

Beyond the “Raked Gardens”: Female Identity in American Suburban Poetry

Jiří Flajšar

<https://doi.org/10.30608/HJEAS/2021/27/2/4>

ABSTRACT

The article analyzes an overlooked aspect of American suburban poetry—the writing of American women poets who deal with the problem of how to represent female identity. Drawing on the existing criticism of women’s poetry, a comprehensive survey of the suburban poems by American women poets, from the 1940s to the 2000s, is provided. The article documents the various approaches that these poets adopt in order to explore identity while resisting the gender stereotypization in American suburbia. These approaches include either embracing the suburban ideal of domestic conformity or attempting to present women suburbanites who reject the socially prescribed roles forced upon them and develop new identities of their own. (JF)

KEYWORDS: American poetry, women’s poetry, suburban, identity, gender roles, criticism

Postwar suburbanization of the United States has been reflected in the work of many American poets. Mostly, these authors have been male and members of the strong postwar generation of academic formalists which includes Richard Wilbur, Howard Nemerov, John Ciardi, Donald Justice, Louis Simpson, and John Updike. They wrote about American suburbia from self-appointed positions of insider cultural superiority, a viewpoint which enabled them to criticize the conformity and intellectual deadness of their environment while being part of it. The

suburban conformity of design and thought was famously denounced by urban historian Lewis Mumford, who likened twentieth-century American suburbia to

a multitude of uniform, unidentifiable houses, lined up inflexibly, at uniform distances, on uniform roads, in a treeless communal waste, inhabited by people of the same class, the same income, the same age group, witnessing the same television performances, eating the same tasteless pre-fabricated foods, from the same freezers, conforming in every outward and inward respect to a common mold. (486)

In a later evaluation of suburbanization in the United States, Kenneth T. Jackson also concludes that postwar American suburbia “came to be regarded less as an intelligent compromise than a cultural, economic, and emotional wasteland” (244). The generic tradition of suburban poetry written as an ironic response to the conformist lifestyle in America has already been surveyed by critics including von Hallberg, Flajšar, Monacell, and Gill,¹ yet suburban poetry by authors who define their identity through writing poems about the suburban experience and the social roles of women in suburbia has so far been overlooked. This article examines representative poems by women poets ranging from Phyllis McGinley (1905-1978) to Laurie Lico Albanese (1959-) in an attempt to define a poetics of female identity in American suburban poetry from the 1940s to the 2000s.

Critics who emphasize the typical problems of women poets making their poetic voices heard argue that poetry by women, in suburbia and elsewhere, faces specific challenges that are related to the traditional marginalization of women as unequal with men, trapped within their limited domestic and family roles. This situation had lasted up to the second-wave feminism of the 1960s and even beyond.² Suzanne Juhasz argues that women poets have had to face a “double bind” situation as they have to write within the tradition of “male norms and values of

a patriarchal culture,” suppress their femininity, and, even if their poems are published and get critical attention, such work is often treated as inferior, since “it is the men who make art, who make books; women make babies” (1). Thus, until the 1960s, the woman poet faced prejudice from outside the literary world as well as from within, a situation which, as Juhasz argues, affected the way the woman poet was able to explore her identity in writing, for “her models have all been men; her criteria and standards of excellence have been created by men describing the work of men,” and writing about the female experience posed additional challenges (3). Namely, if the American “woman poet ‘writes like a man,’ she denies her own experience, if she writes like a woman, her subject matter is [deemed] trivial” (3). This prejudice is evident in an evaluation of the poetry of Louise Bogan by Theodore Roethke. In his review, he pontificates that poetry by women, including Bogan, is inferior by default since it suffers from “lack of range—in subject matter, in emotional tone—and lack of a sense of humour” (133). As Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar emphasize, criticism like Roethke’s simply fault women poets for trying to do what male poets have traditionally been doing without interference, that is, “for writing about God, fate, time, and integrity, for writing obsessively on the same themes or subjects” (542).

In addition to the domination of the male-chauvinist tradition in poetry and literary criticism up to the 1970s and beyond, there are thematic and identity issues which are important particularly in connection with writing by women. According to Judith Kegan Gardiner, “women are encouraged to judge their inner selves through their external physical appearance” while being “taught to create socially approved images of themselves” (360). Although much has changed since Juhasz’s 1970s evaluation of the difficult situation of women’s poetry, it is still fair to say, as Jo Gill has noted, that even in the twenty-first century, women poets demonstrate “an acute self-awareness about their work,” (*Women’s Poetry* 23), a gender-specific anxiety, which is absent in the poetry of their male counterparts. As Gilbert and Gubar

have shown, the woman writer's "dance into speech" (44), the radical act of writing against the thematic, formal, and ideological limitations of the male-chauvinist literary tradition is difficult and often impossible. Surveying the terrain of modernist poetry in the 1920s, Amy Lowell, in "The Sisters," self-consciously addressed her women poet models from Sappho to Emily Dickinson, claiming her place within a glorious, if largely unrecognized, tradition, bringing it up-to-date with a call for a new, vigorous poetry by women who would be able to assert their place in modern America: "Put on your cloaks, my dears, the motor's waiting. / No, you have not seemed strange to me, but near, / Frightfully near, and rather terrifying" (56). However, Lowell's poet contemporaries such as Edna St. Vincent Millay and Dorothy Parker chose to work with the more formalist and popular idioms of lighthearted society verse, which represented a style that Alicia Suskin Ostriker considers "artistically self-conscious, highly crafted, and musical" (44). In the interest of keeping their conservative audience, Millay and Parker avoided experimentation with forms and the problematic theme of identity exploration, afraid of making the leap toward a new female poetics of suburbia that later radicals like Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, and Adrienne Rich ventured to make.

The survey of American suburban poetry by women starts with Phyllis McGinley, arguably the first American poet who consciously chose to explore suburban themes and settings in her writing. She was a very popular poet from the 1930s to the 1970s, publishing widely in mass-market newspapers and magazines, such as *The Saturday Evening Post* and *The New Yorker*. She even received the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1961 and enjoyed the public celebrity status of "the Poet Laureate of Suburbia" while being able to command poem and essay publication fees that her more "serious" male poet contemporaries could only envy.³ However, until recently, McGinley was "almost entirely forgotten . . . [partly because] of our refusal to believe that anyone living on the manicured fringes of a major American city in the middle of the 20th century might have been genuinely pleased to be there" (Bellafante). The

dismissal of McGinley's work as irrelevant light verse is in step with the long history of critics and readers deeming women's poetry unimportant. Gill asserts that McGinley worked "in a mode . . . that seemed small-scale and inconsequential and thereby, according to the ideology of the day, feminine" (*The Poetics* 79). However, McGinley came from a humble background and she actually loved her transition from a poor to a middle-class suburban housewife by her early thirties. For themes, she drew on her experience as mother, housewife, and stay-at-home writer, who commented, with humor and irony, on the joys of her upward mobility, ignored suburbia's social problems and vices, and transformed her experience into poems about the bliss of life in an archetypal suburban community.

In "Suburbia, Of Thee I Sing," her influential essay in defense of suburban identity, she argues that to dismiss suburbia "has long been a literary cliché" and literary representations of suburbia by the late 1940s had misleadingly portrayed the setting as conformist hell in which the man is "the eternal Babbitt who knows all about Buicks and nothing about Picasso" while his wife "plays politics at the P.T.A. and keeps up with the Joneses" (*Province of the Heart* 124). McGinley disagrees with such a reductionist interpretation, giving evidence of how diverse and exciting the suburban lifestyle had become in America since "the true suburbanite need[ed] to conform less than anyone else" (125) and the suffering caused by suburban conformity was but a misleading fiction invented by city-based writers and critics since "we [McGinley's family] could not keep up with the Joneses even if we wanted to," as they are "all quite different people leading the most various lives" (125-26). McGinley rejects the stereotypization of American suburbia as a uniform, dull, and unbearable setting, which precludes any chance of developing a female identity. Moreover, she argues that even her suburban women friends, who should be those affected by the suburban malaise the most, actually lead rich lives of familial and intellectual diversity and "none of them is, as far as I know, doing any of the [conformist] things that suburban ladies are popularly supposed to be

doing” (129). As John Archer argues, the suburban setting has offered, since the middle of the nineteenth century, ideal context for “the production of selfhood, family, neighbourhood, and wider social relations” (“Everyday Suburbia” 25) for men and women alike.

In “Occupation: Housewife,” a sonnet from the 1940s, the same decade in which she wrote her famous defense of suburban life quoted above, McGinley portrays suburbia as resting on the contribution of the stereotypical woman as ideal wife, mother, and house manager:

Her health is good. She owns to forty-one,
 Keeps her hair bright by vegetable rinses,
 Has two well-nourished children—daughter and son—
 Just now away at school. Her house, with chintzes
 Expensively curtained, animates the caller.
 And she is fond of Early American glass
 Stacked in an English breakfront somewhat taller
 Than her best friend’s. Last year she took a class

 In modern drama at the County Center.
 Twice, on Good Friday, she’s heard *Parsifal* sung.
 She often says she might have been a painter,
 Or maybe writer; but she married young.
 She diets. And with Contract she delays
 The encroaching desolation of her days. (*Times Three* 135)

The sonnet is more than a social commentary on the management of American suburbia by a conventional woman. As W. H. Auden explained, such verse may transcend the limitations of

popular entertainment and become a full-fledged statement on life and society as some poets, since the Romantics, have “felt in sufficient intimacy with their audience to be able to forget themselves and their singing-ropes” (x). Auden recalls a long tradition of public, popular poetry in English that goes back to Chaucer, Dryden, and Pope, who were “able to express themselves in an easy manner, to use the speaking voice, and to use as their properties the images of their everyday, i.e. social, life” (xii).

In “Occupation: Housewife,” the title suggests tension between the idyllic image of the house-bound woman being portrayed and her qualms about the professional and personal ambition that she has sacrificed in order to live up to the suburban ideal of womanhood. For McGinley, writing formal poetry on social themes becomes, as Gill documents, a literary vehicle “for establishing a difference between a superficial rendering of suburban mores (whether positive or negative) and a more nuanced second layer of meaning which undermines or displaces the first” (*The Poetics* 92). The first octave of the poem contains a realistic description of the woman whose identity is determined by her well-kept appearance and by the way her house is decorated and filled with the fashionable items of the era. Her social status seems secure, based on the material and cultural achievements of her family. However, the sestet presents a sobering image of the same perfect and beautiful woman who actually feels culture-hungry and tries to seek momentary escape from home by taking a drama class and attending an opera performance in town. Still, the implied “desolation of her days” (McGinley, *Times* 135) is just a conventional, ironic departure from presenting the woman as happy and intellectually fulfilled, which would have been a subject of little literary interest. In a 1950s poem, “Reflections at Dawn,” McGinley continues the presentation of suburban feminine domesticity as pleasurable, yet vaguely annoying in its conformist undertones:

I wish I owned a Dior dress

Made to my order out of satin.
 I wish I weighed a little less
 And could read Latin.
 Had perfect pitch or matching pearls,
 A better head for street directions,
 And seven daughters, all with curls
 And fair complexions.
 I wish I'd tan instead of burn.
 But most, on all the stars that glisten,
 I wish at parties I could learn
 to sit and listen. (*Times* 5)

The speaker is another housewife who came late to her married middle-class station of life and who makes no bones about her evaluation of suburbia as heaven for women who are able to negotiate the demands of domesticity with their own ambitions in art, family matters, and social activities. She may sound dissatisfied, yet, the effect of her mock-complaint about feeling inadequate in suburbia gives the lie to the stereotypization of "Suburbia as a congregation of mindless housewives and amoral go-getters" ("Suburbia, of Thee I Sing" 129).

While McGinley was an early poet who directly explored the joys and limitations of female identity in American suburbia, she did so in traditional forms, with gentle irony and humor that stopped short of criticizing the suburban lifestyle. For this reason, Sylvia Plath dismissed McGinley's poems as "light verse: she's sold herself" (*The Journals* 360). Lynn Keller and Cristanne Miller explain that in the conservative climate of consumerist conformity that came to dominate the public discourse along with "a national social agenda redefining

women's place and roles as primarily domestic," American women poets in the late 1940s and early 1950s still "tended to write without an obvious feminist consciousness" (82).

A typical poem of the 1950s is "The Suburbans" by Carolyn Kizer (1925-2014). Although Kizer's later poetry came to be associated with the feminist turn in American literature,⁴ in this early poem, she ignores the problem of constructing female identity and suburban domesticity, focusing, instead, on the generic criticism of the environmental and cultural degradation of postwar suburbs. She considers the suburban environment as architectural aberration which has destroyed the natural habitat for the fauna and flora in the area:

Forgetting sounds that we no longer hear—

Nightingale, silent for a century:

How touch that bubbling throat, let it touch us

In cardboard-sided suburbs, where the glades

And birds gave way to lawns, fake weathervanes

Topping antennae, or a wrought-iron rooster

Mutely presiding over third-class mail?—

We live on ironed land like cemeteries,

Those famous levelers of human contours. (*Cool, Calm & Collected* 23)

Kizer's critique of the suburban degradation of the natural landscapes of the West goes on for seven more stanzas in which she targets the wasteful lushness of suburban golf greens which are "kept up for doomed Executives," while the libraries, a last haven of culture within the sea of suburban ignorance, barely manage to "preserve an acre for the mind to play" (23). A dominant symbol in the poem is the seagull, a scavenging bird "who eats our loot, / Adores our

garbage, but can rise above it,” (23) able to escape the prison of suburban artificiality, unlike the people who live there. Kizer observes the increasing discrepancy between the power of Nature, “carved and animate,” and the indifference of suburbanites including herself, who, “nailed to our domesticity / Like Van Gogh to the wall” (24) are victims of their own decision to prefer life in uniform communities where privacy has given way to obsession with the neighbors’ activity and conformist impulse to avoid being different from one’s neighbors. The suburbanites are left with “goldfish gazes” as prisoners in their own homes and become a bundle of “transparent nerves” while their identity is defined by what the neighbors think and see of them in a nightmarish vision of totalitarian mind control: “Home is a picture window, and our globes / are mirrors too: we see ourselves inside” (24). As Gill points out, “the apparent narcissism of the suburban gaze is exposed as mediocre” (*The Poetics* 178), for the race to keep up with the Joneses in which the suburbanites participate is hardly a race that enables the construction of real identity.

Ironically, Kizer also undermines the validity of herself as a suburban poet; an avocation whose pursuit seems futile in the face of the ignorant, uncultured materialism of her neighbors. She ends the poem with evoking Walt Whitman: “the drooping nineteenth-century bard in weeds” whose emotions “and tears were free / And easy” while it was still possible, in the pre-suburban America, to hear “authentic birds” (25). The poem also deals with the issue of faith decline in suburbia as locals, including the poet herself, “are saved, from the boring Hell of churches” as they succumb to the suburban “sprawl” along with choosing the substitute religion of consumerism while their pre-cooked, “limited salvation is the word” (25).

In “The Suburbans,” Kizer makes two contradictory claims. On the one hand, she argues for the cultural importance of suburbs, likening them to architectural “symbols” of postwar America while suggesting, on the other hand, that no real identity may be constructed in an environment that has scared away birds and animals, while humans survive as insensitive

automatons. The poem is a fitting critique of the dehumanizing effect of suburbanization while completely evading the question of female identity in suburbia. If there is tension in the poem, it is between the poet's nostalgia for the lost idyll of pre-suburban America of larger houses and lots, which were replaced with the prefabricated small-sized houses in the postwar suburbs. As John Keats shows in *The Crack in the Picture Window*, a satire on postwar tract-housing suburban lifestyle, this architectural development has caused Americans to lose connection with the natural world and increase their unhappiness.⁵

For women poets in America, writing poems that criticized suburban conformity was a difficult and socially unacceptable task that few dared to undertake. As Ostriker notes, "in the 1950s and early 1960s, every woman's magazine in the country preached the joy of wifedom and the creativity of domesticity for women" (58). Betty Friedan explains that the 1950s suburban housewife

was the dream image of the young American women and the envy, it was said, of women all over the world. . . . She was healthy, beautiful, educated, concerned only about her husband and her children, her home. She had found true feminine fulfillment. . . . She was free to choose automobiles, clothes, appliances, supermarkets; she had everything that women ever dreamed of. (13)

Such an ideal woman was a far cry from the home-bound poet scribbling about how unhappy she felt. However, a tension was mounting in American households after WW II between the socially-acceptable identity of the materialist suburban woman and the real identities of numerous American women in suburbia who began to feel, as Friedan argued, "a strange discrepancy between the reality of our lives as women and the image to which we were trying to conform, the image that I came to call the feminine mystique" (7). The difference between

the public and private self of women in suburbia, which was only implied by McGinley, was taken up in the late 1950s by three women poets of radically new suburban sensibility, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, and Adrienne Rich.

Juhasz claims that Plath “is the woman poet . . . who sees the problem, the situation of trying to be a woman poet with the coldest and most unredeeming clarity, and who, try as she might, finds no solution” (114). In “The Applicant,” a lesser-known poem from the *Ariel* sequence, Plath likens the ideal suburban woman to a pre-programmed “living doll” that is designed to meet her future husband’s every wish. Using the persuasive language of salespeople for comic effect, the woman is thrown into her prospective husband’s hand as a product that is both necessary and enjoyable to own: “Open your hand. / Empty? Empty. Here is a hand // To fill it and willing / To bring teacups and roll away headaches / And do whatever you tell it. Will you marry it?” (*Collected* 221) In “The Applicant” and elsewhere, Plath tries to negotiate the contradiction of writing as a radical feminist while hoping to be recognized as a traditional 1950s wife, mother, and object of male desire.⁶ Plath portrays the split identity of the tortured woman and artist who is unable to be the conventional suburban housewife and mother. Instead, she feels caught in the internal conflict of someone whose writing “could destroy surfaces and open inner places, inner wounds, inner emptiness” (Juhasz 88).

In “Amnesiac,” Plath introduces a protagonist who has forgotten all about her social obligations while presenting the fragments of the woman’s shattered memory: “Name, house, car keys, // The little toy wife— / Erased, sigh, sigh. / Four babies and a cooker!” (*Collected* 232-33). Plath chooses to dramatize the problem of reconciling female identity with the impossible demands of suburban womanhood by evoking the persona of a frightening, man-devouring and house-destroying female through whose suffering she presents what Gilbert and Gubar call “fiercely independent characters who seek to destroy all patriarchal structures,” while seeing herself as a character in a play about femininity who moves between the extremes

of “plaster saint and yellow monster” (77-78). The ambition of the protagonist in Plath’s poems such as “Lady Lazarus,” in which the speaker threatens to “eat men like air” (*Collected* 247), is defined by Paul Breslin as the “desire for self-transformation so extreme that it is akin to a desire for self-destruction” (88). Plath achieves this through the theatrical presentation of a doll-like woman in “The Applicant” where the doll is able to satisfy every need of her future husband while her seller claims, ironically, that “there is nothing wrong with it” (222). The covert desperation of the speaker shows in the closure of the poem, with an address to the generic male other to save her as well as himself: “My boy, it’s your last resort. Will you marry it, marry it, marry it” (222). While the myth of the suburban woman as a mechanical doll designed to meet every wish of her future husband seems exaggerated, Plath uses it to expose the pitfalls of postwar suburban domesticity as a fiction which should be redefined and subverted. Ostriker argues that such “revisionist mythmaking in women’s poetry” is crucial to revolutionizing the place of women in postwar American culture (211).

While Plath came to view American suburbia as a stifling hell for the intelligent and ambitious woman and decided to fill it with monstrous agents of domestic destruction, Sexton used the setting for even more radical poems of suicidal extremism. In “Housewife,” she complains that “Some women marry houses” and become dull housewives with no real identity, spending their days cleaning and maintaining the property, waiting for their tired husbands to come home in the evening (*Complete Poems* 77). In “Man and Wife,” Sexton admits that she and her husband are really strangers to each other and, although they are successful and glamorous by the standards of their time, they “look alike . . . but have nothing to say” (116-17). They are “a pair who came to the suburbs by mistake,” urban sophisticates who feel alienated and oppressed by the suburban environment. In “Self in 1958,” Sexton brutally compares herself, just like Plath in “The Applicant,” to “a plaster doll,” who poses “with eyes that cut open without landfall or nightfall / upon some shellacked and grinning person” (155),

that is, upon her suburban husband. Doing so, she feels she is an alien in her family, a “transplant” whose complicity with the stereotype of female perfection is presented in the image of her hair resembling “black-angel stuffing to comb, / nylon legs, luminous arms / and some advertised clothes” (155). Like the unhappily married protagonist of *A Doll’s House* by Ibsen, the speaker of “Self in 1958” lives in the artificial home “with four chairs, / a counterfeit table, a flat roof / and a big front door” (*Collected* 155). Within this oppressive space, she feels like a robot programmed to always do the right thing, “a synthetic doll / who should smile, who should shift gears, / should spring the doors open in a wholesome disorder, / and have no evidence of ruin or fears” (155-56). Sexton transforms the myth of a happy postwar suburban housewife into the nightmarish chronicle of her mental breakdown, which is presented as the only viable reaction to the social expectations placed on her. Having made a career of writing about the decision to reject the socially-acceptable gender and family roles in postwar suburbia, Sexton, in a late dream poem about an ideal home, “45 Mercy Street,” completes her coverage of the poems about female suburbanites by presenting a deranged woman who feels out-of-place in her own skin:

and I have lost my green Ford,
 my house in the suburbs,
 two little kids
 sucked up like pollen by the bee in me
 and a husband
 who has wiped off his eyes
 in order not to see my inside out (*Complete* 483)

The rejection of the suburban lifestyle seems incidental, for there seems to be no clear connection in Sexton's poetry between suburban conformity and the self-destructive, violent, and suicidal response of the poet to the suburban setting. Rather, she simply presents anguish as a fact of life to be reckoned with anywhere she goes:

Next I pull the dream off
 and slam into the cement wall
 of the clumsy calendar
 I live in (484)

Sexton's denunciation of suburbia is similar to Plath's in the sense that her "psychoneurotic symptoms . . . associated with female feelings of powerlessness and rage" (Gilbert and Gubar 284) would be activated anywhere, not only in the suburban setting that the poems discussed here introduce, but also in the city or country, or abroad.

Another suburban poet, Adrienne Rich, exemplifies the radical poetic development from traditional academic formalist to feminist free-verse radical. Rich first became proficient at formal poetry in the tradition of post-Eliotic detachment and intellectuality, and won early critical praise for her mastery of such writing:

. . . my style was formed first by male poets . . . I was reading as an undergraduate—
 Frost, Dylan Thomas, Donne, Auden, MacNeice, Stevens, Yeats. What I learned from
 them was craft. But poems are like dreams: in them you put what you don't know you
 know. ("When We Dead Awaken" 21)

Rich further expounds on how her radical break with traditional poetry was necessitated by her trying to find a form and language to portray the tension she felt between the public expectations placed on women and their inner feelings. This was no easy task at the time, as American women

were making careers of domestic perfection . . . moving out to the suburbs, technology was going to be the answer to everything, even sex; the family was in its glory. Life was extremely private; women were isolated from each other by the loyalties of marriage. I have a sense that women didn't talk to each other much in the fifties—not about their secret emptinesses, their frustrations. (“When We Dead Awaken” 22)

Rich's decision to stop acting as a 1950s model woman became evident in her breakthrough poem “Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law” (*Fact of a Doorframe* 17-21), written in 1958-60, which ushered in the American feminist poetry of the 1960s. In the ten sections of this free-verse poetic manifesto, Rich discards the conformist identity of suburban housewives and that of the shy author of conventional rhymed metrics, while repudiating the male-chauvinist tradition in western literature. When Rich “workshopped” this poem in a later essay on feminist poetics, “When We Dead Awaken,” she admitted that writing the poem “was an extraordinary relief” even if, from the formalist perspective, it was a half-baked victory since she still “hadn't found the courage to do without [male literary] authorities, or even to use the pronoun ‘I’—the woman in the poem is always ‘she’” (24)

The “Snapshots” poem portrays Rich, thinly-disguised as a former “belle in Shreveport,” educated widely in the liberal arts as a young girl, only to marry and move to suburbia where she has to give up all artistic and professional ambitions, which makes her feel like a wasted, brain-dead housewife whose mind is “mouldering like wedding-cake, / heavy

with useless experience”; she is “crumbling to pieces under the knife-edge / of mere fact” (*Fact* 17). The protagonist becomes furious in the prisonlike atmosphere of her suburban kitchen, “banging the coffee-pot into the sink” while hearing “the angels chiding” her for refusing to accept her domestic position (17). When she looks out the window, the suburban perfection of “the raked gardens” is contrasted with “the sloppy sky” of an inviting world beyond her reach (17). The violence of the language moves, in the second section, to the physical violation of the body which the protagonist perpetrates on herself: “Sometimes she’s let the tapstream scald her arm, / a match burn her thumbnail, // or held her hand above the kettle’s snout / right in the woolly steam” (17-18). These acts of self-harm are portrayed as symptomatic of her decision to resist her social role in suburbia, giving up the conventional achievement of middle-class domesticity while feeling numb to physical pain, except for “each morning’s grit blowing into her eyes” (18). While the first two sections introduce the problems of the protagonist’s suburban ennui, the third to the tenth sections present a range of famous male-chauvinist statements about the inadequacy of women writers, which were made by male writers from Diderot to Samuel Johnson. Rich admits that her rebellion while trying to craft a revisionist history of women’s writing faces prejudice from everyone since “the thinking woman sleeps with monsters” (18). She includes the important but faulty examples of women poet pioneers such as Emily Dickinson, who is “dusting everything on the whatnot every day of life” (18), and Corinna, who sings but “neither words nor music are her own” (19). Rich rejects the chauvinistic remarks by male writers about the ridiculous quality of literature by women while trying to formulate an archetypal new identity for women like herself, suburban or not, who regret

all that we might have been,

all that we were—fire, tears,

wit, taste, martyred ambition—

stirs like the memory of refused adultery

the drained and flagging bosom of our middle years. (*Fact* 20)

Tired of a tradition of conventional women writers who accepted the situation in which their radical voices were muted and their “mediocrities over-praised” (20), Rich advocates the construction of a new literary identity which would render “every lapse forgiven” for the woman writer whose “crime” has been to lack the courage to break from the patterns imposed by convention. She suggests woman writers should either “cast too bold a shadow / or smash the mold [of tradition] straight off” (20). As Albert Gelpi explains, the poem succeeds in presenting the female protagonist as resisting “the set of roles which men have established and which female acquiescence has re-enforced” (127).

“Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law” is important not only as a memorable manifesto against female suburban conformity, presented through the suffering of the angry and bored housewife. Rather, it also presents the mixture of what Gelpi calls “resistance and achievement” (127), using a dual tone which Rich assumes in order to define a new identity for women writers, while paying homage to the sincere but doomed effort of her literary predecessors. Ultimately, she outlines the identity of the new woman writer as a mythic warrior figure “who must be / more merciless to herself than history,” transcending gender limitations in order to “plunge breasted and glancing through the currents” (*Fact* 21) of a culture which denigrates any artistic ambitions of women.

In her subsequent writing, Rich manages to pose further challenges to the suburban ideal of womanhood, arguing that “women can no longer be primarily mothers and muses for men” (“When We Dead” 25). Rather, they are able to contribute a refreshing angle to the literary conventions defining American portraits of suburbia as places where communication between the man and woman is problematic by default, a source of great pain and misunderstanding. In

“Orion,” Rich first finds common ground with the figure of the mythological hunter who becomes her “fierce half-brother” (*Fact* 45) only to evoke the painful atmosphere of a dysfunctional relationship at home where she “bruise[s] and blunder[s]” while “a man reaches behind [her] eyes / and finds them empty” to the tune of her detachment from her own anguish as “a woman’s head turns away / from my head in the mirror” (45). In another suburban poem, “In the Evening,” two figures, “a woman and a man” stand on a porch and “haven’t a clue what we’re about” (*Fact* 46). A resolution to their gender difference becomes impossible as they “hover in a famous impasse / and cling together” (46) without reaching communion. While Rich later turned to explorations of the archetypal depths of female identity, in which the suburban setting and heterosexual relationships ceased to matter, her mid-career suburban poems discussed here prove her central position within the tradition of revolutionary suburban poetry by women.

The radical poetic re-furbishing of female identity in postwar American poetry, which is largely the result of the late 1950s and early 1960s contributions of Plath, Sexton, and Rich, made possible the new ways of women poets writing about the female experience in subsequent decades. However, the later women poets of suburbia chose to ignore the tone and language of militant radicalism and returned to the poetics of genteel suburban affirmation pioneered by McGinley. Arguably, the representative woman poet of American suburbia in the 1970s-1990s is Mona Van Duyn, an author of laid-back, meditative poems about suburban life, whose deceptively simple poems hide a complex probe into the female experience. Although she won many major literary awards, including the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize, recognition failed to come from some of her peers, such as Allen Ginsberg, who considered Van Duyn an insignificant author of “domesticated mediocrity.”⁷ However, Van Duyn is a rare poet whose visionary perception of reality utilizes the suburban setting as the locus of epiphanic transformation of the everyday.⁸ According to Emily Grosholz, Van Duyn has “fashioned her

own distinctive poetic perspective” from her “plot of house and garden, sidewalk and lawn,” while “examin[ing] the realities of a life that is very literary and intellectual,” yet also “thoroughly planted in space and time” (47). Kizer also praises Van Duyn’s ability to explore the ambivalence of leading an artist’s life in American suburbia, paying homage to the mundane while showcasing a very literary mind in the poems which are “full of passionate feeling and sensuous perception,” yet able to defamiliarize her lyric utterance in order to “show that the ordinary is strange, with a strangeness that only an artist can reveal to us” (“A Thank You” 7-8). In “Three Valentines to the Wide World,” Van Duyn explores the introspective tradition of the lyric:

When, in the middle of my life, the earth stalks me,
 with sticks and stones, I fear its merciless beauty.
 This morning a bird woke me with a four-note outcry,
 and cried out eighteen times. With the shades down, sleepy
 as I was, I recognized your agony.
 It resembles ours. With one more heave, the day
 sends us a generous orb and lets us see
 all sights lost when we lie down finally. (*Selected* 5)

The poem manifests the quietly proud sensibility of a woman whose identity is defined by her loving relationship to her garden and the elements. As Lorrie Goldensohn explains, Van Duyn skillfully manipulates “both analytic and sensual intelligence” in a poetry that requires “an alert reader, responsive to a leisurely, unforced diction, but with a fondness for paradigm and complex formal strategies,” while her subject matter is “that unhonored kingdom . . . [of] the domestic” (31). In “Toward a Definition of Marriage,” Van Duyn jokes about this venerated

social institution and provides its mock deconstruction, likening marriage to a “marvel of engineering” that is “closest to picaresque, but essentially artless,” or, to “a duel of amateurs,” a circus act leading to “a climax in the main tent,” while the development of marriage in old age is compared to a museum item which is “crippled outside of its case” (*Selected* 14-17). Throughout the poem, the author’s attitude toward her subject oscillates between the adoration of marriage and an ironic undercutting of the same.

In “Elementary Attitudes,” Van Duyn confesses: “I weed and plant or write poems in the backyard garden” (21). Her routine includes the conversation with a bird-feeding neighbor who suddenly stops feeding her birds and erupts “in a frenzy of tapdancing” while the poet thinks of her own flowers, maintained by her “diligent gardening,” and concludes that “collaboration with the earth should be done with care,” thinking of a long list of flowers to be planted the next season, which distracts her from her neighbor’s breakdown (21-22). The second section, devoted to viewing her home from the aerial perspective, gives Van Duyn a chance to recollect the flight she took over her suburban neighborhood, which she sees as “anything but provincial”—an evaluation of her mundane home setting that “leads to overcompensation: in the kitchen,” including “the restrained misery of a hamburger-loving husband”; she finds solace in her garden full of rebellious “plants from far places that never adjusted to Missouri” (22). When she took a tourist helicopter flight over her neighborhood, she “found everything unreal— / my house, lost in that vista half a mile under” while she was “pretending to enjoy the sights and growing blinder and blinder” (23). Such insistence on the superiority of one’s domestic experience was earlier suggested by Ralph Waldo Emerson, who claimed that to travel is foolish when transcendence might be achieved by home-bound mental effort. He argued that the soul “is no traveller; the wise man stays at home” while “the rage of travelling is a symptom of a deeper unsoundness affecting the whole intellectual action” (167). To relate Van Duyn’s meditation on domesticity to the ambitious tradition of Emersonian

individualism and self-reliance, one might look into the third section of “Elementary Attitudes,” which the poet devotes to fire: “These ignitions, and those in the stove // of my flesh, underhand, and speculations, / and barbecue and fireplace in their seasons / keep me quick” (*Selected* 24). The poem concludes with a section on water: “I move secretly, like a skin-diver, but don’t dive,” as “the mind is seldom wholly immersed” in knowledge while humans “live / willingly, fear both drought and drowning, conceive / in swampy places, and drink to provoke love” (25). Van Duyn assumes the viewpoint of a suburban insider who wishes “to uphold the accepted foundations of civilization—marriage and friendship, love and sympathy—while occasionally plumbing those foundations for cracks” (Henry).

In “Notes from a Suburban Heart,” Van Duyn starts with a mundane analysis of different brands of lawn fertilizer, punning on her “grass-roots patriotism” that makes her stick to local products (“St. Louis sewage”) as opposed to imports from more distant regions (*Selected* 34). In the second stanza, she muses on the slow process of her garden birds accepting a new feeder before finally arriving at the real subject of the poem, the poet’s marriage and a loving address to her husband, broached in the third and final stanza:

your life is as much a mystery to me as ever.

The dog pretends to bite fleas out of sheer boredom,
and not even the daffodils know if it’s safe to come
up for air in this crazy, hot-and-cold weather. (34)

The husband of the poet is presented as a mysterious being whose nature and views are deemed forever unknowable to his wife. As Gill documents, Van Duyn evokes the “sustained metaphor or lawn care of the affairs of the suburbanite’s ‘heart’” (“The sssh of sprays” 117-18). As each of the three stanzas ends with the hesitant phrase of “that is to say . . .,” the poet’s real subject

is revealed in her rhetorical answer to these elliptical statements in the final line, a mock-serious address to her husband: “I love you, in my dim-witted way” (*Selected* 34). The poet’s suggested lack of intelligence is an ironic ploy through which Van Duyn implies her sophistication. Ultimately, “Notes” is a suburban gardener’s love poem whose progression from the initial to real subject is conveyed through the deceptive mask of a conventional housewife.

For Van Duyn, the greatest setting in which to construct her identity as a woman poet is her suburban garden. In “The Gardener to His God,” she explores the connection between symbols of being and physical details of growth:

There is no disorder but the heart’s. But if love goes leaking
outward, if shrubs take up its monstrous stalking,
all greenery is spurred, the snapping lips are overgrown,
and over oaks red hearts hang like the sun. Deliver us from its giant gardening, from
walking
all over the earth with no rest from its disproportion. (43)

The mock prayer is heard, for it promotes the “lunatic stemming” before her garden dies “down, down into the great world’s flowering” (43). In “Peony Stalks,” Van Duyn first contemplates the potential of her flowers for phallic symbolism, then switches to observing a puppy “chasing lightning bugs or butterflies,” only to get to the real subject of her poem, which is the fear of loss and dying:

. . . I don’t know about you,
but I live in the feelings, they direct the contortions of the day,
and that is to live in waste. What we must do, we do,

don't we, and learn, in love and art, to see
 that the peony stalks are red, and learn to say this
 in the calm voice of our famous helplessness. (*Selected* 111)

Van Duyn's despair at having to come to grips with the epistemology of loss is countered with her sensibility of a suburban observer who is aware of the need to praise the transient beauty of plants and people.

While the suburban garden poems of Van Duyn deal with a wide range of metaphysical subjects, her biggest achievement is a pair of suburban micro-history poems, "The Block," and "Addendum to 'The Block'" (*Selected* 178-9, 189-90). In the former, several decades of life on a quiet suburban street are recorded through the little but essential details:

Childless, we bought the big brick house on the block,
 just in case. We walked the dog. Mornings the women
 looked up from their clipping and pruning and weeding
 to greet us, at dusk the men stopped their mowing to chat. (178)

The achievement of "The Block" is in the unobtrusive testimony about a suburban street's many years. Van Duyn's understated realism is effective in its focus on the individual stories of her neighbors:

The children were newly married or off to college,
 and dogs they had left behind them barked from backyards
 at our dog, first in warning, later in greeting.
 On other blocks we walked in the zany blare

of adolescent records and stepped around skates
 and tricycles left on the sidewalk, but our middle-aged block,
 busy and quiet, settled us into its solace. (178)

The passage of seasons is likened to the cycle of human life. As the street residents grow older, the children of those blessed with any move away while the poet keeps chronicling: “A lucky few dragged a staggering grandchild on visit / up and down, shyly accepting praise” (178). The inexorable passage of time sets in after all, with all its effect upon the poet’s neighborhood: “The end came before we knew it. All in one year / my husband retired and half of the houses emptied. / Cancer ate four, heart attacks toppled some others, / a nursinghome closed over one, the rest caned off / to apartments with elevators” (179). “The Block” is a great poem in which Van Duyn achieves what Richard Gray says every major American poem has to do, that is, to provide “the utterly unrepeatable expression of the author, the isolated ‘man alive,’ in a particular place and at a particular point in time” (15). While Van Duyn’s style is quietly intelligent, literary yet unobtrusive, her approach to portraying the suburban experience marks her as the only postwar woman poet who was not afraid to build on McGinley’s poetics of suburban celebration.

In “Addendum to ‘The Block’,” Van Duyn updates the story of her neighborhood with the happy knowledge that “three new babies are due all at once,” while later, her optimism reaches its climax during a chance encounter with a neighbor’s toddler:

Before we know it, dangling by his wrist
 From the hand of a leaning mother, one infant lurches
 As far as our drive, legs testing this strange notion,
 Toes touching or missing the ground, eyes wild with promotion. (189)

The poem ends on a note of transcendence, as the poet leaves aside the somber meditation on winter and death (“Soon the cold will keep secret behind each door / pain pleasure, vital, or lifeless conceptions, / boundless scopes or chilling circumspections”) in order to end with the image of a morning, on which

. . . the sun sends a wordless, warm

Hug to us all—children, parents, barren

Couples, frail graybeards, gays—“hello? Goodbye?”

Reaching out of the newborn blue of the sky. (*Selected 190*)

Emerson memorably advocates the impulse of the nonconformist to break free from social limitations in order to achieve one’s dreams:

There is a time in every man’s education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better, for worse, as his portion; that though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given to him to till. (149)

For Van Duyn, the call for home-based nonconformism becomes realized through the poetics of suburban chronicling, which, in addition to the virtue of metaphysical contemplation, is a way to define her identity within the celebration of the seasonal cycle of birth, growth, and death of her plants and neighbors. In a later poem, “The Beginning,” she honors the position of an aging chronicler, who is able to witness “the end / of passion” which “may refashion / a

friend” while “[t]he heart’s core, / unbroken, cringes” and “the soul’s door / swings open / on its hinges” of experience that betrays wisdom (*Selected* 209).

A fitting closure of this survey is a 2004 book of suburban memoir-in-verse, *Blue Suburbia*, by Laurie Lico Albanese. Since the 1990s, the genre has witnessed increased popularity, resulting in a wave of suburban memoirs which, as Martin Dines explains, “typically tell a story that is bigger than an individual life; in various ways they attempt to narrate a collective story, and to resituate their settings within wider historical and cultural frames” (131). A reviewer of *Blue Suburbia* suggested that the hybrid form of the book, combining prose, poetry, and autobiography, might “break some ground” (Scharf 74); indeed, this proved to be the case.⁹ Drawing on the history of formal liberation in 1960s poetry, Albanese is able to portray the ambivalence of the 2000s suburban household as a site of traditional power struggles between a wife and her husband while admitting her complicity in occasional violence. True to her background, she is “yelling / because my parents always yelled / when they put up wallpaper” (*Blue* 85). She records her participation in the recreation of suburban domesticity for her own family: “I am only / a lonely woman spending too much time / at the kitchen sink,” but admits, unlike the speaker in Rich’s “Snapshots,” that “there are worse fates than mine” (104).

In *Blue Suburbia*, Albanese incorporates the experience of having escaped the working-class trauma of an abusive household in which everyone is “too busy bowling, / bickering, hanging wallpaper // watching *Jeopardy!*” (74). Her husband is portrayed as a gentle person with their daughter “Melinda in his arms / and a dishrag / over his shoulder”; at the same time, she realizes that rare moments of domestic violence are bound to recur even in her own marriage, “done / and undone / again and again” (97). Elsewhere, Albanese presents the potentially hackneyed situation of the suburban family dinner, clearly serious about the importance of such an event for family cohesion and well-being:

I put dinner on the table
 summon my family to the kitchen
 and call it ordinary
 when two or more
 of the people I love
 gather in the same room (195)

At the risk of sounding melodramatic, Albanese admits to loving the suburban domestic idyll by refusing to acknowledge its conformist nature; she celebrates the potential of suburbia for experiencing transcendental happiness, prompted by family dinners and skywatching, as “we can feel infinity / in our limbs” and the “stars / spin inside us” (195).

The suburban setting and the problem of coming to terms with the demands of domesticity in American poetry by women authors reflect, in Albanese’s work, the contemporary acceptance of female identity in American suburbia as conformist by joyful choice, not by socially-prescribed necessity. For writers like Albanese, writing from within the suburban comfort zone no longer means having to avoid painful and personal subject matter. Instead, suburban women writers in the twenty-first century seem free to incorporate themes considered taboo before (such as domestic violence and abuse) into their writing, while celebrating the McGinley—Van Duyn kind of muted suburban domesticity that reacts to the earlier feminist denunciation of suburban conformity by Plath, Sexton, and Rich. Albanese’s genteel 2000s suburban affirmation is a manifestation of what Juhasz hoped the new poetry by women might achieve, that is, it aims to become “legitimate and valid . . . , a viable part of what is ‘happening’” (207). As Ostriker suggests, “the divided self [reflecting the dichotomy between a woman’s polished public image as a poet and her private feelings] is probably the single issue

women poets since the 1960s most consistently struggle with, the most visionary of their works appear to be strengthened by acknowledging division and containing it” (237).

From McGinley to Albanese, American women poets of the last seventy years have made suburbia a viable setting for lyric explorations of the battle between the private and public self while maintaining their diverse identities as mothers, wives, and artists. Their suburban poems showcase the woman protagonist as one whose social status is no longer defined by the gender-specific limitations of the suburban lifestyle.

Palacký University, Olomouc

Acknowledgement

Research for this work was supported by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union, Key Action 2: Strategic Partnerships, under Grant “Reflection of National and European Identity in the New Millennium” [2019-1-CZ01-KA203-061227].

Notes

¹ See Robert von Hallberg, *American Poetry and Culture, 1945-1980* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1985), 228-44; Jiří Flajšar, “Poetry of the American Suburbs: An Exercise in Non-Conformity,” in *Conformity and Resistance in America*, edited by Tomasz Lebiecki and Jacek Gutorów (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2007), 89-96; Peter Monacell, “In the American Grid: Modern Poetry and the Suburbs,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 35.1 (Fall 2011), 122-42; and Jo Gill, *The Poetics of the American Suburbs* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 73-171.

² See Adrienne Rich, “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision,” *College English* 34.1 (1972), 18-30; Suzanne Juhasz, *Naked and Fiery Forms: Modern American Poetry by*

Women, A New Tradition (New York: Harper, 1976); Alicia Suskin Ostriker, *Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America* (Boston: Beacon, 1986); Jiří Flajšar, *Dějiny americké poezie* [The History of American Poetry] (Ústí nad Orlicí: OFTIS, 2006), 131-47; and Jo Gill, *Women's Poetry* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2007), 79-137.

³ See Gill, *The Poetics*, 76-77. On the rejection of McGinley by envious male poet colleagues, see John Ciardi, *The Selected Letters of John Ciardi*, edited by Edward M. Cifelli (Fayetteville: U of Arkansas P, 1991), 185; and W. D. Snodgrass, *The Art of Poetry No. 68*, an interview by Alexandra Eyle. *Paris Review* 130, 1994.

⁴ For example, see Kizer's feminist poem from the 1960s, "Pro Femina," (*Cool, Calm & Collected*, 113-17) in which she hails the tradition of women poets preceding her, authors whose female identity comes to the forefront as they "stack up the dishes / and defect to the typewriter," forbidding their children to swamp them, celebrating "the luck of our husbands and lovers, who keep free women" (117).

⁵ See John Keats, *The Crack in the Picture Window* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1956), for a fictionalized story of the Drones, a typical postwar young suburban family which fails to find the beneficial improvement of their situation in the suburbs and, instead, faces many different psychological challenges associated with life in a tract-housing suburban community.

⁶ A recent exhibition, *One Life: Sylvia Plath*, organized in 2017-18 at the National Portrait Gallery of The Smithsonian, Washington, D.C., portrayed Plath not as the stereotyped, haunted, and abandoned housewife, whose suffering gave rise to her writing, but as a typical 1950s young, attractive, and ambitious woman. The show included early 1950s images of Plath, a ravishing blonde sunbathing on a beach, assuming sexy poses in the style of Marilyn Monroe. The exhibition also helped introduce Plath as an accomplished visual artist whose collages, paintings, and drawings complemented her writing. See <https://npg.si.edu/exhibition/one-life-sylvia-plath>.

⁷ Allen Ginsberg, quoted in Robert von Hallberg, *American Poetry and Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1985), 229.

⁸ For an examination of the poetry tradition which focuses on how everyday details trigger a leap into epiphanic realizations of the visionary qualities of secular meaning, which is out of proportion compared to those everyday details, see Flajšar, *Epiphany in American Poetry* (Olomouc: Palacký UP, 2003), 37-61, and “Is There A New Trend In Culture And Literary Criticism?” *Brno Studies in English* 29 (2003), 153-60.

⁹ More recently, other notable books in the memoir-in-verse genre were published. See Jacqueline Woodson, *Brown Girl Dreaming* (New York: Puffin, 2014), and Marilyn Nelson, *How I Discovered Poetry* (New York: Dial, 2014). Both of these, however, are young adult literature books, while Albanese’s *Blue Suburbia* is targeted at the adult audience of poetry and memoir readers.

Works Cited

- Albanese, Laurie Lico. *Blue Suburbia: Almost a Memoir*. New York: Harper, 2004. Print.
- Archer, John. “Everyday Suburbia: Lives and Practices.” *Public: Art/Culture/Ideas* 43 (2011): 2-30. Print.
- Auden, W. H. Introduction. *The Oxford Book of Light Verse*. Ed. W. H. Auden. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1970. vii-xx. Print.
- Bellafante, Ginia. “Suburban Rapture.” *New York Times* 24 Dec. 2008. Web. 15 Jan 2021.
- Breslin, Paul. *The Psycho-Political Muse: American Poetry since the Fifties*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987. Print.
- Dines, Martin. *The Literature of Suburban Change: Narrating Spatial Complexity in Metropolitan America*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2020. Print.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *Selected Essays, Lectures, and Poems*. Ed. Robert D. Richardson, Jr. New York: Bantam Books, 1990. Print.

Flajšar, Jiří. *Dějiny americké poezie* [The History of American Poetry]. Ústí nad Orlicí: OFTIS, 2006. Print.

---. *Epiphany in American Poetry*. Olomouc: Palacký UP, 2003. Print.

---. "Is There A New Trend in Culture and Literary Criticism?" *Brno Studies in English* 29 (2003): 153-60. Print.

---. "Poetry of the American Suburbs: An Exercise in Non-Conformity." *Conformity and Resistance in America*. Eds. Tomasz Lebiecki and Jacek Gutorów. 89-95. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2007. Print.

Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: Dell, 1974. Print.

Gardiner, Judith Kegan. "On Female Identity and Writing by Women." *Critical Inquiry* 8.22 (1981): 347-61. *JSTOR*. Web. 19 Jan. 2021.

Gelpi, Albert. "Adrienne Rich: The Poetics of Change." *American Poetry Since 1960: Some Critical Perspectives*. Ed. Robert B. Shaw. Cheadle: Carcanet, 1973. 123-43. Print.

Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1984. Print.

Gill, Jo. *The Poetics of the American Suburbs*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. Print.

---. "'The ssshh of sprays on all the little lawns': Imagining the Post-war American Suburbs." *New Suburban Stories*. Eds. Martin Dines and Timotheus Vermeulen. London: Bloomsbury, 2013. 111-22. Print.

---. *Women's Poetry*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2007. Print.

Goldensohn, Lorrie. "Mona Van Duyn and the Politics of Love." *Ploughshares* 4.3 (1978): 31-44. Print.

Gray, Richard. *American Poetry of the Twentieth Century*. London: Longman, 1990. Print.

- Grosholz, Emily. "Mrs. Thurston's Neighborhood: A Sense of Place in the Poetry of Mona Van Duyn." *Discovery and Reminiscence: Essays on the Poetry of Mona Van Duyn*. Ed. Michael Burns. Fayetteville: U of Arkansas P, 1998. 47-61. Print.
- Henry, Brian. "Poetry in the Suburbs." *The New York Times* 15 Sept. 2002. Web. 8 March 2016.
- Jackson, Kenneth T. *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*. New York: Oxford UP, 1985. Print.
- Juhasz, Suzanne. *Naked and Fiery Forms: Modern American Poetry by Women, A New Tradition*. New York: Harper, 1976. Print.
- Keller, Lynn, and Cristanne Miller. "Feminism and the Female Poet." *A Concise Companion to Twentieth-Century American Poetry*. Ed. Stephen Fredman. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005. 75-94. Print.
- Kizer, Carolyn. "A Thank You." *Discovery and Reminiscence: Essays on the Poetry of Mona Van Duyn*. Ed. Michael Burns. Fayetteville: U of Arkansas P, 1998. 7-8. Print.
- . *Cool, Calm & Collected: Poems, 1960-2000*. Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press, 2000. Print.
- Ibsen, Henrik. *A Doll's House*. Trans. William Archer. London: Unwin, 1889. Print.
- Keats, John. *The Crack in the Picture Window*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1956. Print.
- Lowell, Amy. *Selected Poems*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1927. Print.
- McGinley, Phyllis. *The Province of the Heart*. New York: Viking, 1959. Print.
- . *Times Three*. New York: Viking, 1960. Print.
- Monacell, Peter. "In the American Grid: Modern Poetry and the Suburbs." *Journal of Modern Literature* 35.1 (2011): 122-42. Print.
- Mumford, Lewis. *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects*. New York: Harcourt, 1961. Print.

Ostriker, Alicia Suskin. *Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America*.

Boston: Beacon, 1986. Print.

Plath, Sylvia. *Collected Poems*. Ed. Ted Hughes. New York: Harper, 1981. Print.

---. *The Journals of Sylvia Plath: 1950-1962*. Ed. Karen V. Kukil. London: Faber, 2000. Print.

Rich, Adrienne. *The Fact of a Doorframe: Selected Poems, 1950-2001*. New York: Norton, 2002. Print.

---. "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision." *College English* 34.1 (1972): 18-30. Print.

Roethke, Theodore. *Selected Prose of Theodore Roethke*. Ed. Ralph J. Mills, Jr. Seattle: U of Washington P, 1965. Print.

Scharf, Michael. Rev. of *Blue Suburbia: Almost a Memoir*, by Laurie Lico Albanese. *Publishers Weekly* 251.5 (2 Feb. 2004): 73-74. Web. 28 Feb. 2021.

Sexton, Anne. *The Complete Poems*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981. Print.

Van Duyn, Mona. *Selected Poems*. New York: Knopf, 2013. Print.

von Hallberg, Robert. *American Poetry and Culture, 1945-1980*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1985. Print.