

Verse, Voice, and Vision

Poetry and the Cinema

Edited by Marlisa Santos



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To Slowpoke,
who taught me how to read.

NOTES

1. An example that demonstrates worries about the status of poetry in society is the fact that the Poetry International Foundation has felt the need to offer a lecture series on the "Defence of Poetry," http://www.poetryinternationalweb.net/pi/site/collection/article_item/int_article/368.
2. Andrew Motion, *Keats* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).
3. Graham Fuller, "Too Late for Antique Vows," *Sight and Sound* 19 (2009).
4. Feona Attwood, "Weird Lullaby: Jane Campion's *The Piano*," *Feminist Review* 98 (1998); Carol Jacobs, "Playing Jane Campion's Piano: Politically," *MLN* 109 (1994); Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).
5. Elizabeth Jones, "Writing for the Market: Keats's Odes as Commodities," *Studies in Romanticism* 34 (1995).
6. Jones, "Writing for the Market."
7. Raymond Williams, "The Romantic Artist," in *Culture and Society: 1780 – 1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 30–48.
8. Mary L. Roberts, "Gender, Consumption, and Commodity Culture," *American Historical Review* 103 (1998): 821; Orrin Wang, private conversation, December 12, 2012. Many thanks also to Orrin Wang for his many helpful suggestions about consumer culture in the Romantic period.
9. This sentiment is echoed also by Hawthorne's famous invective against the "damned mob of scribbling women" and their commercial success.
10. Páraic Finnerty, "The Englishman in America: Masculinities in *Love and Death on Long Island* and *Father of Frankenstein*," *Genders* 51 (2010): 9.
11. John Guillory, *Cultural Capital* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). Guillory develops the term from Pierre Bourdieu.
12. While the film is adapted from Gilbert Adair's novel of the same name, the use of Whitman is specific to the film.
13. Kenneth Price, *To Walt Whitman, America* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006), 67–69.
14. Finnerty, "Englishman in America," 18.
15. Finnerty, "Englishman in America," 19.

Chapter Four

This Aura Sucks

Narrative Cinema and Popular Poetry Criticism in
So I Married an Axe Murderer

Liz Faber

Imagine a poet. He's twenty-something, wearing all black, sitting in a kitschy coffee shop, drinking a cappuccino. When he reads his poetry, he stands in front of a microphone on a small stage in the corner of that coffee shop. He speaks with his Ginsbergesque New York "poet voice," accenting certain syllables by raising his voice and gesturing wildly with his hands. And, most importantly, he looks out at you—the audience—as you watch him perform. Of course, the content of his poems are beside the point, as long as they "authentically" reflect his look and performance style. He is, in short, the icon of a Beat poet.

Now imagine a Beat poem.

This is a slightly more difficult task and, from a pop culture perspective, likely coincides with the image of a Beat poet. In Thomas Schlamme's 1993 romantic comedy *So I Married an Axe Murderer*, the Beat poet is Charlie Mackenzie (Mike Myers), the typical image of 1990s Beat-chic, and throughout much of the film, his poetry is dependent on his image. In the film, Charlie is a twenty-something poet who wears all black, hangs out in a coffee shop, and performs a series of poems for open-mike night about his ex-girlfriends, all titled "Woman, Woman, Woman." These performances simultaneously parody what the Beat image has become and reinforce a distance between the audience and the poet that maintains the focus on the poet, rather than his words. Later in the narrative, however, Charlie performs a new poem called "This Poem . . . Sucks" on a rooftop in an attempt to win back his newest girlfriend, Harriet (Nancy Travis). Not only does the scene juxtapose

the earlier ones by taking the poem itself seriously, but it also provides insight into a new way of allowing a mass audience to move past the spectacle of the poet image in order to critically examine the meaning of the poem. Thus, in this chapter, I will briefly trace the history of the poet image over the last fifty years, particularly the shift toward a “Beat-chic” in the 1990s and examine ways in which scholars, poets, and audiences alike have largely ignored the role of the *poem* in favor of the role of the *poet*. I will then analyze the scene in which Charlie performs his typical “Woman, Woman, Woman” poem, followed by a juxtaposition of its empty imagery with the seriousness of “This Poem . . . Sucks” in order to show how the film not only sutures its audience in through typical Hollywood-style editing, but also, and as a direct cause of this editing, dispels the performative aspects of the poet/spectacle and provides access to the meaning of the poem. In turn, I argue that the meaning of the poem itself further critiques the poet/spectacle, thereby doubly proving its own point. By thus blending cinema and poetry histories—via *So I Married an Axe Murderer*—I hope to reexamine the relationship between poetry and narrative cinema as vital, cultural media that can—and should—work together.

POETRY DOESN'T SUCK, THE POETIC IMAGE DOES

Before turning to the ways in which *So I Married an Axe Murderer* refocuses audience attention away from the poet, I'd like first to explore the historical and theoretical context in which the film is situated. In the early twentieth century, American modernist poets such as T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound sought to “depersonalize” poetry by shirking the Romantic connection between poem and poetic personality and taking a more scientific approach to the linguistic contemplation of the world around us.¹ Interestingly, though, these poets simultaneously achieved a sort of cult status—what Joseph Epstein has described as a “religious aura”—that, for many academics, became the ultimate image of the poet.² After World War II, however, with the rising acceptance in avant-garde circles of surrealism across artistic media and the psychoanalytic ideas of Sigmund Freud, poetry shifted its focus back toward the self. Yet, even such poetry was still mainly read in academic circles and performed on college campuses. By the 1950s, however, the Beat generation of poets, including Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and Gregory Corso, sought to bring poetry into the popular consciousness. And, to a large degree, they succeeded, predominately as a result of the Beat philosophy of existing somewhere between the weary everyday and the greatness of spirituality. Even the term “Beat” arose from street culture, immediately placing it outside academic circles.³

Despite the Beats' success in bringing printed poetry to the popular consciousness, poetry was quickly demonized in mainstream exploitation films of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Through films such as *The Beat Generation* (Charles Haas, 1959), *A Bucket of Blood* (Roger Corman, 1959), *The Rebel Set* (Gene Fowler Jr., 1959), *Beat Girl* (Edmond T. Greville, 1959), and *Hallucination Generation* (Edward A. Mann, 1966), the image of the Beat poet was solidified as equivalent to both the Bohemian philosophy of the Beat generation and the presentational form of their poetry, regardless of the meaning of the poems themselves. As Jack Sargeant has pointed out:

The representation of Beatniks allowed filmmakers to appropriate, and parody, a collective mainstream fantasy version of “Beatnik culture” manifested via the lifestyle and accoutrements of the goatee beard-wearing “drop-out”: bongo drums, poetry, jazz, parties, weird slang, existential angst, artistic pretensions, drugs, and, to a lesser extent, their beliefs in Buddhism, communism, and free love. The themes associated with the Beatniks in the public eye would also guarantee a salacious audience, anxious to witness—and vicariously enjoy—the exploits of the “bizarre new youth culture,” as long as they were granted the salve of moralistic tongue clicking by the film's closing credits.⁴

Although avant-garde/experimental filmmakers of the time were equally inspired by and in conversation with the Beat generation of poets⁵ in a way that, I argue, denied the establishment of a spectacle of poetic authenticity, there was, nevertheless, still a widespread fascination with the Beat poet himself that led to the common conflation of a poet's authentic identity and the meaning of his poetry.

By the late 1980s, the image of the Beat poet remained in the popular consciousness, but poetry—and poets—had receded back into academic circles. In 1988, Joseph Epstein wrote his now infamous essay, “Who Killed Poetry?,” in which he diagnosed two problems with contemporary poetry.⁶ First is the poet himself (at the time, Epstein listed Robert Penn Warren, Richard Wilbur, Seamus Heaney, Allen Ginsberg, and John Ashbery) who tends to become well known by name, but his work is rarely read because his image as a poet overshadows his work. Second is the contemporary shift from epic poems—long narratives told in poetic verse—to lyric poetry—short poems that contemplate a single moment or image. According to Epstein, the loss of narrative in poetry is what has ultimately caused readers to become less interested in the poem and more invested in the image of the poet.⁷

In response to Epstein's essay, nearly everyone in American poetry circles began seeking new ways to open poetry to a mass audience, resulting in two major events in the early 1990s. The first was the rise of slam poetry competitions, instigated by poet Marc Smith in the working-class bars of Chicago. These competitions are essentially open-mike poetry readings in

which the audience judges each poem.⁸ While such efforts did, indeed, bring poetry to a wider—and, importantly, nonacademic—audience, slam as a genre openly conflates the poet with the poem through an emphasis on identity performance:

Because NPS [National Poetry Slam] rules ensure that at slams authors are also always performers and vice versa, audiences commonly conflate the voice of the poem with that of the author. Through the sheer format of the competition, audiences are encouraged to see slam performances as confessional moments in which the “I” of the poem is also the “I” of the author-performer. . . . [T]here is a hyperawareness of self among slam poets and audiences, one that manifests itself most commonly through the author’s performance of identity.⁹

Thus, slam *did* bring poetry back to a mass audience; however, it simultaneously made every competitor into someone performing the role of poetry, and in turn, every reader of poetry became, in actuality, a reader of poetic identity.

The second major result of Epstein’s article was the publication of Dana Gioia’s important response, *Can Poetry Matter?* In this book, Gioia defines poetry as “the art of using words charged with their utmost meaning.”¹⁰ When scholars in the latter half of the twentieth century analyzed a poem, they located these meanings: hence, we know meaning is there, if hidden behind the poet’s image. Yet, Gioia provides only two reasons why poetry matters: first, language is powerful, and poetry can help us harness and understand how to use language in its most powerful form; and second, all forms of art are becoming marginalized to the point that artists are finding it difficult to locate an audience outside of academia and small, avant-garde communities.¹¹ While I agree wholeheartedly with the first point, the second again focuses attention on where the *artist/poet* fits into society, rather than what his or her art can do. Even in his more recent book, *Disappearing Ink*, in which Gioia reconsiders the role of poetry in the rapidly changing print culture, he continues to conflate the societal place of the poet with that of his poetry:

The end of print culture raises many troubling questions about the position of poetry amid these immense cultural and technological changes. What will be the *poet’s place* in a society that has increasingly little use for books, little time for serious culture, little knowledge of the past, little consensus on literary value, and—even among intellectuals—little faith in poetry itself?¹² (emphasis mine)

Here, Gioia implicitly argues that the poet’s place is equivalent to the role of his or her poetry, and, even more problematically, that this place is disappearing as a result of a general loss of appreciation for high culture. Yet, at

the same time, he recognizes the continuing problem in more popular forms of poetry, including slam in particular, but also rap/hip-hop and other forms of popular music—as well as, I would add, today’s newest musical stars, most notably Lady Gaga’s radical creation of an empty superstar icon—of focusing only on the performance of the poet as a means of judging and deriving meaning from a poem, rather than examining the lyrics of the poem itself.¹³

Thus, there has been a long-standing tension among academic poetry circles, the avant-garde, and pop culture that has sought to provide a mass audience access to the vital function of poetry. Yet, the spectacle of the poet has, throughout the twentieth century, consistently gotten in the way. This “aura” of the poet, as Epstein calls it, is not unique to poets, however. Walter Benjamin, in his seminal 1936 article, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” argued that works of art such as paintings have an aura that constructs a sort of “cult value” because they are rare and inaccessible to the general population. This value is expressed both socially and monetarily and maintains an intellectual power structure that makes it difficult for everyday people to glean meaning from artworks.¹⁴ Reproducing the artwork—especially through the cinema—decreases the value of the “original” because everyone can see it.¹⁵ Of course, poetry is also infinitely reproducible, as it may be printed and reprinted in any number of books; yet, the singularity of an author’s performance, not to mention the singularity of the author him- or herself and the fact of the decline of print culture, renders poetry significantly less accessible than movies. Even songs—poetry of the twentieth century—are infinitely reproduced every day on the radio and YouTube and downloadable quickly and cheaply from the Internet. Yet, again, songs are generally associated with a singular singer or band; cinema, on the other hand, is created and performed by a multitude of voices, personalities, and images. Further, while academic/avant-garde art—and I add poetry to this—tends to be seen as elitist by the general population, with film, to use an overused phrase, everyone’s a critic: everyone knows how to “read” and respond to a movie, even in the most rudimentary ways.¹⁶ In fact, we are socially encouraged to do so, because the cinema is specifically created for the masses. We have to be taught to read poetry at some point in school; meanwhile, we all go to the movies and manage to talk about them. This is, of course, not to say that film history and analysis are not important parts of any school curriculum. Visual literacy is an absolutely vital part of learning to think critically and analyze the hypermediated world around us; however, most people not only have a broader access to films than poems, but because the cinema is still treated as “just entertainment,” on the whole, more people are likely to engage with them, see them, memorize them, talk about them, and so forth.

So in 1993, when *So I Married an Axe Murderer* (hereafter, *SIMAM*) was released, it was situated in a time of simultaneous crisis and invention. Rap and slam were becoming popular, and poetry was moving outside of academia. Just five years earlier, while Epstein had invoked Walter Benjamin's sense of "aura" in describing the modernists, the solutions offered after Epstein only magnified the aura of the poet, to the point of total performativity; meanwhile, *SIMAM* actually seems to have played out Benjamin's assertion that film can degrade the aura of a work of art and allow access to meaning for a mass audience. Yet from 1993 to the present, *SIMAM*, which parodies the image of the poet while offering a mode of critical access to poems, was overlooked by poets and scholars alike. And so, I would like to turn now to the ways in which the film demonstrates both Benjamin's solution to the aura (cinema itself) and Epstein's (narrative).

THIS POET . . . DOESN'T MATTER

In many ways, *SIMAM* is a typical Hollywood film, relying heavily on continuity editing and the general conventions of romantic comedy. Nowhere is the 180-degree line broken, and each instance of editing effectively hides the apparatus of the camera. Generically, the film follows the typical romantic structure of "boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl back." The fact that boy (falsely) suspects girl to be an axe murderer provides the comedic twist. On top of this, it significantly parodies the Beat-chic image that had become firmly set in audiences' minds by the time of its release. Yet, in combining such parody with typical editing and narrative techniques, it actually allows the audience to be sutured into the narrative and, through a process of juxtaposing the earlier "Woman, Woman, Woman" poem with the later "This Poem . . . Sucks," it defies audience expectations, thereby encouraging serious, critical access to the meaning of this latter poem.

Throughout the first half of the film, Charlie performs his "Woman, Woman, Woman" poem in a coffee shop several times. In these scenes, the audience in the coffee shop is clearly seen, thereby distancing the film's audience from Charlie's performance and positioning him as the spectacle/object of our gaze. In other words, we don't just see Charlie perform; we see other people watching him. Furthermore, because these poems are repeated several times as a formula for performance, the audience is conditioned to conflate Charlie's Beat persona—fake New York accent, unlit cigarette, accompanying jazz music—with his poems. In this way, *SIMAM*—at first—reinforces the performative image of the Beat poet through editing and mise-en-scène.

The meanings of the "Woman, Woman, Woman" poems also rely on formulaic, pop-culture iconography that reinforces Charlie as a poet icon.

Before turning to the poems themselves, however, I should note that, because they were written specifically for performance on-screen, the lines always already coexist with the image. In this sense, the shots also function as lines of the poems and create meaning as much as the words themselves. Additionally, as with all traditional narrative films, the audience is meant to "read" the entire film at once, including dialogue, cinematography, editing, and so forth. Thus, I've transliterated each poem from the film here as they are both heard and seen in the film: the spoken dialogue is in regular typeface, while the other cinematic elements are in italics. In the spirit of recognizing plural authorship (rather than singular performative authorship), I should also note that the poetry in the film was written by the screenwriter, Robbie Fox; yet, without the performance of the actors, the cinematography, the editing, and the direction, the poems would exist solely on a page written by Fox. It is the very combination of arts that allows access to critical meaning of the poems in *SIMAM*.

So when written, the first incarnation of "Woman, Woman, Woman" is as follows:

1. *Medium tracking shot of Charlie walking onstage as audience in foreground claps and snaps for him*
2. Jazz trio begins playing
3. *Camera rests on medium shot of Charlie holding unlit cigarette, standing in front of a microphone*
4. Woman
5. Image of a woman is projected on small screen behind Charlie
6. Wo-man
7. Whoa
8. Man
9. *Silence; jazz music begins with Charlie's next line*
10. She was a thief
11. You gotta belief
12. She stole my heart and my cat
13. *Close shot of projected image of woman holding a cat*
14. *Wide medium tracking shot of Charlie, over audience members' shoulders*
15. Betty
16. *Projected image changes to Betty Rubble from the television cartoon The Flintstones*
17. Judy
18. Josie and those hot pussycats
19. *Silence until Charlie's next line*
20. *Projected image changes to Josie and the Pussycats from the cartoon of the same name*

21. They make me horny
22. Saturday mornie
23. Girls of cartoo-ins
24. *Wide shot of coffee shop audience*
25. Won't leave me in ruins
26. *Medium shot of Charlie in front of the microphone*
27. I want to be Betty's Barney
28. Close medium shot of Charlie
29. Silence
30. Hey, Jane, get me off
31. This crazy thing
32. Close shot of Charlie
33. Called love
34. Jazz trio continues
35. *On last beat of music, in medium shot, Charlie blows out a candle*
36. Audience applauds

From the very beginning, the combination of the music and the fact that we watch Charlie situate himself onstage establishes this poem as a performance. In addition, the fact that Charlie's performance exists only during his poetry performance (to this point, Myers has been speaking in his natural Canadian accent, and Charlie the character apparently does not smoke) add to the spectacle image, as each element is a part of the performance. When Charlie begins to recite the lines, the images projected behind him echo his words, further solidifying the link between the poet's words and the image he's presenting. Then, in the shift from talking about a photographed woman to hand-drawn cartoons, Charlie claims that he "wants to be Betty's Barney" (a reference to the *Flintstones* couple Betty and Barney), thereby calling on pop-culture iconography to align himself with a character, rather than a real-live man who has just gone through a breakup. And finally, in the last lines, he speaks as a cartoon character, referencing the *Jetsons* line, "Jane, get me off this crazy thing," thereby finally positioning himself as a complete spectacle. To close the poem, he blows the candle out in an allegorical gesture that turns his breakup into nothing more than a performative motion. In the second performance of "Woman, Woman, Woman," much the same happens, except the poem is about Harriet, and Charlie can't bring himself to blow the candle out at the end. Rather than dispelling the image of the poet, though, the film's audience again identifies with the coffee shop's audience, who react to the performance with confusion, indicating that Charlie has screwed up his own formula.

About halfway through the film, these primary audience expectations are challenged when Charlie performs "This Poem . . . Sucks." Immediately, the

audience is sutured into the scene in a way that allows them to identify with, rather than objectify, Charlie. As the scene begins, we hear the same jazzy music as the earlier poetry performances; but immediately, the audience's expectations are denied, as the camera focuses on the jazz trio playing on a rooftop, rather than the coffee shop. As Charlie enters, then, we notice he is looking somewhere off camera, inciting us to identify with him and his gaze as we desire to see what he sees. In the reverse shot, we see an empty window, followed by Harriet's entrance. Thus, the object in this scene is no longer the poet, but rather Harriet.¹⁷ In this way, then, the distance established at the beginning of the film through identification with the coffee shop audience has now been diminished. It's important to note, too, that, since Charlie is a fictional character performing poetry written solely for this film, he carries no tie to a "real" poet outside the diegetic film world. Hence, in identifying with him as he performs "This Poem . . . Sucks," we can truly be sutured into the narrative of the film in order to look past the spectacle of the poet—both Charlie and the real Beat poets whom he references—and focus on the meaning of the poem.

The poem's meaning also deconstructs the performative spectacle of the poet. Just as in the "Woman, Woman, Woman" poems, it's important here to also consider the audiovisual aspects of the performance to be as much a part of the poem as the lines themselves. So when transliterated into text, the poem reads as follows:

1. High, wide shot of trumpet, snare drum, and standup base playing on building rooftop
2. Enter Charlie carrying small poetry notebook and unlit cigarette
3. *Close-up shot of Charlie*
4. Harriet
5. Harri-
6. Et
7. *Wide medium shot of Harriet's window as she enters and leans on sill*
8. Hard-hearted harbinger of haggis
9. Beautiful
10. Bemused
11. Close shot of Charlie
12. Bellicose butcher
13. Untrust-ing
14. Two trumpet notes
15. Unknow-ing
16. Two trumpet notes, then silence from band
17. Unlov-
18. Ed?

19. Music begins again
20. Tighter medium shot of Harriet at window
21. Medium three-shot of Charlie, drummer, and trumpeter
22. He wants you back! He screams into the night air like a fireman going to a window that has no fire
23. Trumpet growls
24. Charlie nods at Harriet in recognition of trumpeter
25. Medium shot of Harriet, who looks impressed
26. Except the passion of his heart
27. Two-shot of Charlie and drummer
28. I am lonely
29. Drum flare; silence
30. It's really hard
31. Five trumpet beats; silence
32. This poem
33. Sucks.
34. Band continues as Charlie approaches Harriet

While the cadence and jazziness of "This Poem . . . Sucks" is similar to "Woman, Woman, Woman," and the camera does cut back and forth between Charlie and his audience, the overall meaning has clearly changed. Audiovisually, Charlie holds the same unlit cigarette and speaks in the same fake accent, but this time, since the scene is taking place on an empty rooftop instead of on a coffee-shop stage, the staginess of these aspects of Charlie's performance become jarring. Why should he stage his performance when, quite literally, he has no stage? Furthermore, unlike in the earlier performance, he now reads from his notebook, thus denying any possibility that his words are authentically flowing from his poetic soul.

The dialogue further calls attention to the falseness of his performance. The first part of the poem, a description of Harriet—this time without the projected image—serves to solidify her as the object of Charlie's gaze. Further, the cadence of "Harriet / Harri-et" mimics the cadence of the first few lines of the "Woman, Woman, Woman" poem; yet here, the juxtaposition of a particular woman—Harriet—with that of the abstract "woman" again jars the audience out of their expectations and calls attention to Charlie's false performativity. The second part of the poem is a description of empty imagery—"a fireman going to a window that has no fire." This directly parallels Charlie's position under Harriet's window, again making him the active non-spectacle and her the image/object.

The first major turn in the poem comes with the two declarative statements—"I am lonely" and "It's really hard." Here, Charlie begins to assume an active role as speaker of the lines, rather than a passive spectacle whose lines must coincide with the image presented. And finally, the last two

lines—"This poem / Sucks"—fully dispels any remaining elitism or conception of a perfect poetic image by engaging in a self-reflexive evaluation. In the very last word, then, Charlie drops back into his natural accent, thereby completely dropping his performance and ending the poem as himself.

SO IT SUCKS . . . NOW WHAT?

As I've shown, twentieth-century poetry has been plagued with the problem of the poet spectacle, from the modernists, through the Beats and contemporaries, and well into more recent slam poets, rappers, musicians, and so forth. In resituating poetry within a fictional, narrative context, though, *SIMAM* succeeds in deconstructing the spectacle of the poet by suturing the audience into the narrative in a way that allows them to focus instead on the meaning of the poem. And, to make things more interesting, *SIMAM*'s main deconstructive poem—"This Poem . . . Sucks"—simultaneously uses its meaning to both reinforce and dispel the falseness of a poet's performative identity.

Yet, this is just one film, made twenty years ago. Since its release, slam has grown and fizzled, rap/hip-hop has gotten flashier and more prominent than even slam, and new artists like Lady Gaga have taken performativity to an all-new height; meanwhile, literary poetry seems to have receded even further into academia, such that more people know the names of poets, rather than their poetry. (Maya Angelou is a particularly salient recent example, as she is widely known as an actress in addition to being a poet.) So where can we go from here? *SIMAM* provides an important case study in the ways poetry may be used in narrative film as a gateway to a more widespread understanding of different forms of poetry. In many ways, though, quotes from movies, not to mention television, music, and the Internet, have become a form of cultural currency that has displaced the oral and literary traditions of poetry that the Beat generation sought to rekindle. Poetic lines certainly still have the power of describing the human condition, from the profound to the mundane, through concrete imagery and the creative use of language. And yet, the spectacle of celebrity in other, more widely available media continues to diminish the accessibility of poetry for the general population. Even other films that feature characters reciting poems within the diegesis, such as *Dead Poets Society* (Peter Weir, 1989) or *Shakespeare in Love* (John Madden, 1998) reinforce the greatness of the poet (Keats, Byron, and others in the former and Shakespeare in the latter) rather than the meanings of the poems.

But, of course, film as a medium unto itself is becoming just as lost in the hypertextual digital age as poetry did in the age of mechanically reproduced film. Yet, the elasticity of poetic language lends itself to hypertext culture quite well; YouTube, Netflix, Hulu, and a variety of other digital media sites,

not to mention the range of platforms through which media can be consumed, have allowed for the rapid convergence of media, blending text, image, sound. Now, more than ever, cultural meaning is created and sustained within and between texts, among creators and consumers. This intertextuality, hypertextuality, and transtextuality of meanings has opened a space for poetry that moves beyond the spectacle of the author. And so, in reconsidering *SIMAM*, I hope to open a dialogue among scholars, poets, and mediamakers that could result in a new form of collaboration which breaks free of the twentieth-century fascination with the spectacle of the poet. Not only can we reconsider poetry within the mass medium of film, but we can also begin, once again, to consider poetry itself as a mass medium in collaboration with other media. In doing so, then, we can begin seeking a democratized, culturally reproducible place for the art—rather than the artist—in the hypermediated twenty-first century.

NOTES

1. Christopher Beach, *The Cambridge Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 49.
2. Joseph Epstein, "Who Killed Poetry?" *Commentary* 86, no. 2 (1988): 13.
3. Jack Sargeant, *The Naked Lens: An Illustrated History of Beat Cinema* (n.p.: Creation Books, 2001), 5.
4. Sargeant, *Naked Lens*, 222–23.
5. For more on these conversations, see Daniel Kane, *We Saw the Light: Conversations between the New American Cinema and Poetry* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2009) and Susan McCabe, *Cinematic Modernism: Modernist Poetry and Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
6. Just three years after the publication of "Who Killed Poetry?," Dana Gioia wrote in his response article, "Can Poetry Matter?" (*Atlantic*, May 1991, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1991/05/can-poetry-matter/305062/>) that "no recent essay on American poetry has generated so many immediate responses in literary journals. And certainly none has drawn so much violently negative criticism from poets themselves. To date at least thirty writers have responded in print. The poet Henry Taylor published two rebuttals."
7. Epstein, "Who Killed Poetry?," 18–19.
8. Susan B. A. Somers-Willet, *The Cultural Politics of Slam Poetry: Race, Identity, and the Performance of Popular Verse in America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), 5.
9. Somers-Willet, *Cultural Politics of Slam Poetry*, 32–33.
10. Dana Gioia, *Can Poetry Matter? Essays on Poetry and American Culture* (St. Paul, Minn.: Graywolf, 1992), 20.
11. Gioia, *Can Poetry Matter?*, 20–21.
12. Dana Gioia, *Disappearing Ink: Poetry at the End of Print Culture* (St. Paul, Minn.: Graywolf, 2004), 5.
13. Gioia, *Disappearing Ink*, 8.
14. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Media and Cultural Studies: Key Works*, ed. Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 22.
15. Benjamin, "Work of Art," 20–21.
16. Benjamin, "Work of Art," 30.

17. Admittedly, such a playing out of the typical use of male gaze is problematic in its own right. But for the purposes of identification with, rather than objectification of, Charlie the poet, it is absolutely vital that we identify with his gaze on Harriet.