, Carolyn Kreiter-Foronda has long been promoting poetry in every corner of Virginia. She is an educator and has received numerous literary and academic honors. A widely published and anthologized poet, Kreiter-Foronda is also an abstract colorist painter and her artwork has been featured in solo exhibitions throughout northern, central, and eastern Virginia. Her most recent publications are *Gathering Light* (2013), *The Embrace: Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo Poems* (2013), *The River Country* (2008).

“As a Teacher I’m inclined to Ignore the Critics”

“Red Poppy”

“Above Clouds”

“Summering at Lake George”

*Gathering Light*. Ed. Robert P. Arthur. Allentown, PA: Northampton House Press LLC e-edition, 2013. Print.



## Maxine Kumin

Kumin was born in Germantown, Philadelphia, in 1925, into a Reform Jewish family. She attained a BA and an MA from Radcliffe, and was a scholar at the Radcliffe Institute for Independent Study. She published her sixteenth poetry collection *Still to Mow* in 2007. Her awards include the Pulitzer and Ruth Lilly Poetry Prizes, the Poet's Prize, the Aiken Taylor Award, the 2005 Harvard Arts Medal, the Robert Frost Medal in 2006, and the 2008 Paterson Prize for Distinguished Literary Achievement. She served as Poet Laureate of the United States and as Poet Laureate of New Hampshire from 1989 to 1994. She taught at Princeton, Columbia, Brandeis, MIT, Washington at St. Louis, and Miami Universities. Together with fellow-poet Carolyn Kizer, she first served on and then resigned from the Board of Chancellors of the Academy of American Poets, an act that galvanized the movement for opening this body to a wider representation by women and minorities. Kumin had a long lasting and nurturing friendship with poet Anne Sexton. Kumin died in 2014.

“A Calling.” *Nurture*. New York: Viking Press, 1989, 49. Print.

## Rickey Laurentiis

Rickey Laurentiis was raised in New Orleans, Louisiana. He received his MFA in Writing at the Washington University in St Louis. He is the author of *Boy with Thorn*, selected by Terrance Hayes for the 2014 Cave Canem Poetry Prize. Laurentiis has been the recipient of 2013 Creative Writing Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts and a 2012 Ruth Lilly Fellowship from the Poetry Foundation. His other honors include fellowships from the Atlantic Center for the Arts, the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, the Cave Canem Foundation, the Civitella Ranieri Foundation in Italy, as well as the Alonzo Davis Fellowship from the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. Named one of the best debut poets of 2015 by *Poets & Writers Magazine*, his poems have appeared in several journals, including *Boston Review*,

*Callaloo*, *Feminist Studies*, *The New York Times*, *Oxford American* and *Poetry*, among others. He lives in Brooklyn, NY, and after having taught at Washington University in St Louis, Cooper Union, Laurentiis currently teaches at Columbia University.

“Black Iris, for Georgia O’Keeffe.” *Boy with Thorn*. Pittsburgh, Pa: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015. Print.

### Lyn Lifshin

Lyn Lifshin is an American poet and teacher. She has published over a hundred books and chapbooks, and has edited four anthologies of women’s writing, appearing then in many others. She has been called “The Queen of Modern Romance Poetry” and “The Queen of the Lit Mags.” She has been the subject of the award winning documentary film *Not Made of Glass*. Her work has appeared in numerous literary magazines and cultural publications, including *The American Scholar*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Ploughshares*, *nthWORD*, *Blue Lake Review*, *Dunes Review*, and *Rolling Stone Magazine*. She divides her time teaching Creative Writing between a home in Niskayuna, New York, and a residence in Virginia.

“Georgia O’Keeffe.” *Cold Comfort: Selected Poems 1970-1996*. Santa Rosa, CA, Black Sparrow Press, 1997, 169. Print.

“Georgia O’Keeffe’s *Black Hills with Cedar*.”

<http://www.paintersandpoets.com/2013/10/poet-lyn-lifshin-on-georgia-okeeffe.html>

“Georgia O’Keeffe’s *Blue Green Music*.”

[http://homesteadreview.net/Spring\\_2014/lifshin.pdf](http://homesteadreview.net/Spring_2014/lifshin.pdf).

“Georgia O’Keeffe’s *Ram’s Head with Hollyhocks*.” *The South Carolina Review* Volume 35, n°1 (Fall 2002). Print.

“Georgia O’Keeffe’s *Hills and Mesa*.” *The South Carolina Review* Volume 35, n°1, Fall 2002.

*The Daughter I Don't Have*. Alexandria, VA: Plan B Press, 2005. Print.

“Georgia O’Keeffe’s Turquoise Trail Intaglios.” *Ekphrasis* 2, n°1 (Spring/Summer 2000): 51. Print.

Gerald Locklin

Gerald Locklin is an American poet. He is a Professor Emeritus of English at California State University, Long Beach and the poetry editor of *Chiron Review*. Highly considered, he is the author of over one hundred and fifty books, chapbooks, and broadsides of poetry, fiction and criticism.

“Alfred Stieglitz: A Portrait: Georgia O’Keeffe, 1918, photograph.” *Modest Aspirations: New Poems by Gerald Locklin, Short Stories by Beth Wilson*. San Pedro, CA: Lummo Press, 2010. Print.

Joanne Barrie Lynn

Joanne Barrie Lynn is a stress management and wellness educator, natural wood sculptor and award-winning writer and poet whose work has been published in magazines, literary journals and anthologies.

“Cow’s Skull with Calico Rose.” *Ekphrasis* 4 n°4, Fall-Winter 2007, Sacramento, CA: Frith Press, 2007, 32. Print.

Carol S. Merrill

Carol S. Merrill is the author of the book *Weekends with O’Keeffe*, winner of the 2012 Zia Award from New Mexico Press Women, and of the book of poems *O’Keeffe—Days in a Life*. Merrill worked for Georgia O’Keeffe between 1973 and 1979 as secretary, librarian, reader, cook, nurse and companion. She recently retired from work as librarian at Kewa Pueblo

School and Cochiti Pueblo School. Presently, she is a librarian at the Ghost Ranch Conference Center.

*O'Keeffe—Days in a Life* —. Albuquerque, NM: La Alameda Press, 1995. Print.

*Weekends with O'Keeffe*. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2013. Print.

### Eve Merriam

Born as Eva Moskowitz in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Eve Merriam graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1937, and moved to New York to pursue graduate studies at Columbia University. Merriam's first book was *Family Circle* (1946), which won the Yale Younger Poets Prize. Her book *The Inner City Mother Goose* was described as one of the most banned books of the time. It inspired a 1971 Broadway musical called *Inner City* and a 1982 musical production called *Street Dreams*. In 1981, she won the National Council of Teachers of English Award for Excellence in Poetry for Children. She published eighty-eight books.

“Going 70.” *Embracing the Dark*. Cambridge, MA: Garden Street Press, 1995, 50-1. Print.

### Douglas McClellan

Douglas McClellan received his MFA in Visual Arts in 1950. He taught art for almost four decades at art institutes, colleges, and at the University of California Santa Cruz. His art has been widely exhibited including solo shows in Northern and Southern California, and group exhibitions on the East and West Coasts, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Library of Congress in Washington, DC. He started writing poetry seriously at the age of seventy. He has published six volumes, among which the collections *The White*

*Gallery* (1993) and *So Many Chairs* (2013). He currently alternates between digital collage and poetry.

“Georgia O’Keeffe.” *The White Gallery*. Santa Cruz, CA: Many Names Press, 1993.

Print.

“O’Keeffe.” *Haiku, Images on Modern Art*. [www.dougstudio.com](http://www.dougstudio.com).

Scott N. Momaday

Navarre Scott Mammedaty (Momaday) is a Kiowa Indian poet and novelist. Born in Lawton, Oklahoma, he grew up in close contact with the Navajo and San Carlos Apache communities. He received his BA in Political Science in 1958 from the University of New Mexico. At Stanford University, he received his MA and PhD in English. His books of poetry include *In the Bear’s House* (1999), *In the Presence of the Sun: Stories and Poems, 1961-1991* (1992), and *The Gourd Dancer* (1976). His first novel *House Made of Dawn* (1969) won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. He is the author of several other novels, prose collections, of the children’s book *Circle of Wonder* (1994), and of the play *The Indolent Boys*. He is also the editor of various anthologies and collections. Momaday’s honors include the Golden Plate Award from the American Academy of Achievement, an Academy of American Poets Prize, an award from the National Institute of Arts and Letters, and the Premio Letterario Internazionale Mondello in Italy. He is recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship, and is a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He holds twelve honorary degrees from American colleges and universities, including Yale University, the University of Massachusetts, and the University of Wisconsin. Momaday was a founding Trustee of the National Museum of the American Indian, and sits on the Boards of First Nations Development Institute and the School of American Research. He has taught as a tenured professor at the Universities of Stanford, Arizona, and Berkley, California, and has been a visiting professor at

Columbia, Princeton, and in Moscow. He is currently the Regents Professor of the Humanities at the University of Arizona and a member of the Kiowa Gourd Clan, a dance society.

“Forms of the Earth at Abiquiu.” *The Gourd Dancer*. New York: Harper & Row, 1976, 60. Print.

#### Lisa Mullenneaux

Lisa Mullenneaux is a journalist and book author. As an editorial consultant, she has managed projects for book, magazine, and internet firms. Mullenneaux began her career at *Westways Magazine* in Los Angeles, working with major authors, photographers, and artists on the West Coast. Returning to her native New York State in 1990, she edited law books at Matthew Bender Co. while contributing to magazines and newspapers on travel, health, and fitness. She resigned to launch a travel book press, Penington Press, which has become a popular website for travel news. She contributes regularly to *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, *The Progressive*, *Z Magazine*, and other global news sources.

“Ladder to the Moon.” *Painters and Poets*. New York: Penington Press, 2012, 17. Print.

#### Elizabeth Murawski

Elizabeth Murawski was born and raised in Chicago. She moved to Washington, DC in 1960. She retired from the U.S. Census Bureau where she worked as a training specialist. She holds an MFA from George Mason University and is a published poet. Awarded a Hawthornden fellowship in 2008, as well as residencies at the Helene Wurlitzer Foundation, the Vermont Studio Center, and the Achill Heinrich Boll Association, she is the author of the collection *Moon and Mercury* (1990) and of two chapbooks, *Troubled by an Angel* (1997) and *Out-Patients* (2010). Over two hundred poems have appeared in journals that include *Yale Review*, *New Republic*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *Field*, *Ontario Review*, *Antioch Review*,

*Southern Review*, *Dubliner*, *Poetry Northwest*, and others. *Zorba's Daughter* (2010) has been a finalist for many poetry awards such as the Field Poetry Prize, the Brittingham and Pollak Poetry Prize, the Blue Lynx Prize for Poetry, The Journal/OSU Poetry Prize, and won the May Swenson Poetry Award in 2010. She lives in Alexandria, Virginia.

“The Chapel that Tempted O’Keeffe to Become a Catholic.” *Zorba's Daughter*. Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 2010, 60. Print.

#### Iman Mersal

Iman Mersal is an Egyptian-Canadian poet. She graduated from Mansoura University and received an MA and a PhD from Cairo University. She co-founded *Bint al-Ard* (Daughter of the Earth), which she co-edited from 1986 to 1992. She immigrated to Boston in 1998, and then to Edmonton, Alberta, with her family in 1999. Mersal serves as Associate Professor of Arabic literature and Middle Eastern and African Studies at the University of Alberta. Her work has appeared in *Blackbird*, *The American Poetry Review*, “*Parnassus*,” and *Paris Review*. She has read at numerous poetry festivals, including the London Poetry Parnassus, considered the biggest gathering of poets in world history, where she represented Egypt. Selected poems from Mersal’s writing have been translated into numerous languages, including English, French, German, Spanish, Dutch, Macedonian, Hindi, and Italian. Khaled Mattawa translated into English Mersal’s collection *These Are Not Oranges, My Love* (2008).

“A Ladder to the Moon.” *These Are Not Oranges, My Love: Selected Poems*. Rhynebeck, NY: Sheep Meadow Press, 2008, 75. Print.

#### Alice Suskin Ostriker

Alicia Suskin Ostriker is an American poet and scholar who writes Jewish feminist poetry. She was born in Brooklyn, New York. She holds a BA from Brandeis University, an

MA and a PhD from the University of Wisconsin–Madison. She is married to the astronomer Jeremiah Ostriker who taught at Princeton University. She currently teaches poetry at Drew University's Low-Residency MFA Program in poetry, and poetry in translation. She began her teaching career at Rutgers University in 1965. She has served as a professor of English there since 1972. Her first collection of poems *Songs* was published in 1969. Her fourth book of poems *The Mother-Child Papers* (1980), considered a feminist classic, was inspired by the birth of her son during the Vietnam War and weeks after the Kent State shootings. Ostriker's sixth collection of poems *The Imaginary Lover* (1986) won the William Carlos Williams Award of the Poetry Society of America. *The Crack in Everything* (1996) was a National Book Award finalist, won the Paterson Poetry Award and the San Francisco State Poetry Center Award. *The Little Space: Poems Selected and New, 1968–1998* was also a 1998 National Book Award finalist. Ostriker's *Dancing at the Devil's Party* (2000) examines the work of poets from Walt Whitman to Maxine Kumin. Ostriker's poems have been translated into Italian, French, German, Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, Hebrew and Arabic. The book *Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America* (1986) traces the history of American women poets and argues that contemporary women's poetry may now be compared to a literary movement. The book has been translated and published in many countries.

“O’Keeffe.” *The Little Space: Poems Selected and New, 1968–1998*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998, 223. Print.

### Gregory Pardlo

Gregory Pardlo was born in Philadelphia. He is an American poet, writer, and professor. He received his BA in English from Rutgers University, Camden. In 2001, he earned his MFA from New York University as a *New York Times* Fellow in Poetry. His first volume of poems, *Totem*, was the winner of the 2007 American Poetry Review / Honickman First Book Prize.



Pardlo is the translator of the full-length poetry collection *Pencil of Rays and Spike Mace* by Danish poet Niels Lyngsø. He is Assistant Professor of English in the Creative Writing department at The George Washington University in Washington, D.C. He has previously taught at Medgar Evers College, NYU, The New School University, John Jay College, Hunter College, and NYU. In 2015, Pardlo's book *Digest* won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry.

“Restoring O’Keeffe.” *Totem*. Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press, 2007, 84-85. Print.

### Richard Peabody

Richard Peabody is a poet, editor, and publisher, based in Washington, D.C. A native of the region, he received a BA in English from the University of Maryland in 1973 and an MA in Literature from the American University in 1975. Peabody is one of the founding editors for *Gargoyle Magazine*. He is also editor for the anthology series *Mondo* and runs a small press called *Paycock Press*, which he originally established in 1976 to publish *Gargoyle Magazine*. Peabody's own fiction and poetry is often set in Washington, D.C. and the surrounding region. His poetry is often noted for its strong influences from the Beat Generation and experimental authors of the 1960s like Ken Kesey. During his writing and publishing career, Peabody has taught Fiction Writing for the University of Maryland, University of Virginia, Johns Hopkins University, and the Writer's Center. In addition, Peabody has taught creative writing courses and workshops at St. John's College, Writer's Center, Georgetown University, and University of Maryland. He currently resides in Arlington, Virginia.

“On the Road to Georgia O’Keeffe.” *The Richard Peabody Reader*. Bethesda, Md: Alan Squire Publishing, 2015, 108-109. Print.

## Elizabeth Perdomo

Elizabeth Perdomo was born and raised in Kansas and later in Colorado. She has written poetry since a young teen. Perdomo has lived in the Southeastern United States for a number of years and finally moved to the region from the Rio Grande Valley of New Mexico. Her written pieces reflect on local place and culture, cooking, gardening, ecology and nature, traditions, and spirituality.

“My Last Door – for Georgia O’Keeffe.”

<http://teachgoodwriting.blogspot.it/2010/06/poem-for-georgia-okeeffe.html>, in press.

## Deborah Pope

Deborah Pope is an American poet and professor of English at Duke University, North Carolina. She holds a PhD from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She has published *A Separate Vision: Isolation in Contemporary Women's Poetry* (1999), *Ties That Bind: Essays on Mothering and Patriarchy* (1990), *Fanatic Heart* (1992), *Mortal World*, and *Falling Out of the Sky* (1999). She is currently co-editing a series of writings on pedagogy and gender. Her primary interests are in Twentieth Century American poetry, women's poetry, feminist theory, and creative writing.

“Plain-Spoken—on Georgia O’Keeffe's ‘Cebolla Church,’ 1937.” *Falling Out of the Sky, Poems*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1999, 8. Print. First appeared in *The Store of Joys, Writers Celebrate the North Carolina Museum of Art’s fiftieth anniversary*, Huston Paschal and North Carolina Museum of Art, 1997. Print.

## Karen Rigby

Karen Rigby was born in Panama City. She received her BA from Carnegie Mellon University and her MFA from the University of Minnesota. Rigby is the author of *Chinoiserie*

(2012) and of two chapbooks *Savage Machinery* (2008) and *Festival Bone* (2004). Awarded a literature fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts, a Vermont Studio Center Fellowship, and a grant from the Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council, Rigby has been published in *Poetry Daily*, *Washington Square*, *Meridian*, *Field*, *Black Warrior Review*, and *New England Review*. Her poetry has been anthologized in *Best New Poets 2008* and *The Arcadia Project*, among others. She was the founding editor of *Cerise Press*, an international online journal of literature, arts, and culture published from 2009 to 2013. As a member of the National Book Critics Circle, she reviews for industry magazines including *ForeWord Reviews* and *Kirkus Reviews*. Her work has also appeared in magazines such as *Next American City*, *High Country News*, *Rain Taxi*, *Bookbrowse*, *Publishers Weekly*, and *The Writer*.

“Horse Skull with White Rose.” *Festival Bones: Poems*. Easthampton, MA: Adastra Press, 2004, Print.

“Cebolla Church.” *Savage Machinery*. Georgetown, KY: Finishing Line Press, 2008, 5. Print. Republished in *Chinoiserie*. Boise, ID: Ahsahta Press, 2012, 18-19. Print.

## May Sarton

May Sarton was born Eleanore Marie Sarton in 1912, in Belgium, and moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts, at the age of four. She was a well-regarded writer and poet whose career spanned close to six decades. After graduating high school, Sarton went to New York City to pursue an acting career. She apprenticed with the Civic Repertory Theatre for a number of years before starting the Associated Actors Theatre in 1933. Even while exploring a life in the theater, Sarton continued to write. A frequent traveler to Europe, she met important literary figures as Virginia Woolf, Elizabeth Bowen and W.H. Auden. She also worked as an instructor and lecturer at a number of schools. Her first volume of poetry *Encounter in April* was published in 1937, and her first novel *The Single Hound*, in 1938. Delving into the genre of

memoir, Sarton wrote her first autobiographical work, *I Knew a Phoenix* (1959). In 1965, May Sarton revealed that she was lesbian through her book *Mrs. Stevens Hears the Mermaids Singing* (1965). This move did not diminish her popularity and later novels such as *Kinds of Love* (1970) scored well with the public. Sarton continued to build on her reputation as a memoirist with 1973's *Journal of a Solitude*, giving readers an inside look at her experiences as a female artist. May Sarton spent her later years in York, Maine, living and writing by the sea. In her last memoir, *Endgame: A Journal of the Seventy-Ninth Year* (1992), she shares her own personal thoughts on getting older. Her final poetry collection, *Coming Into Eighty*, was published in 1993. Sarton died on July 16, 1995, in York, Maine.

“Portrait of One Person—as by Georgia O’Keeffe.” *Encounter in April*. Boston, MA:Houghton Mifflin Company, 1937, 36. Print.

Laura Shovan

Laura Shovan is a Maryland poet, author and educator. Her alter ego is the popular Mrs. Poems, who delights in teaching poetry workshops in elementary, middle, and high schools throughout the region. She has been recently awarded the Clarinda Harriss Poetry Prize. Among his works promoting poetry among young students, Shovan published *Mountain, Log, Salt and Stone* (2010) and *Life in Me like Grass on Fire* (2011).

“Thinking about Georgia—after *Georgia O’Keeffe*, 1918, Alfred Stieglitz.” [authoramok.blogspot.it/2013/01/poetry-postcard-13-guest-postcard-poet.html](http://authoramok.blogspot.it/2013/01/poetry-postcard-13-guest-postcard-poet.html), January 21, 2013.

## Patti Smith

Patricia Lee “Patti” Smith is an American singer-songwriter, a true pacifist and activist. Born in Chicago, she spent her early childhood in Germantown, Pennsylvania, before her family moved to New Jersey. Poet, visual artist, and singer, Smith became a highly influential component of the New York City punk rock movement with her 1975 debut album *Horses*. Called the “Godmother of Punk,” her work has always been a fusion of rock and poetry. Her first collection of poems is *Seventh Heaven* (1972), followed by *Babel* (1978). In 1992, she published a memoir in prose *Woolgathering* and in 1994 another collection of poems, *Early Work: 1970-1979* (1994). In 2005, Smith was named a Commander of the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the French Ministry of Culture, and in 2007, she was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. In 2010, she won the National Book Award for her memoir *Just Kids*. She is also a recipient of the 2011 Polar Music Prize. She published a second autobiographical book *M Train* in October 2015 and is presently working on a new album.

“georgia o’keeffe.” *Early Work, 1970-1979*. New York: Norton, 1994, 48-49. Print.

## Cathy Song

Cathy Song was born in Honolulu, Hawaii, of Korean and Chinese descent. She is a poet, educator, and an instructor of creative writing at various universities. She received a BA from Wellesley College in 1977 and an MA in creative writing from Boston University in 1981. Cathy Song’s *Picture Bride* won the 1982 Yale series of Younger Poets competition and was nominated for the National Book Critics Circle Award. Other works are *Frameless Windows*, *Squares of Light*, (1988), *School Figures* (1994), *The Land of Bliss* (2001), and *Cloud Moving Hands* (2007). Together with Juliet Kono, she was the editor of *Sister Stew: Fiction and Poetry by Women* (1991). Her poetry has been anthologized in *Boomer Girls*, *Poems by Women from the Baby Boom Generation*, *Morrow Anthology of Younger American Poets*, *Norton Anthology*

of *American Literature*, and *Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry*. She was also published in *Best American Poetry 2000*. From Honolulu, where she lives, Song is a contributor to periodicals, including *Asian-Pacific Literature*, *Hawaii Review*, *Poetry*, and *Seneca Review*.

*Picture Bride*. Foreword by Richard Hugo. Volume 78 of the Yale Series of Younger Poets. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983. Print.

Francine Sterle

A native of Minnesota, Francine Sterle holds an MA degree in poetry from Warren Wilson College. She has studied writing in a variety of academic and workshop settings, including Oxford University, the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, the Spoleto Writers' Workshop, the Atlantic Center for the Arts, and the Squaw Valley Community of Writers. She is the author of *Nude in Winter* (2006), *Every Bird is One Bird* (2001), and *The White Bridge* (1999). She is a recipient of a Loft-McKnight Foundation Award, a Jerome Foundation Travel and Study Grant, residency fellowships from the Anderson Center for Interdisciplinary Studies, the Leighton Studios at the Banff Centre for the Arts and the Blacklock Nature Sanctuary as well as both a Fellowship Grant and a Career Opportunity Grant from the Minnesota State Arts Board. Her poems have appeared in a variety of literary journals, including *The North American Review*, *Nimrod*, *The Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Atlanta Review*, and in the anthologies *33 Minnesota Poets* and *The Cancer Poetry Project*. She works as a poetry mentor in both academic and community settings.

"Pelvis I (Pelvis with Blue)." *Nude in Winter*. North Adams, MA: Tupelo Press, 2006, 85. Print.

## Gerald Stern

Gerald Stern was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1925. He is a poet, essayist, and educator. He graduated from the University of Pittsburgh and Columbia University and attended the University of Paris for post-graduate study. He has taught literature and creative writing at Temple University, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Raritan Valley Community College, and Iowa Writers' Workshop. Since 2009, Stern has been a distinguished poet-in-residence and a member of the faculty of Drew University's graduate program for a Master of Fine Arts in poetry. He received the National Book Award for Poetry in 1998 for *This Time: New and Selected Poems*, and was named as a finalist in 1991 for the Pulitzer Prize in Poetry for *Leaving Another Kingdom: Selected Poems*. In 2000, he was appointed as the state's first Poet Laureate. His recent books of poetry include *Divine Nothingness: Poems* (2014), *In Beauty Bright: Poems* (2012). Stern was elected a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets in 2006.

“Kissing Stieglitz Good-bye.” *Early Collected Poems: 1965-1992*. New York: W. W. Norton & C., 2010, 308. Print.

## Jeanine Stevens

Jeanine Stevens was raised in Indiana and has graduate degrees in Anthropology and Education from the California State University. She has completed postgraduate work at the University of California, Davis and Berkeley, including the Oxford-Berkeley Program. She is a member of the Squaw Valley Community of Writers. Her work has been widely published and many of her poems have appeared in *Poet Lore*, *The South Dakota Review*, *Alehouse*, among many other poetry journals. She has received awards from the Stockton Arts Commission, The Mendocino Coast Writer's Conference, and the Ina Coolbrith Competition.

She was awarded the 2009 Ekphrasis Prize. She divides her time between the Sacramento Valley and Lake Tahoe.

“Georgia O’Keeffe and Tree—photo by Ansel Adams, 1938.” *Ekphrasis* 4, No. 6 Fall-Winter, 2008, Sacramento, CA, Frith Press, 2008. Print.

Brian Strand

Brian Strand was born in Buckinghamshire, England, where he still lives. Inspired by becoming a committed Christian in 1987, his writings have been published in small press print magazines and internet poetry magazines.

“Abstract Harmony (Georgia O’Keeffe)”

“Perspectives (Georgia O’Keeffe, *City Nights*)”

*Poema: A Selection of Ekphrastic Poems*. Rothesay, Isle of Butte, UK: Q.Q. Press, 2006. Print.

“Symbolic Intuition/Intution”

“Imagine”

“Captioned Cartoon-Georgia”

“septimal – EVERY WHICH WAY”

“Mistress O’Keeffe”

*poetrysoup.com*, *strandguides.blogspot.com*

Virgil Suárez

Virgil Suárez was born in Havana, Cuba, and moved to the United States in 1974, when he was twelve. He received his MFA in Creative Writing in 1987 from Louisiana State University. His books of poetry include *Guide to the Blue Tongue* (2002), *Banyan* (2001), for which he won the Book Expo America/Latino Literature Hall of Fame Poetry Prize, *In the*



*Republic of Longing* (1999), *Garabato Poems* (1999), and *You Come Singing* (1998). He is also a novelist. He has written about his experience as a Cuban refugee and a Cuban-American in his memoirs *Infinite Refuge* (2002) and *Spared Angola: Memories from a Cuban-American Childhood* (1997). His work has been included in the anthology *Paper Dance: 55 Latino Poets* (2002). Suárez has achieved the Florida State Individual Artist Grant, a MacArthur Poetry Prize, and a National Endowment for the Arts grant. He has served as a Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation Panelist in 2000 and a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship Panel/Judge in 1999. He lives in Tallahassee, Florida, where he is an associate professor of creative writing at Florida State University.

“Summer Departure #3—after Georgia O’Keeffe’s *Pelvis with Moon*.” *Thumbscrew* No 15, Winter/Spring 2000. Print.

“The Stayer.” *90 Miles: Selected and New Poems*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005, 69. Print.

Anna Thilda May “May” Swenson

May Swenson was born in Logan, Utah. She was a poet, playwright and Chancellor of American Poets. She attended Utah State University. She taught poetry as poet-in-residence at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania, the University of North Carolina, the University of California at Riverside, the Purdue University, and the Utah State University. She published eleven volumes of poetry during her lifetime. Among the many awards, she received the Bollingen Prize in 1981 and a MacArthur fellowship in 1987. She is considered one of the most vital and provocative American poets of the twentieth century. Among her many published works, it is worth mentioning *Another Animal* (1954), *A Cage of Spines* (1958), *To Mix with Time: New and Selected Poems* (1963), *Iconographs* (1970), *New & Selected Things Taking Place* (1978), *In Other Words* (1987), and *Collected Poems* (2013).

“O’Keeffe’s retrospective.” *New & Selected Things Taking Place*. Boston, MA: Atlantic-Little Brown, 1978, 26. Print.

Charles Tomlinson

Charles Tomlinson was born in Stoke on Trent, England. He studied English at Cambridge University. He was an elementary school teacher, a secretary in Italy, and then taught at Bristol University, becoming Emeritus Professor of English Literature. He travelled widely in Europe, the United States, Mexico, and Japan. He is the author of many poetry collections. His *Selected Poems: 1995-1997* was published in 1997. His latest collection is *Cracks in the Universe* (2006), together with *New Collected Poems*. He was the editor of *The Oxford Book of Verse in English Translation*, and of critical essays on Marianne Moore and William Carlos Williams. He translated the work of many poets, including Italian poet Attilio Bertolucci and Mexican poet Octavio Paz. Tomlinson was also an artist. His exhibition “In Black and White” combining poetry and graphics was opened at the Hayward Gallery in 1978 by the Arts Council Exhibition, and travelled throughout Britain. He was an Honorary Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, of the Modern Language Association, and of Queens' College, Cambridge, and Royal Holloway College, London. He was made Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire for his Services to Literature in 2001. He received an Honorary Doctorate of Letters from the University of Gloucestershire in 2008. He passed away in summer 2015.

“Abiquiu.” *The Flood*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press Inc., 1981, 23. Print.

Richard Vargas

Richard Vargas was born and raised in Compton, California. He earned his BA at California State University Long Beach, where he studied under Gerald Locklin, Richard Lee,

and Dora Polk. He lived in Illinois where he organized readings for Luis J. Rodriguez, Diane Wakoski, Lisel Mueller, among others. He relocated to Albuquerque in 2002 and graduated with an MFA from the University of New Mexico creative writing program. His poems have been published in various journals and literary reviews. He has published three books of poems: *McLife* (2005), *American Jesus* (2007), and *Guernica Revisited* (2014). Vargas was awarded the Hispanic Writers Award for the 2011 Taos Summer Writers Conference, and served on the faculty of the 2012 Tenth Annual National Latino Writer's Conference. He currently edits and publishes *The Más Tequila Review*, a biannual poetry magazine. At present, he resides in Rockford, Illinois.

“Jazz Poem for Georgia.” unpublished poem, 2014.

Janine Pommy Vega

Janine Pommy Vega was an American poet associated with the Beats. She was born in Union City, New Jersey. She found inspiration in Kerouac's *On the Road* and travelled to New York where she became involved in the Beat scene. After living together with Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky, she fell in love with the painter Fernando Vega and moved to Paris. When her husband tragically died in Ibiza, she returned to New York and then moved to California, where she had her first book of poems published. She spent a long time living as a hermit on the Isla del Sol on the Bolivian-Peruvian border on a self-imposed exile. After her return to the States, she published many books, including *Tracking the Serpent: Journey to Four Continents* (1997), which is a collection of travel writings. A pioneer of the women's movement in the United States, she worked as an educator in various schools and devoted herself to improve the lives, conditions, and opportunities for women in prison. She died in Woodstock, where she was living with poet Andy Clausen.

“The Poppy of Georgia O’Keeffe.” *The Green Piano: Poems*. Jaffrey, NH: Black Sparrow Books, 2005, 64. Print.

Jeanne Wagner

Jeanne Wagner was born in San Francisco, California. She studied German at the University of California and earned an MA in Humanities from San Francisco State University. She started writing in 1996. She has been the recipient of several national awards, including a Writers-at-Work Fellowship, an NFSPS Founders Award, the Francis Locke Award, the MacGuffin Poet Hunt, the Ann Stanford Prize, the Briar Cliff Review Award, and most recently, the Inkwell Prize. Wagner's poems have appeared in the *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Nimrod*, *Cincinnati Review* and *Rhino*. She is the author of five poetry collections. Her first full-length book *The Zen Piano-Mover* won the 2004 Stevens Manuscript Prize. Her most recent book is *In the Body of Our Lives* (2011). Wagner serves on the editorial staff of the *California Quarterly*.

“Ontology—from Georgia O’Keeffe’s *Green Apple on Black Plate*.” *Ekphrasis* 4, n°6 (Fall-Winter 2008): 35-36. Print.

Diane Wakoski

Diane Wakoski was born in Whittier, California and educated at the University of Berkeley, California. Recipient of writing grants from the Guggenheim Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Fullbright Association, she has been Writer in Residence at Michigan State University since 1975. She has published more than forty collections of poems, including her series *The Archaeology of Movies and Books*, which includes *Argonaut Rose* (1998), *The Emerald City of Las Vegas* (1995), *Jason the Sailor* (1993), and *Medea the Sorceress* (1991). *Emerald Ice: Selected Poems 1962-1987* (1988) won

the Poetry Society of America's William Carlos Williams Award. She has also published four books of essays: *Toward a New Poetry* (1979), *Variations on a Theme* (1976), *Creating a Personal Mythology* (1975), and *Form Is an Extension of Content* (1972). Wakoski has been named among the foremost contemporary American poets for her experiential vision and her unique voice. She lives in East Lansing with her husband, the artist Robert Turney.

"Dawn Buds." *Jason the Sailor*. Santa Rosa, Ca: Black Sparrow Press, 1993, 168-169. Print.

"Diane's Personal Ghost Ranch." In press. <http://jacket2.org/commentary/diane-wakoski-three-new-poems-work-progress>

Davi Walders

Davi Walders was born and raised in Texas and Oklahoma. She graduated from the University of Texas at Austin. In Washington, DC, she received an MA in Linguistics from The American University and continued graduate work in Human Development at the University of Maryland College Park. Walders is a writer and educator. Her poetry and prose have appeared in more than two hundred publications, including *The American Scholar*, *JAMA*, *Feminist Studies*, *Lilith*, and *Potomac Review*. Her work has been included in such anthologies as *Worlds in Their Words: Contemporary American Women Writers*, *Beyond Lament: Poets of the World Bearing Witness to the Holocaust*, and *Traveler's Tales: Prague*. Her chapbook *Gifts: Poem Portraits of Gifted Individuals Who Valued Giving* was commissioned by the Milton Murray Foundation for Philanthropy and presented by the Carnegie Corporation to its Carnegie Medal of Philanthropy. She edited the project *Using Poetry in Therapeutic Settings: A Resource Manual & Poetry Collection*. Her latest book is *Women Against Tyranny: Poems of Resistance during the Holocaust* (2011).

“Painting Yellow Cactus.” *Women Against Tyranny: Poems of Resistance during the Holocaust*. Clemson, SC: Clemson University Digital Press, 2011.

Hilda Weiss

Hilda Weiss has been recently published in *Salamander*, *Nerve Cowboy*, *Ekphrasis* and *Pacific Coast Journal*. Her work is forthcoming in the *Tar Wolf Review* and *Meridian Anthology of Contemporary Poetry*. She is the co-founder of [www.poetry.la](http://www.poetry.la), a website featuring videos from Southern California open mic venues. She lives and writes in Santa Monica, California. Weiss’s business experience also includes technical writing, Public Relations writing, and photography.

“Horses Skull with Pink Rose.” *Ekphrasis* Vol. 4, n° .2 (Fall/Winter 2006):32; *Optimism about Trees*. Georgetown, KY: Finishing Line Press, 2011. Print.

Sarah Brown Weitzman

Sarah Brown Weitzman was born and grown in Port Washington, New York. She has been a Pushcart nominee and has had hundreds of poems published in numerous journals such as *America*, *The North American Review*, *Rattle*, *The Mid-American Review*, *The Windless Orchard*, *Slant*, *Poet Lore*, *Potomac Review*. Her latest award is the Harry Hoyt Lacey 2013 Poetry Prize. Weitzman received a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. Main Street Rag published her latest book, a children’s novel, *Herman and the Ice Witch*. She published *Eve and Other Blasphemy* (1984), *The Forbidden and Other Poems* (2003), and *Never Far from Flesh* (2005).

“Georgia O’Keeffe, Santa Fe Noon.”

<http://www.paintersandpoets.com/2013/06/more-ekphrastic-poems-from-delray-beach.html>.

Robert Wynne

Robert Wynne holds an MFA in creative writing from Antioch University. He is a two-time winner of the Academy of American Poets College Award and the Poetry Super Highway online poetry contest, as well as the recipient of The Poetry Society of Texas' Eakin Book Award, the Masters Poetry Prize and the Grasslands Review Editor's Prize. He is the author of two full-length collections of poetry, *Remembering How to Sleep* (2007), and *Museum of Parallel Art* (2008). His poetry has appeared in numerous journals throughout North America and anthologies. He lives in Burleson, Texas with his wife, their daughter and dogs.

"O'Keeffe's 'Irises.'" *Museum of Parallel Art*. Huntington Beach, CA: Tebot Bach, 2008, 43. Print.

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