Małgorzata Myk

Citizen Myles

Abstract: The following paper proposes a reading of American poet Eileen Myles' 2007 poetry collection *Sorry, Tree* in the interrelated contexts of Lauren Berlant's understanding of intimacy and her concept of *intimate citizenship*, Lee Edelman's understanding of sexuality and negativity, as well as Giorgio Agamben's sense of the contemporary as always untimely. An openly lesbian and queer author, Myles gestures towards the flawed and the disempowered, offering an intimate, yet unmistakably political negotiation of a minoritarian lesbian position as both defiant and transformative of the (hetero)normative *status quo* through acts of observation, engagement, and participation that do not necessarily have to be conspicuous or successful to effect reconceptualization of the social; rather, Myles suggests that individual agency in the public world also resides in failure as illuminative of the fact that one's desire for presence is continuously actualized through entanglement with negativity.

Keywords: Eileen Myles, presidential campaign, intimate citizenship, the contemporary, New Narrative, failure, negativity.

Eileen Myles still,
no image

in campaigning to be president when she is a poet there is our country's absent marginalia.
—Leslie Scalapino, *The Front Matter, Dead Souls*, p. 3

This essay begins with a memory of the 2008 *Poetry of the Seventies* Conference organized by the National Poetry Foundation collective at the University of Orono, Maine, where one of the events I attended was the "Queering the '70s" poetry reading. The three avant-garde poets invited to perform in the minimalist space of the on-campus Black Box Theater were Kevin Killian, Dodie Bellamy and Eileen Myles, authors associated with the New Narrative movement that emerged in the San Francisco Bay Area in late 1970s. Reclaiming fraught questions of identity and affect, representatives of New Narrative have been questioning the depersonalized and disaffected landscape of language-centered writing shaped by the continuing legacy of Language poets. Myles read poems published in the 1970s as well as from their 2007 collection *Sorry, Tree,* giving a *tour de force* performance of queer poetry and its sharply intersecting personal and political stakes that left both poets and scholars in the audience completely mesmerized.[1] During one of the post-conference conversa-

1 Referring to Myles, I am using the pronouns "they" and "their," instead of "she" and "her," taking into account the poet's current preference for sidestepping binary gender identification.

tions I had with poet Jennifer Moxley, she remarked that Myles had the gift of turning each flaw into something attractive. Taking the lingering word "flaw" as a point of departure for the following essay, I propose a reading of *Sorry, Tree* that brings into focus Myles' minoritarian queer perspective on the interrelated questions of poetics and politics, and, consequently, traces their poetic commitment to re-evaluation of citizenship and presence as shot through with awareness of flaws, failures, losses, as well as of what one has missed or wasted, making failure a critical and conceptual vehicle of their writing. In my analysis, I am indebted to Lauren Berlant's reflections on intimacy and citizenship from *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (1997), as well as her more recent study written with Lee Edelman, *Sex, or the Unbearable* (2014), devoted to rehabilitation of negativity in present-day discussions of what Berlant and Edelman identify as queer publics.

Broadly speaking, I construe the motif of failure in Myles' work as a vehicle through which the poet unsettles the reader's grasp of presence, actuality and contemporariness, akin to Giorgio Agamben's idea of the contemporary articulated in his 2008 *What is an Apparatus?*:

> Those who are truly contemporary, who truly belong to their time, are those who neither perfectly coincide with it nor adjust themselves to its demands. They are thus in this sense irrelevant [*inattuale*]. But precisely because of this condition, precisely through this disconnection and this anachronism, they are more capable than others of perceiving and grasping their own time. (40)

For Agamben, the contemporary becomes inevitably entangled with the untimely, emerging as a mode of social participation realized not through perfectly timed resistance of existing actualities, but, much more radically, through initiating an altogether different kind of resistance that is not fully aligned with the normative protocols of one's present. As I intend to show, Agamben's definition of the contemporary as always somewhat behind time and anachronistic emerges as a useful ground from which one might approach a sense of anxiety regarding presence and (un)timeliness found in Myles' poems. Throughout this essay the untimely will therefore be treated as an ambivalent category that captures the poet's reflection on their often belated engagement with the reality of unfolding events and recognition that the forces that limit and determine this engagement can be deployed to emancipatory ends. Along these lines, I further suggest that Myles' preoccupation with failure is complicated by the force of negativity that, as Berlant and Edelman argue in *Sex*, accounts for the subject's "psychic and social incoherencies and divisions, conscious and unconscious alike, that trouble any totality or fixity of identity... [and] unsettles the fantasy of sovereignty" (vii). For the authors of *Sex*, and as I shall argue also for Myles, negativity becomes a form that entails both acceptance and resistance, simultaneously producing and undercutting the fantasy of sovereignty, effecting the subjects' seeing of themselves beyond this fantasy as,

paradoxically, nonsovereign individuals. Nonsovereignty, as they suggest, requires a regrounding of the subjects' understanding of relationality, autonomy, self-control, and identification. In the following sections of this essay I examine Myles' poetry collection *Sorry, Tree*, focusing on its preoccupation with citizenship in the context of theoretical frameworks outlined above. In particular, I address the intimate entanglement present in Myles' poetics between citizenship and queer sexuality through the lens of Berlant and Edelman's thoughts on intimacy and nonsovereignty. I further comment on the significance of Myles' 1992 presidential campaign as an instance of the so called *infantile citizenship*, understood in Berlant and Edelman's sense of the term. Finally, I briefly examine the relationship between Myles' poetics and New Narrative as a mode of writing invested in reclaiming self-control and (non) sovereignty enacted through scrutiny of their limits.

Contrary to Myles' other, much louder titles, such as *A Fresh Young Voice from the Plains* (1981), the anthology *The New Fuck You: Adventures in Lesbian Reading* (co-edited with Liz Kotz in 1995), *Not Me* (1991), *Cool for You* (2000), or *Inferno* (2010), *Sorry, Tree* sounds oddly apologetic and dispirited for an openly queer and defiant author. One could say that *Sorry, Tree* is the older and more mature Myles, which would partly account for the change of key. Indeed, the poems resonate with a distinctly minoritarian note, figuring the speaker whose desire for presence is defined by fragility and vulnerability, and whose actions are often belated or unheroic. On the surface, the poems suggest a disconnect between the public sphere where the speaker resides as a citizen and the private one that they identify as home and where they want to thrive. Whereas the public realm is presented as compromised and deprived of political potential, Myles translocates this lost potential to the sphere of privacy, or even intimacy. The poems' most intimate fragments trace moments of regeneration needed for shaking off numbness and regaining motivation for action. At the same time, Myles deploys their poetics as a vehicle for bringing queer intimacy to the point of greater visibility, which may initially appear to be at odds with bigger picture politics indifferent to poetic appeals for queer emancipation. For Myles, however, queer intimacy and sexuality are politically consequential. *Sorry, Tree* includes several erotic poems that articulate queer desire as emancipatory and deeply transformative of one's sense of private space that, as Myles emphasizes, has never really been private, but always already public and political. Queer sexuality does not emerge here as a source of disidentification from constraining social and sexual norms; rather, the poems treat the intimate and the erotic as politicized domains with the potential to create a rupture in the public sphere. As Berlant, Edelman, as well as a host of other scholars, have argued, citizenship and sexuality are intertwined, since sexualities are contingent on material realities underlying the social and political sphere.[2] Myles thematizes the entanglement of the sexual

2 The term of "sexual citizenship" has been coined by David T. Evans in his 1993 book *Sexual Citizenship: The Material Construction of Sexualities*.

and the political, tracing the limits of intimacy's impact in negotiating precarious position of queer citizens. This dynamic is visible in the opening untitled poem of *Sorry, Tree*, which begins with the speaker's desire to make the feelings towards their lover public and ends on a self-conscious note of ambivalence, simultaneously foregrounding and questioning the possibility of recognizing the larger significance of their relationship. The poem's ironic note of disbelief reflects the social reality in which sexual citizenship continues to be both privately and publicly questioned as wanton and unpredictable: "the world / in our / hands a rattle / such a / joke / we shake it / shake it / shake it" (3).[3]

Myles' problematization of the private/public divide culminates in "No Rewriting," an unsettling testimony of the failure to "properly" witness the events of 9/11 terrorist attacks. Through a jarring juxtaposition of fragmented memories, the poem recalls private, rather than political, repercussions of events taking place on the day of the attacks, looking back at the day of 9/11 from the perspective of an individual whose daily routine is disrupted by an occurrence that initially appears too improbable to be grasped in any meaningful, complete, or rational way. They notice the burning towers from the building's roof, but decide to go downstairs to make coffee and then return to watch the unfolding events, eventually missing the moment when one of the towers collapses. The poem casually addresses one's failure to be present at a historic juncture that forecloses any possibility of "rewriting," capturing a sense of disbelief at one's always already untimely actions. It also suggests that the glaring act of tardiness betrays a more general sense of social anomie reflected further in the poem through the imagery depicting disturbing fragmentation and contingency of contemporary American reality. Myles' poem conveys the chaotic quality of the present through a deliberately raw, kaleidoscopic record of trauma that emerges as unamendable and uneditable, and whose intimately configured memories remain the only available account of one's belated response to terror. The poet's recognition of such precariously personalized perspective is exacerbated by the poem's glimpses of things happening at the same time in the neighborhood, such as hedonistic debauchery of lesbians partying hard on the building's roof and distant memories of a next-door neighbor living in abject poverty; the contrast that brings acute awareness of the need to question how one tends to distance oneself from the others' suffering and deprivation. Amidst the unrelenting stream of events and the unnerving illegibility of the present moment, the speaker repeatedly confronts experiences of loss and failure, feels deprived of anonymity and privacy, yet simultaneously desires transcending the limits of their own ego: "I want to be part of something bigger than myself /... / now I'm like king of the losers again /... / but I'm public, public, public" (4-5). The poems dissect these affects figuring life as the art of letting go but not letting it slide, of accepting one's limited perspective and understanding of reality yet standing up for oneself

3 Unless indicated otherwise, all excerpts from cited poems come from *Sorry, Tree*.

and others as we collectively wrestle with the chaotic and unintelligible present. Myles writes: "mainly I think you just have to take the loss into account / I don't care if you get it" (9).

In Myles' poetry, defeat becomes a resource, an occasion not so much for revision, and often no longer for repair, but for vision. In "Each Defeat," the daily and the erotic converge in a ludic queer imaginary:

> Keep smoothing
> the stones in the
> driveway
> let me fry an egg
> on your ass
> & I'll pick up
> the mail.
>
> . . . . . .
> I grow man woman
> Child
> I see wild wild wild
>
> Keep letting the
> day be massive
> Unlicensed
> . . . . . .
> Each defeat
> Is sweet" (21)

By contrast, "Therapy" refigures sessions with the speaker's therapist as temporary lines of flight during which they retreat into the animal-like vulnerability and nakedness of a guilt-free, glasses-free, innocent state. The poems emphasize intimate, domestic, and casual settings, whose safety is naturally conducive to sexual encounters that Myles nevertheless shows as always already public and highly visible. The poems' conversational tone is often punctuated by erotic images whose intensity stands for vitality and empowerment. But Myles' bold glimpses of queer sexuality have subversive potential also as they communicate the likelihood of lack of fulfillment, as well as impending loss or simple failure in one's love life. These intimate details inform the ways in which queer citizenship is negotiated in the text. In this sense, the poems' focus on intimacy is evocative of Berlant's theory, where citizenship is re-examined to include those social groups that are excluded from the making of the national fantasy of citizenship in which women, let alone lesbian or queer women, do not figure. According to Berlant, whereas such inclusion remains a fraught issue complicated by the on-going conflict between emancipatory minority struggle and political agendas inimical to this struggle, it is still politically useful. Berlant captures this conflict through the troubled figure of *infantile citizen* that nevertheless creates a rupture in

the national identity politics narrative: "Democracies can also produce a special form of tyranny that makes citizens like children, infantilized, passive, and overdependent on the 'immense and tutelary power' of the state" (27). In Berlant's account, infantile citizen initially emerges as disturbingly enervated: "a political subjectivity based on the suppression of critical knowledge and a resulting contraction of citizenship to something smaller than agency" (28). However, tracing the underlying paradoxes of production of political subjectivity in the U.S., Berlant discovers that infantile citizenship not only limits but also revitalizes one's attachment to the nation and to others, regrounding the definitional field of citizenship along with its constitutive terms of national identity and available modes of social participation. In her account, it becomes a form that "figures a space of possibility that transcends the fractures and hierarchies of national life" (27).

Berlant's notion of citizenship may also serve as a possible framework for interpreting Myles' 1992 presidential campaign, during which the poet positioned themselves as an openly-female minority candidate. Myles, who was then 41, was campaigning as a write-in candidate, which meant that their name did not appear in the official ballot. They launched the campaign in protest against George H. W. Bush's speech delivered at the University of Michigan, in which Bush disparaged political correctness as an obstacle to the freedom of speech. Myles read his words as a conservative appropriation of the term of political correctness and decided to take action.[4] Initially, campaigning was limited to occasions naturally created by events to which they were invited as a poet or speaker. Myles simply announced during the panels and readings that they were running as a candidate and spoke about the causes that they supported. To make a bigger splash Myles created a mailing list, started contacting fellow poets, friends, and acquaintances, and taking small contributions to be able to keep them informed about the campaign's activities. The word spread quickly and the matter became more public than Myles initially expected. Speeches and other campaign materials are archived on Myles' website, but it is worth evoking the poet's perception of the change that occurred between April 1991 and November 1992, when the campaign ended, as recounted by Joanna Rothkopf in her article about Myles' candidacy based on the internet archive and phone conversations: "I was in 28 states, I was in Europe, I was, you know, I was on MTV. It was kind of a nonstop experience and I realized—whether this was a mock campaign, a real campaign, an imaginary campaign—it was a campaign" (Myles qtd. in Rothkopf). I propose to trace the quixotic ingenuousness of Myles' political action to Berlant's utopian thinking about infantile citizenship as potentially transformative of the idealized national narrative of citizenship. As Berlant explains in *The Queen of America*: "As it is, citizen adults have learned to 'forget' or to render as impractical,

4 Talking to Joanna Rothkopf, Myles explained that they meant the phrase "a politically correct lesbian"; a conservative term used by lesbians. Myles saw the term as belonging to the minority rather than the conservative public discourse represented by Bush. Cf. Rothkopf.

naive, or childish their utopian political identifications in order to be politically happy and economically functional. Confronting the tension between utopia and history, the infantile citizen's stubborn *naiveté* gives her/him enormous power to unsettle, expose, and reframe the machinery of national life" (29). The fact of Myles' candidacy emerges as an extension of their poetry's preoccupation with the personal as inevitably traversed by political commitments, inscribed in the question of poetics seen more broadly as a mode of engagement that Barrett Watten and Lyn Hejinian defined as *writing in the expanded field* in their recently published impressive archive of texts that previously appeared in *Poetics Journal*. Hejinian and Watten see poetics as "a site for reflection on the making of the work that extends its construction into the fields of meaning in which it has its effects" (11). Myles' activism during the presidential campaign, as well as their endorsement of Hillary Clinton in the 2016 campaign, followed from a commitment to the idea that the import of writing can be extended past its formal aspects into the social realm where it keeps producing material effects.[5] In this sense, Myles raises the poetics' stakes in impacting and remodeling the field of meaning to accommodate social and political action.

Myles' poetics emerges as an experiment in nonsovereignty in Berlant and Edelman's paradoxical sense of the term. In their respective accounts, nonsovereignty implies a reconceptualization of our received understanding of the term whose negative potential is embraced so that nonsovereignty becomes a matter of rethinking the notion of relationality itself. As Edelman explains, "negativity disturbs the presumption of sovereignty by way of 'an encounter,' specifically, an encounter with the estrangement and intimacy of being in relation" (viii). Edelman's radical argument connects negativity and nonsovereignty to sexuality, arguing that queer sexuality contributes to revitalization of relationality by disturbing its official channels, becoming a source of temporary restorative disidentification from the socially sanctioned forms of identity:

> Sex and love are not events that change anything, usually; they induce a loosening of the subject that puts fear, pleasure, awkwardness, and above all experimentality in a scene that forces its participants to disturb what it has meant to be a person and to 'have' a world. It forces people to *desire* to be nonsovereign, and sometimes not-autonomous, and that puts them in intimate proximity to play, aversion, and unbearable intensity. (117, original emphasis)

In *Sorry, Tree*, Myles offers a queer perspective in which sexuality is shot through with the awareness of negativity and nonsovereignty, which does not make their perspective negative in the usual sense of the term, but rather decidedly oppositional. Indeed, in line with Edelman's argumentation, sexuality is seen as an aleatory and experimental mode of disidentification only as long as one does not automatically assume that sex

5 Cf. Myles, "Hillary Clinton."

by its very nature functions as a kind of utopian beyond; instead, Edelman suggests that sexuality mobilizes self-questioning. Myles punctuates the poems with glimpses of lesbian sex and images of queer porn shops, making these moments unashamedly intense and visible, yet at the same time avoids creating a jarring contrast between these vivid instances of self-exposure and the poems' generally much subtler, homely tone. Instead, the poems create another "field of meaning," to use Hejinian and Watten's phrase again, that incorporates queer difference without naturalizing, neutralizing, or idealizing it. Myles often alludes to trajectories of queer loves as unpredictable, longings that seem unbearable, or relationships that are beyond repair, which easily makes for a life marked, perhaps irrevocably, with negativity. In the poem "Something Simple," the speaker nevertheless relents: "I am sympathetic / to all that's lost" (61).

Like Berlant and Edelman, Myles complicates the negative and embraces its underlying ambivalence, which becomes more pronounced towards the end of *Sorry, Tree*, when Myles' tone changes, particularly in Ginsbergian "To Hell" and the closing text of the collection "Everyday Barf," originally written as a talk for a panel on the poetry of everyday. These two texts are no longer preoccupied with the elation offered by erotic queer vision, but rather dwell on the less hopeful aspects of queer lives in contemporary American political and social reality. Evocative of Ginsberg's "Howl," "To Hell" is a poem that bypasses Ginsberg's elegiac, apocalyptic vision by adopting a much lighter and realistic tone. The speaker's initially despondent mood caused by the feeling of being alienated in the city ruled by men gradually changes its tone into a sarcastic and playfully perverse quest for queer difference and its presence in public space. Its initial mockery of Republican conservative discourse accompanied by discontent over the masculine-only perspective are dispelled in favor of an unfolding vision of cityscape strategically marked with the word "gay," stubbornly appended at several junctures of the poem. Myles' wryly ironic, self-consciously childlike rant evokes Berlant's figure of *infantile citizen* and their defiant resolve:

> I don't have to wonder whose group I'm in today.
> Certainly the people who always think the public problem is theirs are gay
> . . . . . .
> The uneven horizon's great and of course she's gay
> The buildings are falling in love, and we opened its eye
> today. (71)

"Everyday Barf," on the other hand, becomes a reminder that writing must remain in communication with the less glorified aspects of everyday life, taking over at a point where all stale platitudes are finally expunged. The text's memory of a boat trip that brought about sea-sickness induces the general feeling of queasiness related to life's mundane or unbearable aspects, yet also compels the speaker to spontaneously deal with some personal matters such as writing a letter to their mother. For Myles,

nevertheless, negativity resonates as strongly as it does for Berlant and Edelman, since it "points to many kinds of relation in what follows, from the unbearable, often unknowable, psychic conflicts that constitute the subject to the social forms of negation that also, but differently, produce subjectivity" (xii). This ambivalent take on the fraught nature of both social and intimate relations as often negatively motivated yet still constructive or transformative of queer subjectivity is part and parcel of Myles' poetics. Poetically and politically, Myles embraces the negative with the kind of perverse wisdom and self-irony that do not stifle spontaneity or vitality: "sometimes the only no I have / is to reverse things" (4). Closing their talk given in New York City during the 2014 PEN World Voices Festival of International Literature, titled "Obsession: Eileen Myles On Spoilage and Ruination of Other Kinds," Myles concluded with one of such queer reversals: "I know I won't be getting any dates out of this" (PEN America).

Foregrounding working-class consciousness as well as awareness of communal precarity, Myles' minoritarian poetics echoes Judith Butler's words from her 2015 *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly,* where precarity is defined as "that politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support more than others" (33). Its sense informs the poems' discourse on intimacy and its underlying desire for the safety of being and feeling at home, both as somebody's partner and as a citizen. In the poem "Home," the speaker states the need for inhabiting a space that is not reduced to the function of a workplace, or even a place where one has the comfort of engaging in creative activity, but rather suggests a space that must be wholesome in a broader sense: "It's not where I write / it's where I vegetate" (38). Vegetation, a recurring motif throughout *Sorry, Tree*, entails wholesomeness that one does not find in the highly functional "operative society," to use Jean-Luc Nancy's term, but rather in a different kind of collective relationality that the philosopher called "inoperative community," in which social relations are revised and transformed through the recognition that community cannot ground itself based on what the society has lost; rather, "such a 'loss' is constitutive of 'community' itself" (Nancy 12). In Myles' poetics, loss is similarly seen as constitutive of American culture that, as we read in the poem "Culture," paradoxically "accepts all / marks & none," to which the speaker responds with characteristic unpretentiousness: "So I'll just write / into it" (43). Indeed, Myles' *writing into*, just like their *write-in* candidacy, shows that they see the poet as someone who ventures beyond the aesthetic realm of form and style into the social domain, continues to trouble the *status quo*, and whose actions are equally unsettling and restorative.

Invoking the significance of failure with regard to the poet whose stature has been recently so widely recognized ironically puts at risk my own untimely critique. The author of over twenty volumes of work, Myles is considered one of the most important avant-garde authors in the U.S., coming a long way from the New York City-based experimental poetry scene to international audiences. Many of their

works, including numerous poetry collections, the so-called poet's novels, such as famous *Cool for You* or *Inferno*, libretti, as well as a volume of essays on traveling, art, and writing *The Importance of Being Iceland*, have been recently elevated to the status of cult classics. Myles' charisma inspired Jill Soloway, the creator of award-winning Amazon queer TV series *Transparent* and Myles' former partner, to create a character modeled on the poet, who appears in the last season's several episodes. This curious present-day celebrity profile notwithstanding, Myles has been committed to expanding the notion of poetics and poetic practice by keeping poetry close to vicissitudes of life. Like many of their fellow avant-garde poets, Myles traces the meaning of avant-garde writing to regrounding the concept of relationality, seeing avant-garde as committed to expressing "a different relationship to the world," as they remarked in the 1999 talk "How To Write an Avant-Garde Poem" published in *The Importance of Being Iceland* (159). At the same time, Myles' depiction of intimate citizenship is distinctly American, perhaps closer to Thoreau's praise of hands-on experience of *Walden* and anarchic resistance of *Civil Disobedience* than Emerson's idealized vision of *Self-Reliance*. Myles' often acknowledged preference for Thoreau's version of sovereignty impacts their sense of the avant-garde as a spectrum of artistic practices that must go against the grain of professionalization, pointing to the artist's or writer's commitment to experimentation and improvisation based on materials to which they have immediate access: "Avant-garde means do it yourself" (Myles, 2009, 160). This attitude, which reverberates in the title of *Sorry, Tree* and defines the entire collection, is suggestive of self-criticism needed to overcome the writer's temptation of over-indulgence and wastefulness of natural resources.

Myles' work foregrounds the idealized fantasy of present-day citizenship as continually troubled by lesbian and queer difference, construing the notion of intimate citizenship as a critical space of reflection that does not fall back on the unitary notion of identity but rather expands it. This anti-identitarian aspect may initially seem at odds with Myles openly gay, minoritarian position, and the fact that their work has been associated with New Narrative, a mode of avant-garde writing aligned with the affective turn that privileges autobiographical details, authenticity and messiness over impersonality and orderly formalism based in the calculated erasure of self and emotion that characterized texts of the Language poets.[6] The questions underlying New Narrative, articulated by Robert Glück in his well-known piece "Long Note on New Narrative," can be evoked to describe Myles' work: "How can I convey urgent social meanings while opening or subverting the possibilities of meaning itself?.... What kind of representation least deforms its subject? Can language be aware of itself (as object, as system, as commodity, as abstraction) yet take part in the forces that generate the present? Where in writing does engagement become authentic?" (27). Glück's short essay puts in perspective the tensions

6 Emily Cooke writes on Myles' relationship to New Narrative in her 2012 article "The Semiautobiographers."

between the protocols of Language writing and New Narrative's focus on the mode of writing that not only tries to rehabilitate the subject for avant-garde literary practice but also enquires about the possibility of bridging the gap between the text's work on deconstruction of sense and its simultaneous effort to be socially meaningful. Addressing its autobiographical leanings, Emily Cooke points out that New Narrative does not simply fall back on the conventionally self-reflexive mode of autobiography. As she argues, "the new semiautobiographers, you might call them—reject privacy and propriety for openness and provocation.... [T]hey aim for a synthesis of the personal and the intellectual[.]" While Cooke focuses on New Narrative's key experimental novels, Myles' contribution to New Narrative is the poet's novel, the genre that performs an extension of poetic practice onto prose. As Myles explains in the short essay "Long and Social," included in the anthology of writings on recent innovations in the evolution of the narrative form *Biting the Error: Writers Explore Narrative*, the poet's novel breaks the novelistic mold by aligning itself with the poetic mode: "It's epic poetry in the sense that the epic poem is a communal form, and long and social. I wrote it for you" (149).

"There's only one person in the world who's going to decide what I'm going to do and that's me[.]" These famous words spoken by the epitome of autocracy Charles Foster Kane in Orson Welles' 1941 masterpiece *Citizen Kane* ring ominously true in the context of today's return of authoritarianism in the U.S. and elsewhere. Myles' minoritarian poetics mobilizes the model of intimate citizenship that takes the Agambenian sense of untimeliness in its stride as it strives for presence simultaneously remaining sympathetic to devastating moments of absence, of missing events, things, and persons, which shows the poet's awareness of the world's fragility, as well as of the extent to which democracy continues to be daily jeopardized. Myles belongs to the long line of contemporary U.S. poets whose work proves, as Nicky Marsh wrote in her 2007 *Democracy in Contemporary U.S. Women's Poetry*, "[p]oetry's ability to be at once of the public and yet capable of exceeding its presumptions allows for a space in which the radical contingencies of contemporary power can be reshaped through new conceptions of identity and of responsibility and freedom" (153). The Leslie Scalapino epigraph with which I opened this essay, excerpted from her 1996 *The Front Matter, Dead Souls*, expresses an affinity between Myles' minoritarian poetic/political interventionist practice and Scalapino's innovative political text originally written in the serial form and sent out for publication in several newspapers during the election campaign. Scalapino's texts were rejected by editors and subsequently published as *Front Matter*, offering an extended commentary on the stakes of poetic discourse in contemporary political reality, which Marsh aptly referred to as an alternative form of public discourse (96). Writing this amidst Poland's own political turmoil, I keep recalling the archival footage of Myles' performance of their famous "An American Poem," coming from the 1991 collection *Not Me*, written around the time of the campaign, currently on display as part of the exhibition "Ministry of Internal Affairs: Intimacy as Text" in The Museum of Contemporary Art in Warsaw.

A small tv set casually placed on the stone floor right in the middle of the museum hall is playing on a loop young Myles' fiery reading of the poem that ends with a resolute call for communal (non)sovereignty:

> I am not
> alone tonight because
> we are all Kennedys.
> And I am your President. (3:37)

Works Cited

Agamben, Georgio. *What Is an Apparatus? And Other Essays*. Trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009. Print.

Berlant, Lauren. *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997. Print.

Berlant, Lauren, and Lee Edelman. *Sex, or the Unbearable*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014. Print.

Butler, Judith. *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly*. Cambridge and London, Harvard University Press, 2015. Print.

Citizen Kane. Dir. Orson Welles. Perfs. Orson Welles, Joseph Cotton. RKO Radio Pictures, 1941. DVD.

Cooke, Emily. "The Semiautobiographers." *The New Inquiry*. 8 Nov 2012. Web. Accessed 15 Feb 2017.

Evans, David T. *Sexual Citizenship: The Material Construction of Sexualities*. London: Routledge, 1993. Print.

Glück, Robert. "Long Note on New Narrative." *Biting the Error: Writers Explore Narrative*. Ed. Mary Burger et al. Toronto: Coach House Books, 2004. 25-34. Print.

Hejinian, Lynn and Barrett Watten, eds. *A Guide to Poetics Journal: Writing in the Expanded Field 1982-98*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2013. Print.

Marsh, Nicky. *Democracy in Contemporary U.S. Women's Poetry*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. Print.

Myles, Eileen, perf. "An American Poem." *Ministry of Internal Affairs: Intimacy as Text*. Natalia Sielewicz, curator. Museum of Contemporary Art, Warsaw. 18 Feb 2017.

———. "Hillary Clinton: The Leader You Want When The World Ends." *BuzzFeed News Reader*. 23 Feb. 2016. Web. Accessed 2 Feb. 2017.

———. *Inferno (A Poet's Novel)*. New York: OR Books, 2010. Print.

———. *The Importance of Being Iceland: Travel Essays in Art*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009. Print.

———. *Sorry, Tree*. Seattle and New York: Wave Books, 2007. Print.

——. "Long and Social." *Biting the Error: Writers Explore Narrative*. Mary Burger et al., eds. Toronto: Coach House Books, 2004. 149-151. Print.
——. *Cool for You*. New York: Soft Skull Press, 2000. Print.
——. *Chelsea Girls*. New York: HaperCollins, 1994. Print.
——. *Not Me*. South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 1991. Print.
——. *A Fresh Young Voice from the Plains*. New York: Power Mad Press, 1981. Print.
——. "Hillary Clinton: The Leader You Want When the World Ends." *BuzzFeed News Reader*. 23 Feb 2016. *BuzzFeed*. Web. 9 Feb 2017.
Myles, Eileen, and Liz Kotz. *The New Fuck You: Adventures in Lesbian Reading*. South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 1995. Print.
Nancy, Jean-Luc. *The Inoperative Community*. Trans. Peter Connor et al. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991. Print.
PEN America, creator. "Obsession: Eileen Myles On Spoilage and Ruination of Other Kinds." YouTube. 30 Apr 2014. Web. Feb 9, 2017.
Rothkopf, Joanna. "A Look Back at Eileen Myles' Revolutionary 'Openly-Female' Write-In Presidential Campaign." *The Slot*. 20 Jan 2016. *Jezebel*. Web. 9 Feb 2017.
Scalapino, Leslie. *The Front Matter, Dead Souls*. Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1996. Print.
Solloway, Jill, creator. *Transparent*. Amazon Studios, 2014. Amazon Prime Video.