

**PARALLEL
MOVEMENT
OF THE
HANDS**

FIVE UNFINISHED LONGER WORKS

**JOHN
ASHBERY**

EDITED BY

EMILY SKILLINGS

AND WITH A FOREWORD

BY BEN LERNER

ecco

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FIRST EDITION

Designed by Crisis

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data has been applied for.

ISBN 978-0-06-296885-2

21 22 23 24 25 LSC 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Fig. 1. Photocopy of the first typescript
page of "The History of Photography."

The History of Photography
(1) I.

First takers, first makers.
The first sip of intelligence ^{crumbled}
Splats expands the diapered sky, already erased
with the losses that events are.

A. the old treehouse ^{one is} they are clogged ^{Dust}
with sleep in any case. Grey garlands that sway
like chains of mice. And up from under
the palaver there is golden food.

^{let} So may it be clean at least.
The first person to be photographed was a man
having his boots cleaned. There were others
in the same street, but they moved and ~~as~~ became
invisible. How calm I am!

Baron de Meyer ^{too} says the horse and it moved on.
Nor was the lesson of satin lost on him.
It all came to seem a big joke, his cake.
Besides, who would care, a little later, ^{later on?}

log Not the house dog. The twig of coal?
Not the letterhead, though it is preserved, shining
where tulle cannot undress the board
^{body} under the table. It is all a--how do you say?
—A fancy. 3/12

How could I have had such a good idea?
But you know, the way they all say is a barrel.
Times two and too much. I have been coming and going
a fair share of my life, and some of me is up there,
photographed. Like a chair listening to a victrola record
I experience too little and know too much
for the good of others and their bathing suits.

Then too, as much escapes me as a tailor's dummy
in a photograph by Atget, taking in everything and nothing,
which caused the rain to fall one day.

Another day it was fine, we were "bent" on pleasure.
Sure enough, a skiff comes round a bend in the Thames,
a glory in progress. And we haven't even to see
these men, small as pickerel in the darting black,
for its hum to come to infest us too.

And buildings rise one behind the other.
~~THAT IS THE~~ That is the festivity in this sense,
but it's all like lace paper doilies, alludes...
Meanwhile another man spoke to me
about a pocket watch. I have it here in my pocket
and can choose to let it go.

Fig. 2. Photocopy of the fourth typescript page of
 "The History of Photography." Ashbery cited his quotations
 of Matthew Arnold's poem *Sobrab and Rustum* (1853).

(4)

[*"Sobrab & Rustum",
by great, p. 109*]

laigue

"As some rich woman, on a winter's morn,
 Eyes through her silken curtains the poor drudge
 Who with numb blacken'd fingers makes her fire--
 At cock-crow, on a starlit winter's morn,
 When the frost ~~whiten'd~~ flowers the whiten'd window panes--
 And wonders how she lives, and what the thoughts
 Of that poor drudge may be..." In just such another way,
 from a far, anticipated world, I beg
 the reader's indulgence, I... It has been formulaic
 (from the French *formule* and *laic*), just as setting out
 on a journey to a fixed point, with no notion
 of what comes in between, and without fortifying
 oneself with a cup of broth. What about boating?
 I prefer the train; at least you know
 it gets you there eventually (barring
 some loathesome catastrophe); it has the ground
 under its feet so to speak. In a boat you are never sure of arriving,
 or making any progress; you could be moving backwards
 into a dark nether world not of your imagining
 or anyone's else. So let's travel by water, if
 you please, the light glancing off the darting waves is reward
 enough for any fatal inconveniences we might inherit
 with a shrug, and so all is vapor, and thrading
 passages through some insufficiently imaged context. A clutter.

Then--stay.

negative

~~XXXX~~ Monotonously rings the little bell.
 Eakins, skunked by depression, opted for cheese rinds,
 a lorry driver's running balls--these are things
 that cannot be painted, pole-vaulting figures, Muybridge's hopping woman,
 because one ~~is~~ sheds another, cancels its own credibility
 in a fever of slight adjustments, ends up a mass, twisted.
 It's like corn popping. And yes... I bet I know, it's
 higher, in the petrol-scented wine we all end up quaffing,
 even getting to like. Look, Jack, I know you're my assistant,
 let's end up telling each other impersonal trifles, scented
 pec'cadillos, and that will have meant we collided
 many a day, had attitudes and took off somewhere, before a recorded
 voice summoned up to this studio, made us stand, one after the other.
 I bet you think it's my arrears, but I swear I'm
 not in this alone, that someone paged me... Anyway,
 what's important is how we like each other, aye and without clothes
 sometimes, swashbuckling, or sitting at a desk writing,
 not imagining someone is watching. I'd cover you with kisses
 like a wall with honeysuckle, if only I knew how to find out
 the right place to be in at this time, as though it mattered
 much in time, for you and your sister. All we did was step out
 a moment and came back in, and the earthquake
 and the fire following on it destroyed everything we had ever come to know,
 every chance for order. Oh, but who needs these? Oh, but
 I know you retain a sort of consciousness of them, a seething
 as of breath.

And the old verger, "like some young cypress, tall, and dark, and straight,

Fig. 3. Typescript page with Ashbery's handwritten revisions of poem 19 from *The Art of Finger Dexterity*,
 "Tense Positions with a 'Peaceful' Wrist."

19 Tense Positions with a "Peaceful" Wrist

If New England resembled Bulgaria, both would
 look like this bookcase that stands so moderately,
 like a birthday, ~~like~~ "things seen from right to left."

And in that case, possession (nine points of the)
 would intersect its other meaning. Is this, in fact, Brazil,
 which all foreign countries resemble, even
 the United States? ~~--- If not, let us hide our toes,~~
 fall backward into stagnant ether that is what
 rises to meet us at the end of all days, of all voyages
 in and from the parlor. ~~So, we decide see uskin, swimmer,~~
~~sympathizer. We must connect what is momentous~~ tense ~~translate~~
 into ~~pleasant~~ outcomes that will ripple back
 to foreign origins, not ~~but they~~ to know the name
 for what happened ~~or~~ why we connived at it,
 only that all points are equidistant and ~~goodxxxxx~~ pleased,
 swimmer, ~~or bathhouse~~ the part of you that got on with it.

and part of summer, summer, ~~typewriter~~

peaceful

[6/18/07] NYC

Fig. 4. Typescript page with Ashbery's handwritten revisions
of poems 20 and 21 from *The Art of Finger Dexterity*,
"Double Octaves" and "Parallel Movement of the Hands [I]."

Orig.

20

Double Octaves

Did you get a hat to-day?
~~It's a hat to-day, it's a hat to-day~~
You said it fled from my hand
thereby dirtying it with the band,
(difficulty there).

Let disorder establish itself ~~in~~ here
and that would be something
more than we have or what we have got
except there's no way in.
(Sorghum! But that's not enough...)

21 Parallel Movement of the Hands

Don't put me on the desk.
I was afraid I was going to die very soon,
~~in a paper spree. I was afraid I was going to die~~ Any nice person will
die very shortly. It doesn't really fit.
A missing dog or donkey (registered)
does the American state police talk show
no favors, just as in the past you coaxed
belligerent sweetness from the ~~edge~~ and then *hedge*
it was gone. Color? Why no color?
What did you expect from the microtonal
overlay of minutes? And then when it
did stand up, it was like nothing you ever imagined.

There was an unshapely tuft where the chimes rang
and forever after it was solid wall.
Nothing so became it as its tiresome
leave-taking. We were all pretty much
dispatched to our different sectors when the truth
happened, and bombed yet again.

What registers no vibration can't
expect to be named a consequence
or co-respondent if the peaceful enemy is really
coming back to engage the shares that were laid down
ages ago and are now ~~in~~ indistinguishable
from gaps in the truth. See here,
it seems to say, this is a consequence
(though inconsequential) and all of what was first
only by dreaming itself into position.

It's funny about dreams; they
happen pretty much everywhere. That's why
you can't ever be sure you're in one,
or out of it; why the rules of assembly
never apply to you in the present, only later
when the color of time being is finished anyway.

[Hanson]

6/18/67

Fig. 5. Typescript page with Ashbery's handwritten revisions of poem 21 from *The Art of Finger Dexterity*, "Parallel Movement of the Hands [II]."

21 Parallel Movement of the Hands

Saw him run ing,
a sunken wraith.

Rather than ~~xxxxxxx~~ figuring it all
out ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ in one hour, pull the mud
out from under him, whether that explains
the Treaty of Hubertusburg or this or that
spring wardrobe, it's ~~my~~ my placebo,
with all the trimmings, ~~the~~ way we
and others like it, just so it belongs
to us and them. Granted a day of
catching up we could ~~all~~ work within
the barriers foreign trade imposes
on our ~~is some~~ purpose-built, big casino
across gazebo, your and our place, gliding
~~over~~ the keys mindlessly ~~as~~ in a penance
a dream imposes--otherwise where are
they going to get backing for the ~~new~~ shift
in ways of thinking that lead invariably to your
correct ~~right~~ address, pulling your house and
delusions ~~decisions~~ ~~along~~ with it into the stream?

It's ~~than~~ ~~than~~
If that ~~than~~ I do endorse it,
your ~~the~~ citizenry, ~~the~~ commonwealth, society,
all rowing frantically away
real time from today's mischief as from a wreck
in ~~progress~~, never to congratulate
anyone again on the ~~time~~ light that emerges
to bathe us ~~though~~ we bear no responsibility
for ~~at the moment~~ or our felicity.
The wind blows where it wants ~~to~~
The wind will carry it away.

orig.

6/29/81

[Haden]

Fig. 6. Typescript page with Ashbery's handwritten revisions on his very first draft of "ATTAINER."

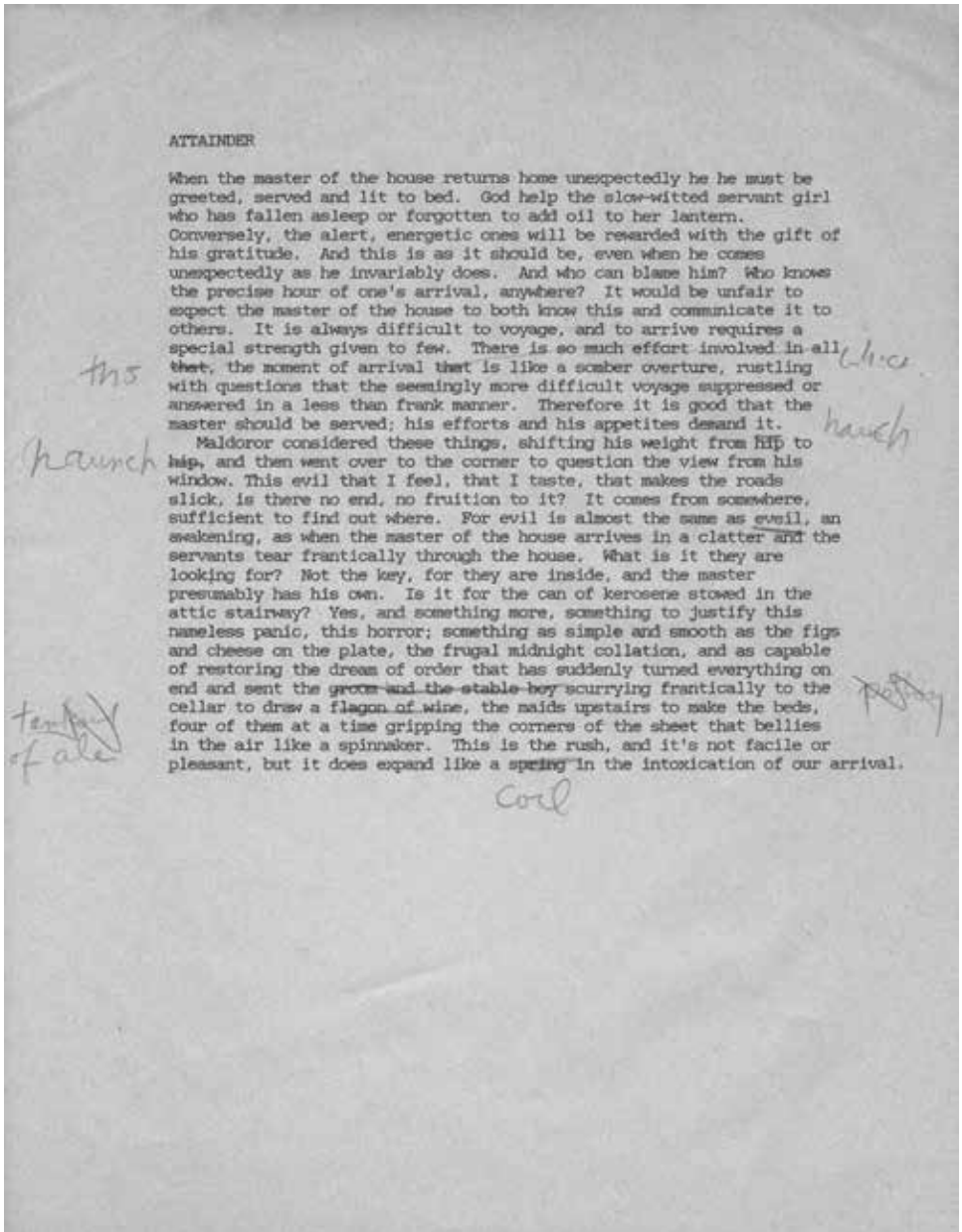


Fig. 7. Photocopy of the fourth typescript page of
 "21 Variations on My Room." Ashbery cited his
 quotations of *Tom Swift and His Rocket Ship* (1954).

21 Variations - p 4

- 16 We reject these. Oh I am sure
 it was as serious then to be struggling
 as it is now. We were children,
 which gave it easier, but harder as well
 because we didn't know anything. Now we have survived,
 you might say, but just look at the results.
 New factors have entered the equation
 but the surround is as messy as ever
 and even more limitless. The one city that accepts these
 excuses is strange to us. ~~(A) (some) surprise me.~~ *It doesn't*
 The words had an unpleasant ring. Hanging out with Baptists,
 drinking temperance beverages, is another kind
 of education, to which one is accustomed
 during the long nights of autumn.
 It comes as no surprise to learn that winter is on the way
 with headlands and diamond aigrettes, and ~~like~~ lightness. *the*
- 17 Still hungry? Head on.
 Shopping where history and kindness meet
 two strangers clamp the gavel to the pleated wellhead.
 Nothing you nor I can say
 can undo what they said, but was it anything?
 A group of wilted children poured the tar
 from where it looked out on the film
 of ashes to the horizontal bars. Or
 it was arranged to look like some other unknown hour.
 A circumstance of such kidney as to bemuse purple assailants.
 They left the drum on. From the radiator to the city center
 it led to indecent bragging and imbrolios.
 Perhaps it's time to
 change the frequency of what is seen
 around us, leave the palace and go home.
 A chariot waits beside the door.
 The way in is blocked by the entrance, near it. *9/3/02*
- 18 I don't know--spring came and went so fast this year,
 sex on the river--the chosen advice. And more.
 Once the foreplay is over the real mess can begin
 and one observes it. "I had no idea it was so complete,"
 Mrs. Swift continued, as they passed the dock area with its
 numerous boats
 and the playfields for tennis, baseball, and the other sports.
 The launching area is directly ahead.
 After that is the supervisors' area
 and you could go home now, except they are expected here
 and, wonderful to behold, are painted a silver gray with a red rose
 and at the base were three red fins on which the ~~rockets~~ *rockets*
 seemed to be poised.
 "The one farther over is the dummy," Tom explained.
 The flaming jet lifters lowered it onto a carpet of specially built,
 heat-resistant boiler-iron splash plate.
 A few moments later Sandy Swift made a perfect landing in a small jet plane.
 "I hope we get the rest of the day off, genius boy," Pud said shyly. *9/29/02 Tom Swift and His Rocket ship, pp36-7*

Fig. 8. Original handwritten annotations and corrections on a photocopy of the first typescript page of *The Kane Richmond Project*.

[many of these changes
WELZ made c. 2. 4/03] ⁶⁷⁸

Story ?
The Kane Richmond Project

(Spy Smasher) change title ?

A hundred major developments--
that's what I think about,
the sort of thing.

When the cause was opened
the singing stopped.

Man wanders along a ledge.
Vanished into the sea.
You both saw him.

Then the seething within is
wine to the dodged sense,
there is ~~no~~ whorl that knows us

or can think
about us
long enough.

The smouldering of brush
on the horizon
is a vivid sign,
one example of that.

Trout all told the truth.
The surface of the lake
was unified.
Then we all got together and pushed.
It was wonderful
for that one time.

Then old lovers fall apart.
We'll have plagues, good
times too. Don't mean
to think about that
or somewhere in there
the fat priest assented.

It was more than Mary could stand.

Dogs a-biting
in spring
is times for tulips again
and those other
forms in imagination.

We crept across a cornice
that was a choice point of entry

Fig. 9. Original handwritten annotations and corrections on a photocopy of the eleventh typescript page of *The Kane Richmond Project*.

KRP no break

orig.

Kane was lost in the Métro,
somewhere between Plaisance and Pernety.

Far from others he assuaged a certain need,
~~then~~ felt better for it; the treetops and stars
danced and dwindled, from gateway to lounge.
Blandest of ghouls, the ~~lieutenant~~ ^{Sergeant}
thought to turn the situation to his advantage yet again.
"Born in Milwaukee, I grew up in central Illinois
with little to show for it. My college education
left much to be desired. Life in Montmartre
was "twice as nice," Lord forgive me
for the occasional breach of bathroom etiquette.
I soldier on."

Memories of misbehavior

~~were~~ still fresh in their minds. They puzzled over a chart
thought to be of importance. ~~And then said nothing more.~~

Boys and girls ~~came~~ ^{came} out to play,
and a little indifference goes a long way
toward coquetry of the sublime. This delightness
under the summer sky is theirs, if they want it. ^{But}
really and truly. "The moon doth shine as bright as day,"
after all.

And then they die.

And then they keep on dying.

~~And then said nothing more.~~

5/21/02

Chapter Seven

The bloody creeps of war weren't long in bringing an isolation to this spot.
Then I guess more visited it. It was not a sacred place, yet it was in the sense
that it was a place of pilgrimage. Rex and Rinty remembered it, Rinty perhaps
a little more clearly due to his dog's disposition. Then I guess the others caught
up with them, a few at a time. The war was almost over now. You could tell because
of the green light in the evening sky. Mme. Delaunay brought out the redingote
she'd knitted before the war and placed it sideways on a chair, it caught the sun's
declining rays. It was a wondrousness of zigzags interrupted by broken arcs toward
the bottom and what looked like shards of tufa settling haphazardly in the comforting
environment of the broken arcs. Long had she labored to sculpt the thing into something
like distinction, but it had always seemed drab to her despite the profusion of spring-
like color that drenched it and the surrounding walls of the room. She could see
down into the tiny square that was almost dark now, though up above the sky was light.
A few vagrants trespassed, for what purpose it was hard to make out. There was a urinoir
at the far edge ~~from~~ from which men emerged quickly every so often, hastening their
steps as the sheaf of light from the ~~any~~ lamp troubled them. The war was dark and
dense, but small now.

Yet it couldn't be ignored, not completely. It was there like the beginning of a
migraine, the song of a siren leading to no good, but was beautiful in a kind of way
that had been formal before the war, like the stiff invitation cards called bristol
that the postman would deliver. They always seemed to clarge for what they were used
for. That kind of patriotism had blent with the ensuing informality and become a
grave tempest, semi-formal as the invitations used to say. Marlise remembered one
evening being driven far out into the country to what turned out to be a truck farm,

Fig. 10. Typescript page with Ashbery's extensive handwritten revisions of "Sex on the River" from *The Kane Richmond Project*. Ashbery cited his quotations from *Danger on Vampire Trail* (1971) in the margin of the first draft.

KRP 15 no break

[0013-]

Sex on the River

"The Mayor is urinating on the wrong side/of
the street! A dandelion sends off sparks:
beware your hair is locked!

~~I didn't know~~ Spring came and went so fast this year.
~~The Rockies one that year. Not one~~
to beat about the bush, rootless,
rootless I go on. ~~In the duds:~~

I pick up the chosen advice
like broken watchworks--will it be time for me?
Or for some other--

Methought the King of Thule
sat by my side in the empty banquet hall,
a gilded goblet in his hand. "Here, try some of this.
It'll put lead in your pencil." "No thanks, King."
Like a madman he staggered to the balcony,
tossed the thing into the sea. ~~Which began to boil.~~

"How can we help?" Joe wanted to know.
"By taking over the ~~WKELE~~ entire assignment.
I've been asked to handle a high-priority case for the government."

VI 1,2

~~"But why the camping trip? How does that come into the picture?"~~
"Conflict of interest, I'm afraid.
He declined to represent me."

~~"Then where does the thing come out?"~~
~~"Below the river's ledge."~~ The old man spoke no more.
We were out of time,
had to be leaving
on a new desperate adventure
that was sure to bring relief to tired heads.
"If only we could believe it."

But you can son, if I can--
make it through the tired morning, that is.

Where shall we meet up afterward?

At Mr. Jenkins' tired circle--the turnaround.

[between 6/18 + 6/21 ?]
or between 6/21 - 6/24

Figs. 11 (facing) and 12 (over). Ashbery's first, handwritten draft of what later became the sections "An Unspecified Amount" and "*très modéré*" in *The Kane Richmond Project*.

An Unspecified amount

Pugging
on
his
break
pipe

Someone must have been telling lies about John A. It happened this way: all day long he would sit on the front porch, watching people and cars go by. Except for his meals, which he took at the kitchen table, he would remain on the porch from dawn until it got quite dark, summer and winter, except for periods of extreme cold. Even then he could survey the street through a species of pan-opticon he had rigged up, which he liked to say was better than television, since it was free and never required adjustment. He said this mostly to himself since he rarely spoke to others, having little occasion to do so. He was not one of those people who sit and wave at cars and ~~greet~~ ^{salute} passersby with a cheery greeting. The one exception to his code of silence was ~~flashed~~, his cleaning woman who came twice a week, and even then his speech concerned mainly practical household matters.

One day a Fuller Brush man happened by, and, undiscouraged by John's laconic reply to his attempts at small talk, seated himself in the wicker chair where John would sit to read the newspaper, and was the only piece of porch furniture except for a glider where he would recline and occasionally take a nap, though this rarely happened since it ~~at~~ prevented him from observing the ~~street~~ activity in the street. Finding that his observations concerning the ^{traffic and} weather ~~were~~ were not rebuffed, though scarcely encouraged,

the man proceeded to expand on other topics such as the decline of the neighborhood. This irritated and frustrated John, who had been expecting ~~to~~ a sales pitch for the brushes, and had already begun preparing a reply to the effect that he was amply provided with cleaning utensils and employed a ~~clean~~ person, part of ~~whose duties included to ascertain~~ ^{whose job was to make certain} that nothing was lacking in that department. He had begun casting about for other ways of ridding him of ~~the~~ ^{this} ~~unpleasant~~ ^{pest} stranger, when he ~~suddenly~~ ^{rather} started him by drawing ^{his attention to} a large package which the postman had suddenly left on the ~~door~~ ^{threshold} by the front door, whose mail slot ~~was~~ ^{would have been} too narrow to accommodate it.

"What do you suppose is in there?" the stranger asked, a bit ~~importantly~~ ^{importantly} it seemed to John.

"Oh, it's probably some boots I ordered from LL Bean," John answered shiftily, aware as he did so that the package obviously contained nothing of the sort and that he had just unwittingly opened ~~up~~ ^{new} ~~new~~ ^{new} avenues in a conversation that was fast becoming vexatious.

The salesman however let the matter rest there. On was he considering the most effective way to continue to irritate John even further?

Just checked and
found no more pages

Fig. 13. Some of Ashbery's source materials for *The Kane Richmond Project*. Ashbery collaged excerpts and quotations from the three children's novels, *Tom Swift and His Rocket Ship* (1954), *Tom Swift and His Repelatron Skyway* (1963), and *Danger on Vampire Trail* (1971), into the poem. Also pictured is Ashbery's copy of volume four of *Serial Pictorial* with Kane Richmond (as Spy Smasher) on the cover. Photo credit: Sandy Noble.



Fig. 14. Table of contents for images
in volume four of *Serial Pictorial*.

SERIAL PICTORIAL
NUMBER FOUR

SPY SMASHER (REPUBLIC 1942)

SCENES IN THIS VOLUME:

Front Cover: Kane Richmond
Inside Front Cover: Kane Richmond, Frank Corsaro and Georges Renavent
Page One: Kane Richmond, Georges Renavent and Frank Corsaro
Page Two: Ken Terrell and Kane Richmond
Page Three: Kane Richmond, The Mask and Frank Corsaro
Page Four: Tom London and Kane Richmond
Page Five: Kane Richmond, Tom London and George Lewis (far right)
Page Six: Players and Kane Richmond
Page Seven: Frank Corsaro, Player, Carleton Young and Kane Richmond
Page Eight: Hans Schumm and Kane Richmond
Page Nine: Kane Richmond in dual role
Page Ten: Kane Richmond, Marguerite Chapman and stand-in for Richmond
Page Eleven: Kane Richmond and Frank Corsaro
Page Twelve: Kane Richmond
Inside Back Cover: Marguerite Chapman, Kane Richmond and Sam Flint
Back Cover: Marguerite Chapman and Kane Richmond



Fig. 15. Image from *Spy Smasher*
in volume four of *Serial Pictorial*.



The History of Photography

March 22, 1993: **I**, *"First takers, first makers." ... "It is all a—how do you say? / —A fancy."* (7–8)

March 23, 1993: **I**, *"How could I have had such a good idea?" ... "a fool in time."* (8–9)

Because of the ambiguity of the date's placement in the margin, it is possible that Ashbery ended this entry earlier, with the line "in the mind of the feeling man, who then gets his share," and that the final two lines of this section were added on March 24.

March 24, 1993: **II**, *"Francis Frith released the pyramids." ... "devolves to this vastness and would-be vastness." (9–10); "But it would have turned out differently anyway," ... "luminous confections / that walk you home, prop you against the front steps, and tiptoe off." (10–12); "Be thankful for this. I saved you." (12)*

Three separate entries marked this day.

March 29, 1993: **III**, *"As some rich woman, on a winter's morn," ... "and we ... we / were all ashore. It made a difference, that time." (12–14)*

March 31, 1993: **III**, *"Not to put too fine a point on it, you did" ... "Give me my scallop-shell of quiet" (15–17)*

April 1, 1993: **III**, *"and I'll be moseying along. The hagiography of this moment / is supported by meager underpinnings." ... "The others, then—no, no, you missed the turnoff / into that driveway. The others must lead you now." (17–18)*

April 2, 1993: **IV**, *"Oh, the legions of seagoing fish!" ... "A last chance of sorts, / gayer than the other, more in a mood to celebrate / the mood. Planted on the leeward side." (18–20)*

April 6, 1993: **V**, *"Opening sky, wandering life, the movers." ... "And whatever conceit we had nourished / then is as a bible now: no / parent or looking-glass: the sacred irony." (20–24); "And when he was gone, / some passed it along," ... "And say, does / Nova Scotia play a part in any of this?" (24–25)*

Two entries marked this day: the first labeled "AM" and the second "PM."

April 8, 1993: **V**, *"Nothing bumptious about that, is there?" ... "and no room / for sorrow or anything resembling it, friends of my complexity." (25–27)*

April 9, 1993: **V**, *"You can sort of tell / which is the elders, by their glassy features / and celluloid reliquaries." ... "then folded / and put away like a deck chair." (27–29)*

April 12, 1993: **V**, “*Then what of the ostentatiously unmeritorious end of this day,*”
... “*And we get up and walk away, cured / of our nap, of her lullaby, / to the end of*
the road.” (29–31)

April 13, 1993: **VI**, “*Get out just the things you know—*” ... “*Try the cherries, they’re*
/ very good this year.” (31–32)

April 14, 1993: **VI**, “*You’d better copy the inside better / lest it melt strictly she said,*”
... “*and those whose modest eccentricities could pass unnoticed / in most crowds, but not*
in this one.” (33–35)

Because of the placement of the date in the margin, it is unclear whether Ashbery ended this entry with the above, or with the following dropped line:
“Everywhere you looked.”

April 15, 1993: **VI**, “*Everywhere you looked / tousled recruits stammered eulogies to*
the four seasons,” ... “*The nectar and food are fine. The sisters are fine and resolute.*”
(35–37)

The Art of Finger Dexterity

May 11, 2007 [NYC]: **1. Application of the Fingers with Quiet Hand** (47)

May 15, 2007 [NYC]: **2. The Passing of the Thumb** (48); **3. Clarity in Velocity**
(49)

Written on the same page as “Application of the Fingers with Quiet Hand.”

May 17, 2007 [NYC]: **4. Light Articulation in Half-Staccato** (50)

May 18, 2007 [NYC]:

Written on the same page as the May 17 entry; Ashbery also wrote and crossed out a longer draft of a poem titled “Evenness in Double Runs” (see Appendix B, entry for p. 51).

May 19, 2007 [NYC]: **5. Evenness in Double Runs** (51); **6. Clarity in Broken Chords** (52)

Written on the same page.

May 20, 2007 [NYC]: **7. Changing Fingers on the Same Key** (53)

Written on the same page as the above entries from May 19.

May 24, 2007 [Hudson]: **8. Light Articulation of the Left Hand** (54–55)

May 30, 2007 [Hudson]: **9. Delicacy in Skips and Staccatos** (56)

June 1, 2007 [Hudson]: **10. Exercise for Thirds [I]** (57)

Written on the same page as “Delicacy in Skips and Staccatos.”

June 1, 2007 [Hudson]: **10. Exercise for Thirds [II]** (58)

June 4, 2007 [Hudson]: **11. Skill in Alternating Fingers** (59)

June 9, 2007 [NYC]: **12. Flexibility of the Left Hand** (60)

June 10, 2007 [NYC]: **13. Maximum Velocity** (61–62)

June 11, 2007 [NYC]: **14. Chord Passages** (63)

June 12, 2007 [NYC]: **15. Wide Position in Fortissimo** (64); **16. Alternating Fingers at Speed** (65)

Written on the same page.

June 15, 2007 [NYC]:

On this day, Ashbery composed an early draft of “Crossing the Hands Naturally and with a Fine Touch.” The corresponding Czerny title for the seventeenth variation is actually “Minor Scales at High Speed,” which he corrected for on the later draft of the poem. Ashbery crossed out the early draft with a large “X,” indicating that he did not want it published (see Appendix B, entry for p. 66).

June 16, 2007 [NYC]: **17. Minor Scales at High Speed** (66)

Title changed from “Crossing the Hands Naturally and with a Fine Touch.”

June 17, 2007 [NYC]: **18. Crossing the Hands Naturally and with a Fine Touch** (67)

June 18, 2007 [NYC]: **19. Tense Positions with a “Peaceful” Wrist** (68)

June 28, 2007 [Hudson]: **20. Double Octaves** (69); **21. Parallel Movement of the Hands [I]** (70–71)

Written on the same page.

June 29, 2007 [Hudson]: **21. Parallel Movement of the Hands [II]** (72–73)

July 6, 2007 [Hudson]: **22. Exercise for the Trill** (74–75)

July 8, 2007 [Hudson]: **23. Light Touch of the Left Hand** (76)

July 9, 2007 [Hudson]: **24. The Thumb on the Black Keys with the Hand Absolutely Quiet** (77–78)

July 20, 2007 [NYC]: **25. Agility and Clarity** (79)

Late July, 2007 [Hudson]: **26. Maximum Velocity in Arpeggios** (80)

Sacred and Profane Dances

“Sacred and Profane Dances” is the only undated manuscript in this collection (see Appendix C).

21 Variations on My Room

August 21, 2002: **Sections 1–7**, “*The single best way to do it.*” . . . “*The pallor of Pallas / overcomes evening do’s and don’ts.*” (99–100)

August 24, 2002: **Sections 8–11**, “*In my dream I was in Paris,*” . . . “*Father in his little house / took a bath. It was almost time for the news.*” (100–101)

It appears that Ashbery wrote the eleventh, final line of section 11, “The trolley arrived in time for dinner,” on the following day, August 25, since the typed date is aligned with the penultimate tenth line. Additionally, the left justification of the eleventh line is slightly out of line with the rest of its stanza.

August 25, 2002: **Sections 11–13**, “*The trolley arrived in time for dinner.*” . . . “*So on my day off, I // took the long trek out of the city. My reward is solitude.*” (101–3)

August 27, 2002: **Sections 13–15**, “*So get a life. It’s been real. I mean really real.*” . . . “*One has to endure / certain systems, then profit by them later in the crust of events.*” (103–4)

September 3, 2002: **Section 16**, “*We reject these. Oh I am sure / it was as serious then to be struggling / as it is now.*” . . . “*It comes as no surprise to learn that winter is on the way / with headlands and diamond aigrettes, and the lightness.*” (104–5)

September 9, 2002: **Sections 17–18**, “*Still hungry? Read on.*” . . . “*‘I hope we get the rest of the day off, genius boy,’ Bud said shyly.*” (105–6)

The Kane Richmond Project

April 23, 2002: **Spy Smasher** (117–19); **Perils of Nyoka** (119); **The Devil Diamond** (119–20)

April 30, 2002: **The Lost City** (121–22)

May 1, 2002: **Racing Blood**, “*Of all the rotten excuses.*” . . . “*That’s what it’s coming to, to true blue.*” (122–24)

May 6, 2002: **Racing Blood**, “*‘Dear’ had life tinged on it? Not on my watch, / they don’t.*” . . . “*It was an end anyway. No hiding place.*” (124–26)

May 7, 2002: **Racing Blood**, “*Now I had nine or ten pages of copy.*” . . . “*A mixed bag, but so it is written.*” (126–28)

May 8, 2002: **Racing Blood**, “*The church gives you a dime, don’t complain.*” . . . “*We’ll all hang around together for a while after that.*” (128–29)

May 13, 2002: **Racing Blood**, “*God doesn’t expect a perfect score / most of the time, but sometimes the idea occurs: / What am I doing this for?*” . . . **A Hard Man**, “*Some other year, maybe, / out of the parade of them, each with its majorettes / and streamers, but not today. You’ve guessed it. He’s passed out. Again.*” (129–32)

Undated entry: **The President’s Dream**, “*Tourists assemble beneath the vast diorama.*” . . . “*Curtain shuddered delicately and withdrew.*” (132–33)

May 20, 2002: [untitled] “**Kane was a righteous dude, heat-packing.**” . . . “*Soon it would be time to break out the champagne again.*” (133–35)

May 21, 2002: [untitled] “**Kane was a righteous dude, heat-packing.**” “*Kane was lost in the Métro, / somewhere between Plaisance and Pernety.*” . . . “*And then said nothing more.*” (135–36)

May 22, 2002: **Chapter Seven** (136–37)

May 29, 2002: **The Mist Rolls in from the Sea** (137–38)

June 1, 2002: **A Lost Dog**, [epigraph] . . . “*‘That caterwaulin’ alone could scare the wits out o’ any critter,’ Rinty reflected.*” (140)

Ashbery began this entry with the epigraph. (See Appendix E, entry for p. 140 for details on the sequencing of this section.)

June 2, 2002: **A Lost Dog**, “*In the fullness of time a foolish man did a good thing.*” . . . “*It was weirdly painted in psychedelic colors.*” (141)

June 3, 2002: **Dog Overboard!** (139)

Undated entry: **Dog and Pony Show** (139)

June 4, 2002: **My Own Best Customer**, “*Bronze building borders chafe at the cat’s slow progress.*” . . . “*We will be BORED.*” (141–42)

June 5, 2002: **My Own Best Customer**, *"If it's life, it's real life." ... "Some day I am going to write about that."* (142)

June 10, 2002: **My Own Best Customer**, *"If only what between me and you / never happened." ... "Unfortunately there is no one who can advise you on these things—no one whose advice you'd be willing to take, anyways. Me and Buster, we—" (143-44)*

June 13, 2002: **My Own Best Customer**, *"Life should be simple and fashionable." ... "No one here was going to remember any of this for very long."* (144-45)

June 17, 2002: **My Own Best Customer**, *"I thought it odd—but what do I know?" ... "They were postulated on the same plane, and adults had seen them. Rex was almost certain of that."* (145-46)

June 18, 2002: **My Own Best Customer**, *"But how to distinguish between sincerity and feigned sincerity." ... Dog of the Limberlost, "Nothing much comes to cheat us / of this vapor."* (146-48)

June 21, 2002: **Dog of the Limberlost**, *"Cheese—at the moment? Nutcases." ... "William Biggs died some years ago."* (148)

Undated entry: **Sex on the River** (148-49)

June 24, 2002: **A Long and Sleepy History**, [epigraphs] ... *"A few more moments and the wreath of cares is done."* (150-51)

Ashbery began this entry with the epigraphs.

June 25, 2002: **A Long and Sleepy History**, *"Dena's mother was sound asleep." ... "BARBARA?" The voice began like thunder, pulling itself up into a cloudlike shape, then expiring for what seemed like hours, with something like tact, though this was not the time for it."* (151-52)

June 26, 2002: **A Long and Sleepy History**, *"If only I had studied a little harder I might recognize the next chapter." ... "I bid you good night."* (152-53)

June 28, 2002: **A Long and Sleepy History**, *"Someday I swear I'm going to ... No, but what was he saying?" ... "We have brighter things to blind us. Now is never."* (153-54)

June 30, 2002: **A Long and Sleepy History**, “*It saves us for the sacredness of talk.*”
... “*Little wonder there are not many takers for the conclusiveness that erupts then.*”
(154)

July 1, 2002: **A Long and Sleepy History**, “*A listener told me not to ‘worry’ about perceived injustice.*” ... “*It must have been all the labor that went into it, but even more that it was useless, as faceless a feature of the landscape as existed then in those parts.*”
(154–55)

July 3, 2002: **A Long and Sleepy History**, “*Oh, I don’t wonder. Does landscape really count?*” ... “*This went on into the hereafter.*” (155)

July 4, 2002: **A Long and Sleepy History**, “*Meanwhile, the attention of the Americans was caught by a herd of lyre-borne Ankole cattle grazing on the grassy slopes.*” ... **The Quitter**, “*Eventually I’ll be issuing a public statement / but for now all I want to do is rest. And consider.*” (155–56)

July 5, 2002: **The Quitter**, “*Sometimes it’s enough just to believe in what could happen,*” ... “*but the curving sandbar always suggests another time, a re-engagement.*”
(156–57)

July 9, 2002: **More about Drew** (157)

July 16, 2002: **Modern Sketch**, “*Sleep a weak hour*” ... “*The fifth can’t salute.*”
(158–59)

July 17, 2002: **Modern Sketch**, “*If so, why bother / sober ascending / Apple Annie*” ... “*at every tip the lorded lark explodes / with the factory whistle in her darkling eyes. Drab pots.*” (159–61)

July 20, 2002: **To Meet with My Father**, “*As I walked on amid fires, a young man approached.*” ... “*Bud looked up in amazement.*” (161)

July 21, 2002: **To Meet with My Father**, “*The woman was just leaving. She had been overseas.*” ... “*After all it was much too late for that. Or so Uncle Possum opined.*”
(161–62)

August 13, 2002: **[untitled]** “**I liked the fourth declension—all those ‘u’s.’**”
... “*You wouldn’t want him to interrupt you.*” (162)

August 14, 2002: **[untitled]** “**I liked the fourth declension—all those ‘u’s.’**”
“*So the Emperor’s clean clothes are brushed and folded and placed without undue reverence in the palissandre credence.*” ... “*But the vast files haven’t budged: like impassable moraines slowly absorbing the dark as the sky goes light, then fades behind them, creating a quizzical unbuilt architecture whose function only the absent ruler knows: like where the haba eases into the patient prairie beyond.*” (162-63)

August 19, 2002: **Miss Otis Regrets Land’s End**, “*We went to America, we didn’t see what they were doing there.*” ... “*There’s no point in being younger about three guys. And now I believe you.*” (163-64)

November 9, 2002: **[untitled]** “**Are you trying to stop us?**” ... “*We can go back to being in the order of each other’s beds, and the rugs beside them, and the chairs pushed against the bed to make a kind of steps leading to the floor—oh wasn’t it like this last month and the one before that and the others stretching back into the coal dust of whatever it was doing before?*” (164-65)

See Appendix E about placement of this entry.

November 13, 2002: **[untitled]** “**Are you trying to stop us?**” “*It’s only a matter of time before two handsome critics sink fingers of mush into whatever it is.*” ... “*Then, though it was already late early evening, a young boy came around telling us all to go somewhere, somewhere not too far away but not a place we had heard of.*” (165-66)

November 16, 2002: **[untitled]** “**Nothing if found convenient.**” ... “*All about us is ajar, like the door is or was the time you tried to break in, having lost your keys on some car seat.*” (166)

November 18, 2002: **[untitled]** “**Nothing if found convenient.**” “*They’re everywhere in the trees, madam! There is another inside another for another time.*” ... **There You Go!** “*What if they came by and saw us? What would people think?*” (166-70)

November 19, 2002: **[untitled]** “**Why wait for another day to cross itself?**” . . . “*Still it’s right that we are on this bill, falling, escaping the crowded paths and the sunset. More’s the pity, he said.*” (170)

November 24, 2002: **[untitled]** “**Why wait for another day to cross itself?**” “*By what mystery are we compounded of loam and spindrift?*” . . . “*Primroses, adolescent love, glistening toy motorcycles, airs d’opérette—you name it, but not before I’ve managed my exit and found a seat in the stalls.*” (170–71)

November 25, 2002: **[untitled]** “**Why wait for another day to cross itself?**” “*They never bother to check those things. I cooked a pot of nice peas.*” . . . “*Do not reject me this time, again.*” (171–72)

December 2, 2002: **[untitled]** “**Why wait for another day to cross itself?**” “*Come right in and sit down. Can I offer you something?*” . . . “*Somebody is going to make some kind of announcement.*” (172–73)

December 3, 2002: **[untitled]** “**Why wait for another day to cross itself?**” “*Or perhaps a nicely buttered roll would satisfy?*” . . . “*Again, there is nothing remote about it.*” (173)

December 4, 2002: “**Arguably**, the park light forecasts rangers, their oxides exit with the clamor of breeze.” . . . **An Unspecified Amount**, “*Someone must have been telling lies about John A. It happened this way: all day long he would sit on the front porch, watching people and cars go by, tugging on his briar pipe.*” (173–74)

“An Unspecified Amount” and “*très modéré*” were handwritten on two undated sheets of yellow legal pad paper before they were typed in these three entries (see Appendix E, entry for p. 174).

December 7, 2002: **An Unspecified Amount**, “*Except for his meals, which he took at the kitchen table, he would remain on the porch from dawn until it got quite dark, summer and winter, except for periods of extreme cold.*” . . . “*Finding that his observations concerning traffic and the weather were not rebuffed, though scarcely encouraged, the man proceeded to expand on other topics such as the decline of the neighborhood.*” (174–75)

December 10, 2002: **très modéré**, “*This irritated and frustrated John, who had been expecting a sales pitch for the brushes, and had already begun preparing a reply to the effect that he was amply provided with cleaning utensils and employed a person whose duties included ascertaining that nothing was lacking in that department.*” . . . **Fried Mackerel and Frozen Peas**, “*That would be the end, friend, the end.*” (175-77)

December 11, 2002: [untitled] “**The point is to find an extra-sensual way to be without it.**” . . . “*It was time to take a pee, to turn back. It was time to head for home.*” (177)

APPENDIX A: THE HISTORY OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Composed March 22–April 15, 1993, this fifteen-manuscript-page poem was found May 2019 (in both stapled and unstapled photocopy versions) in a box in the basement of Ashbery and Kermani’s Hudson home. No original typescript has been located. The unstapled photocopy includes changes that were not present in the stapled photocopy, and so the unstapled version, presumed to be more recent, appears in this collection. The poem was stored in a manila folder marked “Manuscripts—to be sorted by book, if there is one” (crossed out above was “Tuesday Evening¹/ Rough Draft”), which contained a note inside reading “Miscellaneous Drafts, mostly ’97, to be refiled.” Whereas the other contents of this folder were shorter poems and fragments, it also contained very early, out-of-order drafts and printouts of *Girls on the Run* (1999). In the same box were drafts of other unfinished and unpublished works, along with original drafts of poems that later made their way into books and other publications.

While it is unclear whether Ashbery in his title is directly referring to Walter Benjamin’s essay “A Short History of Photography” (1931), their projects are similar, if not linked. Readers familiar with Benjamin’s work will know this essay as a reckoning with photography’s complicated relationship to art, as well as one of the first texts in which Benjamin articulates his concept of “aura.” The quality that images and objects experienced in person and in real time inherently possess, aura is “a peculiar web of space and time: the unique manifestation of a distance, however near it may be.”² This “distance” stretches through Ashbery’s poem, as both a feeling and a vantage point:

1. Ashbery’s long poem “Tuesday Evening” appears in *Can You Hear, Bird: Poems*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995.

2. Walter Benjamin, “A Short History of Photography,” *Screen* 13, no. 1 (Spring 1972): 20.

Never made a dime at this swamp
and some liken it to haze, as distance is draped
in the mind of the feeling man, who then gets his share
of surmise and stumbles off to bed,
a fool in time.³

The first images of Benjamin and Ashbery's works are strikingly occluded. Benjamin begins:

The fog surrounding the origins of photography is not quite as thick as that enveloping the beginnings of printing. In the case of the former it was perhaps more obvious that the hour of invention had arrived, for it had been apprehended by a number of people: men striving independently toward the same goal, that is, to capture images in the *camera obscura* which had certainly been known since Leonardo's time, if not before.⁴

Ashbery's playful opening presents a similar atmospheric occlusion, a sky "diapered" by clouds:

First takers, first makers.
The first sip of intelligence
splits the diapered sky, already crackled
with the losses that events are.⁵

"The History of Photography" contains references to both early and contemporary photographers and advancements in the technologies and modes of early photography. These "first takers," or the "makers" of early photography, clear a visual path in the sky. If events are "losses" that project their traces onto the sky, the photograph captures such events and refutes their existence as purely ephemeral.

Or, compare side by side these two passages, which both refer to the visiting

3. *Parallel Movement of the Hands*, 9.

4. Benjamin, 5.

5. *Parallel Movement of the Hands*, 7.

card and its role in the history of early photography, as well as the photographic image's link to capitalism and industry:

Industry conquered the field with the visiting-card snapshot, its first manufacturer characteristically becoming a millionaire. It would not be surprising if the photographic practices which today, for the first time, direct our gaze back to that pre-industrial prime, turned out to be linked subterraneously with the crisis of capitalism.⁶

Get out just the things you know—
on the road excellent sunflowers, the ubiquitous *carte de visite*,
demographics in which many a man's face is lost
on Pennsylvania coal-mining towns, coming clear at the end.
Wipe the slate clean, a name will be streaming there still.⁷

Ashbery wrote "The History of Photography" in 1993, the year following the publication of *Hotel Lautréamont* (1992), which contains several longer poems in numbered sections. Around the time "The History of Photography" was written, Ashbery would have been composing the poems in *And the Stars Were Shining* (1994), a book in which the individual poems rarely exceed two pages, save for the long title poem that ends the collection. "And the Stars Were Shining," first published in fall 1993 in *Conjunctions* magazine, bears structural resemblance to "The History of Photography." It makes sense, then, that Ashbery may have chosen to omit "The History of Photography" from his 1994 collection so as not to detract attention from its final, serial poem.

As is the case with drafts for many of Ashbery's longer works, the entries of "The History of Photography" are scrupulously dated. This dating shows an almost daily returning to the text, a period of dedicated attention. On April 15, 1993, Ashbery wrote "END" at the bottom of the fifteenth typescript page, making this one of the only works in the collection whose "unfinishedness" presents itself in the possibility that a "clean copy" was never prepared for publication.

6. Benjamin, 5.

7. *Parallel Movement of the Hands*, 31.

Section I (7)

7: *"splits the diapered sky, already crackled"*

This "splits" might easily have been "splats." It is unclear in this photocopy whether the "i" was transposed over the "a" in Ashbery's correction (he originally wrote and crossed out "expands"). "Splits" was chosen for its sonic association with "sip," its closeness to the original word, the slightly more pronounced boldness of the cursive "i," and because it carries the image of parting clouds. The word "crackled" here is a correction of an earlier "erzed," perhaps suggesting a material ribboned through with ore.⁸

7: *"The first person to be photographed was a man / having his boots cleaned. There were others / in the same street, but they moved and became / invisible. How calm I am!"*

A reference to inventor and early photographer Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre's photograph of the Boulevard du Temple in Paris (1838–9), in which, because of the long exposure time, only the subjects who remained stationary, a boot shiner and his customer, were captured in the image. Although the street at that hour was bustling, the people in motion during the exposure did not appear in the daguerreotype.

7: *"Baron de Meyer saw the horse and it too moved on. / Nor was the lesson of satin lost on him."*

A clever collision of Baron Adolph de Meyer, the early twentieth-century portrait and fashion photographer, and Eadweard Muybridge's photographic study entitled *The Horse in Motion* (1878). Meyer titled a 1927 photograph of a woman *Nile Green Satin for Summer*.

8: *"Then too, as much escapes me as a tailor's dummy / in a photograph by Atget, taking in everything and nothing, / which caused the rain to fall one day."*

8. See fig. 1.

In 1925, French photographer Eugène Atget took a series of photos of mannequins in storefront windows on the Avenue des Gobelins in Paris. Atget's photographs would later prove important to the surrealists. Of the photographer and his vacated spaces, Benjamin observes,

Atget was an actor who, repelled by his profession, tore off his mask and then sought to strip reality of its camouflage. . . . Indeed, Atget's Paris photos are the forerunners of surrealist photography; vanguard of the only really broad column which surrealism was able to set in motion. He was the first to disinfect the stuffy atmosphere spread by the conventional portrait photography of the period of decline. He cleansed this atmosphere, indeed cleared it altogether. He initiated the liberation of the object from the aura, which is the most incontestable achievement of the recent school of photography. . . . The city in these pictures is empty in the manner of a flat which has not yet found a new occupant. They are the achievements of surrealist photography which presages a salutary estrangement between man and his environment, thus clearing the ground for the politically-trained eye before which all intimacies serve the illumination of detail.⁹

Ashbery alludes to Atget's dummy photographs in another poem, published in slight variation in two collections, first in *And the Stars Were Shining* (1994) as "Sicilian Bird," and later as "Andante Misterioso" in *Can You Hear, Bird* (1995). He writes, "And wherever man sets his giant foot / petals spring up, and artificial torsos, / dressmakers' dummies. And an ancient photograph / and an ancient phonograph that carols // in mist."¹⁰ It is likely that Ashbery wrote "Sicilian Bird" and "The History of Photography" during the same period, which may explain the crisscrossing references.

9. Benjamin, 20–21.

10. Ashbery, *Can You Hear, Bird*, 10.

Section II (9)

9: “*Francis Frith released the pyramids. / Nègre produced the ogival mysteries, / Mapplethorpe the dissenting penis*”

Beginning with Francis Frith, Ashbery constructs a chain of influential photographers. Frith indeed “released” the pyramids and other Egyptian monuments via photographs, made using the early albumen method of photographic printing, on a series of very productive voyages beginning in 1856.¹¹ The first images many Europeans had ever seen of these structures, these photographs enabled Frith to start a successful postcard business in England selling images captured during his travels to Africa and the Middle East.¹²

Ashbery imagines the viewers of these early photographs in his introduction to an exhibition catalogue of photographer Lynn Davis’s works:

When the first traveler-photographers of the nineteenth century began bringing back and displaying their finds in the capitals of Europe and America, audiences must have found these artifacts doubly puzzling. First there were the subjects themselves: the Pyramids, Yosemite, the Taj Mahal, the Dead Sea, as few had ever seen them, in all their awkward, unapologetic grandeur. But perhaps even more surprising was the fact of photography itself. This new, ill-understood medium for capturing the “wonders of the world” was itself one. In a few short decades, of course, every family would have its Kodak, and snapshots of the Sphinx with Aunt Clara in the foreground would be a feature of many a parlor. The novelty of photography quickly became a commonplace.

Lynn Davis’s images take us back to the dawn of epic photography, when the shock of seeing remote sites hitherto only imagined was compounded by

11. Lisa Hostetler, “Biography: Francis Frith” The International Center of Photography, www.icp.org/browse/archive/constituents/francis-frith?all/all/all/0.

12. Ibid.

the astounding technical means that brought them into view, so that the dew or pollen of earliness still stippled their surfaces.¹³

After Frith comes Charles Nègre, a nineteenth-century French photographer known for his photographs of architecture. Ashbery is likely referring here to Nègre's images of French cathedrals (including Notre Dame in Paris). The final link is Robert Mapplethorpe, whose posthumous book of flower photographs, *Pistils* (1996), features an introduction by Ashbery: "The malign brilliance of his erotic pictures is present throughout, and nowhere more than in the portraits of flowers, impassive but somehow conspiring in their own corruptibility."¹⁴

10: "Grace under pressure is the only reasonable account / it can give of itself. But whence comes / this pressure?"

"Grace under pressure" is Ernest Hemingway's often-quoted definition of either "courage" or "guts," depending on the source.

12: "As some rich woman, on a winter's morn, / Eyes through her silken curtains the poor drudge / Who with numb blacken'd fingers makes her fire— / At cock-crow, on a starlit winter's morn, When the frost flowers the whiten'd window panes— / And wonders how she lives, and what the thoughts / Of that poor drudge may be . . ."

Ashbery noted in the margin that this quotation comes from Matthew Arnold's long narrative poem *Sohrab and Rustum* (1853), and that his edition of this work was a publication selected and introduced by Clifford Dymont: "'Sohrab + Rustum.' Dymont, p. 109."¹⁵ The quotation that begins the last stanza of section II, "like some young cypress, tall, and dark, and straight, / Which in a queen's

13. John Ashbery, "Introduction to an Exhibition Catalogue: Lynn Davis," *Selected Prose*, ed. Eugene Richie. University of Michigan Press, 2004, 276–77.

14. Ashbery, "Introduction to Robert Mapplethorpe's *Pistils*," *Selected Prose*, 256.

15. See fig. 2.

secluded garden throws / Its slight dark shadow on the moonlit turf,” is from the same source, as indicated by the notation “ibid” in the margin beside it; both quotations are from the same stanza in Arnold’s poem.

Just a few years later, Ashbery quotes Arnold’s poetry in a different poem. In “The Dong with the Luminous Nose” from *Wakefulness* (1998), Ashbery uses a line from “The Scholar-Gipsy”: “Come, Shepherd, and again renew the quest,” as the seventh line of his cento, sandwiching it between two quotes from Shakespeare.

13: “*Monotonously rings the little bell. / Eakins, skunked by depression, opted for cheese rinds, / a lorry driver’s running balls—these are things / that cannot be painted—pole-vaulting figures, Muybridge’s hopping woman— / because one vignette sheds another, cancels its own credibility / in a fever of slight adjustments, ends up a mass, twisted.*”

This passage refers to American painter, photographer, and sculptor Thomas Eakins. Initially inspired by Muybridge’s studies of motion, Eakins produced his own photographic studies of human and equine movement using methods he deemed more scientifically accurate, including a series featuring a pole vaulter.¹⁶ Both Eakins and Muybridge captured images of figures hopping and jumping. Eakins’s interest in photography stemmed from a desire to paint figures with greater precision.

14: “like some young cypress, tall, and dark, and straight, / Which in a queen’s secluded garden throws / Its slight dark shadow on the moonlit turf,”

See entry for p. 12, “*As some rich woman, on a winter’s morn . . .*”

Section III (15)

15: “*the black or dark purple sclerotium of the genus Claviceps / that occurs as a club-shaped body which replaces the seed / of various grasses (as rye)*’ into a ‘soft horny stub

16. Lloyd Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work*. Whitney Museum of Art, 1933, 65–71.

/ about the size of chestnut occurring as a normal / growth in the tufts of hair on the back of the fetlock / in the horse’?”

These variant definitions of “ergot” might appear next to one another in an encyclopedia or dictionary entry. The source of these definitions appears to be Ashbery’s favorite dictionary (*Webster’s New International*, 2nd ed., unabridged, 1941), which sat by his desk in Hudson.¹⁷

17: “Give me my scallop-shell of quiet / and I’ll be moseying along.”

In *Can You Hear, Bird* (1995), Ashbery begins his poem “Safe Conduct” with “The coast is clear. Bring me my scallop shell of quiet, / my spear of burning gold.”¹⁸ In his notes to the second Library of America volume of Ashbery’s poetry, Mark Ford observes that “Give me my scallop shell of quiet” is taken “[f]rom the first line of the anonymous poem ‘The Passionate Man’s Pilgrimage’ (1604), often ascribed to Sir Walter Raleigh.”¹⁹

Section V (20)

20: “un peu, beaucoup, / passionnément,”

A fragment of the French version of the game in which one plucks petals from a flower in hopes of divining romantic prospects; English speakers may recognize the game as “He loves me / he loves me not.” In French, the game isn’t so black and white, offering several possibilities: the complete phrase is “*Il m’aime un peu, beaucoup, passionnément, à la folie, pas du tout*,” “He loves me a little, a lot, passionately, madly, not at all.”

21: “Winter was like this, / preventing furring,”

17. David Kermani, email to ES, Apr. 29, 2020.

18. John Ashbery, “Safe Conduct,” *Can You Hear, Bird*, in *Collected Poems, 1991–2000*, ed. Mark Ford. Library of America, 2017, 481.

19. *Ibid.*, 801.

In the photocopied typescript, this line reads “Winter [X] was like this, / prevent[illegible] furring.” The uppercase typewritten “X” between “Winter” and “was” covers either a lowercase “t” or “i.” Ashbery was perhaps about to write “Winter is” and then decided to change the tense. The “s” of “prevents” is covered by an illegible written symbol that seems to combine elements of a “t” and a “g.” I chose “preventing” over “prevents” or “prevented” to agree with the tense of the statement and approximate the written correction.

24: “(*An Egyptian dog, the only living being known to have been killed by a meteorite— / thanks, Robert E. Ripley*)”

A reference to the Nakhla meteorite, which fell to Earth from Mars on June 28, 1911. The meteorite landed in Egypt, and the story goes that a fragment of the object broke off and killed a dog on impact, reducing it to dust. It is unclear whether this tall tale was ever included in a *Ripley’s Believe It or Not!* encyclopedia or comic strip. Cartoonist and curio-collector Robert Ripley’s middle initial, incidentally, is not “E” but “L” (for his first name, LeRoy).

25: “(*for love has fled; maybe, maybe though, it was always empty, / its little door ajar, its cuttlebone holder not unbinged, still / viable. No, love at last left us; no use / debating whether it exited, for it is gone. / Fomenting crises was its thing. And it is happy / and sad now, tears streaming down that smiling face / like rain streaking sunshine. I know nothing / of that, but someone left an envelope for you.*)”

Ashbery neglected to close this parenthetical. He originally added a closed parenthesis after “for it is gone,” but crossed it out with a typed uppercase “X” and continued on. Rather than guess where the mark should go, I have chosen to leave it open, allowing the reader to decide where this particular aside might end.

27: “*And behold, three trancelike / sisters accosted me on the steep path*”

These three sisters, with their attachments to “grief and destiny,” who transform into “three solemn sisters / in sunbonnets”²⁰ and recur again in the last line

20. *Parallel Movement of the Hands*, 34.

of the poem, are likely a reference to the three witches or “weird sisters” from Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*.

28–29: “*First, the animated equestrian film: / it’s true, all its feet are off the ground / simultaneously, its fetlocks / and withers waving triumphally in air, the end / of gravity, that insulating dominance. / There was no rider in that instance, but later / one is glimpsed in the background, then / in the foreground, a jockey of moonbeams, soon / to occupy center stage in the struggle for aesthetic significance*”

A reference to *The Horse in Motion* (1878), Muybridge’s sequences of photographs that reveal the movements of a horse at different gaits. By capturing the gallop as a series of frames, Muybridge showed that there is a single point at which all of the horse’s hooves leave the ground, something the human eye was not before able to discern unaided. As Ashbery notes, there is no rider in some of the series, while others have a rider or a driver. Later, Muybridge animated these still photographs using a zoopraxiscope, a precursor to the film projector. Such innovations earned him the epithet “the godfather of cinema.”

Section VI (31)

36: “*Easy learner, easy burner. / The first photographers / who got it right knew what they were doing.*”

These lines echo the first lines of the poem, “First takers, first makers. / The first sip of intelligence / splits,”²¹ launching us into a final, concise treatment of the history of photography and Ashbery’s witty diagnosis of the progression, innovations, and generations of artists who make up the “history” of any form.

21. Ibid., 7.

APPENDIX B: THE ART OF FINGER DEXTERITY

This manuscript, written between mid-May and late July 2007 in both Hudson and NYC, was kept in the same file drawer in NYC as *The Kane Richmond Project*. There were two folders, one for the original typescript and one containing a set of photocopies. Ashbery heavily and carefully line edited the original typescripts, but made no additional changes to the photocopies.

In a 2007 profile by Nina Shengold, Ashbery mentioned composer Carl Czerny directly, though did not say that he had recently been working on a series of poems based on *The Art of Finger Dexterity*: “Lately, I’ve been listening with a lot of interest to ‘The Art of Finger Dexterity’ by Czerny, which was written to torture piano students. . . . It’s mostly silly little tunes ornamented in a very complicated way to stretch the fingers to the limits of endurance. It’s kind of beautiful because of having been written from that angle, to educate the fingers.”¹

Kunst der Fingerfertigkeit, or *The Art of Finger Dexterity* (Op. 740), was, indeed, an instructional composition. Czerny’s numerous pedagogical compositions tend to eclipse the other music written by Beethoven’s most notable pupil and Franz Liszt’s teacher.² Ashbery owned several versions of the piece of music: two copies of the same cassette tape in NYC, and one CD (a different recording)

1. Nina Shengold, “Perennial Voyager: John Ashbery at Home,” *Chronogram* [Hudson Valley Edition] (Sep. 2007): 57.

2. “Czerny was a great musician and prolific composer whose fate it was to be remembered only for his exercises.” For a brief overview of Czerny’s contributions to the history of classical music composition and performance, I recommend Leon Botstein’s program note to *Beethoven’s Pupil*, a concert performed at the Avery Fisher Hall at Lincoln Center on Nov. 14, 2004, www.leonbotstein.com/blog/beethovens-pupil.

in Hudson.³ Based on the dimensions of the photocopied liner notes kept with the typescript and used for reference, and the fact that by 2007 Ashbery was listening to music on a CD player, it is likely they came from the CD in Hudson.

When I asked Kermani whether or not Ashbery was listening to the corresponding Czerny pieces *while* he wrote the poems, he said it was safe to assume that Ashbery listened “at least some of the time” as he was writing.⁴ Intermittently, Kermani documented the classical music Ashbery often listened to as he wrote, noting the piece of music and date on lists that he kept in folders with the dated poem typescripts. Readers and scholars interested in seeing these lists can eventually find them at Harvard’s Houghton Library. One of the most interesting duties of my job as Ashbery’s assistant was ordering the often obscure recordings that he would circle in issues of *American Record Guide* and *Fanfare*, classical music review magazines to which he subscribed.

It is unclear whether Ashbery designated a title for this specific project. There is no indication of a title on any of the photocopies or original typescripts themselves. On the folder containing photocopies of the poems, “Czerny Variations” is written in my own handwriting on the tab. I only vaguely remember labeling this folder, but am unable to recall whether *Czerny Variations* was Ashbery’s title. It is more likely that I quickly labeled the folder so it could be located later on. Some of these poems were published under the title *Czerny Variations* in issue 225 of *The Paris Review*. After this publication, I was able to locate a chronological list of Ashbery’s poems from 2007, in which the project is called *The Art of Finger Dexterity*, as well as, simply, *Czerny*, indicating that Ashbery may have had two separate titles in mind. The entry reads “Art of Finger Dexterity, The (24 of anticipated 50 sections, 5/15 – 7/9/07, NYC and Hudson; short title:

3. In NYC: Carl Czerny and Vivien Harvey Slate, *The Art of Finger Dexterity: Op. 740*. New York: Musical Heritage Society, 1976, cassette tape. In Hudson: Carl Czerny and Francesco Libetta, *The Art of Finger Dexterity: Op. 740*. Pleasantville, NY: VAI Audio, 2006, compact disk.

4. David Kermani, conversation with ES, Feb. 16, 2020.

Czerny – see separate list).” The last poem included on this list, “Pale Impromptu,” is dated December 16, 2007. The note above suggests that whatever it was going to be titled, Ashbery still considered this project “active” or “in-progress” in December 2007, almost five months after he wrote the last poem in the series. The “separate list” mentioned omits poems 25 and 26 and calls the project *The Art of Finger Dexterity*.

I have used the longer title because it aligns with the concept of the project, as Ashbery named each poem after the first twenty-six of the fifty variations. Wanting to honor the suggestion of an alternate title containing Czerny’s name, I took a cue from Ashbery’s *Girls on the Run* (1999), in which “after Henry Darger” appears underneath the title on the poem’s first page.

In the folder, the poems were organized in descending numerical order, which seemed to me not intentional but merely the way the pages were stacked as Ashbery finished poems. For the purposes of this book, I have arranged them in ascending order. In many cases, he composed more than one short poem on a single page, but here I have given each poem its own page. In instances where Ashbery left poems untitled and only included the number of the variation, I have supplied the corresponding Czerny title, and where Ashbery has omitted the number, I have inserted it as well. Where there is a discrepancy between Ashbery’s and Czerny’s titles, I’ve attempted to determine what is intentional and what is merely a transcription error.

1. Application of the Fingers with Quiet Hand (47)

In the Czerny liner notes, this title is “Articulation of the Fingers with Quiet Hand.” This is the only instance in this manuscript where a different word is supplied, though sometimes Ashbery’s titles do vary from those of his source material. I kept Ashbery’s variation, which contains its own, slightly spooky magic.

5. *Evenness in Double Runs* (51)

Ashbery originally used this title for a twenty-eight-line, three-stanza poem, written the day before this one-line poem. The longer poem, composed on the same page as “LightSkill Articulation in Half-Staccato,” was cut after extensive edits. Ashbery indicated the omission of the earlier version with his typical bold diagonal slash through the text.

The line “O happy something” does not appear in this earlier version. Lines, words, and phrases from this omitted poem, including the last line, “Did ~~that~~ [this] ever happen?” recur, with modification, in “Clarity in Broken Chords.”

6. *Clarity in Broken Chords* (52)

See entry above.

52: “*and through the tonnelle’s damp falls / as though this were a hirsute day / on the river*”

In the original typescript, Ashbery wrote “tonnelles.” It is unclear whether he meant for this word to be possessive plural or possessive singular. The singular was chosen for simplicity.

9. *Delicacy in Skips and Staccatos* (56)

Ashbery tucked this short poem into “Zymurgy,” the final poem in his 2009 collection *Planisphere*. It is quite possible he was consulting an old handwritten fragment and not the Czerny manuscript itself. “Zymurgy” also includes the final line from “Exercise for Thirds [I]”: “No but I’d like to talk to you about it.”⁵

5. *Parallel Movement of the Hands*, 57.

10. *Exercise for Thirds* (57–58)

There are two poems numbered “10” and titled “Exercise for Thirds.” This doubling occurs again later with “Parallel Movement of the Hands.”

11. *Skill in Alternating Fingers* (59)

Fragments in this poem also appear in “Double Whoopee,” published in Ashbery’s 2012 collection *Quick Question*. Additionally, “Double Whoopee” includes the line “Worrier. You understand?” in “Exercise for Thirds [II].”⁶

13. *Maximum Velocity* (61)

61–62: “*Please be this visitor who sees, / not the one who tended / a vitamin shop on the edges, / rolling or coming around.*”

Ashbery originally typed “Please be the visitor who sees,” and penciled “this?” above the “the.”

14. *Chord Passages* (63)

63: “*tire / irons forged against a bettered time, / period of grace for the branded ones.*”

Ashbery struck through the “the,” so that the last line would have read “period of grace for branded ones.” However, he also penciled “the?” below, questioning this deletion. Here I have followed what seems to be his second thought.

6. Ibid., 58.

15. *Wide Position in Fortissimo* (64)

64: “*Indications of sonatine continue to haunt the white / ogre careless of the Thuille-influenced backlit / diorama*”

Ludwig Thuille (1861–1907) was an Austrian composer.

17. *Minor Scales at High Speed* (66)

Ashbery may have lost his place in the liner notes, at first titling poem 17 “Crossing the Hands Naturally and with a Fine Touch” in both an early version that was cut and the version here, which he later corrected in pencil to “Minor Scales at High Speed.” The early version, not included here, is forty-one lines (two sextets followed by a stanza of twenty-nine lines). I have found no subsequent poems that reuse any of the language in this omitted draft, through which Ashbery drew a large “X.”

19. *Tense Positions with a “Peaceful” Wrist* (68)

In the liner notes, quotation marks surround “peaceful wrist.” I have left Ashbery’s title as it is here, with “peaceful” emphasized only.

68: “*only that all points are equidistant and pleased, / and part of summer, the part of you that got on with it.*”

The initial lines were “only that all points are equidistant and pleased, / swimmer, sympathizer—the part of you that got on with it.” Ashbery also tried a variation of “swimmer, sympathizer” earlier in the poem, but crossed it out, while making many other substitutions, two of which return to the language of the title:

~~But~~ If not, let us hide our toes,
 fall backward into stagnant ether that is what
 rises ~~to meet us~~ at the end of all days, of all voyages
 in and from the parlor. ~~So, my little sea urchin, swimmer,~~
~~sympathizer,~~ We must ~~convert~~ [translate] what is ~~meticulous~~ [tense]
 into ~~rigorous~~ [peaceful] outcomes that will ripple back
 to foreign origins, not ~~seeming~~ [wishing] to know the name

In the final line, “swimmer, sympathizer” is crossed out, and the correction “and part of summer, ~~swimmer, sympathizer~~” is written underneath. In total, he crossed this phrase out three times in one page.⁷ After consulting with Rosanne Wasserman, who also knew Ashbery’s handwriting, the word “summer,” which was once indecipherable to me, revealed itself. Ashbery’s final omission of the phrase allows for the beautiful parallelism of the last line, “And part of summer, the part of you that got on with it.”

20. *Double Octaves* (69)

69: “*Did you get a bat today?*”

This is also the beginning line of “Exercise for Thirds [II].”

21. *Parallel Movement of the Hands* (70–73)

This title is used for two consecutive poems, as with “Exercise for Thirds.”⁸

73: “*The wind blows where it wants. / The wind will carry it away.*”

These lines (in slight variation) also end Ashbery’s poem “Saps at Sea,” from his 2012 collection *Quick Question*.

7. See fig. 3.

8. See figs. 4 and 5.

APPENDIX C: SACRED AND PROFANE DANCES

The three prose poems in this section are the only undated works in this collection. Two drafts of the first piece, “ATTAINDER,” were typed on cheap newsprint, whereas “Sacred and Profane Dances” was typed on the high-quality, thick, Eaton cotton-fiber paper more typical of Ashbery’s original typescripts. In his later career, Ashbery typed his poems almost exclusively on Crane paper, only sold in specialty stationery stores. Before his loyalty to Crane became habitual, he would have bought Eaton, which was more widely available.¹ There are other clues that point to these poems being from an earlier period, the most compelling of which is the capitalization of “ATTAINDER.”² Ashbery capitalized his titles until around 1952, after which he began to phase out this practice. After 1955, it is rare to find a poem with a capitalized title.³

David Kermani found these typescripts in Ashbery’s NYC study in a tall white bookcase that contained important correspondence, translations, and professional papers, but little original manuscript material. Grouped together were “ATTAINDER” (four pages, two drafts) and “Sacred and Profane Dances” (three pages, one draft), typed on the same typewriter, along with four pages of computer typescripts incorporating Ashbery’s handwritten revisions for “ATTAINDER” and “Tempest,” all fastened together with a paper clip. The typeface of the original typescripts of the first two sections was unfamiliar to me, which further suggested it was older than the other works in this book. The original

1. David Kermani, conversation with ES, Feb. 16, 2020.

2. See fig. 6.

3. Karin Roffman, email to ES, May 4, 2020.

typescript pages for “Tempest,” the third prose piece, were not found with this grouping and have yet to be located.

While it’s unlikely that “Tempest” was part of the same project as “ATTAINDER” and “Sacred and Profane Dances,” since it breaks from the narrative exploration of the Parable of the Ten Virgins, it is plausible that it is part of the same period of prose experimentation, and was found (as a computer typescript) with the other works. I hesitated about whether to include it, but ultimately decided that its charms as a text outweighed its status as an outsider. Since the series as a whole was untitled, I have named it after its central poem.

Eugene Richie, Ashbery’s former assistant, editor of his *Selected Prose* (2004), and coeditor (with Rosanne Wasserman) of his *Collected French Translations* (Prose and Poetry, 2014), remembers making the facsimile computer typescripts of “ATTAINDER” and “Tempest,” from the original typescript drafts for possible inclusion in *Selected Prose* in the late 1990s.⁴ It is unclear why he did not type “Sacred and Profane Dances,” obviously part of the same series, though perhaps it was written later. According to Richie, Ashbery ultimately felt that these prose poems didn’t fit with the nonfiction work of that collection, and so they were not included.⁵ Ashbery’s short story from 1952, “The Egyptian Helen,” was also left out of the collection for this reason.⁶ For more information regarding the selection process for *Selected Prose*, please refer to Richie’s introduction to that collection.

The first two pieces, “ATTAINDER” and “Sacred and Profane Dances,” loosely follow the events of the Parable of the Ten Virgins, attributed to Jesus, as relayed in the Gospel of Matthew. This story is meant to symbolize the Second Coming of Christ, who in this tale is presented as a bridegroom and the virgins as bridesmaids. When the bridegroom arrives unexpectedly, the “wise” virgins who have oil in their lamps are welcomed to the wedding feast, and the “foolish” virgins who aren’t ready for the festivities are punished and cast out:

4. Eugene Richie, conversation with ES, Jan. 17, 2020.

5. Ibid.

6. First published in Rosanne Wasserman, “Helen of Troy: Her Myth in Modern Poetry” (PhD diss., CUNY 1986). Reprinted in *Gnosis*, 11 (Winter 1995).

Then the Kingdom of Heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. Those who were foolish, when they took their lamps, took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. Now while the bridegroom delayed, they all slumbered and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, "Behold! The bridegroom is coming! Come out to meet him!" Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the wise, "Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out." But the wise answered, saying, "What if there isn't enough for us and you? You go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves." While they went away to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast, and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins also came, saying, "Lord, Lord, open to us." But he answered, "Most certainly I tell you, I don't know you." Watch therefore, for you don't know the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.⁷

Ashbery's playful expansion of this fable seems to take pity on the ostracized virgins—even coming to their defense in places—and imagines a kind of social architecture to the community of the household and its various servants. The piece is also in many ways a meditation on the nature of arrival, both in quotidian and spiritual terms. In our conversations about this manuscript, Ashbery's biographer, Karin Roffman, kindly pointed me toward Ashbery's early poem "A Sermon: Amos 8–11:14," which she discovered was written "the summer between his freshman and sophomore years" at Harvard on his family's farm in Sodus, NY.⁸ This poem later appeared in *The Harvard Advocate*—his first poem published there—in April 1947.⁹ "A Sermon: Amos 8–11:14" also mentions virgins and reflects on a passage of prophetic biblical verse. Roffman mentions this

7. Matt. 25:1–13, *World English Bible*.

8. Karin Roffman, *The Songs We Know Best: John Ashbery's Early Life*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017, 177.

9. Ibid.

poem in *The Songs We Know Best: John Ashbery's Early Life*, in connection with Ashbery's "religious period" at Harvard, quoting letters between Ashbery and his roommate, Bob Hunter:

He vigorously defended his religious interests to his increasingly impatient friends. . . . Bob suspected that John's flirtation with religion was primarily a desire to resolve "the vast contradictions that existed within his soul." John argued that it was even more self-interested; at the very least, he said, it would "be a pity to be caught on the losing team on the Day of Atonement."¹⁰

J. S. Bach's 1731 cantata *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme* (Sleepers Awake) is also based on the Matthew parable. Ashbery's sympathy for "sleepers" everywhere is well documented. A list poem titled "Sleepers Awake" appears in *Can You Hear, Bird* (1995): "I sleep when I cannot avoid it; my writing and sleeping are constantly improving."¹¹

Additionally, Roffman observed that "ATTAINDER" and "Sacred and Profane Dances" bear narrative resemblance to another canonical surprise homecoming, the scenes in the *Odyssey* in which Odysseus returns to Ithaca and his former household, slaying Penelope's suitors—and Telemachus hangs the enslaved women who slept with them.¹²

ATTAINDER (85)

Ashbery typed the first two paragraphs of this poem on a single page, made corrections by hand, then retyped the page on a separate sheet, making further unmarked corrections and adding the third and fourth paragraphs, ending with "What is it about the bridegroom." He wrote the next passage, beginning "While

10. Ibid., 140–41.

11. John Ashbery, "Sleepers Awake," *Can You Hear, Bird*, in *John Ashbery: Collected Poems, 1991–2000*, ed. Mark Ford. Library of America, 2017, 484–85.

12. Karin Roffman, email to ES, May 4, 2020.

he was away, chaos under the guise of calm reigned in the house,” on a separate page, which carries on to another. Since Ashbery seemed to be having some trouble with his typewriter here (the beginnings of some passages extend into the margin), I’ve made editorial choices for paragraph breaks throughout this section.

85: “*Maldoror considered these things, shifting his weight from baunch to baunch, then went over to the corner to question the view from his terrace.*”

This is the first and only mention of Maldoror, the delightfully evil and nihilistic protagonist of one of Ashbery’s favorite works of literature, *Les Chants de Maldoror* (1868–69), a novel in the form of a series of prose poetry cantos written by the Comte de Lautréamont (Isidore Lucien Ducasse). Ashbery first read *Les Chants de Maldoror* in the summer of 1950 in New York City.¹³ In his review of a 1966 publication of Giorgio de Chirico’s *Hebdomeros*, “The Decline of the Verbs,” later reprinted as an introduction to the book, Ashbery compares *Les Chants de Maldoror* to de Chirico’s novel: “Unlike the hero of Lautréamont’s *Chants de Maldoror*, who is committed to evil, he [Hebdomeros] is uncommitted.”¹⁴ Ashbery then goes on to describe Lautréamont’s novel as possessing “insane beauty,” though ultimately lacking the “persuasion” of de Chirico’s work.¹⁵

The shifts in narrator, point of view, and even sympathies that occur across and within these pieces also recall *Maldoror*’s roving narrative locus. Ashbery titled his 1992 collection of poems *Hotel Lautréamont*, in homage to the writer whose description of a sixteen-year-old boy has come to so succinctly capture the ethos of surrealism and assemblage: “He is fair . . . as the chance meeting on a dissecting-table of a sewing-machine and an umbrella!”¹⁶

13. Karin Roffman, email to ES, Apr. 6, 2020.

14. John Ashbery, “Introduction, The Decline of the Verbs,” *Hebdomeros*, Giorgio de Chirico. Exact Change, 1992, x.

15. *Ibid.*, xi.

16. Comte de Lautréamont, *Maldoror*, in *Maldoror & the Complete Works of the Comte de Lautréamont*, trans. Alexis Lykiard. Exact Change, 2011, 193.

Sacred and Profane Dances (90)

This title was also used for a poem in *Your Name Here* (2000). *Danses sacrée et profane* (1904) is a work by Claude Debussy for harp and strings.

91: “*Why, though? Aren’t they part of this whole household picture?*”

Ashbery retyped and subtly corrected the paragraph beginning with these sentences on the subsequent typescript page before continuing on.

Tempest (93)

94: “*whose volumes of Opie Read and F. Hopkinson Smith had remained untouched for almost a century,*”

Opie Read (1852–1939) was an American journalist and novelist; Francis Hopkinson Smith (1838–1915) was an American engineer, illustrator, and author. It is plausible that a stuffy American family of certain “conservative advanced taste,” such as the fictional Wildwoods, would have these authors represented on their shelves.

APPENDIX D: 21 VARIATIONS

ON MY ROOM

Photocopies of this long poem were found in both of Ashbery's homes. In NYC, the poem was inside a folder with a note from Kermani: "JA poems 2003—NOT yet typed up / (these are ms copies) + 1 orig." Kermani penciled "[unfinished]," on the upper right-hand corner of the poem's first page. The one original typescript contained in the folder is a single quintet titled "Faded Ugliness," written in late 2003 or early 2004, that Ashbery indicated was not to be published. The Hudson photocopy, found in a folder marked "JA Xeroxes of poems," was among misfit photocopies from the early '90s-00s, including early photocopied drafts of his long poem "Heavenly Days."¹ It also contains typed and handwritten changes and corrections not present on the NYC photocopy.

Ashbery wrote "21 Variations on My Room" between August 21 and September 9, 2002. Incidentally, this was during his longest hiatus from writing *The Kane Richmond Project*, August 19 to November 9, 2002. According to his datebooks, this period was incredibly busy for Ashbery, including travel and readings for programs celebrating his seventy-fifth birthday "at the Pompidou Center in Paris (... organized by Olivier Brossard and Omar Berrada) and the Tate Modern in London" that fall, and even outpatient surgery during the summer.^{2, 3} This poem, written just a few weeks before Ashbery and Kermani left for Paris, shares a source text with *The Kane Richmond Project: Tom Swift and His Rocket Ship* (1954), the third book in the serial Tom Swift novels for boys written by Victor

1. Published in John Ashbery, *Chinese Whispers*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002.

2. David Kermani, email to ES, Nov. 27, 2019.

3. Mark Ford and David Kermani, Chronology, in *John Ashbery: Collected Poems, 1991–2000*, ed. Mark Ford. Library of America, 2017, 783.

Appleton II, a collective name for the Stratemeyer Syndicate, which also published the Nancy Drew, Hardy Boys, and Bobbsey Twins serial novels.⁴ In addition to *Tom Swift and His Rocket Ship*, Ashbery collaged material from two other Tom Swift/Hardy Boys novels into *The Kane Richmond Project* (see Appendix E). Because the two poems also share an Apollinaire epigraph and other language, “21 Variations on My Room” may have been conceived as part of the longer poem.

The number of lines in each stanza (with some exceptions) increase incrementally to more or less match the stanza’s number. Only eighteen of the proposed “21 Variations” are completed.

In his long poem “And the Stars Were Shining,” Ashbery writes: “Rummaging through some old poems / for ideas—surely I must have had some / once?”⁵ Years after leaving “21 Variations on My Room” unfinished, Ashbery returned to it for inspiration, integrating many of its sections into “The Handshake, the Cough, the Kiss,” published in his 2007 collection *A Worldly Country*. Though these two poems share much of their language, I have decided to include “21 Variations on My Room” in this collection. From a formal perspective, “21 Variations on My Room” creates a completely different reading experience from “The Handshake, the Cough, the Kiss,” with its numbered sections and stanzaic constraints. The poem also sheds light on Ashbery’s process of writing longer poems in his late career; the transition from the segmented form of “21 Variations . . .” to the seamlessness of “The Handshake . . .” is interesting to consider in terms of his compositional process and habit of self-recycling. Its connections to both this beloved long poem from *A Worldly Country* and *The Kane Richmond Project* mark it as an intriguing fulcrum in Ashbery’s late writing.

99: [Epigraph] “Ma chambre a la forme d’une cage. —Guillaume Apollinaire, ‘Hôtel’”

4. Victor Appleton II, *Tom Swift and His Rocket Ship*, ser. 3. Grosset & Dunlap, 1954.

5. John Ashbery, “And the Stars Were Shining,” *And the Stars Were Shining*, in *John Ashbery: Collected Poems, 1991–2000*, 409.

“My room looks like a cage”⁶: This epigraph is not present on the photocopy of the poem found in NYC, but appears on the Hudson photocopy; Ashbery may have photocopied the original typescript to bring to NYC and later, in Hudson, typed the epigraph directly onto the photocopy. This epigraph also begins “A Long and Sleepy History,” the seventeenth section of *The Kane Richmond Project*, which predates this poem. Additionally, Ashbery used this quote as an epigraph for the poem “Counterpane.”⁷

100: **6.** If we follow the poem’s formal logic, we might expect six lines here instead of five.

102: **12.** With thirteen lines instead of twelve, this stanza also breaks from the form of incrementally increasing lines per stanza.

102-3: **13.** This section is doubled, consisting of two thirteen-line stanzas.

104: **15.** “*One has to endure / certain systems, then profit by them later in the crust of events.*”

The NYC photocopy of the poem has “evening” as the last word of this stanza. In the only original correction on the Hudson photocopy (other than the addition of the epigraph), Ashbery changed this word to “events.”

105: **18.** “*I don’t know—spring came and went so fast this year, / sex on the river—the chosen advice. And more.*”

These lines appear, in slight variation, in the chapter “Sex on the River” in *The Kane Richmond Project*.

106: “*After that is the supervisors’ area / and you could go home now, except they are expected here / and, wonderful to behold,*”

Save for the first few lines (“I don’t know—spring came and went so fast this

6. Guillaume Apollinaire, “Hotel,” *Zone: Selected Poems*, trans. Ron Padgett. New York Review Books, 2015, 131.

7. John Ashbery, *Where Shall I Wander*. Ecco/HarperCollins, 2005.

year . . . and one observes it.”), this is the only additional language supplied by Ashbery in this final stanza. The remaining material was collaged from pages 36–37 of *Tom Swift and His Rocket Ship*, a source Ashbery indicated with a typed note.⁸

106: “*‘I hope we get the rest of the day off, genius boy,’ Bud said shyly.*”

The final line substitutes “shyly” for the *Tom Swift and His Rocket Ship*’s “slyly.”

8. See fig. 7.

APPENDIX E: THE KANE

RICHMOND PROJECT

On March 19, 2002, Ashbery printed a particularly handsome photograph of serial actor Kane Richmond he found on the internet. Two days later, he printed a filmography for Richmond, along with an article from *Images* journal, a “non-commercial Web site created for everyone who enjoys movies and popular culture.”¹ The journal’s fourth issue was dedicated to the subject of cliffhangers, and here Ashbery found an article by contributing editor Grant Tracey on *Spy Smasher*, a 1942 Republic Pictures Corporation serial directed by William Witney and starring Richmond as the cape-wearing, Nazi-busting superhero vigilante, whose true identity is Alan Armstrong, a war correspondent (Richmond also plays *Spy Smasher*’s twin brother, Jack Armstrong). Tracey’s enthusiasm for the serial is remarkable—every other sentence seems to end with an exclamation mark—and this three-page article, with its plot summaries of the various chapters, photographs, and analyses of the series’ finer shots, became an important source for Ashbery, who even used the index of other articles from the issue (e.g., “Perils of Nyoka”) as chapter titles. Also in Ashbery’s possession was volume four of *Serial Pictorial*, a pulp fanzine from the late 1960s comprised of film stills and photographs from *Spy Smasher*.² On the front cover is Kane Richmond, half-smiling in his costume. These materials were found in Ashbery’s study in NYC, in the desk drawer where he regularly kept files on ongoing projects and areas of curiosity.

Ashbery owned many film reference books, which he may have consulted in the writing of this poem. These included *Cliffhanger: A Pictorial History of the*

1. Grant Tracey, Elizabeth Abele, David Ng, and Craig Fischer, eds., *Images*, pub. Gary Johnson, www.imagesjournal.com/about.htm.

2. See figs. 13, 14, and 15.

Motion Picture Serial by Alan G. Barbour (1977), *A Pictorial History of the Silent Screen* by Daniel Blum (1953), *Harold Lloyd: The Man on the Clock* by Tom Dardis (1983), *Continued Next Week: A History of the Moving Picture Serial* by Kalton C. Lahue (1964), and *To Be Continued . . . : A Complete Guide to Motion Picture Serials* by Ken Weiss and Ed Goodgold (1972).³

Kane Richmond was a B-movie actor, best known for his appearance in serial films such as *The Shadow* and *Brick Bradford*. In this poem, Ashbery weaves together plotlines and characters from two of Richmond's other serials, *The Adventures of Rex and Rinty* (1935) and *Spy Smasher*, along with numerous allusions to other films from the 1920s, '30s, and '40s.

In two long poems from Ashbery's early career, he used text taken directly from books for adolescents. "Europe," the notoriously "inaccessible" 111-section poem published in *The Tennis Court Oath* (1962), contains long passages from *Beryl of the Biplane: Being the Romance of an Air-woman of To-day* (1917). Ashbery described the novel as a

circa WWI book for young teenage girls . . . by William Le Queux, who was once a very successful English fiction writer. I found the book in a bookstall on the Seine and brought it home, planning to use it, but I didn't know how yet. It became an important element in my Europe "worldview," perhaps a further sign of orneriness on my part because it is mostly set in England, which is not really a part of Europe, as we know.⁴

3. For a complete listing of these film reference books, along with other books in Ashbery's library, see Rosangela Briscese and Micaela Morrisette's online bibliographic catalog of Ashbery's Hudson library. Rosangela Briscese and Micaela Morrisette, "Where Created Spaces Intersect: A Preliminary Inventory of John Ashbery's Personal Library," *A Dream of This Room: A Created Spaces Portfolio of Works on John Ashbery's Textual and Domestic Environments*, 2008, www.raintaxi.com/literary-features/john-ashbery-created-spaces/where-created-spaces-intersect/.

4. John Ashbery, transcript of handwritten annotations to *The Tennis Court Oath* (1962) for PEN America/First Editions, Second Thoughts, Mar.–Apr. 2014. Transcribed by ES.

Ashbery lifted long prose passages from *Beryl of the Biplane*, placing them, without context, among diffuse and abstract numbered sections. Of section 77, which reads in full, “‘Perhaps you’ve heard of her. She’s a great flying woman.’ // ‘Oh yes,’ replied the stranger. ‘I’ve seen things about / her in the papers. Does she fly much?’”⁵ Ashbery recounted that these lines, quotes from the novel, are “fragments of conversation about the heroine from spies who are tracking her.”⁶

Another poem that collages text from books written for children is “The Skaters,” the long poem that ends the 1966 collection *Rivers and Mountains*, in which Ashbery included text from the 1911 hobby book, *Three Hundred Things a Bright Boy Can Do*, by “Many Hands.” This user’s guide for early twentieth-century boyhood features illustrated, highly detailed instructional chapters ranging from “Paperchasing, Football, Golf, and Boxing,” to “Butterflies and Moths,” and “Ventriloquism and Polyphony.” David Shapiro, in a chapter dedicated entirely to the poem in *John Ashbery: An Introduction to the Poetry*, describes “The Skaters” as “a modulated collage on the ambiguous amusements of solitary mind.”^{7, 8}

In *The Kane Richmond Project*, Ashbery repeats this collage process, integrating language from three serialized novels for boys from the Tom Swift and Hardy Boys adventure series: *Tom Swift and His Rocket Ship* (1954) and *Tom Swift and His Repelatron Skyway* (1963), by Victor Appleton II; and *Danger on Vampire Trail*,

5. John Ashbery, “Europe,” *The Tennis Court Oath*, in *John Ashbery: Collected Poems, 1956–1987*, ed. Mark Ford. Library of America, 2008, 106.

6. Ashbery, transcript of handwritten annotations to *The Tennis Court Oath* (1962).

7. I encourage readers interested in seeing the original typescript of “The Skaters,” its first and second drafts, along with an impressive critical edition of the text (including “semantic annotations,” “quantitative data analysis,” and “searchable index”) to seek out the incredible web-based “critical and genetic digital edition” of “The Skaters,” created and conceived by Robin Seguy and Charles Bernstein for Text/*works*, a project supported by the University of Pennsylvania at www.text-works.org/Texts/Ashbery/JA-Sk_data/JA-Sk_EdN.html.

8. David Shapiro, *John Ashbery: An Introduction to the Poetry*. Columbia University Press, 1979, 93.

by Franklin W. Dixon (1971).^{9, 10} A fourth book found with these texts, *Tom Swift and the Cosmic Astronauts* (1960), was not used. Dixon and Appleton are house pseudonyms for the Stratemeyer Syndicate, which also published the Nancy Drew and Bobbsey Twins serial novels, among others. Ashbery's use of these books marks a return to a previous source. In his critical study *On the Outside Looking Out: John Ashbery's Poetry*, John Shoptaw notes that after Ashbery wrote "Europe" in 1958, he used a Hardy Boys novel, *The Secret of the Old Mill*, to create a "puzzle-poem" with the same title on a seven-page grid of 36 squares.¹¹

Ashbery's editions of these books once belonged to the personal libraries of Richard "Richie" E. Holland and Danny Klonsky. They were priced at \$1 apiece; Ashbery may have bought them at Rodgers Book Barn in Hillsdale, NY, a famously treasure-packed used bookstore run by Maureen Rodgers that he loved and frequented. It is clear why Ashbery would have been attracted to these books: they are ripe for the collagist, with their imaginative inventions, over-the-top dialogue and character names, and humorous descriptions. In addition to being serialized novels, they also employ a cliffhanger structure between chapters, similar to the movie serials Ashbery references.

It bears mentioning that there are multiple moments of orientalism and racialized othering in *The Kane Richmond Project*. Because this associative poem evokes and collages the landscapes, plotlines, and characters of early Hollywood cinema and midcentury children's literature, it is difficult to say when this rhetoric is being directly deployed and when it is being parodied or otherwise repurposed. I personally feel that the reproduction of this language is unfortunate

9. See fig. 13.

10. Victor Appleton II, *Tom Swift and His Rocket Ship*, ser. 3. Grosset & Dunlap, 1954; Victor Appleton II, *Tom Swift and His Repelatron Skyway*, ser. 22. Grosset & Dunlap, 1963; Franklin W. Dixon, *The Hardy Boys: Danger on Vampire Trail*, ser. 50. Grosset & Dunlap, 1971.

11. John Shoptaw, *On the Outside Looking Out: John Ashbery's Poetry*. Harvard University Press, 1994, 359.

and—whatever Ashbery’s intentions—participates in a colonialist, Eurocentric literary tradition of using the nonwhite figure as a nameless feature of the landscape or a placeholder for non sequitur, mystery, and indecipherability. To my knowledge, only a few scholars have taken up this aspect of Ashbery’s writing: Stephen Ross discusses Ashbery’s use of orientalism in the context of his fascination with “badness” in his book *Invisible Terrain: John Ashbery and the Aesthetics of Nature* (Oxford University Press, 2017). Kevin Killian wrote about racial stereotyping in Ashbery’s plays.¹² I believe this facet of Ashbery’s writing deserves further attention.

Readers may notice some reappearance of phrases throughout the poem, instances of which I have made an attempt to note. Additionally, there are recurrences of language between this poem and “21 Variations on My Room.” These repetitions are not unusual for Ashbery, who was known in his drafts and published work to reuse lines (and even titles) across several poems, since he often worked from fragments written on scraps of paper. Sometimes, he would forget already having used a fragment in another poem, or would want to try it somewhere else in a different context.¹³ On a larger scale, three poems from Ashbery’s collection *And the Stars Were Shining* (1994) appeared, sometimes in slight variation or with differing titles, in *Can You Hear, Bird* (1995). This repetition of material was a conscious element of his collage work—as the same image could induce drastically different effects in different contexts, such as Pieter Bruegel the Elder’s *Tower[s] of Babel*, the pastel macaron cookie cutouts sprinkled throughout Ashbery’s later collages, or the reappearance of Parmigianino’s *Self-*

12. Kevin Killian, “Ashbery’s Theater: ‘Three Plays’ (1978),” *Conjunctions*, John Ashbery Tribute, eds. Peter Gizzi and Bradford Morrow, 49 (2007): 334–40.

13. Around the late 1990s or early 2000s, Ashbery and Kermani became frustrated by how long it was taking to find unwanted repetitions in the poem drafts, and decided that Kermani should place a checkmark next to fragments that had been used in a draft, and, on the verso of the fragment, note the date on which the corresponding poem was written; the intent was not to stop the repetitions, but merely to make it easier to locate them so Ashbery could decide which to retain and which to change.

portrait in a Convex Mirror in varying sizes across many years of collage-making. In his visual art, these recurrences were a way of uniting a group of collages, creating visual and referential conversations within a body of work. But as a poet, Ashbery would sometimes seek out and remove these repeated moments from a manuscript. In *The Kane Richmond Project*, among other noticeable patterns of repetition, quotes from the body of the poem often reappear later as chapter titles, producing an interesting, regenerative effect.

As for the physical manuscript itself, the original typescripts and corresponding photocopies were found in a manila folder in the same file drawer in the NYC apartment as *The Art of Finger Dexterity*. A note by Kermani placed at the beginning of the folder of manuscript material explains that some pages were, at some point, separated and lost (and later recovered), which might illuminate some of the erratic ordering and discrepancies with regard to section breaks. There are multiple copies: original typescripts, photocopies with handwritten changes by Ashbery, and a final copy assembled on May 21, 2003, by Kermani, in which, according to a note on the separate folder in which this copy of the manuscript was stored, “only [the] most recent revised pages” are present.

This manuscript presented many editorial challenges. Because Ashbery wrote from both Hudson and NYC and wanted photocopies in both locations (and sometimes made additional photocopies when he traveled elsewhere), multiple drafts with different variants exist. There are misordered pages, several undated entries, and handwritten pages, and a pattern emerged wherein Ashbery began new passages out of sequence underneath previous entries or on their own pages, with no indication of whether or not he wanted a section break. Luckily, Kermani’s meticulously annotated and assembled final copy, along with Ashbery’s practice of dating his entries, made it possible to reconstruct a version of *The Kane Richmond Project* that might resemble Ashbery’s vision. What emerges is a collaged, hybrid, and exciting homage to the serial form.

Toward the end of the typescript, Ashbery stopped indicating breaks in the text at the top of the page. In some places, even when indicated, it is unclear whether Ashbery intended a break at the top or bottom of the page, or whether “break” means stanza/paragraph break or section break. At these cruxes, I con-

sidered the overall function of the “break” in this poem, with its many titled chapters, and how a break, for the poet, can act as its own cliffhanger or rupture in narrative or image. In these formal considerations and decisions, I have tried, instead of “tidying up,” to make choices that leave the text as open as possible to the many possibilities in formatting and form. Here, untitled sections, indicated in the text by three asterisks (* * *), signify page breaks in the typescript, which because of long periods of time elapsed between entries or space left at the bottom of the previous page, I could not determine to be either section breaks or stanza/paragraph breaks.

According to a note by Kermani on a photocopy of the first page of the original typescript, Ashbery made many of the handwritten changes in April 2003, four months after he completed his last entry. Though a note by Kermani tucked into one of the Tom Swift books in order to link it with this poem refers to *The Kane Richmond Project* as “unfinished,” it reads as though it has a beginning, middle, and end. The only steps that remained were integrating Ashbery’s changes and making some decisions regarding formatting and structure. I felt honored to facilitate this part of the process.

A note on the title: In a document labeled “(DRAFT) Alphabetical List of JA Poems: Late 2001–2002 (as of 5/15/03),” this project is referred to as *Spy Smasher*; *The Kane Richmond Project*. Ashbery indicated that he was considering *Spy Smasher* as a title for the full manuscript on a photocopy of the first page, circling “Spy Smasher,” the first chapter title underneath the title *The Kane Richmond Project*, and writing “Change title?”¹⁴ next to it. On the first page of the original typescript, Ashbery even circled “Spy Smasher” and drew an arrow above *The Kane Richmond Project*. Ashbery also considered *The Kane Richmond Story*, writing “Story?” above “Project” on the photocopy of the first page.¹⁵ Since I could find no definitive preference, I kept to Ashbery’s original title.

14. See fig. 8.

15. Ibid.

Spy Smasher (117)

Ashbery proposed this as an alternate title for the manuscript.

Perils of Nyoka (119)

Ashbery titled this chapter “Perils of Inoka.” However, *Perils of Nyoka* is the 1942 serial, also directed by William Witney, listed on Ashbery’s source material (with the correct spelling), directly underneath *Spy Smasher*. Since Ashbery may have unintentionally transposed the consonant and vowel sounds of “ny” and “in,” I corrected the chapter title to reflect his source.

The Devil Diamond (119)

This title, along with *The Lost City*, *Racing Blood*, *Spy Smasher*, and *The Adventures of Rex and Rinty* (not used as a chapter title but referenced throughout the poem), appears on the printout of Kane Richmond’s filmography found in Ashbery’s study. Ashbery indicated that he was thinking about beginning the poem with this section, writing “begin here?” in the left margin and drawing a line toward this chapter title.

The Devil Diamond (1937) is a film directed by Leslie Goodwins and starring Kane Richmond as Jerry Carter, an undercover detective who is hired to keep tabs on a large diamond that is coveted by thieves and rumored to be cursed.

119: “*and huge morsel of bone for Bonzo*”

Bonzo the Dog is a 1920s cartoon character illustrated by George Studdy, a British comic artist.

The Lost City (121)

The Lost City (1935) is an unwatchable sci-fi serial starring Richmond as engineer Bruce Gordon.

Racing Blood (122)

Richmond plays a handsome stable owner in *Racing Blood* (1936), a film directed by Victor Halperin about a “crippled colt” that grows up to be a racing champion at the center of a web of racetrack-related crime and deception.

124: “‘Dear’ had life tinged on it? Not on my watch, / they don’t. It was so casual of you, too.”

These lines begin the top of the fifth typescript page, labeled “KRP 5 stanza break,” indicating Ashbery wanted a stanza break between this and what came before on the previous page. The word “dear” is lowercase, and Ashbery wrote “missing page?” in pen above the text, likely because the first word isn’t capitalized. The last line of the previous page, “That’s what it’s coming to, to true blue,” ends in a period. It makes sense that “‘dear’ had life” is here because of the appearance of the phrase in the first stanza of “*Racing Blood*”: “started bailing for dear life. ‘Dear’ life?”¹⁶ but since this lack of capitalization confused even Ashbery, I’ve capitalized the first word of this stanza.

125: “*Rudy is shanghaied aboard the Lady Letty / and falls for Moran, the captain’s daughter. / Soon the kindly captain dies. Rudy’s rich friends / have forgotten him, though he dreams of them. / Here, do it like this. / No, like this.*”

Here, Ashbery is referring to *Moran of the Lady Letty* (1922), an American silent film starring Dorothy Dalton as Moran, the resourceful daughter of a Norwegian sea captain, and silent-era heartthrob Rudolph Valentino as Ramon

16. *Parallel Movement of the Hands*, 122.

Laredo, a member of San Francisco's upper class. The film also includes a performance by Japanese actor George Kuwa. As with Ashbery's use of "Kane," the character carries the actor's name, "Rudy." An expository intertitle reads, "the rich man's son—Ramon Laredo—spends the dash and fire inherited from his Spanish ancestors in leading cotillions. . . . Cradled in luxury this man-child came to earth, heir to the aimless life of a rich man's son." On his way to a day of yachting hosted by his Nob Hill debutante love interest, Ramon is shanghaied by crew members of the *Heart of China*, a pirate ship passing through San Francisco Bay. A coal fire erupts on Moran's father's nearby ship, the *Lady Letty*, and all of the crew members (including its captain) expire in the noxious fumes. When sailors from the *Heart of China* arrive to pillage the ship, they find Moran alive, but think her to be a boy. When it is discovered that Moran is a woman, Ramon Laredo saves her from the advances of the captain. The two eventually fall in love, and Laredo gives up his swanky lifestyle, pledging his life to Moran and the open sea.

The film is particularly striking from a gender perspective. Moran is described as having been "reared as a hardy seaman. . . . Born on the deep and rocked to sleep by storms, this girl-child came of a long line of sea-faring men." When Laredo declares his love, Moran sighs, "I ought to have been born a boy." Laredo, on the other hand, is cruelly mocked by the captain in front of the crew for his softness and femininity, and is given the nickname "Lillee of the Vallee" on deck, a detail I can see Ashbery enjoying.

125: "*Rex and Rinty are a part / of the equation.*"

This is the first mention of Rex and Rinty, the scrappy animal pals and co-conspiratorial duo of the twelve-part serial *The Adventures of Rex and Rinty* (1935). Rex, a black Arabian stallion played by equine actor Rex, King of the Wild Horses, lives on the island of Sujan, where the inhabitants worship him like a god, "cherishing him as sincerely as did the Assyrians the Bull; the Egyptians the Cat; or the Mayans the Feathered Serpent." Rex is stolen from the island by a gang of Americans and shipped to California, fated to become a polo horse. Rinty, played by canine actor Rin Tin Tin Jr., is a "homeless" Californian

dog with “human intelligence.” The two join forces to get Rex back home, helping to free each other from many perils in the process. This serial’s human cast includes Kane Richmond as Frank Bradley, a “famed polo player,” who helps Rex return to Sujan after he is held captive by villain Crawford and his accomplices. Rex and Rinty become repeated characters in Ashbery’s poem, and their story lines often commingle with those of *Spy Smasher*.

This isn’t the first time Ashbery drew inspiration from a film starring Rin Tin Tin. In her biography of Ashbery’s early life, *The Songs We Know Best* (2017), Karin Roffman recounts his involvement in the Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society in the mid-1950s, and how his attendance inspired his play *The Compromise*:

At the very first event, he found inspiration for a new play. After watching a two-minute hand-colored film from 1900 called *The Flower Fairy*, he also saw, for the first time, the classic, full-length Rin Tin Tin feature *Where the North Begins* (1923). Afterward, he rapturously described it to Kenneth [Koch] as “the greatest film ever—Rinty is a superb actor.” The story is set on a remote mountain, where deep snow has left a small group in almost total isolation from the rest of society for much of the year. Rin Tin Tin, raised by wolves but with the old soul of a dog, provides a lonely young family with companionship, loyalty, and wisdom. Moved by the film, Ashbery went to work that night as soon as he arrived home.

Less than three weeks later, he had a complete draft of his first three-act play.¹⁷

Ashbery also provided an account of seeing this film in an interview with Mark Ford:

The Compromise was inspired by going to a film society that Edward Gorey belonged to, which was sort of semi-clandestine, as if they didn’t really want

17. Karin Roffman, *The Songs We Know Best: John Ashbery’s Early Life*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017, 234.

people to come, and it moved around from one space to another. They showed very strange unknown films—it was run by William K. Everson, an English film scholar who lived in New York. *The Compromise* was inspired by a 1923 Rin Tin Tin movie I saw there, *Where the North Begins*. I took the plot of this movie, though I omitted the dog at the centre of it. This dog had been left to guard a baby in a trappers' cabin while the parents are out; they come back and find the baby missing and the whole place torn apart—in fact by the furious fight the dog had with the baby's kidnappers, but the parents wrongly conclude that the dog has eaten the baby, and cast the poor mutt out into the snow! There was something about this film which intrigued me—maybe because it was made just before I was born, around the time my parents got married, and I saw something of my parents in both of the leading actors, though I've no idea now who they were.¹⁸

126: "*Goran stabs the horse fatally, and police in riot gear / converge on the scene.*"

It is unclear here whether Ashbery meant to write "Moran," the female lead in *Moran of the Lady Letty*.

126: "*That's the president's dream*"

Ashbery titled a later chapter "The President's Dream."

127: "'Society figure' (that would be Rudy) 'missing: foul play feared.' / What about our crimes and delusions? Haven't we walked the plank far enough?"

This refers to a scene in *Moran of the Lady Letty* in which Laredo's socialite girlfriend is reading headlines about his disappearance in the newspaper.

128: "*I have researched my position paper / to the fullest, and am ready to pronounce: / Big music in mid-disaster.*"

Ashbery titled a poem "Position Paper" in his collection *Breezeway* (2015).

128: "*Rex and Rinty were never the same / after the burning stable incident, but did either of them let out a growl / or as much as a whimper?*"

18. John Ashbery and Mark Ford, *John Ashbery in Conversation with Mark Ford. Between the Lines*, 2003, 36–37.

A direct reference to a cliffhanger in the third chapter of *The Adventures of Rex and Rinty*, “Fangs of Flame,” in which the barn where Crawford’s men are holding Rex catches fire after one of them drops a cigarette on a bale of hay. Richmond’s character, Frank Bradley, rushes in to save Rinty and the stolen horse from the fire and (in the next chapter) frees Rex from the horse thieves.

130–31: “*The real test came though when Rinty found Kane all tied up like that. / In a flash he knew what to do—chew through the cords so Kane could reach his holster, / and nary a moment too soon—the Gestapo guy returned / to the cell. ‘Vell, haf you considered the terms of my—’ / Whop! in a moment Rinty was all over him, Kane kicked over the bales / of straw and ignited them and escaped through the door with Rinty / to the tunnel the Gestapo guy had left open, slamming the door behind them. / Now he was free to rejoin his twin brother, / he of the gorgeous tweeds, in the sky, in an airship floating over Paris.*”

This is a conflation of scenes from *Spy Smasher* (part of which is set in Nazi-occupied Paris) and *The Adventures of Rex and Rinty*.

The President’s Dream (132)

A short, undated chapter, written sometime between April 13 and 20, 2002. It begins on the bottom of the eighth typescript page, and continues onto the top of the ninth, after which there is much blank space.

[untitled] “*Kane was a righteous dude, beat-packing.*” (133)

This passage begins on a page that Ashbery originally labeled “KRP 8 - break.” The “8” is crossed out and replaced by a “9” on the original typescript, which is then replaced by a “10” in the final copy. This is the first in a series of mislabeled pages throughout the typescripts, perhaps due to Ashbery forgetting to number his pages, or because of pages getting misordered or temporarily misplaced during relocations between Hudson and NYC. Up until this point, chap-

ters have been separated by titles, much like the chapters in the serial films to which Ashbery refers. In this case, since the passage on the previous page was undated and much space remained at the bottom of the page, I've treated this passage as its own, untitled chapter and maintained Ashbery's section break (not his page break), as I do several times throughout the poem.

133: "*He preferred the poetry of Charlotte Mew to that of Nathalia Crane,*"

Charlotte Mew (1869–1928) was an English poet, known for her poem "The Farmer's Bride." Nathalia Crane (1913–1998) was an American novelist and poet who published *The Janitor's Boy*, her first poetry collection, when she was just eleven.

134: "*The sky was dark as coagulated blood. / 'Hallelujah! They must think I'm daft / not to notice what's going on behind. / Here, I think I'll fake a snooze, and then ...'*"

I initially corrected this strange spelling of "Hallelujah," but then reverted it to Ashbery's original spelling, thinking it could perhaps be intentional, indicating a regional accent. Rosanne Wasserman pointed me to a 1928 recording by Harry McClintock of the popular folk song "Hallelujah! I'm a Bum," in which the word is indeed pronounced this way, with an additional "ul" lilting in the middle of the word.¹⁹

135: "*In a cellar somewhere in Paris the scratchy sounds / of the TSF had made their point, though.*"

TSF is an acronym for *Télécoms Sans Frontières*, a French nongovernmental organization providing emergency communications during times of crisis.

135: "*Kane was lost in the Métro, / somewhere between Plaisance and Pernety.*"

This phrase begins a page that Ashbery originally labeled "KRP 9 no break." In subsequent drafts, the "9" is crossed out and replaced with a "10," and the "10" is crossed out and replaced with an "11."²⁰ Although Ashbery wrote "no

19. Rosanne Wasserman, conversation with ES, Dec. 19, 2019.

20. See fig. 9.

break,” it seems that a natural break occurs between the last line of the previous page (“Soon it would be time to break out the champagne again.”) and the line that begins page 11 (“Kane was lost in the Métro”). Because the pagination is confused, I have inserted a stanza break here.

Ashbery cut a version of these lines a few pages earlier, from the end of “The President’s Dream.” After “Can we take their irrelevance seriously?”²¹ Ashbery initially wrote “Gaps in the Metro—Plaisance and Pernety. Women who smoke / and haunt the *fortifs*.”

135: “*They puzzled over a chart / thought to be of importance.*”

The last line of this section (“And then said nothing more.”) originally followed this line, but Ashbery moved it to the end of the section in a subsequent draft.²²

136: “*The moon doth shine as bright as day,*”

This is a line from the eighteenth-century nursery rhyme “Girls and Boys Come Out to Play”:

Girls and boys, come out to play,
The moon doth shine as bright as day;
Leave your supper, and leave your sleep,
And come with your playfellows into the street.
Come with a whoop, come with a call,
Come with a good will or not at all.
Up the ladder and down the wall,
A halfpenny roll will serve us all.
You find milk, and I’ll find flour,
And we’ll have a pudding in half an hour.²³

21. *Parallel Movement of the Hands*, 133.

22. See fig. 9.

23. J. O. Halliwell-Phillipps, *The Nursery Rhymes of England: Collected Chiefly from Oral Tradition*. J. R. Smith, 1846, 203.

Chapter Seven (136)

This is actually the eighth chapter title in the poem, not the seventh.

136: “*Mme. Delaunay brought out the redingote she’d knitted before the war and placed it sideways on a chair, it caught the sun’s declining rays.*”

Here Ashbery is referring to the Russian-born Parisian painter Sonia Delaunay, a figure associated with the Orphism movement. Delaunay was also a textile and costume designer, which explains the description of a gorgeous and impossible garment that follows.

The Mist Rolls in from the Sea (137)

137–38: “*Tin lizzies were slamming around the neat suburban streets in the Harold Lloyd movie, past lawns and houses that looked newer than 1923.*”

Harold Lloyd was an American silent-film-era comedic actor and stuntman. The film referred to here is likely the comedic romance *Safety Last* (1923), with its iconic “human fly” scene of Lloyd hanging from the hands of a skyscraper’s large exterior clock.

Dog and Pony Show (139)

Ashbery wrote “begin here?” in the margin next to the title of this short, undated chapter.

A Lost Dog (140)

In the original typescript and subsequent photocopies, this section, written June 1–2, 2002, appears on its own page after a page containing three sections: “The Mist Rolls in from the Sea” (May 29, 2002), “Dog Overboard!” (June 3, 2002), and the three-sentence “Dog and Pony Show” (undated). Ashbery’s dates indicate that he wrote “A Lost Dog” between “The Mist Rolls in from the Sea” and “Dog Overboard!” and that he returned to the previous page the following day to fill in the space he’d left blank underneath the earlier passage.

The text of the epigraph, from French Calvinist poet and historical writer Théodore-Agrippa d’Aubigné’s autobiography, *His Life, to His Children*, has been corrected to match the original passage. Ashbery indicated his edition of the book and the page number with a note in the margin, “(Pléiade 406).”²⁴ In his 1989 translation of Aubigné’s text, John Nothnagle renders this passage as

Dominge, having fulfilled his vow, went to Agen, where he found his master playing handball with Laverdin. They stopped their game to question him. He spoke of the action [at Castel-Jaloux] with praise for his captain, not as extravagant as that of Bacoue, but more judicious, and thereby completely lost the friendship of his master as well as compensation for thirty-eight harquebus wounds that he had suffered. Note what the great men of this world turn their backs to, even the best of them.²⁵

140: “‘He hides his face to become an evil spirit,’ she explained. ‘The medicine gourd is my sister Betty’s, and the axe is the sign of Skip, the thunder god.’ // As the witch doctor danced, he began to chant and wail. His voice rose to a hideous shriek as he hopped about. ‘That caterwaulin’ alone could scare the wits out o’ any critter,’ Rinty reflected.”

These quotes come from a passage in *Tom Swift and His Repelatron Skyway*. Ashbery indicated this source with the novel’s title and the page number “(73)”

24. Théodore-Agrippa d’Aubigné, *Oeuvres*, ed. Henry Weber. Bibliothèque de la Pléiade. Paris, 1969.

25. Théodore-Agrippa d’Aubigné, *His Life, to His Children* = *Sa vie à ses enfants*, trans. John Nothnagle. University of Nebraska Press, 1989, 38–39.

alongside the date of the entry. Here, Ashbery has substituted “My sister Betty’s” and “Skip” for the original text’s “Uoshu’s” and “Sho-sho-go,” respectively.

141: “They walked rapidly behind the bound, who kept his nose to the ground, with ears flapping. He stopped beside the steps of a small trailer. It was weirdly painted in psychedelic colors.”

Ashbery notes that this passage is taken from page 107 of the Hardy Boys novel, *Danger on Vampire Trail*.

My Own Best Customer (141)

The page on which this passage begins is one of the most mysterious in the typescripts. The original typescript page has a few handwritten changes, and subsequent photocopies of this page (of which there are three in the original manuscript folder) accumulated more changes and corrections, not all of which were carried over from draft to draft. The page was photocopied at least once *before* it was finished, leaving a half-completed copy under which Ashbery, five months later, began the entry starting “Are you trying to stop us?”²⁶ The timing of this sequencing error corresponds with Ashbery’s return from a long trip to France and the UK for the celebration of his seventy-fifth birthday, during which time he did not work on *The Kane Richmond Project*. This passage was photocopied and relocated to its proper place in the typescripts by Kermani when he compiled the final copy.

On what appears to be the first photocopy of this passage (made from the completed original typescript page), Ashbery wrote and circled the chapter title “My own best customer” at the top. In subsequent drafts, on which additional handwritten changes were made, this insertion was not carried over. My first impulse was to not include this title, which does not appear on the final copy,

26. *Parallel Movement of the Hands*, 164.

but after researching the source of the phrase as it relates to Ashbery's life, I have decided to reinsert it.

In her article "This Comic Version of Myself," Karin Roffman mentions this phrase in relation to some of the humorous language in *A Nest of Nimmies* (1969):

For Ashbery, it was his mother and her female friends who provided the material for some of the funniest lines in the novel. . . . Underlying these comments was a vision of the world that was tragic but accepting, but Ashbery learned to put his own ironic, witty spin on the kinds of things his mother and her friends said. For example, a Sodus friend, who owned an antique store, said one day to Ashbery: "I am my own best customer." The phrase was said straightforwardly, but Ashbery loved how it pithily explained her lack of business success, for her store was failing.²⁷

The phrase "my own best customer" ends the first stanza of "Blueprints and Others," from Ashbery's collection *Breezeway* (2015): "The man across the street seems happy, / or pleased. Sometimes a porter evades the grounds. / After you play a lot with the military / you are my own best customer."²⁸

144: "The Big Clock, The Big Knife, *and* The Big Sleep *were all playing, next to* The Big House. *Still, if you'd rather I'd . . .*"

All initial letters in these four film titles are capitalized here, which was not consistent in the typescripts, and in italics, since Ashbery italicized film titles in later sections (e.g., *Think Fast, Mr. Moto*).

Ashbery owned a number of film guides and reference books on film. In a 2016 interview with scholar David Spittle about the influence of film and surrealism on his poetry, Ashbery responded, "I can't think of other books on film that have been important, except for the Hallowell guides and Leonard Maltin's

27. Karin Roffman, "This Comic Version of Myself: Humor and Autobiography in John Ashbery's Poetry and Prose," *Humor in Modern American Poetry*, ed. Rachel Trousdale. Bloomsbury Academic, 2018, 204.

28. John Ashbery, *Breezeway*. Ecco/HarperCollins, 2015, 64.

guides for catching films on TV. That book was useful when I wrote a poem, ‘They Knew What They Wanted,’ where every line was a movie title that began with ‘they.’”²⁹ Ashbery may have gleaned this list of films from a similar guide.

145: “All right, John. John are you home? *I am a pack rat.*”

The phrase “I am a pack rat” also occurs in “A Long and Sleepy History.”³⁰

145: “*Both had a long and sleepy history. One came from where it had been aroused.*”

Ashbery titled a later chapter “A Long and Sleepy History.”

Dog of the Limberlost (147)

A Girl of the Limberlost is a 1909 novel by American naturalist and author Gene Stratton-Porter, with several film adaptations.

148: “*Cheese—at the moment? Nutcases. / The night when you saw Screwy Squirrel / When I went over to him I said I’m sorry. / We respect these. // William Biggs died some years ago.*”

Ashbery originally ended this section with the line above these, “Nothing much comes to cheat us / of this vapor.” Three days later, he fed a photocopy of the original typescript page through his typewriter, adding this last passage, which does not appear on subsequent drafts with Ashbery’s corrections and changes. Thinking this omission was perhaps an error, and since the passage was not crossed out, I’ve included it.

29. John Ashbery and David Spittle, “An Interview with John Ashbery,” *The Midnight Mollusc* (blog), Sep. 15, 2016, themidnightmollusc.blogspot.com/2016/09/an-interview-with-john-ashbery.html.

30. *Parallel Movement of the Hands*, 150.

Sex on the River (148)

Ashbery heavily edited this poem, cutting and rearranging stanzas, and combining, inverting, and excising lines on the undated typescript page. Many of the original lines were taken from *Danger on Vampire Trail*, though none survived in the revision. He indicates this with a note, “VT 1, 2,” in the right margin.³¹ Ashbery’s copy of the novel originally belonged to a boy named Richie Holland, who wrote his name (in very nice cursive) in red ink on the title page. One could see why Ashbery would have been attracted to this book from the campy synopsis in its front matter:

An assignment from their famous detective father to track down a ring of credit-card counterfeiters takes Frank and Joe Hardy on an exciting camping trip to the Rocky Mountains.

The cross-country trek with their pals Chet Morton and Biff Hooper is jinxed from the very first day. Trouble with their tent trailer is compounded by vicious harassments all the way to Colorado. Here their enemies strike at Biff’s loveable bloodhound in another attempt to scare the teen-age detectives off the case. In Denver a skein of clues confuses the Hardys. How many gangs are out to get them—one, two, or three?

Strange happenings on a nearly impassable mountain lure Frank, Joe, Chet, and Biff to almost certain death before they discover the sinister reason for the danger on Vampire Trail.

Ashbery repeated some of the language in “Sex on the River” in section 18 of “21 Variations on My Room” (see Appendix D, entry for p. 105, “*I don’t know—spring came and went so fast this year . . .*”).

I have added the attribution of the epigraph, James Tate’s “The Wheelchair Butterfly,” from his 1970 collection *The Oblivion Ha-Ha*. For the entire time I worked for him, Ashbery had a stack of Tate’s books on the antique daybed in

31. See fig. 10.

the office in NYC where he wrote. He also kept a grouping of Tate's books near his workspace in his Hudson study.³²

A Long and Sleepy History (150)

After this section, Ashbery, for the most part, stopped indicating at the top of pages whether there is a section, paragraph, or stanza break, so in many cases from this place forward, I've had to use contextual information to make an educated guess.

I have added information such as Stein's and Apollinaire's first names and the title of Apollinaire's poem, to the two epigraphs; the Apollinaire epigraph also begins "21 Variations on My Room."

150: *"Stepping into the little skiff one is quickly carried away to a land of impatient dreams."*

Ashbery spelled the penultimate word in this sentence "ompaitnet," later indicating with a handwritten note that even he was unclear as to whether he meant to write "impatient" or "omnipotent." Both have their charms. At first, I leaned toward the latter, which is easier to misspell and carries the first letter of the original word. But "impatient" is in fact closer to the misspelled word and contains the same number of letters. In a preceding sentence, the river that will presumably carry one to this land of dreams is "impertinent," which, being a near homophone, would nicely foreshadow "impatient." The following sentence, "No, it's this way we wanted to come," struck me as particularly impatient, too.

150: *"I am a pack rat,' one said, as though to reassure himself."*

The phrase "I am a pack rat" occurs first in "My Own Best Customer."³³

155: *"Meanwhile, the attention of the Americans was caught by a herd of lyre-borne Ankole cattle grazing on the grassy slopes. // 'Right smart-lookin' beeves,' Chow commented."*

32. David Kermani, email to ES, Apr. 29, 2020.

33. *Parallel Movement of the Hands*, 145.

Ashbery indicated in a typed parenthetical, “(repelatron 58),” that this quotation is sourced from *Tom Swift and His Repelatron Skyway*.

The Quitter (156)

156: “*What amazes me is the lack / of a clue or anything resembling one, or / even an inkling such things can exist.*”

This phrase recalls a line in the first stanza of Ashbery’s poem “Breezeway,” from his eponymous 2015 collection: “Alas it wasn’t my call. / I didn’t have a call or anything resembling one.”³⁴

Modern Sketch (158)

158: “*Sleep a weak hour*”

In the original typescript pages, passages of poetry are often indented further than prose sections. There is a typed “Slee” in the left margin (crossed out with a typewritten “XXXX”), suggesting Ashbery may have originally intended to begin this passage as prose.

158: “*air of Reynaldo Hahn: / ‘C’est l’heure . . . l’heure exquisite’—sbo’!*”

Reynaldo Hahn (1874–1947), born in Venezuela, was a French composer and singer beloved by many writers, including Mallarmé and Proust. “L’Heure exquisite” (“The Exquisite Hour”) is one of his most famous songs, its lyrics a poem by Paul Verlaine. Ashbery’s collage *L’Heure Exquise* (1977) depicts a woman with a parrot perched on her knee. In the background are silhouettes of giant saguaro cacti in a lightning storm.

159: “*It is exactly where you left it. / I want out.*”

There is no indication as to whether there should be a stanza break between

34. Ashbery, *Breezeway*, 14.

these two lines, which span a page break in the typescript. I chose not to insert a stanza break, as it seemed more in keeping with the patterning of lines per stanza (the following stanza is also seven lines, and there are no other three-line stanzas in this chapter).

159–60: “*If so, why bother / sober ascending / Apple Annie*”

Apple Annie is a character played by actress May Robson in the film comedy *Lady for a Day* (1933). Annie, a loud-mouthed, drunken apple seller on the streets of New York City, must disguise herself as a lady of society in order to fool her own daughter, who has been residing in a Spanish convent since Annie gave her up at birth and is coming to visit Annie on the occasion of her recent engagement. Annie has been corresponding with her daughter across the ocean under the false name Mrs. E. Worthington Manville, and maintains appearances for the reunion with help from her disreputable acquaintances.

To Meet with My Father (161)

This short chapter, written on July 20 and 21, 2002, occurs at the top of its own, unnumbered page. Since Ashbery wrote it only several days after the chapter ending on the previous page, I have inserted a chapter break, but not a page break, between this and the previous section. Given that there is extra space at the bottom of the page, I have also inserted a chapter break between “To Meet with My Father” and the entry that begins on the next typescript page.

161: “*Bud looked up in amazement.*”

Ashbery indicated with a parenthetical, “(Swift Rocket, 149),” inserted in the middle of the paragraph, that this sentence is taken from *Tom Swift and His Rocket Ship*.

[untitled] *"I liked the fourth declension—all those 'u's."* (162)

I have placed a section break between this untitled passage and the previous chapter, "To Meet with My Father," because twenty-two days elapsed between the writing of these sections, and Ashbery did not indicate whether this new passage is part of the previous section or the beginning of its own. It was my hope that this choice might leave both possibilities open to the reader.

Miss Otis Regrets Land's End (163)

The title references a song for which Ashbery had a particular fondness. "Miss Otis Regrets" (1934) by Cole Porter was performed and revived by many singers. The song, a parody of the vigilante murder ballad, describes an upper-class woman who shoots a lover who has done her wrong. She is eventually caught, and, as she awaits her hanging, is forced to politely decline her lunch plans via a butler or doorman, who reports: "Miss Otis regrets she's unable to lunch today."

In an email to Mark Ford, dated January 23, 2012, Ashbery wrote:

I'll also play you selections from my new CD of thirties British camp icon Douglas Byng, such as Songs of the Shires ("Nana of the Manor" is my favorite), and "Boadicea": "I'm just a keen old British queen who rules the countryside, / I never disregard me 'igh vocation!" It includes his rendition of Cole Porter's tragicomic "Miss Otis Regrets." I had 78 rpm's of them when I was at Harvard. Oh well, here's an unrequested snatch from the former, sung as if by "Old Nana, the keeper of the manor, In and out the lodge all day": "Now they say the manor's haunted, full of ghosts with eyes that shine. Well, I slept up there one Christmas—lots of guests, and lots of wine (giggle). But all I heard was gentle taps, on every door but mine! In and out the lodge all day!" Surely there must be an influence on "Are You Being Served?" of which we

just watched a prime example wherein Mrs. Slocombe takes to the bottle (an atomizer full of gin, for one) and imagines herself madly in love with Mr. Humphries.³⁵

Ford and Ashbery continued a New York School epistolary tradition by signing and addressing their letters to each other with humorous names, and “Miss Otis” may well have been one of them. The exchange from which the above was taken produced the *noms de plume* “Peggy Popular,” “Nana of the Manor,” and “Boadicea,” to name just a few.³⁶

Sometimes, when Ashbery mentioned a song in an email he was dictating that was unfamiliar to me, he would invite me to play it on the stereo or pull it up on the laptop. On special occasions, he would sing along gloriously.

164: “*What the, she’s happy. And so arse we—just don’t know it yet.*”

The typescript originally reads “And so are we,” but Ashbery (thankfully) changed “are” to “arse.”

[untitled] “*Are you trying to stop us?*” (164)

I have treated this passage as its own chapter so as not to make assumptions regarding Ashbery’s structural wishes. On November 9, Ashbery began this passage underneath an old, partial photocopy of what became “My Own Best Customer” (see entry for p. 141, “My Own Best Customer”). Only entries from June 4–5, 2002, were present when this photocopy was made, before the June 10 entry was added. When Kermani assembled a final copy of the manuscript, he photocopied this page and placed it back in chronological order, indicating clearly that the text on the top of the page and the added text on the

35. John Ashbery, correspondence with Mark Ford, 2012. Courtesy of the Estate of John Ashbery.

36. A selection of Ashbery’s correspondence with Ford from 1986–2017, along with a list of these names, was edited by Ford and published in *PN Review* 44.3 (Jan./Feb. 2018).

bottom from November 9 and 13, 2002, belong to separate sections. The text from November 13 spills over onto another typescript page. This discrepancy in the typescripts makes some sense, given that it corresponds with Ashbery's trip to France and the UK in 2002, and marks a return to the poem after a nearly three-month hiatus. "21 Variations on My Room" was written during this break. This is a prime example of a place where Kermani's careful notetaking was essential to reordering the poem.

164: "*New factors entered in.*"

See the seventh line of section 16 in "21 Variations on My Room," "New factors have entered the equation."³⁷

164–65: "*Mostly it's the getting back, a chore like a sea wind and gulls coming to meet you, you'd hoped for more than this, or more comfort at least, but it's always a 'gray area.'*"

The original typescript reads "Mistly it's the *getting back*"; there is a chance Ashbery intended this word, as it is in keeping with the atmosphere of the "sea wind," but given that "i" and "o" are in such close proximity on the keyboard, and after conferring with Kermani and several other trusted colleagues, I have supplied the likelier "mostly."

165: "*Oh, we're not floating at all. We're partial home buyers and as such spend a lot of time on the floor, just lolling. We sat on it and jerked it. In the fullness of time a foolish man did a good thing.*"

The section beginning with this passage, written November 13, 2002, begins on its own page, but is connected to the previous three sentences after Ashbery's November 9 entry on the previous page, which Ashbery erroneously typed underneath a copy of entries from June 4 and June 5 (see entry for p. 141, "My Own Best Customer"). Kermani made note of this connection on a photocopy of the original typescript, observing that there is mention of a "floor" in the entry on the previous typescript page ("We can go back to being in the order

37. *Parallel Movement of the Hands*, 104.

of each other's beds, and the rugs beside them, and the chairs pushed against the bed to make a kind of steps leading to the floor—"), which links the entries narratively. There is no indication of whether Ashbery wanted a paragraph break between this and the previous entry, but I have inserted one, as it seems appropriate.

The phrases "Oh, we're not floating at all" and "We sat on it and jerked it" appear earlier in the brief, lineated passage of "My Own Best Customer."³⁸ The phrase "In the fullness of time a foolish man did a good thing" appears toward the end of "A Lost Dog."³⁹

165: "Think Fast, Mr. Moto."

The first in an eight-film series of Mr. Moto detective films (1937–1939) starring Peter Lorre and directed by Norman Foster.

165: "*The prancing of tires on a frozen roadway, expecting to promise what we knew no random event could deliver.*"

Ashbery wrote "even" where I have supplied "event." "Even" is, perhaps, an archaic usage for "evening," but far likelier is that he accidentally omitted the "t."

[untitled] "*Nothing if found convenient.*" (166)

Ashbery indicated that he wanted a "break" here. This and the next page are the only instances in the typescript's final pages where he specifies breaks. He types "KRP break 13" at the top of the page, later crossing out the "13" and replacing it with a "22." Though it's unclear as to whether he meant paragraph break or section break, I have inserted a section break, since there is a large amount of space at the bottom of the previous page/section.

166: "*That boy who looked adoringly at you twenty, thirty or forty years ago, with the gentle Kane Richmond eyes and licorice breath*"

38. *Parallel Movement of the Hands*, 143.

39. *Ibid.*, 141.

In Ashbery's printed source material, Grant Tracey begins his article on *Spy Smasher*, "In chapter three, 'Iron Coffin,' Witney cues us to expect the unexpected. He constructs a typical sequence: Spy Smasher busts into a warehouse; a licorice trail of gun powder blazes."⁴⁰

There You Go! (167)

Two chapters before, the phrase "there you go" appears as the second sentence of "[untitled] Are you trying to stop us?"⁴¹

167: "*All about you would be milling and streaming, rivers of Roman striped ribbons from cartwheel hats that say, 'No, excuse us! Please, you be the guest.'*"

Ashbery omitted end quotation marks, so I have made an educated guess as to where to place them.

167: "*'Shucks, I was, but I guess I'll stay now, or maybe I'll go, it's kind of getting to be time . . .'*"

I added the open quotation marks to this bit of dialogue.

169: "*Surely this is the reason we are all drawn to art, and why art loves us, and if anything were any different, that is more or less perfect, it wouldn't have the same hold over us.*"

Given the position of letters on the keyboard and the context of this sentence, I interpreted the word that Ashbery typed as "efe" as "were."

[untitled] "Why wait for another day to cross itself?" (170)

Ashbery began this section on its own page (erroneously labeled "KRP 15") on

40. Grant Tracey, "Cliffhangers: Spy Smasher," *Images*, 4, www.imagesjournal.com/issue04/infocus/spysmasher.htm.

41. *Parallel Movement of the Hands*, 164.

November 24, 2002; the page also contains entries from November 25 and December 2 (the latter of which spills over onto the next page). On November 25, the ribbon ran out of ink, resulting in a very faint area of text (“They never bother to check those things. . . . Rejoice in the thousands of cousins that support you, and after that never say the dark cart isn’t coming to get you.”). The ribbon was replaced in the middle of the entry. This page was then retyped on a computer by either Kermani or (likelier) Marcella Durand, Ashbery’s assistant at the time, who mentioned “typ[ing] in The Kane Richmond Project” in a note she saved to the office laptop in NYC. The previous section, “There You Go!” ends in the middle of the previous page, and it is unclear whether or not this page is a continuation of that section. Here, I have inserted a section break and treated the text as a separate, untitled chapter.

171: *“It may happen then as it has in the past that the spider king will unhitch himself to plummet directly into our daily affairs as they seemed on the point of opening, creating themselves and us as a by-product?”*

Here the original text reads “ot hopenig,” so Ashbery may have intended either “of opening” or “of happening.”

172–73: *“The villains have Kane trapped in a barn and are starting to set fire to it. Then it’s all over, for this week at least. The feature is beginning and the music wells up very lively and somber; it’s a romance starring that lovely Greta Gynt. Pass me a mint, dear. I’m afraid my mascara is streaked. It must look awful in this rapid play of flashing lights and shadows. Heavens! It seems the projector is broken. We’ll have to wait in the dark. Only they’ve turned the lights up now. Somebody is going to make some kind of announcement.”*

This passage is full of interesting details. Though we have glimpsed him many times, Kane Richmond (the actor) is “introduced.” As readers and viewers, we are placed before a feature film in the movie theater, the site where one would have experienced these serials. We pass through a cliffhanger moment (the one relayed here is the ending scene from chapter 3 of *The Adventures of Rex and Rinty*) into the moving opening credits of a film starring Norwegian actress

Greta Gynt, perhaps *Mr. Emmanuel* (1944), which is indeed a romance with “lively and somber” music accompanying its opening credits. Finally, we are thrown into the abstract flashes of a mechanical failure. The projector has broken.

An Unspecified Amount (174)

Ashbery handwrote the first draft of this section, in part, along with what became “*très modéré*,” on two pages (legal pad, undated), and later typed it under the section “Arguably,” with no chapter title to separate it. On the first page of the handwritten draft, he titled the section “An Unspecified Amount,”⁴² which he did not carry over to the typescript. On the second page of the handwritten draft, he wrote “Fried Mackerel and Frozen Peas” in the margin,⁴³ which became the title of the chapter following “*très modéré*.” I have reinstated “An Unspecified Amount” in the interest of seriality and in case it was omitted in error.

Kermani noted on photocopies of the handwritten pages that this text becomes the December 4, 7, and 10, 2002, entries in the typescript, and that the original handwritten pages were missing. He found them on June 10, 2003, almost a month after he first assembled the final copy.

174: “*Someone must have been telling lies about John A.*”

This line echoes the opening of Franz Kafka’s *The Trial* (1925): “Someone must have been telling lies about Josef K.”

174: “*Even then he could survey the street through a species of panopticon he had rigged up, which he liked to say was better than television, since it was free and never required adjustment.*”

On several occasions while I was working for him, Ashbery enlisted my assistance in remembering the word “panopticon.”

42. See fig. 11.

43. See fig. 12.

174: “*One day a Fuller Brush man happened by,*”

A “Fuller Brush man” was a door-to-door salesman of personal and household products from the Fuller Brush Company. This occupation was dramatized in the comedic film *The Fuller Brush Man* (1948), starring Red Skelton and directed by S. Sylvan Simon. A Fuller Brush man also makes an appearance in Ashbery’s prose poem “Be Careful What You Wish For,” published in his collection *Breezeway* (2015): “Go back to sleep. And they did (writing in the grass). The Fuller Brush man (clean-jawed) stopped by. See you down there. Lemme know. Just because Scooby Doo thinks you should . . .”⁴⁴

très modéré (175)

175: “*be had just unwittingly opened new avenues in a conversation in a conversation that was fast becoming vexatious.*”

I did not correct the doubling of “in a conversation,” as Ashbery may have intended it to underline the exasperating nature of the conversation between the characters. The repetition also recalls Ashbery’s poem “A Sweet Disorder”: “It can’t have escaped your escaped your attention / that I would argue. / How was it supposed to look? / Do I wake or sleep?”⁴⁵

Fried Mackerel and Frozen Peas (176)

I have adhered to Ashbery’s unique formatting in the verse portion of this chapter as much as possible, treating the last segment of this section as “broken prose,” wherein I follow paragraph breaks strictly, but line breaks may differ from the original, in order to prioritize Ashbery’s unique, mid-sentence breaks within long lines. The text of this section reaches the bottom of the typescript page.

44. Ashbery, *Breezeway*, 104.

45. *Ibid.*, 105.

174: “*One day a Fuller Brush man happened by,*”

A “Fuller Brush man” was a door-to-door salesman of personal and household products from the Fuller Brush Company. This occupation was dramatized in the comedic film *The Fuller Brush Man* (1948), starring Red Skelton and directed by S. Sylvan Simon. A Fuller Brush man also makes an appearance in Ashbery’s prose poem “Be Careful What You Wish For,” published in his collection *Breezeway* (2015): “Go back to sleep. And they did (writing in the grass). The Fuller Brush man (clean-jawed) stopped by. See you down there. Lemme know. Just because Scooby Doo thinks you should . . .”⁴⁴

très modéré (175)

175: “*be had just unwittingly opened new avenues in a conversation in a conversation that was fast becoming vexatious.*”

I did not correct the doubling of “in a conversation,” as Ashbery may have intended it to underline the exasperating nature of the conversation between the characters. The repetition also recalls Ashbery’s poem “A Sweet Disorder”: “It can’t have escaped your escaped your attention / that I would argue. / How was it supposed to look? / Do I wake or sleep?”⁴⁵

Fried Mackerel and Frozen Peas (176)

I have adhered to Ashbery’s unique formatting in the verse portion of this chapter as much as possible, treating the last segment of this section as “broken prose,” wherein I follow paragraph breaks strictly, but line breaks may differ from the original, in order to prioritize Ashbery’s unique, mid-sentence breaks within long lines. The text of this section reaches the bottom of the typescript page.

44. Ashbery, *Breezeway*, 104.

45. *Ibid.*, 105.

*[untitled] “The point is to find an
extra-sensual way to be without it.” (177)*

This final passage of *The Kane Richmond Project* begins on its own page but, as is typical in this portion of the typescript, Ashbery gave no indication as to whether or not there is a section break or paragraph break in between this and the previous section, or whether this entry is part of “Fried Mackerel and Frozen Peas” at all. So I have deferred to Ashbery’s sense of a false ending or cliffhanger at the end of “Fried Mackerel and Frozen Peas” on the previous typescript page. He writes, “There’s lots of new openings. And the air, the air is rife with possibilities. Just don’t tell anybody I told you about it. That would be the end, friend, the end.” Here I chose to take a formal cue from Ashbery’s content. Breaking the section allows for a second ending that is very much a “new opening.”