

DAN BEACHY-QUICK

Ghosting the Line: Susan Howe and the Ethics of Haunting

it must acknowledge the spiritual forces which have made it

—Marianne Moore

Too much and not enough.

—Heraclitus

Prefatory

I first read Susan Howe's poems in the spring time. A professor had given me a copy of *The Nonconformist's Memorial*, and one day when the sun shone bright and winter finally felt put away, I walked out from the ratty apartment I shared with my wife, walked across the street, sat under a tree, my back against the rough bark, and began to read. I read the entire book. When I was done I turned back to those mirrored pages in "A Bibliography of the King's Book, or Eikon Basilike," the lines not behaving on the page as lines of poems were supposed to behave, lines crossing each other, clipping across each other's utterances, lines that confuse, lines that confound, that make of themselves a web in the eye, a nest in the eye, lines growing tangle as they grew tangent, not one voice but voices; I could hear them as if in a room in which words gained body, words putting themselves in this difficult and impossible grace called *delay*. Something meant to disappear had not disappeared here: the words of which voice is constructed, these "vibrations of air." These mirrored pages seemed to look at each other; when the book is closed, these pages lie with one face pressed to the face of the other, not a kiss, but a kind of circular breathing, a kind of circulation. I looked and looked at those pages. I read in the middle—

t

o

v ip

A

and on the facing page—

A
pi v
o
t¹

the word broken apart letter by letter, but legible through its damage. Here is one form of fearful symmetry: a pivot that pivots itself. See how the word isn't linear, but in orbit around itself, a centerless center. But these two pages mirror each other, reflect each other. The word is not the only thing in circulation. It is as if one page looks at itself in the mirror, but neither page knows which is but image and which is actual, nor does the reader know. There is a question here; it is not a question that asks itself, nor is it a question that can be asked. We feel the medieval philosopher's endless concern with the nature of the reality of the mirrored image. Save here it is not a face reflected, behind which could be seen the room in which the philosopher asks his questions of himself to himself, some self who will not answer, but only mimes back the face in its effort. Here voice reflects voice, an echo chamber in a mirror on a page as still—one might hazard to say—as Narcissus's pond. Origin asks a haunted question. Am I the first?

Am I the first?—that is how I felt reading Susan Howe's poetry. It is the feeling of one who enters into the world and becomes bewildered. It is a wilderness condition. And when I looked up from the pages I looked up into the tree out-branching above me. I felt like my breath had blossomed; and when I breathed in, I breathed in the whole tree.

Breath

The library is a forest, a woods, a wilderness. Leaves of trees and leaves of pages fall from branch and from binding fall. That hush in the dim-lit narrow between stacks? Don't mistake solemnity for the dead-leaf strewn path; don't mistake silence for those thinnest threads voices trail behind them in their song. Even what is wild finds a trail and marks it more legible as it passes. Reading is when the eye falls on some compost the foot can't find. "Often a damaged edition's semi-decay is the soil in which I thrive,"² says Howe in her "Personal Narrative" in *Souls of the Labadie Tract*. The damaged voice provides the fertile ground.

Invert the symbol and the library becomes ocean. Melville, quoted by Howe in *The Nonconformist's Memorial*: "But I have swam through libraries." Howe, too (like Coleridge), a "library-cormorant,"

finds in words' watery depths that which nourishes. There is also the book open and flat on the library's table, the pages gathering as two waves about to crash together (or is it a wave about to crash into its own reflection?). And Dickinson: "There is no Frigate like a Book."

To enter these woods recognizes that the "errand in the wilderness" is still our own, these woods through which voices run more swiftly than do the deer, these savage-haunted, prophet-hunted woods. To enter this ocean is to ship with Bulkington on Captain Ahab's Pequod, where "all deep, earnest thinking is but the intrepid effort of the soul to keep the open independence of her sea."³ When Susan Howe walks into a library she walks into the woods. In the "vocalized wilderness" she grows bewildered. It is a mark of honesty, this becoming lost, this losing one's way. When she dives down she dies a little and also she denies death. A page is just a surface masking underneath its unfathomable depths. What does the poet-reader, library-cormorant do? She learns to hold her breath.

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I have heard the wind blow through the woods in such a way that I thought the ocean was near. And I have smelled in the air blown off the ocean a fertile, fecund, rotting smell, as of leaves overturned in a forest. Wind plays tricks, and breath plays tricks, too.

Sometimes by the seaside
All echoes link as air
Not I cannot tell what
so wanton and so all about⁴

The voice, Howe reminds us not only in *The Nonconformist's Memorial*, but throughout the entire body of her work, is composite in the strangest of ways. A construction of opposites, a voice is word carried on breath, sound borne by silence. The voice lives "a sort of border life,"⁵ and the border divides what it divides not flawlessly, but with deep flaw. The voice keeps letting time escape into memory, moment into echo. The body of the word keeps breaking down into no body at all, a kind of silence that is also a kind of soul. The voice marks that border where oppositions fail to be opposite, word and world, syllable and silence, body and spirit. The voice found on the page—that ocean-like blank formed of the forest's wood—navigates a wilderness it contains within itself. It bears in it the marks of "The literature of savagism / under a spell of savagism,"⁶ where here, *savage* shakes free

of connotation, and returns to Thoreau's etymology, traced from the Latin *sylva*, dividing in Old French and Middle English into *sauvage* and *salvage*, the latter meaning simply *a person of the woods*. Pages are savage. Words make the trails they mark. To read is to enter the woods, and to enter the woods is to become bewildered. Howe: "Who is not a wild Enthusiast."⁷

But the enthusiast wilds herself at more than the music inside the voices she hears. She hears also that in the voice which the voice cannot speak, the silence the voice contains, marked by no words but by the breath words contain within themselves, some blank instant some call now, and some call forever. Thoreau, January 4, 1851: "The longest silence is the most pertinent question most pertinently put." Howe is a poet uniquely suited not to answering this most pertinent question, but through the border life of the poetic voice, letting silence ask its ongoing question within her own words. It is a question by which she brings herself into question. Thoreau, again:

My life at this moment is like a summer morning when birds are singing. Yet that is false, for nature's is an idle pleasure in comparison: my hour has a more solid serenity. I have been breaking silence these twenty-three years and have hardly made a rent in it. Silence has no end; speech is but the beginning of it. My friend thinks I *keep* silence, who am only choked with letting it out so fast. Does he forget that new mines of secrecy are constantly opening in me?⁸

Thoreau sees that to speak is to speak silence, speech being but silence's beginning. A word strangely reflects the crisis of body and soul. A syllable marks not only the initial sound as it builds into sense, it marks exactly there where time seems to begin—and because of time, suddenly there is history, suddenly there is history in all its suddenness. But the voice is carried in breath's silence; but the voice carries within it the silence on which it is borne. Words contain within themselves breath that is silence without end, silence larger than the word that contains it—a silence that does not deny expression, but affirms it. That breath affirms chaos still dwelling within cosmos.

Words are an illusion
are vibrations of air
Fabricating senselessness
He has shattered gates
thrown open to himself⁹

When the word is spoken, when the illusion ends, one is left with the senseless air alone. One has put breath then into one's breathing—shattered gate of one's own mouth, one's own mind. That breath is not simply one's own. Not simply the air in the lungs.

Such silence marks the curious terrain of poetic perception. Giorgio Agamben offers to bring such silence into consideration:

. . . not only memory . . . but also forgetfulness, are contemporaneous with perception and the present. While we perceive something, we simultaneously remember and forget it. Every present thus contains a part of non-lived experience. Indeed, it is, at the limit, what remains non-lived in every life, that which, for its traumatic character or its excessive proximity remains unexperienced in every experience . . .¹⁰

Howe, who knows to ask through the work of the poem about that toward which the poem itself works, writes in the "unutterable gathering darkness"¹¹ where "I stray to stray,"¹² toward that *who* "Who is this distance / Waiting for a restoration."¹³ It is too simple to say that this poetry's relation to history is one of reclamation and recognition—of bodying the ghosts—for Howe's poetry contains in it the full complexity of memory occurring in the moment. It arrives in its experience containing that which cannot be experienced. Howe speaks her invitation, her voice in which voices might reside, the poem a place of dwelling not unlike the Library's wilds where, the poet says, "I am at home in the library / I will lie down and sleep."¹⁴ Howe does this work—a work not wholly unlike how sleep bides in the midst of wakefulness—of bringing herself, and so bringing her readers, into that "excessive proximity" that remains silent, experienced only through the fact of its resistance to experience. She offers what remains "not-lived in every life" and whose spiritual nature belongs, as Howe writes of it, to the "Occult ferocity of origin."¹⁵

Breath, I mean to say, is an origin. Breath occult in every word. We forget we are speaking silence when we speak. We forget that when we breathe we breathe in some original silence that preserves our relation to a life we forgot we're still living. That breath gains its greatest philosophical weight in the idea of the medieval *pneuma*; it is a breath we still breathe. The *pneuma* is, as Agamben writes of it, "the breath that animates the universe, [it] circulates in the arteries, and fertilizes the sperm [and] is the same one that, in the brain and in the heart, receives forms and phantasms of the things we see, imagine,

dream, and love."¹⁶ This breath connects the outermost limits of world to the innermost excess of proximity, threads together the macrocosm and the microcosm, universe and self. That spirit-substance that makes the star shine is the very same spirit-substance that makes the sperm potent, that enlivens the heart with the images that there dwell. Medical knowledge of the time thought that the veins carried blood, but the arteries carried *pneuma*. Circulating through the body entire is this breath of the stars, this world-breath. The *pneuma* connects and keeps livid the uncertain realm where the corporeal and the incorporeal join, maintain through their opposition an unforeseeable unity. The poem is a star-chamber and a self-chamber through which the same breath blows.

I listen spheres of stars
I draw you close ever so
Communion come down and down
Quiet place to stop here
Who knows ever no one knows
to know unlove no forgive

Half thought thought otherwise
loveless and sleepless the sea
Where you are and where I would be
half thought thought otherwise
Loveless and sleepless the sea¹⁷

What does the poem do? It learns to listen to the stars, not to know, not to know. How does it learn not to know? How does it learn to listen?

The poem learns to breathe.

Body

Reductive, but maybe helpful, perhaps even honest, to say that Howe's poetry over the course of the books entire contain within them a continuous pivot that turning to one side opens onto poems whose nature explores the *pneumatic* line's spiritual implications, and turning to the other side, opens to a language whose nature explores the physical, the body of the voice, or the voice as body. In part, this complexity in her work—work of spirit and work of body—arises as both a natural and an ethical consequence of the poetic ground she finds herself standing on: "I thought I stood on the shores of a history

of the world where forms of wildness brought up by memory become desire and multiply."¹⁸ Here the wilderness wilds itself, emerging from history's strict fact and wilding that fact back into complexity, into desire, back into those bodies whose only evidence lurks within the "damaged edition's semi-decay" in which Howe finds her fertile soil. Like Oppen's deer in "Psalm," as she finds voices that are themselves bodies, the startle is that "they are there," roots dangling from their mouths, "scattering earth in the strange woods." It is here, in this location all the more real for needing the imagination to find it, that Howe discovers the necessity for her radical vacillation between body and breath:

domain of transcendental subjectivity
Etymology the this

present in the past now
So many thread¹⁹

A "transcendental subjectivity" finds itself no longer limited to the self and the self's experience; rather, this self when it says "I" finds this pronoun of greatest intimacy, this word of the self-same, open on every side rather than closed. The "transcendental subject" finds herself apprehensive as a basic condition: fearful, yes, but also grasping, also seeking, also understanding. Words contain a history that includes us and exceeds us. A word points back through itself past the definite article to the accusative this (Etymology here ambivalent in such a way that it acts almost as a verb—almost as a verb in the imperative). *This* says we are in the presence of what has arrived from out the past's wilds, shuttles the opened self into the past whose nature isn't history's index, but now's experience. A word is a thread. The poem is a test of the words that fill it, a test that seeks to discover if the thread is strong enough to pull into itself that wilderness to which the poem is attached, or strong enough for the poet herself to be pulled through the poem into that wilderness. Haunted, haunting work.

Howe seeks a way "To write against the ghost."²⁰ Such writing doesn't seek to negate, but by pressing against, to bring by the work of language in the crucible of poetic fervor, the ghost into relief—as if the statue could step bodily out of the blank stone, or as a child rubs a crayon against the page until in every detail, down to the very veins, the leaf beneath appears.

The last, short section of *Souls of the Labadie Tract*, "Fragment of the

Wedding Dress of Sarah Pierpont Edwards," re-materializes the body of the poem in a book remarkable in part for the pneumatic quality of the long series that precedes it. The first poem is the fragment of wedding dress itself, reproduced in black and white, a square cloth whose selvage on each side slightly frays, a partial blossom darker than the background cloth, one thread on the top arching above the whole like a solar flare. The fragment is as much a poem as the poem to follow—not simply an artifact for proof, not merely an evidence. Looking at it one feels that the fragment could be pulled apart thread by thread from any side of the fabric; likewise, one feels that from every margin threads could gather and weave themselves into the dress entire.

The fragment is a haunted intimacy—fragment of wedding dress and fragment of poem. The fabric points back to the body that wore it. Though the dress fragment appears flat, it has an inside that pressed against the body of Sarah Pierpont Edwards, and it has an outside that faces the world. To look at the square swatch of cloth long enough is to realize that one doesn't know which side of the fabric is seen—am I outside the body or am I within it? The poem fragment shares the same dilemma. The poems in the section feel comprised of a language pulled from multiple sources: definitions, descriptions archival and speculative, personal notes, notational marginalia, historical facts, categorical ephemera. It is a language found and language assembled and a language created; it is a language frayed, a selvage-language, a language marking the weave of its own construction, marking the schisms of its own damage. Certain lines are revelatory without being revealing:

the space of time into paper. Generation to²¹

And later:

fragile security . when alphabetic characters still
light of twilight share the approaching sun
carrying traces²²

The collage work emphasizes not only a pulling from multiple sources, or from differing registers of voice, but the helpless recognition that no voice is singular in its unity. Like some unconscious, inevitable Philomela, we speak by weaving a cloth that depicts our history—

save, our history is never merely our own. We seldom see how a line of poetry is simultaneously a vocalized reality and a tangible thread. Less often do we see that the threads with which we weave our voices are not a self-made material. The "alphabetic characters" carry traces. Those traces in part are the indefinite permutations of every use the alphabetic characters have been put to, as if words built of these letters contain in them those experiences which before our own lives they have named. We speak other lives when we speak our own—it is not enough to say we speak *of* them. We speak them. In Howe's poem, there are these traces exerting themselves bodily in word as a material, in the word as fragment, in the fragment of the dress, in the dress's material. These fragments contain within themselves not only traces of history ongoing and so not history at all—Faulkner's "The past isn't dead. It's not even past"—but contain within themselves the "twilight" of the "approaching sun," light that turns the material semi-transparent, that reveals behind the fragment, be it cloth or be it poem, the presence of the body or the absence of the body.

More to the difficult point, we find in the fragment itself the intimate definition of the poet's nature. Wordsworth's sense that the poet possesses "a disposition to be affected more than other men by absent things as if they were present"²³ finds both confirmation and complication in Howe's work. Howe's poems *present* absence, and *absent* presence. They make of themselves a fragment of the wedding dress turning itself always inside-out and then outside-in, confusing intimacy with surface, confounding surface with intimacy. Her work is a deeply erotic work, and so the fragment of wedding dress is a fitting emblem to the nature not of the poet necessarily, but of the poetry itself. The poem is both the external evidence of an internal work, as the thought moves into voice and voice exits the body into the vibrating air. But there is air inside the poem's body—breath, *pnuema*—also vibrating. The miraculous pivot in Howe's poetry is an exchange of breath because an exchange of body. We find ourselves within and without at once—wearing the dress we are admiring on the bride, inside the poem we are holding as we read it.

Affirming Wordsworth's sense of the poet and poetry's work at one level, Howe also refutes him at another. Far from Wordsworth's "egotistical sublime" (cf. Keats's letter to Richard Woodhouse, October 27, 1818), Howe presents the apprehensive self, the open self, the adhesive self, and the permeable self. In *Singularities*, she quotes from Deleuze and Guattari:

The proper name (*nom propre*) does not designate an individual: it is on the contrary when the individual opens up to the multiplicities pervading him or her, at the outcome of the most severe operation of depersonalization, that he or she acquires his or her true proper name. The proper name is the instantaneous apprehension of a multiplicity. The proper name is the subject of a pure infinitive comprehended as such in a field of intensity.²⁴

The voices gather in the name of the poet and give her her name. She is a body for their breath, and then also her breath fills their body. Who isn't a many and a one? Who isn't a ghosted chorus? Who isn't a body filled with breath?—or is it, a breath filled with body?

Here the poem is the poet.

Here the poet haunts the haunted ground.

"Speak to me," Sappho says.

"Let me in" is a question and an answer.

Ghosts

Howe's poems alternate between materiality and intangibility; they never mark the line that divides their own opposition. We find instead poems built of languages found, gathered, and gleaned which Howe assembles into collages of intimate damage. These poems hover in some uncertain realm between clarity and dispersal, unable to signal within themselves a tendency toward manifestation or decay. Reading such poems, we feel witness to the holy moment when being decides to step into itself and begin to speak. But there are traces that remind one, that in the midst of this bodying forth from *saying* to *said*, that the construction is a wary one, finding in itself, on itself, those marks that map the intent of the construction, and so map the fault lines by which it may also fall apart. The majority of the poems in *That This*—Howe's most recent book whose cover is the slate blue fragment of Sarah Pierpont Edward's wedding dress glimpsed in ghostly black and white in *Souls of the Labadie Tract*—show the spectral lines of the "invisible" tape holding these voices together. Those traces point back at the poet whose adhesive effort leaves a ghostly demarcation. It cannot be helped. The poet ghosts the ghosts.

Conversely, we find poems (as in the majority of poems in *Souls of the Labadie Tract*) whose standard lineation offers only the most basic clue that in them an alternate (read altering; read alterity) work is occurring. The differences are more profound, more mysterious.

Here, too, voices arrive manifold, but bear no mark of that multiplicity. Among those voices is Howe's own. It does not designate itself simply by saying *I*. Nor do the other voices name themselves, nor offer their voices up for naming. To do so would be to commit a violence from which the poem itself might not recover—false claim of identity, of naming names, of pinning voice to history as a butterfly is pinned to a mat. Howe's effort opposes such reductions, resists such categorizations. Rather, the ethical effort infusing the poems must be reflected in the reader's ethical effort in experiencing the work. We must learn to hear how many voices dwell in another voice; we must learn to read so as other voices may dwell in us. We must learn to hear the haunting chorus, that when we say *I* we say *I* for all.

A haunted voice denies that its primary value is historical. It speaks through itself not merely of the fact of its own occurrence, but of that ongoing source that speaks through the fecund decay of the nearly forgotten words that populate and wild Howe's poems. That ongoing source could be called origin. It could be thought of as before history, as before language. It is precisely here—though "here" is in Howe no precise point—where the historical arrives not as any end in itself, not as any reclamation or revision or recovery, but arrives so as to open within itself another threshold, ontological in nature. History enters into the poem's realm not as a door closing or a wall fitting into place, but enters with a casement window faultily latched in the midst of its certainty, half-open in the midst of its facts. But one must not forget that such openings, ontological in nature, are also violent. They have in them the violence of that which, once open, refuses to close.

We should also see, as Giorgio Agamben encourages,²⁵ that such violence marks the work of the poem concerned with tradition. Howe's poems radically redefine the nature of the traditional lyric. Ghosts demonize tradition's old dilemmas. They wander through the woods, these sourceless sources. They make the leaves shake. Howe invites them in, not merely into the content of her own poems, but into her voice that opens on the page that metaphysical space the poem must first open within itself. The blank page is the place on which the poem is printed, but within the poem is another space, the haunted realm that occurs only after the words have been written:

Unconscious demarcations range

I pick my compass to pieces

Dark here in the drifting
In the spaces of drifting

Complicity battling redemption²⁶

The traditional voice—that is, the voice that invites into it that which haunts it—disorients itself through its own method. It creates the dark space of its own drifting. It realizes it is complicit in the creation of the very condition from which it wants to redeem those it discovers. Those voices:

Oh I see—I have to see
you fresh as those rough
streams are as power is

Caught—and wide awake

Oh—we are past saving
Aren't odd books full of us
What do you wake us for²⁷

The voices themselves, “saved” into the poet’s poems, ask why it is they’re being awakened. (When such ghosts awaken, they open their mouths and not their eyes.) To see “you fresh as those rough / streams” is to understand that the poem on the page cannot remove itself from a consideration of the history that precedes it. Such a poem doesn’t venerate history, but damages it, or is willing to damage it—damage, perhaps, to destruction complete. The traditional poem asks a question of which tradition is not the answer sought, but that origin before tradition, underneath tradition. There is in the poem the furious effort to become its own source. The genuinely traditional poem, of which in my mind Howe’s is the necessary example, cannot take for granted the means by which it has come to its knowing, but must pull up its own roots, must tear up and tear apart, the very history that makes its own utterance possible. It must disturb its own roots. It is no simple act of reclamation. Nor is the effort to restore, to repair. It also disturbs the root that is the poet herself:

“Here we are”—You can’t
hear us without having to be
us knowing everything we

know—you know you can't

Verbal echoes so many ghosts
poets I think of you as wild
and fugitive—"Stop awhile"²⁸

The poet invites the ghosts into the poem and in doing so makes of the ghosts poets. The poem becomes some dwelling the poet writes so as to enter, and in entering becomes less real, less than real, the countermotion of which is the arrival of the ghosts into the same space, an arrival that makes them more real, more than real. Then their wildness finds confine; then they are not fugitive. But this poetry does not seek to tame. The nature of the confine is the poetic line which in uttering itself opens itself. In opening itself, it opens to the utterances of the ghosts that fill it; the poet's line loses the narrow subjectivity of identity, and grows multiple: "The tone of an oldest voice / Still one of great multitude."

Howe's work concerns the epistemological repercussions and the ethical consequences of the poem as a realm of gathering proximity. The voice gathers these ghosts; these ghosts gather in a voice. Milton's "darkness visible" seems too legible a construction to speak honestly about how the reader encounters the multiplicity of voices speaking within one another, and against one another, in Howe's poems. But Levinas's sense of the work of art existing in a "dark light" brings us closer to that light in which we might approach Howe's work—approach, as the poems themselves demand, so as to enter ourselves into that shade among the shades.

I keep you here to keep
your promise all that you
think I've wrought what

I see or do in the twilight
of time but keep forgetting
you keep coming back²⁹

These ghosts, this multiple-you, this other that is always others, keep entering into the twilit space of forgetting. These ghosts exist in the very space in which they cease to exist, they find remembrance in these very woods—"Language a wood for thought"³⁰—where the non-experiential existing always within experience exerts ceaselessly its paradoxical condition.

This "dark light" illuminates its own obstructions. It alters radically the assumption a reader has of a poem's own impetus toward formal completion. In these poems, where "Memory was and will be,"³¹ incompleteness replaces completion as the poem's end. All that exists within the unfinished, unfinishable limits of the poem's utterance—subject and object, speaker and spoken—finds itself fated to incompleteness, an uncertain condition, half-lit or dark-lit, in which the poem's ethical complexity finds its difficult, stuttering expression. This ethical stuttering does not belong to the poet, for who now is the poet? Nor does it belong to the ghosts, for who are they? In the dark light of the poem such distinctions can only be falsifications. It occurs in rhythm more than image, as Levinas writes, where rhythm

represents a unique situation where we cannot speak of consent, assumption, initiative or freedom, because the subject is caught up and carried away by it . . . It is so not even despite itself, for in the rhythm there is no longer a oneself, but rather a sort of passage from oneself to anonymity . . .³²

Howe's willingness to write so as to create on the page that uncertain realm in which the ongoing work of proximity may continue marks not only the greatness of her project, but its most profound, and most complicated, ethical work. She writes so as to sentence herself to an anonymity that cannot be maintained, slipping back always into the narrow realm of singular self, but doing so in such a way that the traces of that "oldest voice of greatest multitude" require (more than merely make possible) the next poem into whose wilderness she casts her voice so as to open her voice, and opens her voice so as to enter it just as others enter it. Just as we enter it who read her poems. The ethical work isn't one of clarification, but one of mystification. Beyond even the Levinasian framework in which the ethical obligation begins in the discovery of the supervening precedence of the other's face, we find in these bewildered poems a condition in which the face of the other cannot wholly be seen.

The face can't be seen, but the voice can be heard.

That voice is no single voice—though within it, as of the hiss at universe's edge, one can hear, or imagine one hears, that pre-original, pre-language drone that marks the inexperiential edge where chaos hedges into cosmos. One can almost sense the limit, the binding source. But it is only heard by suffering this poetry's ethical difficulty, suffering it just as the poem suffers it:

Is one mind put into another
in us unknown to ourselves
by going about among trees
and fields in moonlight or in
a garden to ease distance to
fetch home spiritual things³³

Perhaps there is no other home than the home poetry offers, the home the poem is. Open the door to that home and find the wilderness growing in it. The poem contains the forest it wanders through, continual mystical inversion of form and content. The poem contains what contains it. Is it that one writes so as to enter? A word being a door and a wood and a wild leaf and an initiation? To enter is to find in one's own mind another mind, many minds, each with a mind in its own. Confounded among the trees, in the moonlit fields. The effort, as the poem so plainly says, is to "ease distance to / fetch home spiritual things." Such things are ghosts, are phantasms, these images-not-quite-images invoke in the singular subject an ethereal obligation to dismantle the edifice of one's merest self, ego's iota, and to let the ghosts climb into the poem, dwell in the voice, multiply and sing, accuse and comfort, and make of the poet's mouth only a crooked path in a dark forest, whose trees branch up through the brain, whose leaves open not to the sun but to this dark light, the word's own shining, call it responsibility, and whose echo from the edges calls back, *response*.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Howe, Susan. *The Nonconformist's Memorial*. (56–57).
- 2 Ibid. *Souls of the Labadie Tract*. (15).
- 3 Melville, Herman. *Moby-Dick*. "The Lee Shore."
- 4 Howe, Susan. *The Nonconformist's Memorial*. (36).
- 5 Ibid. *Singularities*. (50).
- 6 Ibid. (49).
- 7 Ibid. *The Nonconformist's Memorial*. (74).
- 8 Thoreau, Henry David. *Journals, Volume 1*. (pp).
- 9 Howe, Susan. *The Nonconformist's Memorial*. (38).
- 10 Agamben, Giorgio. *The Signature of All Things: On Method*. "Philosophical Archaeology." (95).

- 11 Howe, Susan. *The Nonconformist's Memorial*. (69).
- 12 Ibid. (16).
- 13 Ibid. (26).
- 14 Ibid. (75).
- 15 Ibid. *Singularities*. (30).
- 16 Agamben, Giorgio. *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*. "Chapter 13: *Spiriticus phantasticus*" (94).
- 17 Howe, Susan. *The Nonconformist's Memorial*. (42).
- 18 Ibid. *Singularities*. (40).
- 19 Ibid. (43).
- 20 Ibid. *The Nonconformist's Memorial*. (61).
- 21 Ibid. *Souls of the Labadie Tract*. (120).
- 22 Ibid. (122).
- 23 Wordsworth, William. "Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*." (165).
- 24 Howe, Susan. *Singularities*. (41).
- 25 Agamben, Giorgio. *The Signature of All Things: On Method*. "Philosophical Archeology."
- 26 Howe, Susan. *Singularities*. (55).
- 27 Ibid. *Souls of the Labadie Tract*. (50).
- 28 Ibid. (58).
- 29 Ibid. (55).
- 30 Ibid. *The Nonconformist's Memorial*. (39).
- 31 Ibid. (34).
- 32 Quoted in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*. Bruns, Gerald. "The Concepts of Art and Poetry in Emmanuel Levinas's Writings."
- 33 Howe, Susan. *That This*. (104).