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Amy E. Elkins Date

Crafting Modernity:
Gender, Art-Making, and Literature's Materials of Resistance in the Extreme 20th Century

by

Amy E. Elkins
Doctor of Philosophy

English

_____
Dr. Walter Kalaidjian
Advisor

_____
Dr. Jennifer Wicke
Advisor

_____
Dr. Geraldine Higgins
Committee Member

_____
Dr. Dalia Judovitz
Committee Member

Accepted:

_____
Lisa A. Tedesco, Ph.D.
Dean of the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies

_____
Date

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An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies
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Abstract

Crafting Modernity: Gender, Art-Making, and Literature's Materials of Resistance in the Extreme 20th Century
By Amy E. Elkins

Crafting Modernity argues that craft materials and processes—from the specificities of assemblage and needlework media to the processes of developing photos and blending paint pigments—inform rhetorics of nonviolent resistance in recent literary history. Thinking across what Eric Hobsbawm calls the "extreme twentieth century," this dissertation historicizes art-making as it intersects with new technologies, literary experimentation, post-colonial identity, human rights, and feminist critique. In paying sustained attention to the mediums and processes of making that underpin these material and cultural formations, this project recasts the critical connection between the aesthetic and political by interrogating new interarts archives of particular significance to women writers and queer activists. In addition to original archival discoveries, including authors' own art works and craft projects, *Crafting Modernity* draws upon art history, political philosophy, visual theory, and studies of global material culture in chapters that focus on the works of Virginia Woolf, H.D. (Hilda Doolittle), Mina Loy, Lorna Goodison, and Zadie Smith.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 2.2 *Back of Trois Arbres needlepoint by H.D.*, date unknown
Reproduced courtesy of the Schaffner Family Foundation

Fig. 2.3 *Fruit Grove needlepoint by H.D.*, date unknown, 17" x 37 ½"
Reproduced courtesy of the Schaffner Family Foundation

Fig. 2.4 *Trois Arbres needlepoint by H.D.*, date unknown, 12 ½" x 16"
Reproduced courtesy of the Schaffner Family Foundation

Fig. 2.5 *The Lady and the Unicorn Tapestry (Sight)*, ca. 1500.
Musée de Cluny, Paris (Image in public domain)

Fig. 2.6 *Sanctus Hubertus needlepoint by H.D.*, date unknown, 15"x22"
Reproduced courtesy of the Schaffner Family Foundation

Fig. 2.7 H.D.'s collection and note: "Wool left from St. Hubertus and Perdita's Bag," date unknown.
Reproduced courtesy of the Schaffner Family Foundation

Fig. 2.8 *Pastoral needlepoint by H.D.*, 21"x50," date unknown
Reproduced courtesy of the Schaffner Family Foundation

Fig. 2.9 detail from *Pastoral needlepoint by H.D.*, 21"x50," date unknown
Reproduced courtesy of the Schaffner Family Foundation

Fig. 3.1 *Househunting assemblage by Mina Loy*
Reproduced courtesy of Carolyn Burke

Fig. 3.2 *Communal Cot assemblage by Mina Loy*
Reproduced courtesy of Marianne Elrick-Manley

Fig. 3.3 Detail from *Communal Cot assemblage by Mina Loy*
Reproduced courtesy of Marianne Elrick-Manley

Fig. 3.4 *Christ on a Clothesline assemblage by Mina Loy*
From the private collection of Roz Jacobs

Fig. 3.5 *Bums Praying assemblage by Mina Loy, photographed by Berenice Abbott*
Ryerson Image Centre Archives, used with permission of Getty Images

Fig. 3.6 **Fig. 3.6** *No Parking assemblage by Mina Loy from the Bodley Gallery Exhibition Announcement*, 1959
Beinecke Library Collections, Za Van Vechten, Photograph by Carl Van Vechten
Used by permission of The Van Vechten Trust

Fig. 3.7 *Bait to the Stars (bottom)* and *Sensorium (top) assemblages by Mina Loy, photographed by Berenice Abbott*
Ryerson Image Centre Archives, used with permission of Getty Images

Fig. 3.8 *Erotic Garbage assemblage by Mina Loy, photographed by Berenice Abbott*
Ryerson Image Centre Archives, used with permission of Getty Images

Fig. 3.9 *Luminous Busts assemblage by Mina Loy, photographed by Carolyn Burke*
Reproduced courtesy of Carolyn Burke

Fig. 3.10 *Man Ray photograph of Mina Loy*
© Man Ray Trust / Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY / ADAGP, Paris 2015

Fig. 4.1 *Teasing a Butterfly*, Mina Loy. 1902 Oil on canvas, 33 x 45 inches. Private Collection; reproduced courtesy of Francis M. Naumann Fine Art, New York.

Fig. 4.2 Lorna Goodison Book Cover for *I Am Becoming My Mother*
Reproduced courtesy of Lorna Goodison

Fig. 4.3 *Wolverine Press edition of Lorna Goodison's poem*, "To Make Various Sorts of Black"
Reproduced courtesy of Fritz Swanson, Wolverine Press

Fig. 4.4 *Wolverine Press edition of Lorna Goodison's poem*, "To Make Various Sorts of Black"
Reproduced courtesy of Fritz Swanson, Wolverine Press

Fig. 4.5 Illustration from *Tamarind Season* by Lorna Goodison
Reproduced courtesy of Lorna Goodison

Fig. 4.6 Book cover of Lorna Goodison's *Selected Poems*
Reproduced courtesy of Lorna Goodison

Fig. 4.7 University of Toronto, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library. Original watercolor by Lorna Goodison (MS Coll 1000342, Box 23). Used with permission from Lorna Goodison

Fig. 4.8 Illustration by Lorna Goodison from *On Holy Week* by Mervyn Morris
Reproduced courtesy of Lorna Goodison

Fig. 4.9 Original ink drawing by Lorna Goodison for *Goldengrove*
University of Toronto, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library (MS Coll 00524, Box 9),
Reproduced courtesy of Lorna Goodison

Fig. 4.10 *Turn Thanks* book cover illustration by Lorna Goodison
Reproduced courtesy of Lorna Goodison

Fig. 5.1 *Kabe Wilson's 4'x13' version of Of One Woman or So*
Reproduced courtesy of Kabe Wilson

Fig. 5.2 *Penguin cover for Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own and Kabe Wilson's assemblage cover for Of One Woman or So*
Reproduced courtesy of Kabe Wilson

Fig. 5.3 Detail from handmade version of *Kabe Wilson's Of One Woman or So*
Reproduced courtesy of Kabe Wilson

Fig. 5.4 *Kabe Wilson's as Virginia Woolf*
Reproduced courtesy of Kabe Wilson

Fig. 5.5 *Kabe Wilson's Dreadlock Hoax portraits*
Reproduced courtesy of Kabe Wilson

Fig. 5.6 Screenshot of Penguin U.S.A. website

INTRODUCTION: **Crafting Modernity**

"The thing is made that endures."
Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*

"But the craft aspect of art making—or, more simply put, of thing making—does seem (doesn't it?) to be an exceptionally fruitful place for exploring those middle ranges of agency."
Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *"Making Things, Practicing Emptiness"*

"The reality of art is the reality of imagination."
Jeanette Winterson, *"Art Objects"*

The lines that open this introduction—by the modernist writer Virginia Woolf, the architect of queer theory, Eve Sedgwick, and contemporary writer, critic, and art collector, Jeanette Winterson—emphasize the vexed, but enduring, relationship between art and the mind. In particular, they call attention to the ways in which invisible worlds become material phenomena, be it Woolf's "thing" that survives, Sedgwick's notion that art-making is a form of radical agency, or Winterson's provocation that the conceptual worlds of art, writ large, ultimately and fundamentally constitute our lived reality. Tracking along this border between the invisible and visible, the making and the made, *Crafting Modernity* considers art's world-making capabilities by ranging widely across works by twentieth-century and contemporary writings by artists, novelists, poets, and theorists to show how craft became a mode of nonviolent resistance in recent literary history.

This project began with two questions in mind:

- ☞ How do writers engage with the history of craft in the twentieth century?
- ☞ What happens to the study of visual art and visual culture in literary studies when we hold a microscope to particular mediums and processes of art-making?

These questions emerged in ways I will discuss further, but they also grew into new questions:

- How might craft, as a practice but also as a conceptual framework, reveal new modes of making in modernity?
- In what ways does the history of art enable writers to engage with issues of trauma, agency, and activism across the verbal and visual?
- Why might that matter?

In bridging my fascination with modes of making alongside literary craft, I began to see these questions shuttle between two primary ideas, what I now see as the warp and weft of this dissertation's primary theoretical concerns:

- How does gender factor into the history of so-called women's work across artistic media, from the page to the canvas?
- How do writers use craft as a mode of nonviolent resistance?

Virginia Woolf's notion that "a thing is made that endures" underscores the intrinsic value in reading the made thing alongside the written word. As I hope this tapestry of questions makes clear, this dissertation seeks to integrate technical and material consideration of craft processes and art media into the toolbox of literary analysis.

This study emerges from an ongoing sense that interdisciplinary scholarship in literary studies gives short shrift to the art processes and media that form an important, subterranean narrative within the history of twentieth-century and contemporary literature. Scholars privilege artistic metaphors, stylistic comparisons, and treatment of artworks as finished products. These approaches have brought a range of valuable critical insights to light but largely neglect the specific materials and operations of art. We might begin by thinking about how all art is multimedia: even a simple painting uses canvas, supported by wood and staples, perhaps primed, then covered using various

layers and techniques with a specific kind of pigment, paints that are applied with a paint brush with either natural or synthetic bristles or using an object such as a spatula. Even the paint's container or the type of palette used can shape the work of art along a series of specific media choices and interactions. These layers of process and materiality supply rhetorics of agency in literature, shaping authors' engagement with visual culture in striking and unexpected ways.

Craft culture, from feminist collectives to socialist utopias, has its roots firmly in the nineteenth century. During this period, William Morris and his followers shed light on craft's persistent value in the wake of the Industrial Revolution. Even more, making things became a mode of political activism, a thread connecting subcultures across time and place. These Victorian traditions span the twentieth-century up to contemporary craftivist projects such as AIDS quilts and yarn bombing, an assemblage of craft cultures that encompass various critical contexts having to do with trauma, war, gender, capitalism, race, and colonialism. Therefore, my project aims to bring critical attention—vis-à-vis craft—to the nuances of political, social, and psychological engagement circulating in texts.

Craft as Criticism

From the new materialist studies to a surge of interest in object-oriented ontology, critics are discovering compelling new ways to revel in craft metaphors as philosophical theory. Ian Bogost's *Alien Phenomenology, or What it's Like to be a Thing* draws a whole section from the concept of carpentry—what we might understand as both the making of things and things as made in the context of object-oriented ontologies. These recent

critical turns emphasize the agency of objects and technologies, thinking alongside post-humanists and ecocritics about the critical animation of nonhuman life as a fundamental precursor to philosophy in the 21st century.[1] These questions coincide with an increasingly material assessment of literature from 1850 to present. Critics such as Susan Howe, Charles Bornstein, and Jerome McGann advance readings of literature's material life on the page—its bibliographic codes. These bibliographic codes join literature's linguistic codes in ways that have productively called attention to the publication and circulation of literary texts as material entities. Furthermore, Bill Brown, Victoria Rosner, and Douglas Mao have challenged readings of the modernist aesthetic as purely intellectual, interpretive, and abstracted. The objects, furnishings, and art works circulating in early-twentieth century culture, and consequently in literary texts, reveal profound insights into the "architecture of modern life," to use Rosner's phrase. Drawing attention to "sensuous encounter[s] with the physical world," these perspectives underscore how the imaginative spaces of literature unfold in everyday, ordinary spaces (Brown 17). While these contributions have been invaluable to material and visual culture studies in literature, they largely attend to objects as already-made, as produced things already in circulation. However, much insight is to be gained by attending to processes of making, especially in relation to the art objects that surface in literary texts

[1] The technologies of art and visual perception have similarly entered literary studies through work by Fredrich Kittler, Sara Danius, Mark Goble, and David Trotter. While these studies have advanced sophisticated paradigms about the role of media technologies in social and political life, they verge at times on the deterministic. Such is especially the case with Kittler's famous techno-deterministic dictum that "media determine our situation" (xxxix). Indeed, media (especially writ large, with technology) can change the shape of things, but such theories hinge dangerously on assertions that strip agency from how we interact with media. As a result, this project is careful to reincorporate agency as a central component of artistic practice, looking at how authors engage with a medium to interact creatively and purposefully with their cultural environments. In this sense, the medium is not deterministic of one's situation. Rather, these materialities are resources, available to be used strategically and expressionistically—an expression of making that is as, if not more, important than the finished, exhibited, consumed product.

and political commentary. Art becomes embedded in processes of creativity and the craft of writing itself; or, put the other way, literary craft as a practice directs our attention to art-making and its political potential.

Visual theorists from Walter Benjamin to Jacques Rancière have pushed for greater nuance in scholarly discussions of the visual.[2] Largely due to the Arts and Crafts Movement, the early-twentieth century encountered handiwork alongside its industrial counterparts; as a result, the visual is embedded in a complex web of social, cultural, and economic factors and forms a deeply complicated historical network. Fredric Jameson argues that literary studies should recharge conversations about aesthetics with "artistic histories" because they invent and support new and important conversations about canonicity, social networks, and narrative (383). This radical juxtaposition of art as a historical, material practice and literary texts encourages "peculiar conjunctures and reversals, [which] help us break out of the old problems of irony or point of view, of style indirect libre or thematic imagery, and propose new stories to be told, new kinds of histories to be constructed" (Jameson 383). My dissertation seeks to redress the "old problems" of interarts scholarship in literary studies by shifting the emphasis away from a product-oriented interpretive mode to a process-oriented analysis. *Literary craft* functions throughout this project in a double sense, as authors practice art and craft as part of the creative literary process and as texts grapple with art history, visual culture, and the political aesthetics of making. I read objects and issues of reception in visual

[2] For example, Roland Barthes's 1964 "The Rhetoric of the Image" guides the reader through a visual and semiotic analysis of an advertisement. He demonstrates how mass images circulate and make meaning by addressing the specific function of each visual sign. By modeling analysis for the reader, Barthes assumes a didactic role while also revealing the many potential theoretical layers of a static, popular image. The essay contains an implicit critique of how scholars overlook the rich multidimensionality of visual images.

culture, [3] but I also further nuance those readings by thinking through the processes of design and creation and the particular materials, substances, surfaces, and media used to render visual theories visible.

Craft encapsulates the role of process and medium in art-making, and art historians have debated the vicissitudes of meaning surrounding these concepts for centuries. While not of particular importance to the literary scholars until very recently, the concept of medium has proved especially and historically contestatory in art history. A survey of medium would begin with Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's 1766 argument that the medium ought to be transparent in the finished work of art. This mimetic conception of art put poetry and literature squarely in the temporal field with painting occupying the spatial domain. Joseph Frank famously debunked this tidy divide between poetry and painting in 1945 by suggesting that modernist poetry's experimental qualities made it spatial, with its pieces arranged in strange and complex relation to one another rather than organized in a temporal progression of fixed points. More recently, Rosalind Krauss delimited a "post-medium condition" that emerges around 1960. Her reading of the post-medium condition is a critique of Clement Greenberg's reduction of painting "to the medium's essence—namely flatness," which erroneously denies the "internal plurality of any given medium" (Krauss 9, 6). To reduce art to a conceptual abstraction at the level of medium, she argues, participates in a capitalist development that denies art's materiality in favor of its "essence"—in other words, art as a pure product, its meaning constituted

[3] Visual culture, defined as the mass circulation and consumption of images, has been well documented by critics such as Jessie Matz writing on impressionism, Michael North on the dialectic between race and language in literature, and Karen Jacob's thorough reading of aesthetic interpretation in modernist spectacle. Following Roland Barthes, further work by theorist W. J. T. Mitchell has advocated for "Picture Theory," the notion that the best readings of visual culture emerge by reading the signs of images themselves. Taken together, this impressive constellation of visual and literary theories suggests the kind of tightly knit relationship between word and image central to this dissertation.

by its commodification (10). In "New Literary History After the End of the New," Jameson essentially agrees with Krauss, asserting that the postmodern moment has reoriented our relationship to art objects in such a way that the very processes of art are no longer material or artistic but exist in a realm of ideas. Such ideas circulate suggestively around Walter Benjamin's concept of the aura—the uniqueness of art that supposedly dissipates in the age of mechanical production.

However, in the works I examine, material specificity and the artist's hand preserve the aura, producing pronounced and understudied traces of the tactile, in particular, within artistic practice. This intimacy with the medium creates a layered experience between the author/creator and the will of the materials themselves. For example, Julia Margaret Cameron's making of a photograph often involved touching the emulsion on the glass negative—an act of artistic will that is dialectically dependent on the nature of the materials; it is the materiality of glass that provides the aesthetic platform for a subversive or disruptive narrative of visual commentary. Similarly, Woolf understands the visual spectacle of broken glass in *Between the Acts* as a useful aesthetic political critique—in fracturing the usually whole pane of glass, she underscores the effect of war on civilian life as a process. Cameron does not just capture a scene in her photographs; she calls attention to the processes of making that construct and present photographic content. Woolf does not just write about the Blitz bombings as an isolated traumatic event but uses the photographic medium of glass to call attention to group behavior as politically subject—reflecting back the processes of patriarchy at work behind war. Moments of action, resistance, and survival materialize in the texts I examine through an engagement with art in its making.

By paying attention to the materials of making, this project attempts to initiate and participate in a more rigorous conversation linking art and literature. Rancière describes his own methodology, which I take as instructive, as conceptualizing the work of art "in terms of horizontal distributions, combinations between systems and possibilities, not in terms of surface and substratum" (49).[4] This new distribution calls attention to the power of art in both its craft and in its circulation. I examine art objects and literary texts as a series of material, textural, and technical choices in order to suggest new relations between literary aesthetics and the politics of twentieth-century cultures of activism. These artistic possibilities are at once medium specific and multimedia since, by parsing the material processes of art, we are able to isolate various tools and techniques—an approach that allows for greater specificity and nuance.

CRAFTING MODERNITY, WRITING THE EXTREME

Two key terms circulate throughout this project: Modernity and the Extreme Twentieth Century. In his 1863 "The Painter of Modern Life," Baudelaire coins modernity as an aesthetic category. For Baudelaire, the artist pursues modernity in the fleeting moments of urban life, an aesthetic rooted in the craft of observation and defined

[4] Rancière's spatial conception of modernism echoes a resounding call in modernist studies to reconsider guiding spatial metaphors guiding scholarly methods. For example, Jahan Ramazani conceptualizes transnational poetics as a dynamic exchange in multiple directions. He writes, "In contrast to the one-way, homogenizing model, poetry's transnational flows can be seen as moving in multiple directions, or in leaps and loops" (10). However, Susan Friedman argues that modernist studies, even in its most earnest attempt at transnational analysis, has remained entrenched in a schema of center vs. periphery. In other words, scholars extend their readings to figures on the periphery while still privileging, however unconsciously, a canonical center. As a corrective, she urges a rhetoric of multiplicity, which she explains through a spatial relationship to our modernist objects of study: "like the point of Cubism—is epistemological: that seeing is multi-faceted; that what is seen must be seen from multiple points of view. Hold it up. Walk around it. Mull on its multiplicities" (475). These insights respond to Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz's "The New Modernist Studies" an intellectual and critical movement aimed at "temporal, spatial, and vertical" expansion (737). Core questions of period, national boundaries, and interdisciplinary possibilities are reconceived in the context of a new, more globalized rhetoric of modernism.

by historic rupture. Pushing forward into our own moment, the stakes of modernity have been rigorously rethought quite recently in Susan Stanford Friedman's *Planetary Modernisms: Provocations on Modernity Across Time*. In it, she points to the critical oscillation surrounding modernist studies, concluding that perhaps these vacillations point to that which characterizes modernity itself. I follow Friedman in her assessment of modernity's aesthetics, especially in her focus on modernism as the central organizing principle for new readings of activism, nationhood, and history. As an organizing period category, modernity—expansive as it is—suits my current project because craft persists across time and space in fascinating ways, and artifacts resist our usual critical categories.

The critical categories of modernity arrive powerfully in Eric Hobsbawm's *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914-1991*. Published in 1996, the British historian takes a look back at the not-so-distant developments of the twentieth century. *Crafting Modernity* is both in conversation with Hobsbawm while also working to actively test and expand some of his assertions, especially about the roles of art and technology in a slightly expanded sense of the extreme century, drawing up to the present day. In his account, it is not just the "what" of history but the "how" of historical memory that matters. He writes,

> The destruction of the past, or rather of the social mechanisms that link one's contemporary experience to that of earlier generations, is one of the most characteristic and eerie phenomena of the late twentieth century. Most young men and women at the century's end grow up in a sort of permanent present lacking any organic relation to the public past of the times they live in. (3)

In other words, technology has severed our relationship to the past. In a moment of intense interconnection (the web of the internet, linking us all in a common experience of the present), the past gets lost. But Hobsbawm is perhaps too limited in his assessment of the technological present. As the new modernist studies have demonstrated, global networks of communication, aesthetics, and politics have persisted, and preservation has become a primary concern. In their paradigm-shifting essay, "The New Modernist Studies," Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz argue that we should expand modernist scholarship along three axes: temporal expansion in which "periods seem inevitably to get bigger," spatial expansion in which "texts produced in other quarters of the world" receive more attention, and vertical expansion in which the "quite sharp boundaries between high art and popular forms of culture have been reconsidered" (737-38). Even more, the dialectic between common, shared experience and difference has come into better focus. There has been a necessary acknowledgment of difference (what you experience is not necessarily or essentially my experience) alongside the increasing emphasis on global communities (just because we are from different places does not mean that our experiences are fundamentally different—we share the common bond of humanity or, less abstractly, the same class background, value system, sexual orientation, etc.).

In this sense, my definition and use of modernity in this project also springs from calls to rethink the ways in which modernity functions in literary analysis as a gendered category. Rita Felski's *The Gender of Modernity* describes the activist potential of a project focused on women's work under the heading of modernity:

> One of the reasons for the renewed interest in the idea of the modern in contemporary theory is the dethroning of the white bourgeois male as privileged subject of history, which re-opens and leaves unresolved the question of what modernity might mean for women and other subaltern groups […] How can we rethink the temporality of texts in such a way as to do justice to issues of gender politics? (208)

Although usually associated with so-called women's work, or bored ladies in drawing rooms, craft is a traditionally male occupation, from medieval craft guilds up through Morris's socialist craft utopias. Even today, woodworking, carpentry, and shoemaking are still gendered as masculine crafts, activities undertaken by crafts*men*. By examining the work of "women and other subaltern groups," I add texture to the tapestry of craft history as a political phenomenon that spans a long period of technological, social, and gendered development—known as modernity. Thus the historical persistence of craft resonates in the chambers of modernity, following its dialectic into the present. All of my chapters explore these resonances across time, space, gender, and value, necessary expansions for the complexity, energy, and aesthetic of the extreme century.

Chapter Overview

Crafting Modernity's first chapter, "A 'whole made of shivering fragments': Virginia Woolf and the Photographic Archive" explores Woolf's fascination with glass as a photographic medium. I argue that she transposes her great-aunt Julia Margaret Cameron's photographic techniques to inform a fractured optical representation of broken glass, reflective mirrors, and fragmented bodies. These photo-aesthetic features emerge

most forcefully in her later pro-peace writings and speak to the self-consciously artsy aesthetic of fin de siècle and modernist high art, literature, and design. And yet, taking a cue from more popular uses of photography, Woolf also distorts the high/low divide by calling attention to the craft of photography—its mechanics, materials, and developments—as a lens for critique in an era of world war.

The second chapter turns from Woolf and photography to H.D.'s engagement with needlework and textile crafts and is entitled "The 'Fibre of her being': H.D.'s Craft Modernism." I conclude that H.D. confronts issues of endurance, history, and agency in both her writings and textile crafts. I recently rediscovered her needlepoint tapestries in a private archive. Presented for the first time in my chapter, I read these art objects as inextricably woven into in the production of H.D.'s wartime writings. These tapestries attest to the complex relationship between the verbal and visual in modernism at an interval when debates surrounding the New Modernist Studies tackle questions about how we view verbal artifacts in an expanded field of cultural production. H.D.'s needlework archive recasts our critical categories (1) by expanding the transnational reach of her historical imagination, most notably to Egypt where the earliest needlepoint artifacts were discovered in Tut's tomb shortly before her 1923 visit; (2) by widening the periodization of modernism through WWII at least; and (3) by advancing the media field of modernism to include the sources and processes of art making in a new register of historical critique. Worked during the Blitz, her needleworks testify to the precarity of history in conversation with modernity's new forms of violence.

Problems of ephemerality for the historiography of mid-century art and literature come down to earth in my third chapter, "Mina Loy's 'Contours of Collapse':

Assemblage and the Politics of Trash." This chapter argues that as an avant-garde writer, designer, and artist, Loy utilizes assemblage sculpture as a medium of social critique. In the late 1950s, she constructed assemblages made from trash, often collaborating with the homeless population that lived near her in NYC's Bowery district. In her assemblages and in her writings, she remediates the discarded remains of urban personhood, extending the problematic of the material from the gutter to gallery. Loy's late art has been read as an attempt to beautify human suffering from an outsider position, but this perspective incorrectly relegates Loy to the sidelines of the political art movements of her time (especially Dada) and neglects serious consideration of her assemblage artwork. This chapter contends that Loy's creative economy of socio-political critique emerges from her multimedia art making and makes new the Arts and Crafts socialism of the nineteenth century.

My final chapter, "'Draw deep from your palette': Lorna Goodison's Earthly Modernity," examines post-colonial womanhood through the art of painting. Drawing on color theory and Caribbean feminist writings, I develop a theory of "earthly" pigmentation—an activist aesthetic grounded in representations of place and personhood rooted in the production of pigment as a racial marker and as the base material of paint media. Goodison—a contemporary Jamaican author of English, Irish, and Guinean descent—uses this earthly aesthetic to bring the questions of violence, history, and nationality into conversation with the racial politics of the late-twentieth century. Trained as a painter and deeply interested in its historical materials, she addresses the history of art at its most fundamental level by looking at Renaissance pigment recipes, while also bringing a rich history of Jamaican visual art to life on the page. In particular,

Goodison puts black at the center of her work by redrawing the contours of black womanhood's associations with earthiness and simplicity with bolder, more complex representations of racial passing, black identity, and fetishizaiton of blackness and whiteness, color and transparency.

A Coda, entitled "Out of Line: Disorientation, Craft, and (Multi)media in the Multicultural Present" returns to Woolf and examines contemporary multimedia experiments with her works. In this section, I focus on how the signifying resources latent in art processes and mediums are enabling new forms of political resistance in British literature—a set of issues I illustrate through readings of contemporary, multimedia representations of multiculturalism. Cambridge-based artist Kabe Wilson, and Jamaican-British writer Zadie Smith use Woolf's literary legacy to simultaneously orient and disorient readers in an arc of social critique, experimental narrative, and race consciousness. In the cases of these authors, disorientation—its aesthetics, ethics, and affects across media—provides a useful starting place for analysis of familiar terrain made strange or unrecognizable. For both Wilson and Smith, the terrain is in fact a spatial or geographic phenomenon, but it's also the mental, or psychological landscapes of modern experience. Technological layering makes craft transparent, even as identity politics (being 'out of line' in the British context) queer the history of craft from the periphery.

THE ARCHIVE 'OUT OF LINE'

This project has depended on an expanded sense of the archive—and, even more, the persistent practice of new archival methods. My approach to interarts scholarship

presented myriad difficulties and delights. From issues of access and permissions to the ways art objects elude us, hiding as they do in old boxes or deteriorating at the hands of moth and time, works of art often end up outside the walls of traditional, or institutional, archives. But the calling to attend to this difficulty, both on the page and in practice, was a strong and important one. The following are some of my conclusions about this dissertation's methodological tactics:

- *Take a closer look*: Jennifer L. Roberts, an art historian at Harvard, writes about "The Power of Patience: Teaching Students the Value of Deceleration and Immersive Attention." She recounts asking students to begin their research by looking at a single painting for three full hours. Works of art are not static, and seeing—really seeing—is not an instantaneous process. In my first chapter, I spent a long time—longer than I care to admit—staring at Cameron's photographs. The cracks and textures slowly began to show themselves, drawing my attention to her mediums—the glass plate negative, the mirrors and lenses in the camera, filtered light. When I read her memoir, "Annals of my Glass House," I saw her glass house, or studio, through the lens of glass in a more capacious, photographic sense. How does light, like glass, compress its visual subjects? Where do women divide into light and dark? Where does glass round or fracture at the edges, and how does Cameron use a craftsman's hand on her wet plates? With these questions in mind, I returned to Woolf's *Between the Acts*, to a scene that had always perplexed me. As a village history play draws to a close, local children emerge from bushes surrounding an outdoor theatre holding shards of glass and broken mirrors. I took a closer look here, too. Caught in the flashing lights of the reflecting glass, an audience member

understands herself as a photographic subject: "To snap us as we are, before we've had time to assume…And only, too, in parts…That's what's so disorienting and upsetting" (184). Woolf-the-snapshooter fractures her great-aunt's medium, a literal breaking with tradition in the historical crisis of WWII. This thinking through media is specific, attentive to materiality in the extreme, and it reveals a new way of reading Woolf and photography. Even more, photography as a craft with a complex history comes into focus as the layers of process and the specific materials of art-making fill the scene with meaning.

☞ *Don't be afraid to ask*: When we study art and literature, it is productive (as we know) to put some analytical distance between the author and ourselves. Biography and intention can easily become slippery slopes for anyone trying to make a real contribution to literary criticism. And yet, authors were or are living people. At some point, I think we should be bolder in asking questions about the ways in which artifacts circulate. If you take a risk (and yes, it does feel risky) and reach out to a real person, you may or may not get a response. You haven't lost anything, but you've pursued a potential gain—a gain that might be fruitful for everyone involved.

When I first started working on H.D., I was fascinated by her attention to textual materiality. The palimpsest, the trope she is most famous for, is an early writing technology in which layers of text could be scraped off, making space for new writing but leaving a trace of the old. But I also noticed other layers of visual and verbal communication in her texts, especially needlework. All of H.D.'s papers are housed in Yale's Beinecke Library, and I tracked down particular mentions of her

needlework in the letters. I also found her daughter's recollections of H.D.'s reliance on sewing as a form of therapy during the Blitz bombings. She describes the skeins of yarn and a particular needlework tapestry of a fruit grove. Could it still exist? I couldn't shake the question. Her daughter is deceased, so I emailed her grandchildren. In the months that followed, I corresponded with her grandson about the possibility of these artifacts' survival, suggesting that any forgotten boxes might be the key, as is often the case with forgotten treasures in my family of crafters. The needleworks were found, along with H.D.'s sewing kit from the Ritz, her yarn carrying roll, notes about her plans for original designs, and more. Standing in a bright studio in NYC, I held my breath as I opened the boxes and unrolled the needlepoints. The markings on the base fabric were visible beneath the stitches, and H.D.'s handwriting emerged from scraps of paper in faded blue. I placed her tiny thimble on my finger, an experience that surpasses the usual thrill of a scholarly discovery.

☞ *'Perseverance, secret of all triumphs'*: This is a quote (in translation) from Victor Hugo, but it is also a sort of mantra for this dissertation. I have learned to follow clues as far as I can. That seems simple, but extant archives often seem as complete as they can be. Institutional holdings may claim to possess all of an author's works, and, conversely, certain objects are quite ephemeral, making them difficult or impossible to preserve in the first place. My work on Mina Loy's assemblages proved the most difficult archive of the dissertation. Loy made many assemblage sculptures at the end of her life, and unlike other assemblage artists such as her

friend Joseph Cornell, her works have not been celebrated. I first tried to locate any existing assemblages or people who had seen them firsthand. Loy's biographer, Carolyn Burke, owns one that was given to her by Peggy Guggenheim. A couple others exist in private hands, and Francis Naumann (a gallery owner and Surrealism/Dada art historian) hosted a small show of Loy's art works in 2006. It is presumed that almost all of Loy's other works are in an extensive private collection owned by her literary executor, Roger Conover. For the purposes of my research, I requested and was denied access to Conover's collection. Given this setback, I adapted my strategy and began to look back to the institutional archive for further, perhaps overlooked, documentation. In Burke's wonderful Loy biography, she writes that the American photographer, Berenice Abbott (Loy's friend and neighbor in NYC's Bowery neighborhood), photographed Loy's assemblages. I requested Burke's research notes and files on the Loy project from the Beinecke Library and located an interview from 1978 as well as correspondence between Burke and Abbott. Abbott writes, "It would be good idea if you could telephone me some [time] Sunday—because there is quite a lot to tell about Mina Loy. Her last days in New York, were very interesting. I photographed for her some remarkable 'rag' 'paintings' made of bowery characters and I should have the negatives somewhere" (Beinecke YCAL MSS 788 Box 4). Abbott never found the negatives, much less the photographs—but I had confirmation that they definitely existed, or did exist at some point.

I combed the Abbott holdings online, particularly the significant collection at the New York Public Library and inquired with Commerce Graphics (a company

that oversees the commercial side of Abbott's archive) with no luck. Several months later, an announcement caught my eye, that the Ryerson Image Centre at Ryerson University has just acquired an Abbott collection. Having worked in manuscript processing at Emory, I knew the archivists would soon be going through the boxes and beginning to process the collection. Although it was a long shot, I wrote to the Centre and asked them to keep an eye out for photographs of Loy's assemblages, on the off chance that they'd ended up in this particular stash. After their initial search, they did not find anything, but a couple months later, I followed up to see if anything else had surfaced—and lo! It had. Six photographic prints and five negatives. Of the six photographs, two assemblages were totally new to me, and one photograph includes an additional, small assemblage in the frame. It was a significant discovery, to see Loy's assemblages in their contemporary form, documented before their dispersion and decay. And perhaps equally fascinating, to find evidence for her collaboration with Abbott on preserving the memory and visual impact of these "rag paintings." It's easy to take no for an answer, but persistence and curiosity pay off.

☞ *Test your critical categories*: As I have already noted, this project is in conversation with the new modernist studies, which seeks to recast and question our usual critical categories. The payoffs are multiple, from creating a more dynamic, inclusive canon to reenergizing research in popular culture alongside high literary movements. When I talk about my work, I inevitably get questions about critical categories, especially more traditional readings of art and literature: the Victorian 'sister arts,' the Greek etymology of *poesis* as the act of making something, or ekphrasis. While

all of this background matters to the ways I approach interdisciplinary scholarship in the arts, my dissertation seeks to redress these comparative methods by introducing them to the virtues of greater specificity. For example, ekphrasis is a limited analytical category; it is the "verbal representation of visual representation," but authors often, as I argue, explore visual processes and artistic media in far more depth than the product, or "literary representation" as such (Mitchell, *Picture* 152). For example, Lorna Goodison not only writes beautiful ekphrastic poems about Van Gogh and Max Ernst but also expands her canon to anonymous women artists and Jamaican folk painters. Then, she goes a step further, engaging with Renaissance pigment recipes and fresco techniques as poetic imagery, all filtered through her own training as a painter with Jacob Lawrence in NYC. Writers not only think through art in their literary writings but also in their personal artistic practices. Ekphrasis, in this sense, extends representation to include traces of praxis that inform literary works beyond content and that bear significantly on form, context, and theories of making.

☞ *Reading the post-digital archive*: A couple of years ago, I had a few hours to kill and wandered into the Museum of Art and Design in New York. The entire museum was devoted to a single exhibit called "Out of Hand: Materializing the Postdigital." It explored digital fabrication, or how decorative and utilitarian art objects are made using digital technologies such as 3-D printing. I was amazed at how embodied the work was. It was possible to use a potter's wheel to digitally mold a pot with your hands that could then be printed out and placed on a shelf. Similar processes applied

to architectural designs, fashion, and jewelry. One artist worked with an assistant to scan visitors as they spun on a platform to create figurines—my miniature, 3-D portrait stares out coyly from my bookshelf as a memento. Meanwhile, upstairs, a visiting artist named Peter Cole used found objects—keys, toy horses, and a collection of old handkerchiefs—to create art from his non-technological surroundings, drawing inspiration from Brooklyn's flea markets. The confluence of the digital and material provoked me to consider media afterlives. The shape of the archive in the digital era has changed, as the recent curation of "born digital" archives suggests, but it is easy to forget the real, enduring complexity surrounding media, collecting practices, and artifacts.

My Coda section pursues these questions in its focus on multimedia activism in the work of Kabe Wilson and Zadie Smith, a line of thinking beyond the dissertation project as such inspired by Claudia Rankine's multimedia text, *Citizen*. Taking up issues of race, gender, and media representation, she asks readers to recognize their own complacency in the perpetuation of racism, violence, and discrimination while also actively recognizing marginalized and mistreated groups. *Citizen* emerged from video essay collaborations between Rankine and John Lucas they call the Situation videos. The text includes Youtube stills, instant replay, visual art, photography, assemblage mixed in with Situation video stills and scripts, prose poetry, journalistic accounts, memorials, and searing free indirect discourse renderings of violence against black citizens.

Writing in the *Washington Post*, Rankine describes her relationship to histories of violence and white supremacy as a vexed site of readership. That site of

readership continues into and through her literary texts through her engagement with multiple mediums, which in turn demands renewed attention to the state of literary craft. In a conversation with Lauren Berlant, she describes how collaborating on the Situation videos intensifies the critical perspective:

> The decision to exist within the events of the "Situation videos" came about because the use of video manipulation by John Lucas allowed me to slow down and enter the event, in moments, as if I were there in real time rather than as a spectator considering it in retrospect. As a writer working with someone with a different skill set, I was given access to a kind of seeing that is highly developed in the visual artist, and that I don't rely on as intuitively. My search for meaning—"What do you think that means?"—is often countered with a "Did you see that?" from John. That kind of close looking, the ability to freeze the frame, challenges the language of the script to meet the moment […] The indwelling of those Situation pieces becomes a performance of switching your body out with the body in the frame and moving methodically through pathways of thought and positionings. (*BOMB*, n.p.)

Rankine's theory of "close looking" puts language in tension with perception, which is perhaps *Citizen*'s greatest accomplishment as a disorienting textual experience with political significance well beyond its bound pages. The multi-mediation of racial experience allows Rankine and her readers to access multiple levels of cultural experience.

From Virginia Woolf to Zadie Smith, this dissertation invests in analysis of craft—on the page and in the studio—as an activist practice. In attending to media on multiple levels, and perhaps most importantly, by expanding an approach to archival and visual research in literary studies, I underscore makers' agency. As my epigraph by Sedgwick suggests, craft practices mirror the complexity of human experience, especially the "middle ranges of agency" that constitute ordinary experiences of the body, politics, and aesthetics in today's world.

CHAPTER ONE: **A "whole made of shivering fragments": Woolf, Cameron, and the Photographic Archive**

When Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* came to the New Burlington Galleries in London in 1938, Virginia Woolf's name appeared on the list of patrons.[5] Picasso's canvas disorients visual norms, even as it powerfully critiques the spectacle of war and violence, especially civilian suffering as a result of aerial bombings. The painting resembles early photography in its black, white, and grey color scheme, recalling the newspaper photographs Woolf collected during the Spanish Civil war. *Guernica* was housed behind bulletproof glass when it was installed in Madrid in 1981. Accumulating the histories of photography, anti-war activism, and cubist aesthetics, Picasso's work speaks beyond its content alone, perhaps most forcefully from its position behind glass. Visitors complained that the glass troubled their access to the work, its reflective distortion a further, contemporary commentary on the visible world of terrorism. Blocking access to the painting on conceptual and corporeal levels, *Guernica*'s protective glass calls attention to the political practice of making and the ways in which a medium (or layers of media) shapes the experience of art.

Even earlier than Picasso, Duchamp's *Large Glass*, or the Casón del Buen Retiro's unsightly glass screens, Woolf argued that glass functions as a powerful medium for putting the body at the center of art, perception, and modernist literature. In *On Being Ill*, she writes: "[L]iterature does its best to maintain that its concern is with the mind; that the body is a sheet of plain glass through with the soul looks straight and clear […]

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[5] See Francis Spalding's *Virginia Woolf: Art, Life and Vision* for a reprint of the Burlington Galleries announcement (156).

On the contrary, the very opposite is true. All day, all night the body intervenes; blunts or sharpens, colours or discolours" (4). Critiquing the common metaphorical misuse of glass as a clear medium, she puts glass at the center of literary craft by emphasizing its perceptual diversity and complicated aesthetic mediation. Woolf's work has been well-documented in the context of the art world (from her post-impressionist prose to the history of the book). Scholars such as Maggie Humm, Emily Setina, and Diane Gillespie have been especially interested in Woolf's relationship to photography and snapshot aesthetics, but they have largely neglected Woolf's particular investment in the materials and processes of photographic history. By the same token, critics have noticed that glass plays an important role in her writing, but they fail to connect these moments to the photographic technologies that often underpin Woolf's glass aesthetic.[6] In this chapter, I connect photographic glass in Woolf's writings to her larger investments in cultural critique, a dialectic that moves between the theoretical and material. By suggesting that the material and theoretical, like the everyday and extraordinary or the domestic and political, inform and enrich each other, my readings synthesize art and craft in Woolf's literary craft. That is, we can see through her work that glass provides a way to think through processes of representation, which, for her, begin with the photograph. Therefore, glass and photography, observed together, shed light on a process of meta-reflexivity in Woolf's writing. For Woolf, glass indexes photographic processes more often than not. However, precisely because the medium signifies more widely, it proves

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[6] See, for example, "Collecting, Shopping, and Reading: Virginia Woolf's Stories About Objects" by Ruth Hoberman in *Trespassing Boundaries: Virginia Woolf's Short Fiction* (81-98), which notes Hermione Lee's assertion that Woolf' displayed a notable "fascination with glass and decorative objects" in general during the late-teens and early 1920s (Lee 370). Also, Christina Walter's *Optical Impersonality: Science, Images, and Literary Modernism* explicitly connects Woolf's fascination with glass and technologies of sight in her reading of the "optical gadgetry" underpinning much of Woolf's *Between the Acts* (21).

a useful way of thinking through issues of modern visual representation for feminism (women's images in modernism), anti-war aesthetics (how to both capture and resist war and its destruction), and perception (the optical representation of trauma in the wake of war).[7] Woolf's great-aunt, Julia Margaret Cameron, was a famous (and famously contentious) Victorian photographer who printed on glass plate negatives. The use of glass negatives and glass-based prints was not in itself innovative, but Cameron's photographs draw attention to the medium of glass in a manner that remains extraordinary in a variety of ways. Cracked negatives left traces on the final print, models were curiously lit and compressed, among other techniques detailed later in the chapter. Stern criticisms from her contemporary art world stand as a lasting testament to the innovative quality of Cameron's work, marked most recently by the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Cameron exhibit, which was enthusiastically received. Drawing a line from Cameron to Woolf, this project underscores the meta-reflexivity of glass in Woolf's work as a way to think through, and perhaps endure, the trauma of modernity—from gender trouble to all-destructive war to the more mundane aesthetic ruptures of modern life.

In what follows, I nuance the biographical and aesthetic relationship between Woolf and Cameron, calling attention to the use of glass in Cameron's enduringly strange images and thereby filling a gap in art historical assessments of her legacy as a photographer and feminist. Then, in reading across Woolf's works, I explore the linkages between women and materiality which surface around glass, mirrors, and other materials associated with Cameron's photographic oddities. In this chapter's final section, the

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[7] Critics have increasingly focused on Woolf as a war writer. See, for example, the collection of essays in Mark Hussey's *Virginia Woolf and War: Fiction, Reality, and Myth* (Syracuse UP, 1991).

processes of photographic craft reveal a surprisingly fractured vision of war that paradoxically remains whole, a vision that both participates in and criticizes the spectacle of modern violence. While visual theorists have long been fascinated by the mutually complicated experiences of perception and aesthetics in modernism, questions about medium and process have gone largely unrecognized, especially in literary criticism. The archive of modernist perception is significantly enriched by a reading of art and craft in an expanded field of both material studies and theoretical critique.

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Given their different historical moments (Cameron died in 1879 and Woolf was born in 1882), photography would mean something slightly different for Cameron and Woolf. In particular, we might imagine that photos suggested the opportunity to commemorate and critique culture in different ways for each generation. With the popularization of Kodak cameras and the snapshot in the early-20th century, photography rapidly became a powerful way to remember loved ones. As Humm suggests, this culturally situated photographic register imbued Woolf's work with "an almost photographic seriality," further evidenced in her carefully arranged personal photo albums (*Modernist Women* 28). Cameron's photos occupied the most prized place in Woolf's photo albums, even though her cameras, film, and processing techniques would have differed from those of Woolf and most of her contemporaries. Cameron used a large format camera that took wet plate glass negatives. Given her process, seriality is not an immediately noticeable aesthetic hallmark as it is in Woolf's snapshots. And yet, she dedicated a large part of her career to photographing a series of narrative images for

works such as Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, which includes similar frames and successive images.

In other ways, too, we find Cameron and Woolf corresponding across aesthetic traditions: Cameron was taken to task for her messy photos, and critics have long noted that Woolf's fiction, like her images, are "consciously artsy" (Humm, *Women* 59). Furthermore, Cameron memorialized both loved ones and famous public figures in her photos. Woolf's most cherished photograph of her mother, who died when she was young, was taken by Cameron, and she visited Cameron's Dimbola Lodge on the Isle of Wight at age 13, two years before she fully devoted herself to photography.[8] When she published Cameron's photographs in 1926, Woolf titled the collection *Victorian Photographs of Famous Men & Fair Women*. Woolf also memorializes family, friends, and famous acquaintances in her albums and diaries, domesticating the art of photography, even as she praises Cameron's "magnificently uncompromising" relationship to her art (*Famous Men* 18). Photography has always been caught between categorization as art and objective record, between the aesthetic and the sentimental. In Cameron's time, photography replaced portrait painting as evidence of the real—theorized as *indexicality*—but at the same time, practitioners such as Cameron, Frances Benjamin Johnston, Gertrude Käsebier, and Alfred Stieglitz understood the highly mediated space of the photographic image and actively participated in promoting their work as high art. Woolf's relationship was similarly diverse in both practice and in literary references—ranging from the precocious snapshooter who appears in *Jacob's Room* to Cameron herself as a character in *Freshwater: A Comedy*.

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[8] See Humm's *Snapshots of Bloomsbury* for the photo of Woolf at Dimbola in 1895 (54).

Woolf and her sister Vanessa Bell lined the walls of their first home as independent young adults with Cameron's photos, and Woolf writes playfully about Cameron in *Freshwater: A Comedy* and in an early draft of "The Searchlight," and more seriously in her introduction to the collection of Cameron's photographs published by her own Hogarth Press. Furthermore, Woolf understood the technology of the camera—its moving parts, celluloid films, mirrors, and glass lenses. She owned cameras (from an early Frena box camera to the more costly Zeiss camera she purchased in 1931), took thousands of photos (including some that illustrate *Orlando*, *Flush*, and *Three Guineas*), and she collected images in albums, even handmaking the albums at times.[9] Woolf also developed her own images. At age 15, she oversaw the acquisition of a camera, its proper loading with film, and celebrates her first subject: "We photographed Simon [a dog] 6 times—on the chair with a coat and pope, and lying on the ground […] After tea, Nessa and I developed in the night nursery"[10] (*Passionate Apprentice* 35).

Humm has suggested that Woolf's biographical and aesthetic similarities to Cameron constitute a Lacanian return wherein "Woolf's continual photographic repetitions would suggest the 'return' of a visual event which took place outside her contemporary frames" [11] (64). This chapter argues for an additional site of photographic

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[9] The Harvard University Houghton Library has digitized the Monk's House Albums. The description of the first album notes, "Monk's House album MH-1 has covers made of thick cardboard. The cover is inscribed in pencil as 'Photographs.' It is not a commercial photograph album - the mounting slots for the photographs are cut by hand" (Humm, Snapshots 188). The handmade album suggests even more intimacy with photography and the arrangement of the images, and Humm suggests that Woolf's status as "a knowledgeable bookbinder who personally chose and bound the illustrations for dust jackets and covers for the Hogarth Press books" contributes to the albums' designs and organization (Humm, Women 58).

[10] See Humm's *Snapshots of Bloomsbury* for one of the Simon photos, contained in Bell's album 1A (61).

[11] Humm traces the similarities between Woolf and Cameron starting with Woolf's role as her great-aunt's publisher and editor, their mutual connection to Ceylon—Leonard Woolf was in the Civil Service there, and Cameron was born and died there, their shared financial generosity to family and friends, a similar fascination with the optical effects of light and shadow, and the arrangement of photographic subjects in domestic environments.

return in the medium of glass. While no evidence suggests that Woolf developed photos with the dangerous collodion process used by her great-aunt, she was familiar with the process and how its use of glass and chemicals shaped the aesthetic of Cameron's haunting images. In a mirthful letter to her sister Vanessa Bell in May 1927, Woolf confesses, "I got in the habit of cigar smoking in Italy and can't break myself of it" and relays a phone call from her half brother in which he inquires, "I am trying to find Cameron photographs of Mama—Can you lend me any negatives?" (Letters Vol. III, 380). This exchange suggests that Woolf may have owned Cameron's glass negatives; however, even the knowledge of their existence proves critical since only two Cameron glass negatives are known to survive—and only one of them in her signature large format size.[12] She also visited Cameron's son, Henry Herschel Cameron in March 1897 "about some photographs," and alludes directly to Cameron's glass plates as she developed her own first films: "We developed Simon after tea, two of him are very good, the rest very fair—one has somehow moved, and the dog appears twice on the same plate" (*Passionate Apprentice* 48, 38). In this telling description of a double exposure, Woolf maps her great-aunt's "plates" onto her photographic negatives. In point of fact, her camera, a Frena, could be said to bridge the technology of Cameron's large format cameras with Kodak snapshot cameras. Instead of using rolled film, the Frena camera contained 40 square negatives that would drop either to the bottom or back of the camera between exposures.

[12] See *Julia Margaret Cameron: The Complete Photographs* edited by Julian Cox and Colin Ford for a reproduction of the negative and an exceedingly learned analysis of how the surviving negative "provides valuable clues as to her working methods and reveals the precise stages in the process" (48-49).

THINKING GLASS: CAMERON'S PHOTOGRAPHIC MATERIALITY

Cameron's photographs, especially in their attention to medium and process, bear significantly on Woolf's later use of glass in the literary imaginary of modernism, WWII in particular. I want to draw our attention to five primary but understudied aesthetic hallmarks of Cameron's work that manifest across the visual and literary in Woolf. They are:

- Mirrored Glass (reflection)
- Wet Glass (streaking, puddles, and fogging)
- Compression (cropping, framing)
- Manipulated Emulsion (making beams of light visible, hatching)
- Broken glass negatives (cracks)

Through these aesthetic particulars, Cameron calls direct attention to the photographic materials of making, a creative choice that Woolf continues and that anticipates the medium specificity of modern art wherein representation often emerges from technique and texture rather than content; for example, modern painting privileged abstraction and texture (note paint thickness, brushstrokes) over and beyond realistic depictions. This material aesthetic dialectic, rather than denying interiority, facilitates the merging of material and theoretical worlds—a meta-reflexive expression of art as a material process that becomes increasingly political as a result of its layered aesthetic circulation.

In *Sappho, 1866*, Cameron's model is both contained within the boundaries of the photograph while also looking beyond them [see fig. 1.1].

Fig. 1.1 Julia Margaret Cameron, *Sappho, 1866*
OASC: The Metropolitan Museum of Art www.metmuseum.org. The Rubel Collection, Purchase, Jennifer and Joseph Duke and Anonymous Gifts, 1997

She refuses to meet the viewer/photographer's gaze, but in the lower half of the image, the model's shoulders rotate forward. Thus, the image creates tension surrounding access to the psychological life of the woman depicted, complicated by the intense focus on only half of her striking face. The photo announces its medium around the model's neck; she wears a clear glass necklace, which divides the image in half with a thick line and heavy drops of glass. The subject's right shoulder presses forward in the bottom left corner of the image, and we can see that Cameron's negative has cracked in the process of development. This detail causes us to see the medium of glass and to experience the

model's eruption from the contained image in a new dimension. Although sometimes difficult to detect (especially in reproductions), cracked glass appears on other Cameron photos, such as her portrait of *Henry Taylor* from 1864 [see fig. 1.2], which is cracked in the top left corner. The cracked medium of the photograph not only calls attention to photography as mediated, manipulated, flawed vision but links destruction and art in new ways.

Fig. 1.2 Julia Margaret Cameron, *Henry Taylor, 1864*
OASC: The Metropolitan Museum of Art www.metmuseum.org. Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1941

Cameron's photographic vision also manifests and challenges idealized iconography, turning the mythology of photographic indexicality on its head. *Cupid's*

Pencil of Light from 1870 depicts a young child as Cupid, a subject familiar in Cameron's photographs [see fig. 1.3].

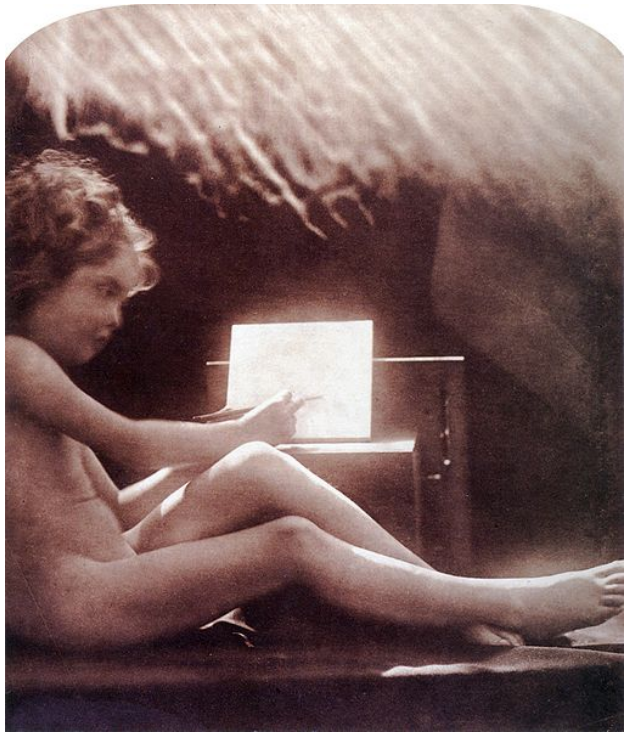

Fig. 1.3 Julia Margaret Cameron, *Cupid's Pencil of Light, 1870*
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Gift of Mrs. J. D. Cameron Bradley.
Photograph © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Carol Armstrong has suggested that in this photo, Cameron reproduces "Photography in the image of its own process, its own mode of production, rather than Photography ruled by the technical decrees of the established arts" (251). On its surface, Cameron calls to mind William Henry Fox Talbot's *Pencil of Light*, a book that established photography in its earliest years—and of course photography's etymology as "drawing with light." But it is significant that this writing with light happens on the surface of a glass negative at the center of the image, which, when reflected with light becomes the medium for a divine inscription. Thus, Cameron's medium is also a prop.

Calling further attention to the glass negative, Cameron has manipulated the emulsion on the actual negative to create the beams of light coming from the top of the image. Notably, it is not light that creates this effect but the manual manipulation of the photographer's hand (or perhaps a tool). In a final disruption of the transparent photograph, Cameron highlights the negative plate's square shape by cropping it at the corners. Cropping is extremely common in her photographs (but not often where you would expect it), and a striking number feature the feathering effect of light, likely created by Cameron while the plate was still wet or damp—this effect is commonly seen in images of children in angel's wings, such as her *Angel of the Nativity* from 1872 and *I Wait*, 1872.

Fig. 1.4 Julia Margaret Cameron, *Deathbed Study of Adeline Grace Clogstoun, 1872*
National Gallery of Art, Patrons' Permanent Fund

While *Cupid's Pencil of Light* uses glass to reflect light, Cameron's 1872 *Deathbed Study* [see fig. 1.4] uses a mirror in the background to not only reflect light coming through the window but also the camera itself. She does not crop out the camera or the other bed behind the make-shift backdrop, instead using these elements to call attention to both the content matter and the photographer's role in art-making. The camera's illuminated round lens hole (seen in the back right) is replicated as a floating round orb, hovering above the dead body. The child's dirty feet contrast suggestively with the mass of whiteness surrounding her body, similar to the aesthetically disruptive spots, smears, and imperfections common on Cameron's prints. White areas frequently glow in Cameron's images, a kind of auratic emphasis on narrative, or divine action, such as in the glowing robes of her 1874 *Isabel Bateman* or the halo-like fog descending on *Nude Child with Hands Folded* from 1864. These images demonstrate her diverse range of photographic mastery, a willingness to use the tools of her trade against the conventions of her craft. These bold disruptions create an important space for critique across textual and visual encounters.

One of Cameron's most striking so-called imperfections is the visible trace of streaking captured in her prints, which create the appearance of wet glass. In order to disrupt a viewer's sense that a photograph provides unmediated access to the real thing, Cameron visually obscures the transparent glass negative in her process. The streaks are likely caused by starting with wet or improperly cleaned plate glass or by coating the moist, exposed plate unevenly with developer on the first application. As one might imagine, wet process photography requires fresh water in addition to liquid chemicals: "Julia Margaret claimed each photograph required 'nine cans of water fresh from the

well'" (Ford 39). "Water fresh" is perhaps a further allusion to her home in Freshwater on the Isle of Wight, a location itself surrounded by water, but her use of so much water is nevertheless essential to the traces of wetness that show up in her prints. For example, *Love in Idleness* [see Fig. 5] depicts a child and is cropped round.

Fig. 1.5 Julia Margaret Cameron, *Love in Idleness, 1867*
Wikimedia Commons. Scanned from Colin Ford's *Julia Margaret Cameron: 19th Century Photographer of Genius*. Originally from Liverpool Libraries and Information Services.

The surface of the image looks puddled, as if reflected in a round pool. Although the child looks like Cupid, it's possible that his "Idleness" has transformed him into a

Narcissus.[13] In *May. Freshwater*, the hand at the image's center is stained darker than the rest of the image (likely where the chemical pour of developer began), and the entire frame is marked by water streaks [see fig. 1.6].

Fig. 1.6 Julia Margaret Cameron, *May. Freshwater, 1870*
OASC: The Metropolitan Museum of Art www.metmuseum.org. The Elisha Whittelsey Collection, The Elisha Whittelsey Fund, 1969

This photo is extremely detailed, with exquisite textures and patterns set against an ornate background; and yet, the details fade, a visual sacrifice that brings forward the photographic process instead, informed as it is by the glass plate. Rosalind E. Krauss, in

[13] Love-in-Idleness is also the name of a pansy, named in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as the flower hit by Cupid (from mythology) that allows Puck to (mis)manage various love plots.

The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths encapsulates the fluidity and power of glass as a medium. "But if glass transmits," she writes, "it also reflects. And so the window is experienced as a mirror as well – something that freezes and locks the self into the space of its own reduplicated being. Flowing and freezing; *glace* in French means glass, mirror, and ice; transparency, opacity, and water" (16-17). In making glass opaque, Cameron shatters photography's prized transparency. Her images, in which the artist's hand is everywhere, directly problematize photography's so-called indexicality (or access to the 'real' thing).

Fig. 1.7 Julia Margaret Cameron, *Rosebud Garden of Girls, 1868*
The Paul J. Getty Museum, Digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program

Rosebud Garden of Girls 1868 [see fig. 1.7] more abstractly, but still quite profoundly, calls our attention to glass as the primary medium of photographic vision. The backdrop encroaches on the women as a disembodied hand emerges from the center of the frame—the only portion of the photograph in clear focus. Cameron's models are

barely contained in the photo's boundaries, and their distracted gazes refuse contact with the viewer. The photographic artist brings attention to her embodied presence behind the camera by focusing, literally, on a hand that emerges from the middle of the image—a common, but overlooked, visual trope in Cameron's work. The arrangement flattens the models against the front of the image, an odd but affecting use of the medium to capture the ways form (the photographic glass plate) meets content (a gathering of women, pressed forward like a rosebush into the frame). The vignetted corners of the image further emphasize the camera's round glass lens in contrast with the square glass negative.

This last image recalls Picasso's 1907 *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* for its two-dimensional compression, libidinal energy, the arrangement of the figures, and of course, its break with aesthetic convention. I mention the connection to emphasize the way in which Cameron's glass aesthetic speaks to visual modernism. To bring glass—mirrored, fractured, transparent, cased in window frames, or in the camera's lens—to the fore of modernism's visual culture of aesthetic disruption and literary mediation echoes the notion that there "might be something good about bad artistic behavior" espoused in new directions for modernist studies (*Bad Modernism* 2). Cameron's "bad" practices, her smudges, soft focus, and broken negatives, frame, compress, and light her subjects' bodies by calling attention to the photographic development process and ultimately lay the aesthetic groundwork for Woolf's fiction. However provocative Cameron's photographic practices may have been, and indeed still are, her intentions are not on trial; rather it is the ways in which these aesthetic codes make meaning across time and space, most especially in Woolf's modernist moment as a way to describe the disorienting,

fractured, historically significant experience of war. It is quite undeniable that Cameron valued glass as the medium of photography and intended to highlight its presence in her work quite directly. At her first show in 1865, Cameron exhibited 146 prints for sale. Colin Ford explains, "Curiously half-a-dozen of these are described as being on glass, which suggests that they were original negatives with a black backing" (41). Transforming the glass negative into a glass positive was common in a much smaller format called an ambrotype, but Cameron is the only recorded photographer to use a large format glass negative in this way.

It is not the aim of this chapter to compare Woolf-as-photographer to her great-aunt, but rather to call attention to how glass as a medium and photographic craft processes inflect her visual-literary activism in response to modernity. However, it is certainly worth mentioning briefly that many of Woolf's photographs reproduce Cameron's aesthetic traits.

Fig. 1.8 Virginia Woolf Monk's House photograph album 2, *Annie and Lily picking apples, undated* MS Thr 559 (17), Houghton Library, Harvard University

In a snapshot of *Annie and Lily Picking Apples* [see fig. 1.8], the background foliage encroaches on the women, both physically as leaves and branches surround them, and visually, with pronounced shadows coming across the women on the right's dress. The bright glow of the left figure recalls Cameron's often startling use of white in her images, and the hand at the center of the picture (clasping the apple) draws the eye to the Pre-Raphaelite theme of the forbidden fruit—suggesting a complicated relationship between women and the natural world, not least each other. As in Cameron's *Rosebud Garden of Girls*, the women are compressed between the camera's lens and the natural landscape, and the close-up frame further strips the image of depth.

Fig. 1.9 Virginia Woolf Monk's House photograph album 3, *Leonard Woolf sitting indoors looking out a window, ca. 1931*
MS Thr 560 (9), Houghton Library, Harvard University

Woolf's 1931 photograph of her husband Leonard sitting beside a window shows one side of his face lit by the window just outside the frame [Fig. 1.9]. As in many of Cameron's photos, the window's natural light announces the photographic light source, and the soft focus adds a further affect of contemplation—like the subject is slightly out of reach, inaccessible, and absorbed in his thoughts. His large hand clasped in the center of the photo steadies the image in its own intensity, marked visually by the clear, straight diagonal line cutting the background in half. Woolf took many experimental photographs (and Vanessa Bell is perhaps most clearly in conversation with Cameron in her

photographs), including characters in fancy dress and intense children, but it is difficult to specify exactly which photographs she took in the albums. These two images, however, were almost certainly taken by Woolf, and their relatively domestic subject matter still reveals a powerful multi-generational aesthetic continuity that has the potential to deepen the way readers and critics read art and materiality in her fiction.

WOOLF'S PHOTOGRAPHIC PROTOLANGUAGE

Woolf's work creates a representative and generative depiction of the paradox between destruction and creation by miming certain photographic materials and process, particularly the subversive aesthetic of Cameron's use of glass in her photographs. In a sense, she deconstructs and reconstructs Aunt Julia within a much larger framework of art, memory, and trauma. In drawing a connection between the use of photographic materials and processes in Woolf and Cameron, this chapter conceptualizes glass as a paradoxical aesthetic of endurance—its mediating, framing, and reflective qualities hold things together, while its shattered, splintered, obscuring features record destruction and political corruption. Creative agency offers a possibility for saying what essentially cannot be said—a critique of modernity from the center of modernist crisis and progress. Cameron describes her early photography as "lisping and stammering," only able to speak for itself with "confidence and power" after careful cultivation and time (*Annals* 11). For Woolf, the experience of war stammers, is inarticulate, fractured, and traumatized, but the modernist artist must speak about it—she must find ways to account for the notion that around "1910 human character changed" ("Mr. Bennett and Mr. Brown" 422-23). Such is Septimus Smith's call in *Mrs. Dalloway* to record his

revelations and poems on the backs of envelopes (like his foremother Emily Dickinson, we might think), to speak the name of his dead comrade Evans, and to circulate a "new religion" of peace (23). His inability to feel and communicate ends with his death—whether immediate or delayed, the war has killed this bright, literary man. In what follows, I want to trace the development of Woolf's photographic language in her fiction along the Cameron aesthetic of visible light, haptic interventions in art, and the visual affect of wetness on glass. The aesthetic complexity of mirrors, glass, and reflections in literature coalesce around Woolf's more directly photographic commitments. Her oeuvre's photographic trajectory concludes most powerfully with Woolf's final novel, *Between the Acts*, set in the shadow of WWII and the Blitz bombings—a visual spectacle on a horrific scale that was, for Woolf, most directly represented by the interplay of light and broken glass.

Woolf's earliest published work, "Phyllis and Rosamond" follows two sisters in 1906 who, being "educated for marriage," begin to question their conceptions of love and matrimony when they attend a party thrown by the more liberated, independent Tristam sisters (9). Sylvia Tristam "wrote and had a literary delight in seeing herself reflected in strange looking-glasses, and of holding up her own mirror to the lives of others," so, despite their differences, she begins to sympathize with the conventional Phyllis (15). Shackled to her domestic future, Phyllis declares, "most young ladies are slaves; and you mustn't insult me because you happen to be free" (15). The mirror here reflects both simpatico (both women can *see* themselves in the generous light of the other), but Sylvia's feminist biases are also reflected back to her—her situation, however right, is still one of privilege in education and class. Her gaze, captured in the strange looking-

glass, confronts her with its return in the "lives of others" (15). Similarly in "The Lady in the Looking-Glass: A Reflection," Woolf visually frames a section of parlor by the mirror in the hall. While "[n]othing stayed the same for two seconds together," the photographically reflected mirror/lens captures the scene in its frame "so fixedly that they seemed held there in their reality unescapably. It was a strange contrast—all changing here, all stillness there" (2). Isabella Tyson, the owner of the house, is reflected, as the title suggests, through the idealized perspective of the narrator (a reflection in prose), in addition to her mirror. When the postal carrier brings the mail, "A large black form loomed into the looking-glass; blotted out everything…But the picture was entirely altered. For the moment it was […] entirely out of focus" (5). The letters become the focus of the story, not just as objects (the letter packets and pages on the table) but as semiotics. That is, the letters on the table mirror the letter on the page, a phenomenon of textual-visual memory making that offers a physical trace of the real while also limiting (through focus) access to the moment of visible comprehension/literacy.

Textual-visual memory is necessarily meta-reflexive as reflecting on the past involves the visual recreation of the lost image in the present, understood by Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida* through photography's capacity as a memorial object (the book, a meditation on photography, is an elegy to his mother). Being photographed, he argues, constitutes a powerfully disruptive experience because the sitter is "neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object: I then experience a micro-version of death (of parenthesis)" (14). The shutter's click, textually coded as a parenthetical interjection, is also the symbolically violent moment of becoming immortal in image. Barthes continues to understand the photograph as "this death in which his

gesture will embalm me" (14). The photographer embalms the photographic subject using the apparatus of the camera and the substances of development. To be caught "motionless and made-up" by the camera performs death in life, "because it certifies, so to speak, that the corpse is alive, as *corpse*: it is the living image of a dead thing" (32, 79). Photographs fix memories even as time moves forward, just as Woolf's mirrors and frames crop and arrest the literary moment and visual spectacle—such is literature's power to record.

And yet, there is perhaps another particularly modernist connection between embalming and photography. The primary chemical used in Cameron's wet plate process was collodion. Just before Frederick Scott Archer began using collodion on glass plate photographic negatives in 1851, John Parker Maynard, a Boston doctor, used collodion to dress wounds in 1847. That surgical discovery would be used in 1915 by Albert Worsham to embalm severely mangled bodies—he used cotton and collodion to fill in and reconstruct facial features, his most famous case involving the 1917 preparation of a fatally wounded lion tamer's body. Woolf's looking-glass, like the photographic image it mimics, contrasts with the surroundings, alive and in motion. She writes, "the voice of the transient and the perishing, it seemed, coming and going like human breath, while in the looking-glass things had ceased to breathe and lay still in the trance of immortality" (2-3). Cameron's inaccessible, aloof female models often appear trance-like, and such is photography's nature to suspend images, especially of loved ones, between life and death, permanence and transience.

Death is a main character in Woolf's "A Haunted House," and light, rather than objects, becomes physically tangible. A dead couple inhabits their old house, their story

told through a reader's experience of reading their afterlife. In this ghostly wonderland, the visible world is reflected in shadow and light: "the window-panes reflected apples, reflected roses; all the eaves were green in the glass […] The shadow of a thrust crossed the carpet […] A moment later the light had faded" (3). Recalling the Cameron's reflective glass plates exposed in shadow and light, Woolf's love story (the couple's treasure that brings them to the house is "The light in the heart") traps death between panes of glass, the darkness of death illuminated and remembered on the page (5). She writes, "But the trees spun darkness for a wandering beam of sun. So fine, so rare, coolly sunk beneath the surface the beam I sought always burnt behind the glass. Death was the glass; death was between us […] the rooms were darkened" (4). Beams of light and silver imagery multiply in this very short vignette, as "rain slides silver down the glass" (4). Cameron's photographic aesthetic suggests that wet plate photography—its panes of glass, silver nitrate, and exposure through light and shadow—informs Woolf's story about the small treasures of death.

As "rain slides silver down the glass" in Woolf's haunted house, glass's liquefaction characterizes and animates a dinner scene in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*:

> Now all the candles were lit up, and the faces on both sides of the table were brought nearer by the candle light, and composed…for the night was now shut off by panes of glass, which, far from giving any accurate view of the outside world, rippled it so strangely that here, inside the room, seemed to be order and dry land; there, outside, a reflection in which things waved and vanished, waterily. (97)

Suspended between life and death (not just metaphorically—the house physically carries the story of death and rebirth), his otherworldly interior reads more like a wake than a

dinner party. The individual guests are distorted and "composed" in the photographic frame. Like the streaks on Cameron's prints, the "panes of glass" ripple reflections "waterily." This odd aesthetic moment, using light as glass and water, underscores the novel's two primary sites of tension: the delayed trip across the sea to the lighthouse and Mrs. Ramsay's death. The lighthouse is itself structured by panes of glass and light, as Mr. Ramsay describes, "There it loomed up, stark and straight, glaring white and black, and one could see the waves breaking in white splinters like smashed glass […] One could see the windows clearly" (203). The black and white contrasted image is framed by glass, splintered at the base and in window panes at the top.

This moment of fractured glass references an earlier moment in the text when the housekeeper, Mrs. McNab visits the abandoned, deteriorating house. Nature encroaches on the domestic space. "Let the broken glass and the china," she observes, "lie out on the lawn and be tangled over" (138). This section of the novel, entitled "Time Passes," evokes the losses of WWI through the house's evacuation and changing façade, but the entire section is illuminated by the steady light of the Lighthouse, and the house's surfaces shimmer and flash against the dark backdrops of night. Mrs. McNab's presence in the old house (she has arrived to open it up before a few people arrive for a visit) is almost entirely mediated by her reflection in a mirror: "Rubbing the glass of the long looking-glass and leering sideways," she returns to the mirror several more times, a representation of "the scattered parts of the vision within" (130, 132). This vision within is so powerful in the "Time Passes" section because it persists in the wreckage of WWI. The traces of destruction are first noted by "weeds that had grown close to the glass in the night tapped methodically at the window-pane," which escalates as "Now and again some

glass tinkled in the cupboard as if a giant voice had shrieked so lout in its agony that tumblers […] vibrated" (132, 133). The sounds of war shake the house:

> Then again silence fell; and then, night after night, and sometimes in plain mid-day when the roses were bright an light turned on the wall its shape clearly there seemed to drop into this silence, this indifference, this integrity, the thud of something falling. [A shell exploded. Twenty or thirty young men were blown up in France, among them Andrew Ramsay, whose death, mercifully, was instantaneous]. (133, Woolf's brackets)

Glass registers the urgency and tragedy of wartime; the pained emotional life is represented externally and catalogued aesthetically. The beauty of the roses remains indifferent to the thud, a distant explosion that kills the young boy who lived at the house, but the narrator does not remain indifferent, instead recording the death in a short obituary. In this context, it is difficult for Mrs. McNab "to marvel how beauty outside mirrored beauty within"; in fact, "the mirror was broken" (134). Among the books turned from black to "white-stained," Mrs. McNab leaves the now-broken mirror for a new optical device, perhaps hopeful for a new perception in the middle of all this destruction: "the telescope fitted itself to Mr. McNab's eyes, and in a ring of light she saw the old gentleman" (140). The visual technology is imbued with agency, fitting *itself* to the old woman's eye. This exchange between machine and human eye brings other people into focus, suggesting that perhaps all is not broken, lost, or alone. These lenses and panes of glass not only describe the architectural decay but extend the individual experience of trauma and loss in war to a more collective vision—the old gentlemen is soon joined by the cook, Mrs. Bast, and the gardener Davie, and Lily Briscoe, the painter

who began a painting ten years ago, returned to finish her work. Cam, possibly short for Cameron herself (or the *cam*era),[14] narrates much of the novel's final section, declaring "It was all a blur to her," figuring both the lighthouse as a visual event and the metaphor of familial history (207). These glass-inflected photographic tropes articulate the difficult expressions of Woolf's critical stance on modernity, especially in regards to women's experiences of violence, past and present.

In "Unmaking and Making in *To the Lighthouse*," Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak excavates nonverbal communication in Woolf's novel, focusing on Mrs. Ramsay's "moments when words break down, when silence encroaches, or when the inanimate world reflects in her" (43). This refusal to speak, for Spivak, underscores Mrs. Ramsay's success as a wife. For the purposes of this project's argument, we should note Spivak's fascination with "the double-edged fact that in this woman's book, complacent and uncooperating nature is feminine, and she shares with the human mind the image of the mirroring surface" (51). While reflective surfaces are not Spivak's central focus, they proliferate in her analysis of womb envy (privileging the womb as a "place of production" rather than a counter to penis envy, or the lack), especially in the charwoman, Mrs. McNab's, "power to recuperate the mirror" (62, 52). Her acute reading centers on Woolf's ontology in the ruin of war but also between women—lingering on their reflection, or commemoration through the material encounter (62, 52).

Glass, the photographic medium made meta-reflexive in Cameron's work, speaks beyond words, a visual feminism that both subverts and activates. In that way, following Spivak, mechanical reproduction (not in the Benjaminian mass-production sense but

[14] Mark Hussey's annotated *To the Lighthouse* suggests numerous other possible sources for Cam's name, which of course may certainly be quite valid, but I think it is plausible that Cameron was another basis. See Hussey *n*24 (218).

more in the Barthesian register of using the optical device to reproduce a likeness or generate meaning beyond the fixed image) functions as the apparatus for verbal *and* nonverbal repartition. In *Freshwater*, Cameron passes on her photographic apparatus and her aesthetic trademark, saying "Take my lens. I bequeath it to my descendants. See that it is always slightly out of focus" (73). As suggested earlier, Cameron occupies contentious territory in the history of art photography, and her photographs call attention to the medium of glass and its manufacture. Her technique, and, as we will see, her writing about photography, trouble and complicate stable visual signs surrounding photography's realism and indexicality.

As the opening of this chapter suggests, the history of optic technology and production reveals a deep tension between the materiality of the technology and the vicissitudes of experience engendered by its use. Plate glass was not machine manufactured until the 20th century. A historian of glass, Isobel Armstrong tells us that the handmade glass "panels of the Crystal Palace in 1851 were made up of 956,000 square feet of…breath-created glass" (4). The same sort of breath-created glass plates would be loaded into the large format cameras that were used at the time. Cameron's wet collodion process required the photographer to coat the glass with collodion and silver nitrate, load the camera with the wet negative, expose the image through a glass lens, and then quickly and carefully develop and fix the negative on the spot in the dark. The glass negatives she used would have been created through a similar process used to manufacture the panels used in Victorian architecture. This particular process of glass production, known as cylinder production, involves blowing glass through a pipe and then swinging the pipe through trenches in the floor to lengthen the glass, which is then

cooled, cut at the ends, and allowed to fall open flat. These blown glass panes show the traces of the craftsman's breath, and that quality became an important cultural topos. Armstrong highlights the index of the artist's body: "[the glass blower] was often mythologized as a figure capable of heroic feats of labour…[and] glass was the spectre of his breath" (5). Both in her time and ours, Cameron was accused of sloppiness because fingerprints, dust, and hair—the physical traces of the photographer's body—showed up in her prints, and her soft focus methods undermined the value placed on clarity and precision. While the glass blower's bodily traces were mythologized, the female photographer's visual experiments called attention to the artist's agency and individual presence, which was harshly criticized by photography critics in Cameron's time who believed that photography should not expose an individual's experimental hand (the old debates about photography as an art vs. machine).[15]

Cameron's images pose a double threat—they unsettle viewers because they call attention to the medium itself and they refuse to deny the artists' bodily intervention in the process. She shatters photographic transparency by calling attention to the image as an object that has been manipulated for a visual affect. Cameron frequently undercuts convention by confronting it. In her memoir, *Annals of My Glass House*, Cameron (perhaps sarcastically) acknowledges that her "out-of-focus pictures were a fluke" but then insists "that when coming to something, which, to my eye, was very beautiful, I stopped there instead of screwing the lens to make the more definite focus which all other photographers insist upon" (8). Cameron develops a photographic protolanguage that

[15] For a full overview of these negative reviews and Cameron's responses, see Mirjam Brusius's "Impresciseness in Julia Margaret Cameron's Portrait Photographs," *History of Photography*, 34: 4, 342-55.

fractures preconceived modes of perception surrounding photography's transparency, realism, and accessibility.

Cameron produced the bulk of her photographs from 1874-1875 and wrote an autobiographical sketch entitled *Annals of my Glass House* in 1874, just five years before her death in India. Her studio, a glass house, was a "glazed fowl-house" where she composed her distinctive images.[16] Modernists such as Walter Gropius, Paul Scheerbart, Bruno Taut, and Walter Benjamin connected glass structures to theories of transparency or the promise of democratic vision. But for the Victorian Cameron, glass had a more artistic, malleable relationship to practical and aesthetic forms. Just as the chicken coop gets refigured for the photographer's studio, glass as a medium takes on different culturally accepted forms, allowing for a more fungible relationship to what plate glass means, be it on a building or in the camera's lens. Cameron's autobiography was never finished, and it remained unpublished until 1889 when her son included it in an exhibit catalog for the Camera Gallery in London. Just as art critics have wanted to correct the soft focus and so-called messiness of Cameron's photos, writers have continued to take liberties with *Annals* to make the text more "accurate" and objective, especially surrounding dates, names, and locations of manuscripts as proof for her reflections. However, *Annals*, like her photographs, disrupts conventions of narrative and reception in

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[16] Cameron recalls, "I turned my coal-house into my dark room, and a glazed fowl-house I had given to my children became my glass house!" (12). Although it is not entirely clear where Cameron got the term glass house—and biographers and critics have not yet speculated—some clues from the period suggest this was, as she suggests in *Annals*, a popular name for poultry houses. Indeed, in the February 1890 "The Poultry World" newspaper, a headline reads, "Glass! Beware!" The column warns, "There are those who think that 'you cannot have too much of a good thing,' and, therefore, knowing that glass is a good thing in a poultry-house try to introduce all the glass they can into their poultry-houses" (22). It is clear that whoever oversaw the building of Cameron's Glass House (when it was the home of chickens) struck the perfect balance in making the structure out of glazed glass. Light could nourish the chickens, while the glazed surface diffused the direct rays of the sun and helped to keep warmer air inside.

order to create something wholly original and profound—to breathe life into Victorian photography. She writes, "from the first moment I handled my lens with a tender ardour, it has become to me as a living thing, with voice and memory and creative vigour" (11). Her autobiography is also deeply intertextual with allusions to poetry and letters to Cameron from others. And yet, especially in the case of the Tennyson poems that she quotes, she makes subtle changes to the lines and does not cite the great poet who was also her next door neighbor. Cameron turns the assumed transparency of photography on its head and weaves it tactically into her own, new creation. She writes,

> Many and many a week in the year '64 I worked fruitlessly, but not hopelessly—
>
> > […] A crowd of hopes
> >
> > That sought to sow themselves like winged lies
> >
> > Born out everything I heard and saw
> >
> > Fluttered about my senses and my soul.
>
> I longed to arrest all beauty that came before me, and at length the longing has been satisfied. (12)

First, Cameron fuses her narration with the content of the verse, blending the two into a coherent whole. She changes Tennyson's phrase "winged seed" to "winged lies," suggesting that the truth factor of photography as a transparent medium becomes suspect in her working process as a fine art photographer. She expresses her longing to arrest all beauty on the wings of lies or half-lies, a flurry of quasi-transparent, near-photographic disorientation that makes new meaning through its qualified disruptions.

These disruptions help Cameron enact a new visual agency, which she crafts in the images by calling attention to glass, the glass plate negative in particular. In the

Hogarth publication of *Victorian Photographs of Famous Men & Fair Women by Julia Margaret Cameron*, Tristam Powell (in a revised edition of the text) describes the complexity of Cameron's printing with glass plate negatives: Using a "wet collodian process" required that "The glass was free of grain and therefore gave much better definition than the textured paper negative did…[Thus] A highly polished, spotless glass plate had to be evenly coated with collodian solution and dipped into a bath of nitrate silver to make the emulsion sensitive to light" (11). In this process, glass is coated (implying opacity), even though it is valued for its grainless transparency. The plate's original transparency is reversed as it's dipped in the silver nitrate, becomes sensitive to light, thus locking the particles on the surface in order to produce contrast. Carol Hanbery MacKay notes that Cameron's glass plates "were usually 12 x 15 inches" and she "created some 3,000 to 4,000 prints, with an overall image count of around 1,000 during her fifteen-year career" (24). Cameron famously refused to touch up her photographs after they were printed, but she did frequently interact with the image on the wet plate, using smudges, hatching, and onlays to created desired effects.

Cameron writes colorfully about her earliest manipulation of the glass plate negative. She describes, "my first picture I effaced to my consternation by rubbing my hand over the filmy side of the glass…this was the one I effaced when holding it triumphantly to dry" (12). Here we see Cameron caught between success and failure, holding the plate to dry while simultaneously smearing its contents. She calls attention to the "filmy side of the glass," drawing an important conclusion about the photographer's position behind the lens. That is to say, the distinction between photographer and photographed falls short as Cameron demonstrates that she exists fully on both the filmy

side and the untreated side of the plate. Her use of the word "efface" is especially suggestive in this regard, since Cameron often effaced even her most successful prints through extremely soft focus or by turning the face away from the camera's eye.

Overcoming this first supposedly botched print, Cameron succeeds in photographing a young child named Annie. She continues, "I was in a transport of delight. I ran all over the house to search for gifts for the child. I felt as if she entirely had made the picture. I printed, toned, fixed and framed it, and presented it to her father that same day: size 11 in. by 9 in. …how much I long to meet her [today] and try my master hand upon her" (12). In an expert double move, Cameron mocks her initial naiveté that the model "had made the picture" in an attempt to assert her agency tenfold. For it is the artist-photographer who processes the print in a series of steps, sizes it, and makes a gift of the product. She ironizes her initial impulse that "[Annie] entirely had made the picture" by ending the narrative with an assertion of her "master hand." With her haptic prowess, photographer claims her success, even as she describes the mystic wonder of developing a first image. Between the real and the phantasmal, art opens new aesthetic registers of experience and expression with profound implications for Woolf's modernist political landscape.

Art, write large, signals endurance in Woolf's work, and Cameron's photographic vision haunts the spaces and minds of Woolf's characters.[17] As a result, visual spectacles and altered perception advance critiques (and perhaps alternatives) to the violence and destruction of war. In her short story, "The Searchlight," Woolf's hostess recalls her

[17] See Emily M. Hinnov's "'To Give the Moment Whole': The Nature of Time and Cosmic (Comm)unity in Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*" for an insightful overview of the "socially redemptive value of an art that allows audiences to contemplate human choices and find instances of agency in the real world," especially through visual encounters (214).

great-grandfather's telescope as a searchlight cuts the darkness surrounding the house and guests. She writes,

> "He focussed it," she said. "He focussed it upon the earth. He focussed it upon a dark mass of wood upon the horizon. He focussed it so that he could see…each tree…each tree separate…and the birds…rising and falling…and a stem of smoke…there…in the midst of the trees…And then…lower…lower…(she lowered her eyes)…there was a house …a house among the trees…a farm-house…every brick showed […] they kissed." (123-124)

The optical prosthetic is also the erotic prosthetic, as the great-grandfather's gaze becomes increasingly voyeuristic. Echoing Jane Goldman's reading of the eclipse in Woolf, Holly Henry argues optical technology in the story responds to Edwin Hubble's 1923 discovery of the Andromeda nebula, but the searchlight cuts across time and space, complicating the love story of the telescope. Written in 1939 on the cusp of WWII, Woolf's partygoers are drenched in the light of dread: "A shaft of light fell upon Mrs. Ivimey as if someone had focused the lens of a telescope upon her. (It was the air force, looking for enemy aircraft) (148). Caught in the light, the hostess becomes both star and dead bug: the searchlight illuminates, and the telescope focuses her illuminated figure, as she is caught under the lens of a microscope—dehumanized, dissected by the war.

In an earlier draft of "The Searchlight," Cameron makes an appearance. More biographical, the draft names the man with the telescope Sir Henry Taylor, Cameron's photographic subject and a frequent visitor to her house. J. W. Graham's collation of the draft reveals that Woolf wrote two or three drafts of "The Searchlight" in 1929-30 and six more later, most likely after the start of WWII. In the second group of drafts, which he

calls the "Freshwater drafts," Sir Henry poses "for his friend Julia Cameron in the role of King Arthur. In one of those lulls to which the famous photographer so frequently abandoned her sitters, he slips away in the company of a nameless young lady" (386). Set in Freshwater, most of these drafts bring the WWII right up against Cameron's Victorian moment:

> There is his bust in the Colonial Office. And if you turn the leave of old photograph albums you will find him, draped in a shawl, posed as King Arthur […] it is impossible to contradict them, for the book in which the whole story is told in plain English was destroyed the other day "by enemy action." (qtd. in Graham 386).

Woolf identifies Cameron's fancy dress portrait as the surviving record of Henry Taylor—and, indeed, draft 4 ends with a note: "But since Hitlers bombs the other day destroyed a copy of the DNB it has been impossible to verify these facts," presumably the facts of Taylor's love life (qtd. in Graham 387). The DNB, or *Dictionary of National Biography*, was as much a family affair as Cameron's photography since it was edited by Woolf's father, Leslie Stephen. Stephen's painstaking labor over the DNB is represented by Mr. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*. Obsessed with alphabetical progression, he finds himself stuck at Q—the journey to the fixed point that seems impossible, just like the trip with his children to the lighthouse. The linear, rational conclusion eludes Mr. Ramsay, though, emphasizing the art of language so central to Woolf's literary aesthetic. In his analysis of "The Searchlight" multiple drafts—themselves a manifestation of language's complexity—Graham perceptibly argues that the telescope stands in for art itself, in particular the translation of past stories and present atrocities into a visual moment of

being. Using light and glass to fix a subject in time, the photographer employs the technologies used in the telescope, microscope, and searchlight.

Woolf's WWI novel, *Jacob's Room*, less directly but still quite undeniably links Cameron to the telescope. Recalling Cameron, "Miss Eliot, planting her tripod upon the lawn," draws Joseph Clutterbuck into her photographic snare, ordering him to sit for her (63). A greenhouse looms in the background, reminiscent of Cameron's glass house; the novel opens with Jacob's mother, her eyes full of tears that "flashed the glass house in her eyes," later described as "the diamond flash of little glass houses in the sun" (7, 17). All of this activity and photographic allusion comes at the end of a dinner party in which Jacob's black suit—foreshadowing his eventual death shroud—cloaks his body like the "black cloth an imperfect screen" Cameron would have hidden under to expose her negatives (57). The dinner party is interrupted by light of a ship sailing "from one corner of the window-frame to the other" (59). The party gazes at the stars with a telescope with Mr. Clutterbuck "reciting the names of the constellations: 'Andromeda, Bootes, Sidonia, Cassiopeia…" (59). One of Cameron's most striking photographs, *Cassiopeia* from 1866, captures the direct gaze of a young, angular woman [see fig. 1.10]. Subtle cracking creeps up her neck in the center of the image. Woolf published this photograph in her edition of Cameron's works just a few years after *Jacob's Room* so it is very likely that this constellation is also the Cameron photograph, burning bright in her mind's eye.

Fig. 1.10 Julia Margaret Cameron, *Cassiopeia, 1866*
OASC: The Metropolitan Museum of Art www.metmuseum.org. The Rubel Collection, Purchase, Lila Acheson Wallace, Harry Kahn, and Ann Tenenbaum and Thomas H. Lee Gifts, 1997.

Furthermore, *Jacob's Room* is a novel especially attuned to photography more generally. Walking to an attraction in Greece, Jacob is appalled to see "Madame Lucien Gravè perched on a block of marble with her Kodak pointed at his head" (151). Gillespie reads this scene as Woolf's critique of photography's "stiff artificiality," which people misinterpret as fact (146). This transparency further applies to war—the patriotism that leads young men like Jacob to fight snaps the lids shut on their lives. Gravè, suggesting Jacob's Grave, sits on the marble block, not unlike a war memorial, her Kodak—the gun, ready to take the shot—aimed at his head. Such is the Barthesian violence of photography, the pain of photographic memory, and the power of the medium to capture

an image even as it denies real access to the subject—a kind of cognitive window, constantly frustrating the expectations of mechanical reproduction.

Between the Acts of Woolf's Fractured Archive

During the aerial bombing of London and the Blitzkrieg that followed, Woolf wrote her final novel, *Between the Acts*. It follows a group of friends and relatives gathered in the local village for a history pageant written by Miss La Trobe. Using glass as her primary visual medium, the playwright's theatrical experiment culminates in a disorienting photographic depiction of the current moment as threatening planes cross the sky above the spectators—a scene to which we will return. In a detailed and compelling account of Woolf's final years, Hermione Lee takes seriously the material conditions of war that impinged on Woolf's life and work; she describes the blackness created by enforced black-outs, in addition to the rations, picnics and walks interrupted by low flying or crashing planes, and the village plays in Rodmell meant to boost morale. In addition to these material and environmental realities, Lee suggests that Woolf's reading of Freud while writing the novel defined her relationship to death, memory, and community during the Blitz. As a result, Lee argues, *Between the Acts* is Woolf's most directly Freudian work because it is "filled up with ideas about group behavior" characterized by a primitive, destructive, hateful instinct as opposed to Eros, Freud's "term for love in its widest sense" (Lee 712). We might best understand issues of preservation, destruction, and the material archive of war through Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. As the title might suggest, when thinking through the concept of an archive, Derrida argues that the impressions left by certain

events, technologies, beliefs, or psychoanalysis itself are not just conceptual or historical but also material. In this way, the will to preserve and the will to destroy exist simultaneously as "The archivization produces as much as it records the event" (Derrida 17). In *Between the Acts*, the stage play at the heart of the novel (and the visual spectacle it produces) records history and constructs the modern moment in relation to that history. In what follows, I explore a few ways Woolf creates a representative and generative depiction of this paradox between destruction and creation by further engagement with Cameron's photographic materials and processes. Her journals from the Blitz period nuance the tension between survival and the death drive: "Why try again to make the familiar catalogue, from which something escapes. Should I think of death? […] I said to L.: I dont want to die yet" (Journal Vol. 5 326). The "catalogue," or archive, of the familiar eludes her, its material trace manifested through the desire to escape death. To record is to acknowledge the fundamental *need for* commemoration, and the *preservation* of modern experience is similarly fraught by the destructive, uncontainable reality of daily bombings. These bombings, for Woolf, manifest the psychic process through glass: shattered, smashed, leaving behind a negative, unmediated space.

Susan Sontag has similarly read Woolf's relationship to war during this period as visual. She catalogs Woolf's satirical photographs in *Three Guineas* as gender critiques of war: "war is a man's game—that the killing machine has a gender, and it is male" (6). Specifically, Sontag understands Woolf's relationship to photographs from the Spanish Civil war as troubled by the voyeurism and spectatorship inherent in this kind of journalistic looking. But while Sontag sees the photographer as "witness," rather than agent (26), Humm argues that beyond the passive witness, female photographers (as

Woolf was her entire life) create "a specifically female modernist memory" with the body at its core (197). It is easy to see these kinds of debates emerging and coalescing around Woolf's photographic content. The critique of patriarchy as the war machine in *Three Guineas* emerges in its photos of great men in silly costumes, and the gender-bending agenda of *Orlando* is made visible in the book's androgynous portraits of Vita Sackville-West. In *Between the Acts*, glass is the material history of photography that allows Woolf to radically disrupt vision in ways that brings the war into contact with the Freudian individual vs. collective experience of war trauma. Cameron's photographic *process*, especially the glass negative, shapes Woolf's engagement with WWII visuality, for as Derrida reminds us "destruction belongs to the *process* of archivization and produces the very thing it reduces, on occasion to ashes" (94). With this in mind, glass plate negatives and the modes of vision they produce help to theorize the destruction of the Blitz explored and foreshadowed in *Between the Acts*.

Woolf wrote the bulk of *Between the Acts* in 1940 when the bombings of England were most severe, and the novel is set in June 1939, "a moment of transition, almost the last moment of peace before England's declaration of war, a few months later," according to Julia Briggs (386). In her letters and diary entries from 1939-1941, almost every description of the Blitz includes some description of shattered glass. Woolf's firsthand accounts make the Blitz visible to her reader through glass in its various forms, in addition to the rhetoric of breaking and shattering. For example, after German planes drop bombs around Woolf's garden, she writes, "Bombs shook the windows of my lodge. Will it drop I asked? If so, we shall be broken together" (qtd. Lee 727). Lee describes Woolf's "sharp fragmentary prose" of the period, as she visits London to survey the

destruction and salvage her and Leonard's property (729). She observes, "A looking glass I think swinging" on a bare wall and "Heaps of blue green glass in the road at Chancery Lane. Men breaking off fragments left in the frames. Glass falling […] windows broken […] Glass on stairs […] houses with broken windows, but undamaged" (Journal Vol. 5 316, 317). Destruction or its lack are rendered through these shards of glass, as Woolf laments the bomb that "blew out all windows…smashed all my china" in their London flat, with "Oxford Street now smashed…All windows at 46 [Gordon Square] broken," as a friend describes the Woolf's "picking about around the ruins of their flat. Rubble and broken glass were everywhere" (Journal Vol. 5 323, qtd. Lee 729-730). The examples proliferate from here, but this sampling demonstrates that for Woolf, glass captured the visual experience of life during the Blitz.

The final scene in *Between the Acts* creates visual affects through a processural description of glass that echoes the photographic. The audience, having sat through the history of England, reaches the present moment. Miss La Trobe, the play's mastermind, wants to "expose" the audience to "present time," echoing the exposed glass plate process, or Woolf's declaration in her short essay, "A Sketch of the Past," that the artist is "a sensitive plate exposed to invisible rays" (*BTA* 179, "Sketch" 135). After a rain shower, La Trobe plays music that "snapped; broke; jagged" as glass might, foreshadowing the play's final scene: (183).

> Look! Out they come, from the bushes…Holding what? Tin cans? Bedroom candlesticks? Old jars? My dear, that's the cheval glass from the Rectory! And the mirror—that I lent her. My mother's. Cracked. What's the notion? Anything that's bright enough to reflect, presumably, ourselves?

> Ourselves! Ourselves!
>
> Out they lept, jerked skipped. Flashing, dazzling, dancing, jumping. Now old Bart…he was caught. Now Manresa. Here a nose...There a skirt…Then trousers only---Now perhaps a face…Ourselves? But that's cruel. To snap us as we are, before we've had time to assume—And only, too, in parts…That's what's so distorting and upsetting and unfair. (183-4)

Like Cameron, Woolf calls attention to glass as a visual medium with the capacity to both disrupt and preserve. Even as it breaks, it reflects, similar aesthetically to Cameron's fractured panes that reveal the medium itself. The clear surface made reflective by the sun illuminates the visual dualism of wet plate processing. Glass, and particularly glass in its photo-negative incarnation, is a fluid medium, capable of turning in on itself even as it reflects something beyond it.

"Snapped" through the medium of glass, the audience in the novel is prompted to critical reflection about empire, selfhood, and war rather than the typical ending "with a Grand Ensemble" of patriotic celebration (179). As in "A Sketch of the Past," Woolf conflates the instantaneousness of the snapshot with the rhetoric of the glass plate-made image, blending her photographic process with Cameron's. England's history, be it national or photographic, merges with the present moment—an affect achieved through glass in various forms. The novel's characters see themselves and reflective surfaces illuminate them, bouncing light off their bodies and the surrounding environment. This glass, reflective and transparent, sensitized and mirrored, broken and whole seems familiar to the audience, but it also estranges them as the positive space between the acts of WWI and WWII force certain truths into negative.

This destruction, made material through a broken glass metaphor, is seen as both threatening to an old order but also perhaps necessary in the construction of a new vision. The children, representative of a new generation are described as "The young, who can't make, but only break; shiver into splinters the old vision; smash to atoms what was whole" (183). Woolf implicates the individual in the collective and vice versa, using "Anything that's bright enough to reflect, presumably, ourselves?" (183). The audience protests being captured "in parts" as they are unable to ignore the violence and chaos of their present moment" (184). The light, darting and flashing on the audience recalls the searchlights used during night raids. Exposed by the "hand glasses, tin cans, scraps of scullery glass, and heavily embossed silver mirrors" the viewers see themselves both whole and fragmented (185). A loud voice then tells the audience that they must "break the rhythm" of their lives and "calmly consider ourselves" (187). This visual circumstance fractures the usual modes of perception, and Woolf urges her readers to see themselves as objectively part of the communal spirit of war while also subject to its individual traumas.

The audience, illuminated by the flashing, reflecting light of the glass, is also captured in the image, made spatially whole by a medium that fractures, reflects, compresses, and reveals. At the end of the novel, their experience of beauty and violence is now wholly mediated by glass: "And the audience turning saw the flaming windows, each daubed with golden sun" (196). The country house, under threat of total destruction, anticipates its fate in flames visually and materially, and the glass surface becomes the photographic negative, traced by the sun and reflecting the horizon. This

final scene, in which "The house had lost its shelter" echoes Woolf's feeling at the end of her life that "Ideas are 'the only efficient air-raid shelter'" (qtd. in Lee 715).

Glass reflects ideas while also mediating new ones—processing war. The audience confronts the idea that "Each is part of the whole…We act different parts; but are the same" (192). They must collectively and individually confront their archive fever—their desire to understand by way of recording, However, the realization of complicity emerges in Woolf's text and, by extension, critiques the immense loss of life and property that engenders their communal solidarity and individual fear and reflection. As a result of La Trobe's visual disorientation, they ask questions about those systems; one attendee reflects, "It's true, there's a sense in which we all, I admit are savages still," but, continues, "if we're left asking questions, isn't it a failure, as a play?" (199, 200). In calling attention to the material destruction of the Blitz, she reveals each individual's implication in a collective culture of war in the hope that such self-reflection might engender enough critique, or self-awareness through self-reflection, that a different, pro-peace, and anti-patriarchal perception might eventually come to dominate.

As I have argued here, Woolf achieves this material, political, and psychological complexity through the alternative medium of glass. Cameron's photographic craft inflects Woolf's textual interpretation of the visual spectacle, creating a (quite literally) broken textual field. Read through this lens of material history and anti-war critique, her texts represent the collective experience of trauma while also underscoring individual accountability through a process of self-reflection, refraction, and transmission—a process we can trace directly and with extraordinary interpretive significance to our

understanding of Woolf's cultural moment and the processes of representation her work undertakes.

CHAPTER TWO: **The "Fibre of her Being": H.D.'s Craft Modernism from Egypt to WWII**

In "Manned by Women," a 1943 short documentary, female WWII volunteers sit together reading, crocheting, knitting, and doing embroidery before suiting up to operate the searchlights. Manning the giant lamps, these women and their crafts become a material expression of the liminal, civilian space of late modernist warfare. The mind and hands, through reading and craft, frame their use of the machines. What is the role of the made thing in this web of war, feminist agency, and literary history? What are the complicated continuities outlined by this web in twentieth-century alternative activisms? As we saw in Chapter One, for Virginia Woolf, the made thing endures, an expression of activist ideals in material form, which possesses the ability to record the traces of destruction that survive—the guiding paradox of extreme modernity in her work. Craft becomes a global expression of humanistic solidarity, as she writes in "A Sketch of the Past": "Behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we—I mean all human beings—are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art" (72). The palimpsest of art provides a critical vocabulary that advocates for human connection, compassion, and survival in the era of world war. And yet, this layering of art-making and activism also critiques the historical trajectories leading the the situation of world war, especially in the work of H.D. (Hilda Doolittle).

While Woolf invokes the seemingly outmoded technical oddities of Victorian photography in her critique of war-as-spectacle, H.D. radically interrogates the role of history, memory, and psychology through textile art, needlework in particular. The made

thing, and therefore the potentially broken thing, signify modernity in Woolf's literary imaginary; H.D. also lived through the Blitz, writing and crafting from the center of London—so a similar architectural aesthetic (broken windows, roofless houses, gaps in rows of houses) characterizes her reflections on this period. However, H.D. is more invested in how modern perception shuffles between modes of endurance, repair, and remaking. In this way, the author-crafter has some agency to critique, observe, and survive. As a civilian observer, H.D. writes a deeply historical account of violence using the conceptual complexity and material practice of needlework. In *The Invention of Craft*, Glenn Adamson echoes many of my readings of craft and needlework in this chapter, which emphasize the precise imbrication of trauma, agency, text, and temporality in twentieth-century craft practice:

> Craft's relation to time is complex—rather like a novel set in times past, but written in the authorial present. When the potential of this temporal structure is realized, craft can be a powerful mediator between the present and the past, and therefore between the individual and the collective […] In short, modern craft is potent not in spite of its temporal impurity, but because of it. Its dynamic relation to memory provides a framework in which traumatic experiences can be processed, forms from the past renewed, questions of agency brought to the fore, and new possibilities explored, all at once. (210)

Adamson's lexicon for the temporal dialectic of craft emphasizes the simultaneous practice of social progress and critique. He explicitly connects literary craft, the "novel set in times past," to art making, fostering cross-talk between these creative practices. Furthermore, the temporal, historic character of craft underscores the important, and

certainly overlooked, theoretical potential for craft studies in literature. For H.D., Woolf's art-world ("the whole world is a work of art") spins on the affective experiences of trauma, agency, and coping, shaped in turn by the mind, body, and hands.

Therefore, this essay considers the role of craft, "making something real" as H.D. would have it, in the symbolic economy of war trauma and literary production (Schaffner, *Signets* 5). In what follows, I historicize needlework as a medium and process, and I suggest the ways in which the material and theoretical dimensions of needlecrafts bring together several significant strands of modernist and H.D. scholarship. I argue that for H.D.—and others living during the Blitz—a material frame of reference for repair, preservation, and aesthetic historicity was not only necessary to survival but also supplied a deeply suggestive register of artistic, political, and gendered making. H.D.'s particular engagement with needlework—both in theory and in practice—forms the substance of this materialist schema.

Needlepoint is a type of embroidery in which thread, typically yarn, crosses an open-weave fabric, usually linen or a rougher base fabric, diagonally across the warp and weft. The result is a stronger, fortified textile, equally operative as a decorative or functional object. In traditional needlepoint, the use of courser thread and a rough base fabric resulted in a less delicate, more utilitarian product. At the same time, needlepoint is closely associated with fine tapestry weaving in its materials and use of hand-drawn patterns (called cartoons). Reading through a medium specific lens, this chapter considers needlework as a multi-layered, complex negotiation of materiality, a process that generates narrative in addition to a crafted object. For H.D. and other modernists, literary craft and handicraft inform each other to a degree not usually discussed in literary

critical history or cultural studies, despite recent turns to new materialisms, thing theory, and object oriented ontology.[18]

What modes of experience, perception, and communication does needlepoint and its associated craft forms make possible in H.D.'s literary aesthetic? In what follows, I argue that the civilian experience of WWII, in addition to H.D.'s historic and mythic conceptions of modernity, most powerfully brings together needlework as both a theme and material practice in her oeuvre. Between 1941 and 1943, H.D. wrote a prose memoir about her Moravian family history entitled *The Gift*. She ends the book with a proleptic jump to the present moment: 1943, the Blitz bombings of London. What happens to the self, to memory, to the *Sanctus Spiritus*, the to will to live during war? These questions haunt her as bombs fall and her peace-loving ancestors appear in flashes of literary and spiritual inspiration. H.D.'s daughter, Perdita Schaffner, wrote an introduction to *The Gift*, which comments directly on this experience of terror, self-reflection, and war. In "Unless a Bomb Falls…," Schaffner recalls a vivid childhood memory from this period in war-torn London, worth quoting at length:

> Normally a voracious reader and eternal student, [H.D.] now found it hard to concentrate on her beloved books. There was plenty of time in the afternoons and during the long evenings, but the times were "disintegrating"—one of her key words. Her psyche refused to lose itself in the printed page. So she turned to needlework. It kept her hands busy and freed her mind to soar or to settle […] She kept it in a floppy brown bag along with the wool—lovely soft skeins of every shade. She always brought it out after tea, and worked away while guests

[18] Craft weaves through modernism explicitly, ranging from Woolf's decree that "Knitting is the saving of a life" to Lily and Elizabeth Yeats' Cuala Press and Industries, to Mina Loy's lampshade designs for Peggy Guggenheim.

> lingered on. When they left, she continued till dinner time. She completed an elaborate masterpiece which hangs on my wall. Strange hybrid animals prowl an overladen fruit grove. She started another. I have that too—same bag, same wool, undamaged by time or moth. (x)

According to Schaffner, it was a scene like this ("She was stitching, lost in thought"), combined with Bryher's dismay at an explosion of apple jelly meant for Edith Sitwell, that triggers memories of H.D.'s ancestors and the "orchards of Pennsylvania" (x, xi). Schaffner describes her mother's needlework in one other instance, in her short but quite dazzling essay called "A Sketch of H.D.: The Egyptian Cat." She recalls H.D.'s daily writing routine, as H.D. herself described it: "'Like working on a sampler,' she confided, years later. 'So many stitches and just so many rows, day after day. If I miss even one day, I drop a stitch and lose the pattern and I feel I'm never going to find it again […] My past, the past, the past that never was, and making something real of it'" (*Signets* 5). Literary craft is, for H.D., "all part of the ragtag-and-bobtail of my sewing basket," but H.D.'s sewing basket, both real and imagined, has not been considered in H.D. scholarship because she has been more closely associated with the abstract realms of psychoanalysis, mythic ephemerality, and the symbolic economy of poetic imagery. However, needlework's modernist incarnations intersect with literature and creative expression in H.D.'s fiction and prose, a relationship that intensifies rather than detracts from our understanding of the psychological, ephemeral, and symbolic in her work. Reading craft practices through both H.D.'s literary works and the needlework she did during the Blitz deepens modernist narratives of making, survival, and materiality. In this chapter, I establish H.D.'s long intellectual and practical involvement with needlework,

beginning with its historical roots as an Egyptian craft to its contemporary theoretical importance in traumatic recovery, activism, and queer materialism. As part of the critical narrative, I also read H.D.'s needlework tapestries from the period, pieces she worked by hand and preserved. While certainly almost all of H.D.'s literary archives have been collected by libraries, most notably the Beinecke Library at Yale University, these craft works have not been seen in many years and have not received any critical attention. Through a bit of scholarly detective work, I recently located and examined H.D.'s tapestry work in a private archive, unearthing artifacts that, until now, have not been studied as physical, material works of art and craft on their own terms or in conversation with H.D.'s literary archive.

Out of the Tomb: Egypt and Needlework

"Secret Name: Excavator's Egypt," the third section of H.D.'s *Palimpsest*, is narrated by "crafty" Helen Fairwood, secretary to Bodge-Grafton, "the famous Egyptologist "(189). She is sent to record the "new Tutankhamen excavation" in Egypt (189). Indeed, as Susan Stanford Friedman notes, H.D., her mother, and Bryher "were present at the dramatic opening of King Tut's tomb in Egypt" (*Penelope's Web* 221). They visited in February 1923, just a few months after its initial discovery. The public opening of the tomb was especially significant to art and craft history because it contained one of two of the oldest, most elaborate examples of needlework ever found. Dated to around 1500 B.C., Tut's tomb was excavated by archaeologist Howard Carter who discovered decorative needlepoint stitching in the cave. In his notes and catalog, Carter identifies traditional linen robes: "The opening for the neck and at the chest were

adorned with richly woven pattern. One of the vestments with field plain, has narrow sleeves like the tunicle and needlework representing animals and floral design applied to its broad hem at the collar" (TAA.i.2.10.62 ©Griffith Institute, University of Oxford). In addition to these decorative designs, ancient Egyptians also used what is now known in decorative embroidery as *tent stitch* to stitch together canvas tents—a practical application of early embroidery. Various other instances of Egyptian weaving and embroidery (from the very utilitarian to the ornate) were discovered in the mid-to-late-19th century as numerous tombs were excavated and mummies began to circulate in the art market—but this was the earliest.

While the later Greek and Roman myths involving tapestry and needlework circulated in H.D.'s literary imagination, Egyptian needlework entered her consciousness materially. As a result of this fertile combination, embroidery and needlework proliferate in H.D.'s literary works; a triad of the most conspicuous textile artists appear in Helen (who embroiders the Trojan War in the *Iliad*), Penelope (who weaves and unweaves the tapestry of Odysseus' lifeline in the Odyssey), and Ariadne. But her interest in the medium also extends the Victorian fascination with arts and crafts as a form of political activism, evidenced most clearly in the Arts and Crafts Movement and the work of William Morris, who H.D. writes about directly in *White Rose and the Red*.[19] Although Tut's tomb produced the earliest example of needlework in modernism, the Victorians were also exposed to Egyptian artifacts, with plain and embellished fabrics certainly counted among them. Much was made of Pliny's expertise on the history of needlecrafts

[19] In addition to William Morris's lasting influence, May Morris remained the figurehead of late-Victorian needlework. See her book, *Decorative Needlework.* London: Joseph Hughe & Co., 1893. See also Cassandra Laity's *H.D. and the Victorian Fin de Siecle: Gender, Modernism, Decadence* for a more detailed account of H.D.'s investment in Pre-Raphaelite (re)visions of womanhood.

during the period[20], and in 1875 the Royal School of Art Needlework in London was founded to advance the practical as well as aesthetic dimensions of these craft processes in ancient and contemporary contexts.

H.D. was fascinated with Egypt's history as well as its survival and seemingly-endless excavation in the modern age, a set of interests documented in her personal book collection. Virginia Smyers's catalog of H.D.'s books in Bryher's collection includes her well-thumbed Baedeker guide to Egypt, complete with H.D.'s owl-themed bookplate and an inscription: "Hilda Aldington Jan 11 1923." In *Palimpsest*, H.D. emphasizes Mary's Baedeker, which is appropriately forgotten so that "common sense" must intervene (182). She continues, "Common sense preceded her. 'Wonderful the lighting of these old tombs with real electricity.' A tiny familiar electric bulb glowered overhead" (182). Modern technology illuminates ancient history, so alive it *glowers* rather than merely glows, as Helen enters the tomb and approaches the mummy—the ultimate incarnation of history preserved:

> The absolute essence of her underground experience was that the long graceful figure stretched in state in the centre of the minute and exquisite palace-tomb, was some potent opal. Long, oval with the exquisite contour of some huge and polished gem, it lay as it had lain for some four thousand years. It had attained by sheer permanence, a cryptic power. It rested now, a symbol of etheralised, black opal, from which if one persistently gazed (she was sure) small cloud-like dark images would emerge, as from a darkened crystal, small images from the past.

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[20] For a contemporary account of Pliny and Homer's influence on the history of needlepoint, see *The Hand-book of Needlework* by Miss Lambert, Philadelphia: Willis P. Hazard, 1851.

> The gilt of the tiny palace room was as if laid on yesterday by some skilled quattrocento craftsman. (183)

The natural substances (clouds, crystals, and most importantly the opal/body) are arranged by the "skilled quattrocento craftsman" who, located in 15th century Italy, creates work as fresh "as if laid on yesterday." Time and history become fluid categories in the space of the tomb where the intense spectacle of preservation moves Helen between sensory and subconscious modes of perception. The room possesses "An almost too modern glitter one might have said, as if these tiny things needed only age to convinced one of their authenticity. Age should have sullied them, they had not even ripened into dignity" (183). Egypt's shrines, "too modern," not only cast history into a radically new aesthetic light but also redefine modernity itself. For Helen, a more authentic interpretation of "modernity" emerges in the expanded temporal and material archive of the tomb (183).

As literary, material, and spiritual culture endures in Egypt, modern civilization crumbles during the world wars of the early 20th century. In this way, the excavation of the tomb does two things in H.D.'s work: it extends modernity beyond the patriarchal destruction of war, and it complicates the ways in which modernity, as an aesthetic category, unfolds along a historical progression. The tomb is a paradox, at once ancient and indescribably new—a womb space full of both history and potential: "In Egypt there was this unassuming comfort. One measured oneself by new and as yet unpremeditated standards" (209). As Marsha Bryan and Mary Ann Eaverly have pointed out, the authority of Egypt in H.D.'s work hinges on its durability and "the longevity of Karnak, which was built of large blocks of stone and spans millennia," an enduring visual and

material monument that destabilizes the "terrors of airborne destruction" in modernist warfare (79).[21] *Palimpsest* grapples with these questions of modernity and longevity directly. H.D. writes, "This was Egypt. America had been wiped out, she had thought, even before the heavy down-weight of London five war-years. Before the down-weight even of London five war-years. But it wasn't" (199). Egyptian ruins can be excavated for preserved bodies (the tomb is a protective space) in contrast to the symbolic and literal rubble of London and America after WWI. In Egypt, the ruins seem to be construction projects in progress: "The heavy wall looked solid, commonplace, like some heavy foundation that workmen in a New York thoroughfare had left for the noon hour; silent, empty, heavy and solid in its incompleteness. This was no dreary ruinous waste" (234). Indeed, *Palimpsest* ends when Mary and Helen say goodbye as "modernity swept across them" in the midst of Egypt's timeless architecture (238).

Throughout the third section of *Palimpsest*, textures and craft metaphors increasingly refer to the materials and processes associated with needlework. With its origin in Egypt and associations with durability, needlepoint functions as an antidote to modernity in H.D.'s work. Language itself (the medium of H.D.'s literary craft) originates in the metaphorical space of artistic craft.[22] Entering the central hall of the ruins, the hieroglyphs translate into "squares of crochet-like wave pattern, of broken line" (206). The woven line patterns emphasize the visual rhetoric of hieroglyphic language, seemingly broken and abstracted but also intertwined with the origins of communication

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[21] In their chapter on H.D.'s Egypt, Bryant and Eaverly expertly detail H.D.'s conviction that Karnak was a central conception in surviving modern warfare. The enduring textuality symbolized by hieroglyphic writing encapsulated the paradox of literary craft, or the "the physical vulnerability of her writing" during the blitz, set against the "permanent chronicle" of hieroglyphic inscription (79).

[22] Walter Benjamin describes language in terms of textile arts: "Work on good prose," he writes, is a textile "when it is woven." See *Selected Writings* Vol. 1, p. 455.

and visual art. Exploring the decorated walls further, Helen's glove becomes a foil for language: "The fringe of her glove brushed the heavy marked-in hieroglyph that even in the shadow shone clear […] The very hieroglyphs shone out, black pattern even in this dusk, like pattern cut deep with a slender stick on wet and glistening sand" (215). The powerfully well-defined hieroglyphs shine out, a pattern etched on the base surface that lasts through the "dusk" of modern experience. As in needlepoint, the pattern is pierced; it is possible to see the "slender stick" as the needle, piercing through the historical layers of material reality and psychological experience. The gloved finger also becomes a needle, as Helen's "ravelled [sic.] leather fringe" brushes against a "hieratic hawk" and she pushes her finger into the shape (216). This time, penetration is not metaphorical but unfolds through a material encounter with the rock/fabric: "And as she paused, digging with her gloved finger down some inches (it seemed) into the incurve" of the hieroglyph (216). As Sigmund Freud's student, H.D. would have no doubt understood the phallic dimension of this penetrative impulse,[23] and Roland Barthes' reading of the visual-affective concept of the punctum, described as a subjective "prick" of visual experience, foregrounds H.D.'s archeological probe (27). Thus, Hilda's penetrating, gloved finger recalls the embroidered pattern, a visual experience made possible by the threaded needle. Like hieroglyphic language, H.D.'s descriptions are both visual and linguistic, alive even in their stasis (the "hieratic hawk" a fixed image but symbolic of expansive flight), and composed by the Barthesian prick of affective, as well as material, experience (216).

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[23] In *Penelope's Web: Gender, Modernity, H.D.'s Fiction*, Friedman, attuned to the material dimension of modernist scholarship, includes images of H.D.'s scrapbook collages. One collage, entitled Séances in Vienna, connects H.D. and Freud to Egypt explicitly, depicting three volumes of Egyptian history in a pile.

Beyond the affective, haptic dimensions of pictorial design and handiwork processes, *Palimpsest* is a text fascinated with fabric in its most real sense. Jerry criticizes Mary's coat, a catalyst for repeated musings on the quality of fabric and its greater implications: "he took in his strong fingers, felt like some amateur of textures the rather sleezy gold and black […] 'this stuff has no body, it's pretty but I should think useless'" (220). In what follows, Mary struggles with the proliferating sense that she is wrapped in the "curious texture of golden cobwebs," "webbed with that fine light," "webbed with fine silver spider gauze […] webbed with that fine substance" (222). Engulfed in feelings of disconnection, she has "no body" just like the "amateur of textures" quality of her coat. Echoing this textural anxiety, Helen suggests that women are thought weak—even though they will be seen as "thin, frayed bits of feminine wreckage. It was so patently false. It was they, the two of them in an emergency, this type, this American, beaten and weathered machine type, thin as rails, steel-bone and sinew, that mounted ponies and endured the change of tropic and zero weather, that outlasted the great blossoms of over-ripe summer rose maturity" (231). Throughout the "Secret Name" section, women struggle between submission and independence, the traditional gender roles that follow them to Egypt, even as they rewrite those roles through world travel, erotic relationships with other women, and physical toughness. The flimsiness of fabrics such as gauze and netting gradually give way to linen, the traditional base fabric of needlework. Delicate textures of subconsciousness, ephemeral experience, and the psychic life are not the whole picture; the real world, the durability of history, and strong female figures coalesce around linen as a medium.

Mary's nets, gauzes, and veils turn to a meditation on the "cold of her sheets" (223). Wrapped up like a mummy in her bed, she finds new bodily awareness, "she became in those sheets a little less stoically discomforted, as the sheets warmed, drew her to a more human, a more cynic outlook" (223-24). Once again, the materiality of the tomb (in this case, the wrapped, preserved body) recreates the primal security of the womb. Through the Egyptian material history of cloth, women recast the delicate as durable. Flax, harvested in Egypt, was weaved into linen, the base fabric for the earliest needleworks ever discovered and the textile wraps used to preserve bodies. As a result, Mary switches to a linen coat, her delicate bones now wrapped in something more historically durable: "She felt under her hand, beneath the cool thick linen of the dust-coat, bones of the girl's thin shoulders and the fibre of her being" (233). This fiber, linen, appears repeatedly in the rest of *Palimpsest*, a layering of textural references that demonstrate how needlework's media and processes capture the paradoxical strength and vulnerability of women in a transhistorical context.

Helen in Egypt similarly underscores the relationship between historicity, women's crafts, and Egypt. In Book Six Poem Three, Helen reflects on meeting and falling in love with Achilles. In her preface to the poem, H.D. writes, "'God does not weave a loose web,' no. Perhaps it is the beauty and proportion of the pattern that amazes Helen. It is not 'in the oracles of Greece or the hieroglyphs of Egypt' that she finds the answer" (82). Helen's web, Penelope's tapestry, and Ariadne's loom circulate in H.D.'s poems, joining female historical figures to the durability of Egyptian culture and art—needlework, in particular. While these women are traditionally understood as part of Greek myth and history, their thoughts often turn to an Egyptian origin, especially

when they consider the "beauty and proportion of the pattern[s]" of experience. As she declares in *Palimpsest*, "*The Greeks came to Egypt to learn*" (217, her emphasis). Having learned the Egyptian crafts of weaving linen and pictorial design, Penelope in "At Ithaca" weaves an image she must destroy:

> Over and back,
> the tangled thread falls slack,
> over and up and on;
> over and all is sewn;
> now while I bind the end,
> I wish some fiery friend
> would sweep impetuously
> these fingers from the loom. (lines 8-15)

Unable to bring her craft to life, she wishes for an end to the process, an act of undoing that requires the weaver to "tear the pattern there" even though it represents her desire and fantasy (line 21). The binds of patriarchy fray on either end; unweaving the "tangled thread," Penelope participates in her undoing, even as she weaves as a form of survival. In H.D., women weave to preserve, and however difficult the process (of either weaving or unweaving), it serves an important function in how the map of their lives unfold. For example, in "Ariadne," another mythic weaver searches for her agency in the threads of her craft after being abandoned. Ariadne, the story goes, saves Theseus from the Minotaur when she uses a thread to help her hero-lover navigate the multiple routes of the labyrinth. Written after "an island monster," presumably Theseus, abandons Ariadne, H. D. writes,

I am weaving here;
the colours glow
with blue, sea-blue and violet;
I have dipped deep my thread
it will not fade,
I have long practised stitch and counter-stitch;
the frame is firm;
the pattern clear but spaced
with subtlety and symbol
those will know,
who have faced at the last
the ultimate,
ultimate fear; (II: 58-72)

Concerned with the archival preservation of her needlework, Ariadne "dipped deep" her thread in the dye, suggesting the endurance of her tale and her participation in the history of Egyptian needlework. While Penelope longs for destruction ("I wish some fiery friend" would end her work at "the loom"), Ariadne's pattern regards "the ultimate, / ultimate fear" with "subtlety and symbol." Her (text)ile speaks in symbols, but the message is also subtle and enduring. Not just in a linear manner, she weaves "stitch and counter-stitch" within the fabric's frame. The frame sets her textile "firm" in the process of making and suggests that life itself is woven into the fabric of trans-aesthetic experience.

The materials used in needlecrafts and textiles become the tools for survival in H.D's poetics. Hecuba, in "Sea-Choros," pleads for freedom as she is being transported to slavery:

shall I
be claimed by another
and find
the shuttle,
the needle,
the loom
my fate?
am I doomed
to the court
of far Pallas? (lines 80-89)

Hecuba fears the loom's prophecy, which may depict her death or fate as a "doomed," imprisoned woman. However, she realizes that the same craft tools can help her appeal to the gods and possibly escape. She asks,

what thread,
glowing crocus and red,
shall I thread
upon multiple thread,
til the pattern unfold
to depict
great Zeus,

son of ever-great Cronos?

shall I prick

out

the flight of the giants,

the fire-bolt,

Athena's yoked chariot? (lines 90-102)

She offers her services as an embroiderer to the gods in exchange for an escape from the ship carrying her to Pallas. Red thread, patterns, and the prick of the needle promise visual masterpieces depicting great narratives and give her an "out." At, first, Hecuba is convinced that she will read her fate in a narrative tapestry—she will interpret the image, condemned to its message, lacking agency entirely. But when she *enacts the making*, her agency is restored; through needlework, she can create a pattern with a different outcome. Fates and metaphors of needlework have been traditionally linked by Clotho, the spinner of fate and destiny, a role Hecuba claims in order to exercise some element of intervention in her own life. In these poems, the vulnerable subjects of patriarchy recast their agency between the threads of textile arts.

H.D.'s modernity, realized in needlepoint's processes and tools (needle, thread, and the woven base fabric), hinges on the notion that "*The Greeks came to Egypt to learn*" (217, *Palimpsest*, her emphasis). Handicrafts, such as the frequently mentioned "embroidered table-cover," furnish H.D.'s *The Gift*, and her father is compared to William Morris, as women seek alternatives to a stifling, increasingly violent sense of modernity (8). H.D. constructs the story of her intellectual gifts and her Moravian childhood through needlework: "The needles are on the table, the whole of Mama's

workbasket is on the table. There is a strawberry of wax for thread and a strawberry with emery powder for sharpening needles and getting the rust off" (40). As a child, she is told of her aunt Mercy who "died when she was a very little girl" (42). "Mercy had done a sampler," and she wonders, "Where was the sampler? Had Aunt Rosa the sampler?" (42). Mercy, for H.D.'s women, often appears in the form of needle and thread, pictorial designs and pin-pricks with ties to the craft's origin in Egypt. Once again returning to the tomb, H.D. emphasizes the life-giving nature of Egypt's archives. She writes, "There were the Egyptians who lived along the river. They built little houses to live in when they were dead. In these underground houses they piled up furniture, chairs, tables, boxes, jars, food even. Some wheat taken out of a tomb (it had been buried thousands of years) grew when it was planted" (5). The tomb springs forth new life, a symbol of the durable-ephemeral dialectic that keeps H.D.'s works both historically grounded and ever new, hopeful about modernity even as she writes from the middle of great destruction and desolation—a kind of reworking the pattern, making the linen base fabric stronger, more durable and whole even as a narrative design emerges on top.

A Stitch in Time: Embroidering the Blitz

The Gift begins with a symbol of hope—the ancient wheat springing to life from the tomb in the twentieth century, but it ends with one of the most powerful accounts of life during the Blitz bombings of WWII.[24] H.D.'s childhood merges suddenly with the present moment of the memoir's composition: 1943 in the center of London. She writes,

[24] See Madelyn Detloff's "Burnt Offerings or Incendiary Devices? Ambivalence, Trauma, and Cultural Work in *The Gift* and *Trilogy*" (*Approaches to Teaching H.D.* eds. Debo and Vetter, 127-34) and Debo's comprehensive introduction to H.D.'s *Within the Walls and "What do I Love?"* for a detailed account of the Blitz and H.D.'s WWII cultural context.

"I would sink down and down and all the terrors that I had so carefully held in leash during the great fires and the terrible bombing of London would now break loose" (131). Her terror, a thread about to break, finds an outlet in artistic expression, in both literary craft and handicraft.[25] H.D.'s longstanding interest in the material and artistic history of Egypt emerging from the tomb in modernism travels alongside her war trauma, revealing an interest in the craft processes that helped her conceptualize, theorize, and overcome this trauma. *The Gift*'s final chapter describes the shock and physical sensations that accompany a nighttime bombing, an experience of survival that transforms the "tension and terror" of the present moment into "another dimension" where her childhood memories surface (so as to be recorded, as the memoir demonstrates) against the backdrop of "a dome of Mohammedan tomb on the sands of Egypt that rose familiar beyond the gigantic columns of the temples" (135, 133). The material survival of Egyptian artifacts, protected by the tombs, fortifies H.D. psychologically and makes literary production possible.

Literature, like the psychic life, must endure for both the historical record and humankind to survive. H.D. develops an anti-war ethic that foregrounds psychological and physical suffering as a particularly feminine, transhistorical experience. She explains, "I was sick to death of tension and tiredness and distress and distorted values and the high-pitched level and the fortitude, which we had proved beyond doubt that we possessed" (136). The "distorted values" of patriarchal war culture test the limits of human survival, a "fortitude" that paradoxically emanates from suffering. Like the

[25] See Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, which traces trauma's connection to agency as a historical development. While traumatized subjects may feel that repeated traumatic expressions are "entirely outside their wish or control," the expression itself becomes a story imbued in the agency of narrative (2).

crumbling architecture of modernity, the body and mind strive to endure, but often problematically and in unbelievably traumatic conditions:

> We had had too much. The mind, the body is not built to endure so much. We had endured too much […] It is true that the psyche, the soul can endure anything. But one did not want the body broken—we must not think about that […] It has been worthwhile to prove to oneself that one's mind and body could endure the very worst that life had to offer—to endure—to be able to face this worst of all trials, to be driven down and down to the uttermost depth of subconscious terror and to be able to rise again. (136-138)

The linen-wrapped mummy's body "rise[s] again," an Egypto-Christian mythology that suggests the psychological dimension of trauma is a complicated negotiation of terror and endurance. In addition to their activist meditations on war, agency, and history, H.D. and Bryher endured the bombings as a matter of course. Bryher explains, rather misleadingly, "The only rope that held us together was routine" (179). I say misleading because, in fact, their lives were full of traumatic incidents that compromised routine—bombs, rations, friends and family leaving, H.D.'s illnesses. Bryher does, however, focus on the mundane experiences of daily life, the routines that continue even during war. As Leo Mellor suggests, these routines, accompanied as they were by confusion and unease, were deeply entrenched in the material realm; in *Reading the Ruins*, he urges us to "acknowledge a material basis to disorder and the possibilities for narratives of reclaiming, rebuilding and remaking" (2). For example, Egyptian fibers shape Bryher's experience of war in a no less significant but perhaps very different way than H.D.'s

abstract and literal reading of needlework. She explains in her WWII memoir how camel fur was used to make thread and fabric:

> Camels, however, seemed to haunt me. I opened the newspaper one April morning to find that the Zoo was offering to sell clippings from their coats without coupons. Our clothes by now were wearing out but even Robert was uninterested although he was temporarily in London getting his bomb-damaged house repaired, so I dashed off alone at lunch hour. (60)[26]

Walking through the deserted zoo, she recalls that "once I had ridden on a real camel across hot sand," referring no doubt to her Egyptian adventures. Camel wool is both durable and light, and despite H.D.'s protestations, Bryher houses the fur until it can be sent to Scotland: "Then without warning six skeins of rough and prickly wool, together with a startlingly small bill arrived with the morning post" (62). This exchange highlights the quotidian and also quite extraordinary awareness of textiles in their lives and further reveals the metaphorical dimensions of needlework's complex layers.

Underscoring the regeneration of art and aesthetics in H.D., Raffaella Baccolini argues that H.D.'s *Trilogy* section entitled *The Walls Do Not Fall* seeks "inspiration in devastation," suggesting that "Art that is despised and deemed futile is reevaluated in this section with a defiant tone that celebrates its persistence (124). The persistence of art, emerging from the ruins, announces itself in the dedication, "*for* Karnak 1923 / *from* London 1942" (509). H.D.'s 1923 visit to Tut's tomb is connected directly to the present moment of war and of the poems' composition. The first poem claims the endurance of the pictorial and literary "…prophesy / from the stone papyrus: / there, as here, ruin

[26] Vita Sackville-West similarly sent Virginia Woolf wool from her sheep at Sissinghurst to offset the rations. See *The Letters of Vita Sackville-West to Virginia Woolf* eds. Louise DeSalvo and Mitchell Leaska. San Francisco: Clies Press, Inc., 1984. 374.

opens / the tomb, the temple; enter" (lines 8-11). The ruin of modernity and its machine-age warfare expose the tomb, but rather than desolation, this exposure reveals a history of profound endurance. H.D.'s needlework archive makes this material relationship visible (see fig. 2.1). Her needles are stored on tiny felt book pages, a material intertwining of literary and artistic histories in the context of modernism. The linen book matches her yarn carrying roll, and the materials of needlework (needle, yarn, and a woven linen background) are all present, arranged alongside a needlework-themed reproduction of a book.

Fig. 2.1 *H.D.'s needle book*, date unknown
Reproduced courtesy of the Schaffner Family Foundation

The Walls Do Not Fall proliferates writing surfaces, from burning books and hieroglyphs to papyrus and parchment (518-519). The voices that emanate from these texts, she argues, are present in modernist literary craft, a form of endurance that binds people and histories despite unimaginable destruction. These writers, she says in poem

15, “we are the keepers of the secret, / the carriers, the spinners / of the rare intangible thread / that binds all humanity / to ancient wisdom, / to antiquity” (lines 5-10). The thread that binds humanity (reminding us also of bookbinding) exists with the spinners manufacturing the materials of psychic wisdom and the literary traditions that tell the story. H.D. reveals that her notoriously allusive poems take the imagined form of textile art: “This search for historical parallels, / research in psychic affinities // each has its peculiar intricate map, threads weave over and under” (poem 38 lines 1-2, 11-12). Traversing the map of cultural traditions and geographical locations, H.D.’s textural poems surpass the frames of modernity, characterized as it is by war and desolation. Her poetry and fiction, concerned primarily with (un)consciousness, rarely give the reader something straight; instead, what Slavoj Zizek (thinking through Lacan) calls “quilting points” of ideology, or *points de capiton*, anchor the reader to a larger meaning (87). These historical, mythic, and literary allusions weave through her text, aesthetically nebulous but tacked to the narrative histories most often dealing with the history of war and women’s agency. The stable-yet-subjective “knot of meanings” contained in modernist allusion both anchor and complicate the messy crises of modernity (95). Very interested in complicated continuities, H.D. can pull threads of meaning through layers of history, weaving these strands around modern questions of endurance and nonviolent protest (often enacted through literary craft, or, as I am suggesting, handicraft itself). As the backside of her needlepoint canvases demonstrate, history’s design (especially as a patriarchal construct) is a messy web of abstract weavings, much like the unconscious mind (see fig. 2.2).

Fig. 2.2 *Back of Trois Arbres needlepoint by H.D.*, date unknown
Reproduced courtesy of the Schaffner Family Foundation

H.D. explicitly compares the work of psychoanalytic memory and storytelling to tapestry work in a letter to George Plank in 1935: "The things I wrote you were simply spot-light bits that I can't talk about. There are lots of other things, a woven tapestry of back-ground; I hope eventually to shape it" (*Analyzing Freud* 542). Or, a few months later, in a letter to Bryher about starting analysis with a new analyst: "There is and will be no change in my personal triangles, simply that he is helping me fill in threads, on the tapestry that F. [Freud] and I pretty well outlined" (533). Throughout her war experiences, H.D. tried to make sense—a clearer picture—of her unconscious as her brilliant writings on Freud and psychoanalysis can attest. Like needlepoint, the needle's point and yarn navigate the layers of unseen and seen reality. These metaphors of the mind transcend literary craft on the page, however. This additional, material layer of psychological depth, reading, and coping reveal how the very real layers of human experience emerge in H.D.'s WWII work.

Writing—and crafting—from the center of WWII London, H.D.'s palimpsestic perspective provides an important and understudied bridge between the visual and literary arts. In "The Storyteller," Walter Benjamin cites Paul Valery's reading of needlecrafts to underscore this very bridge, the sensory connection between craft and the literary arts:

> 'Artistic observation,' [Valery] says in reflections on a woman artist whose work consisted in the silk embroidery of figures, 'can attain an almost mystical depth. The objects on which it falls lose their names. Light and shade form very particular systems' […] With these words, soul, eye, and hand are brought into connection. Interacting with one another, they determine a practice. We are no longer familiar with this practice. The role of the hand in production has become more modest, and the place it filled in storytelling lies waste. (107-08)

Of course, not all storytelling lies waste per se, but Benjamin's point is that artistic practice and literary craft go hand in hand. Sacrifice one, and you dilute the communicative power of the other. Like H.D., Valery, by way of Benjamin, evokes embroidery's formal properties—the eye and hand as instruments for translating light and shade—to refocus attention on craft itself. Rather than losing connection to "mystical depth," this practice highlights the meditative capacity of art. Haptic sensory perception aligns storytelling and craft, developing "particular systems" for reading between the lines of mind, body, and emotive experience.

Furthermore, beyond her dedication to psychoanalysis, H.D. embroiders as a method of survival—craft as a form of therapy is both physically calming and functions as a metaphor for repair, strength, history, and beauty in her life. Eve Sedgwick's work

on craft processes most directly underlines the ways in which H.D.'s work during this period indicates a deeply meditative, historically sensitive stitching up of war torn London and its inhabitants' traumatized minds and bodies. In "Making Things, Practicing Emptiness," Sedgwick records her interest in needlework and textile arts towards the end of her life when she was living with terminal cancer. She describes "a meditative practice of possibilities of emptiness and even of nonbeing" (69). In contemplating the queerness of death, Sedgwick posits that the *practice* of art becomes central to seeing the beauty of nonbeing. Her textile arts practice is further deepened by "the emphasis that Buddhist mysticism places on nondualism," echoed in H.D.'s *Within the Walls* when she describes a string of beads given to her by a Buddhist friend that she uses to relax at night: "My mind had been shattered and I had tried various ways and means of healing thought and of expression" (Sedgwick 75, 32). Because needlework's history is so inextricably tied to narrative, women's agency, and the reparative, feminine aesthetic of craft, it is a medium that accesses alternative histories. Sedgwick would appear to agree, writing that "the craft aspect of art making—or, more simply put, of thing making—does seem (doesn't it?) to be an exceptionally fruitful place for exploring those middle ranges of agency" (79). Worked during the bombings, H.D.'s needleworks speak to those middle ranges of agency, crossing histories and traditions in her modern moment.

H.D. AS ARTIST-CRAFTER

On a blustery March afternoon, I enter the lobby of a nondescript building near the Empire State Building and take a cramped elevator up several floors to a long hall

lined with doors marked with small signs. I find the one I'm looking for, and tentatively, I knock, and a voice from inside says to come in. Inside, a bright, white studio with books and photographs and a large drafting table, and a tall, elegant figure backlit by the big windows. H.D.'s grandson, Valentine Schaffner, shows me several boxes and gestures towards a large, framed needlepoint tapestry I recognize instantly from Perdita's descriptions of the fruit grove that hung on her wall. The boxes contain three more needlepoints along with more sewing and embroidery supplies and an assortment of other random items. My inquiries about H.D.'s craft practice initiated the rediscovery of this collection, and the contents were more complete and suggestive than I could have anticipated.

The four needleworks by H.D. have only just emerged from their hiding spot, and while we can be certain that H.D. did needlepoint and these are her projects, they are not dated. Based on her daughter's account, we can be certain that the *Fruit Grove* needlepoint was worked during the Blitz, and, owned by Perdita, was completed and framed. We also know that she had amassed a large collection of wool, "lovely skeins of every shade," which she kept in a bag (x). All of her works feature animals and plants, indexing the media of needlepoint itself: wool and linen. The materiality of art is often foregrounded in H.D.'s work as we have seen, so it is particularly exciting to see her theoretical elaborations take material form. Generally speaking (before I turn attention to the individual needlepoints), the open-weave base fabric is visible in the works, and at times the pattern underneath is also detectable. She works in both loose, broad stiches and very fine, detailed work, and the content is quite varied. Her technical mastery and use of color is extraordinary, especially considering the range of historical content.

The *Fruit Grove* needlepoint (see fig. 2.3) depicts large fruit-laden trees against a fairly simple background with large birds, dogs, and an insect scattered among the trees. The border design frames this tightly-packed scene, compressing its busy pattern and nuanced shades much like H.D.'s terse poems. The warped perspective of the piece—clusters of what appear to be grapes are as big as dogs, birds as big as dragonflies—furthers its poetic density as the eye focuses in on large pears, abstracted leaves, and the delicate shading of the animals. In particular, the dogs (especially the center one) recall the Egyptian beasts so influential to H.D.'s imagism, and the birds resemble phoenixes. These elements combine in a visual message of regeneration and renewal—a stitching together of icons and the medium itself that somehow endure.

Fig. 2.3 *Fruit Grove needlepoint by H.D.*, date unknown, 17" x 37 ½"
Reproduced courtesy of the Schaffner Family Foundation

Furthermore, the pear motif recalls H.D.'s famous imagist poem, "Pear Tree":

O white pear,

your flower-tufts

thick on branch

bring summer and ripe fruits

> in their purple hearts. (lines 12-16).

The poem's "silver" color scheme and abundant flowers suggest a visual excess, which, in turn, suggests a poem ripe with deeper meanings (lines 1, 5, 11). For this reason, the *Fruit Grove* needlework demands closer attention to its complexities and oddities, which at first present rather simply. In *Paint it Today*, H.D. returns to the pear motif, this time less in the vein of imagism and more critically on the surface. A meditation on World War I and same sex love, the novella highlights tensions of sameness and difference, mingled with beauty and destruction, early on. H.D. reflects,

> There are white pear trees and a wysteria's knotted vine stock, untidy with its rope-colored strands of fibrous, tattered bark, fraying from the wood. The wysteria, long embedded in the undershingles of the low roof, has thrown its blossoms this year far out of reach, into the branches of the nearest pear. The pear is an English Bartlett grafted with a French cuisse-madame. The two grafts are distinct in their blossoming and the wysteria smothers both down like a vine with ghosts of clusters. (3)

The needlepoint features two distinctive types of pears, repeated in the novella by the English Bartlett and French cuisse madame varieties, grafted together. This politically-charged coupling blossoms together despite differences, but they are also threatened by a greater force, represented by "the wisteria [that] smothers both down." What at first glance looks like grapes in the tapestry may be these wisteria blooms. Suddenly, the critical struggle between the pears and wisteria vines comes into focus, poem and tapestry in conversation across media. "[U]ntidy" ropes of bark disorient the reader/viewer and call attention to the "ghosts" that threaten a peaceful flourishing of natural elements.

The uneasy relationship between nature's regenerative power and threats posed by haunted histories emerges again in H.D.'s *Trois Arbres* needlepoint (see fig. 2.4). It appears to be a work in progress, with needles stuck in the canvas and neither border design nor binding. The plants and animals are arranged against a William Morris-inspired black backdrop in a traditional mille fleur tapestry design, but the aesthetic is more abstract and spaced out. As a decorative Eden, the needlepoint's black background dramatizes the fertile fruit trees and the surreal juxtaposition of animals and flora. Interestingly, the piece promises symmetry but, upon closer examination, does not deliver; all of the trees, flowers, and animals are different on facing sides. Because of this arrangement, it is not a realistic geography, with the various parts arranged in a flat spatial dimension.

Fig. 2.4 *Trois Arbres needlepoint by H.D.*, date unknown, 12 ½" x 16"
Reproduced courtesy of the Schaffner Family Foundation

Fig. 2.5 *The Lady and the Unicorn Tapestry (Sight)*, ca. 1500.
Musée de Cluny, Paris (Image in public domain)

This tapestry, I would argue, can be put in conversation with the famous *The Lady and the Unicorn* tapestry series housed at the Musée de Cluny in Paris. While we can be almost certain that H.D. saw them in person, we have another clue that she may have been influenced by these masterpieces: she kept most of her yarn in brown paper wrappers, and on one of them, she wrote "Cluny 3 Panels" before scratching it out. Take, for example, the panel labeled "Sight" (each panel is an allegory of the senses) (see fig. 2.5). The trees on each side are slightly different, just as they are in H.D.'s needlepoint.[27] Friendly animals in profile look more like static monuments or illustrations than realistic

[27] I make much of the trees in these tapestries because, in H.D.'s poetry and prose, trees are often metonymic symbols of self-realization and identity formation, such as the following reflection by her roman a clef narrator in *HERmione*: "Tree on tree on tree. TREE. I am the Tree of Life. Tree. I am a tree planted by the rivers of water. I am…I am…HER exactly" (70).

creatures and are dispersed evenly in both pictures planes. In the "Sight" tapestry, a rabbit is closest to the top center, and a similar rabbit crowns H.D.'s needlepoint. The inner circle flower designs and colors in the unicorn panel are also similar to the flowers in *Trois Arbres*. The tapestries' purely decorative elements mingle with the trees, which resemble support beams or pillars and the flying-buttress-like patterns of the floating flower clusters further call attention to the works' architectural dimensions. H.D.'s short white flowers around the bottom edge of the lighter inner circle resemble supports for a foundation, mirrored by a similar white edge around the inner circle in all of the unicorn panels. We might also note the two needles still embedded in H.D.'s design, which suggest nails—given H.D.'s concern with architectural destruction during the war period, sound edifices mattered and may have manifested in her artistic expressions.

The *Sanctus Hubertus* needlepoint is even more abstracted in its design, with textures merging into each other in bright technicolor and a tribal, or Egyptian, border framing it (see fig. 2.6).

Fig. 2.6 *Sanctus Hubertus needlepoint by H.D.*, date unknown, 15"x22"
Reproduced courtesy of the Schaffner Family Foundation

The legend of St. Hubertus recounts a great hunter who receives a divine message from a stag; as a result, he spent the rest of his life advocating compassion for God's creatures and more ethical hunting practices. In H.D.'s rendering, Hubertus sits atop his horse, already surrounded by a yellow halo in the moment of his famous vision. He draws his bow towards his body and the dogs are calm. H.D.'s interpretation of the saint's encounter with the divine hart speaks intertextually to her own written visions and spiritual experiences, which similarly condemned suffering and slaughter. It is possible that H.D. contemplated the gray area of killing from the center of WWII by underscoring the tale in vivid, modern color. As if commenting on the veneration of the hart, she labeled and preserved the leftover yarn, an animal product-turned-relic by archivization (see fig. 2.7).

Fig. 2.7 H.D.'s collection and note: "Wool left from St. Hubertus and Perdita's Bag," date unknown. Reproduced courtesy of the Schaffner Family Foundation

There are noticeably hybrid elements to *Sanctus Hubertus*, with the horse spotted like a giraffe, and the fauna ranging from pointillist trees to tropical undergrowth. Hubertus's name is written across the banner, but his figure is noticeably androgynous. It's possible that H.D. had another hunter in mind, Atemis or Diana (also often depicted as redheads). Artimes likewise held the hart sacred, and H.D. writes directly about her experience of the hunt in another imagist poem, "Huntress," or her lament in "Orion Dead": "I once pierced the flesh / of the wild deer, / now I am afraid to touch / the blue and the gold-veined hyacinths" (lines 8-11). The hyacinths hover symbolically between life and death, between murder and regeneration, just as the Hubertus and Artemis tales negotiate the complexity of life and death in a historical register that continues to generate artistic and literary meaning.

H.D.'s *Pastoral* tapestry similarly bridges medieval imagery—the castle or fortress amidst rolling hills flocked by idyllic animals—with a more understated, but still quite surreal, vision of ruin (see fig. 2.8).

Fig. 2.8 *Pastoral needlepoint by H.D.*, 21"x50," date unknown
Reproduced courtesy of the Schaffner Family Foundation

Multiple shades of green, blue, and gray form rolling hills with trees and shrubs. But the striking blue hue of the hills also recalls water, strangely merging land and sea (the sky is notably *not* blue, lacking color, clouds, and fowl altogether). Two buildings, perhaps country house, and a castle or a fortress, are connected by a mysterious pink ridge and seem to be enveloped in plumes of smoke. The brown and gray threads of the plumes match the chimney smoke, so it's suggested that the hillside and houses are on fire. This dreamlike vision of bucolic devastation manipulates its viewers' expectations, much like a Breugel or Bosch painting might feature some distant battle in tension with the Arcadian scene. As in some of the other needlepoints, the animals are worked in very fine stitching, in contrast to the looser, long horizontal stitches in the background (see fig. 2.9).

Fig. 2.9 detail from *Pastoral needlepoint by H.D.*, 21"x50," date unknown
Reproduced courtesy of the Schaffner Family Foundation

This pastoral is a scene full of contrasts, in terms of stitching, color, and content. If we read the pink swatches as flames (rather than flowers) and the plumes of smoke as fire (rather than fog or clouds), certain possible narratives begin to unfold. *Pastoral* is a

noticeably pretty, long panel with bright colors—it looks like a Victorian sampler. As a result, its actual content jostles against the aesthetic presentation creating the kind of visual-psychological contrast that runs throughout the pieces. H.D. does not deny the violence of contemporary experience but she does cast it in historical terms, and the medium itself insists on a subversive femininity. In 1943, H.D. gave her first public reading. She read a poem entitled "Ancient Widsom Speaks to the Mountain" in which wisdom, a woman, "speaks of the endurance of art" (Debo 80):

> *remember these* (you said)
> *who when the earth-quake shook their city,*
> *when angry blast and fire*
>
> *broke open their frail door,*
> *did not forget*
> *beauty.* (qtd. In Debo 80)

How can art, especially a highly-feminized version of it, "remember" those who endure through beauty? What survives when the "frail door" of war-torn modernity caves in? In her carefully stitched *Pastoral*, the house and landscape in flames recalls the destruction of medieval estates by mobs and riots often depicted in Victorian engravings, such as the 1831 fire at Nottingham castle.[28] These acts of political protest by arson resonated in the twentieth-century for two reasons; not only were estates burned during the Blitz, country houses were abandoned for financial reasons and Britain's radically shifting class system,

[28] See University of Nottingham's Manuscripts and Special Collections Library for the diaries of Henry Pelham Fiennes Pelham Clinton, 4th Duke of Newcastle-under-Lyne (1785-1851), which detail the Reform Bill Riots and his reaction to property destruction.

especially during and after WWII. Country houses were used to house war offices and hospitals, often returned to their owners in a state of disrepair. Starting with WWI, soldiers convalescing in these make-shift hospitals were often prescribed needlework as a form of therapy. Their work, overseen by the Royal School of Needlework, focused on social uplift and veteran rehabilitation through art and craft.

The attention to detail and the tedious work of needlepoint occupied the hands and the mind, giving H.D. an outlet for the fear and helplessness associated with her experiences of war and illness. For H.D., writing itself was like a sampler, the words on the page "so many stitches and just so many rows," a pattern that remained continuous (Schaffner, *Signets* 5). Craft media (linen and wool in particular) function as material manifestations of H.D.'s complex relationship to history and women's artistic work. Sedgwick calls this negotiation between artist and materiality the "textural perception" of textile art (84). Each of H.D.'s tapestries skew perception in order to point up the epistemological tangles of modern life. Their abstraction of mythic, traditional images is mirrored by the pairing of very loose, revealing lines of yarn with extremely tight, small stitching, especially on animals. These layers of texture mirror the close up and panorama shots of cinema, visual techniques that not only fascinated H.D. intellectually but also may have informed her approach to needlwork's capacity for shade, detail, and depth.[29] The shading in all of the needlepoint canvases is thoughtfully varied, moving between solid lines of abstract coloration to intensely concentrated, realistic color

[29] Christina Walter reads H.D.'s poems as "imagetexts," to borrow W. J. T. Mitchell's term, "as part of a scientific vernacular of vision that mixes psychology, psychology, and optics," and especially influenced by Fredudian dis-order (93). Walter most interestingly reads scientific visualities through H.D.'s engagement with cinematic technology, writing, "H.D. suggests that recent film technologies, from closeup and panorama to the layered and depth effects produced by splicing or superimposing negatives, were now offering her a new language for approaching the subject's incoherence" (102).

shadowing. They are visual indices of H.D.'s relationship to concision, artistic vision, and the continuity of narrative across time and place.

Likely written during the time of her needlework, *Within the Walls* centers mostly on January 1941, a time when, according to H.D.'s account in the text, "There are already 40,000 civilian casualties" as a result of WWII (113). During this period, H.D. suffered debilitating headaches, hunger and malnutrition, bleeding ears, thoughts of suicide,[30] evacuations, shock, and other effects of war. London is "desolate" pockmarked by "gaps in our rows of houses" left by the bombs (123). These holes allows the unconscious to filter in, traumatic gaps in perception that the memoir, like H.D.'s needlepoints, attempts to repair through reflections on history and women in war. The narrator describes her political vision as, "a dream of peace and hope. It seems to indicate that though our houses and our minds have been sliced open by the attacks of the enemy overhead, that, overhead is as well, the great drive of stars, and those stars found entrance into the shattered house of life" (128). London's architecture splits open, and so too does the traumatized mind; but H.D. creates a space for beauty—something transcendent—to come in, and her aesthetic is notably critical of violence and the patriarchal traditions underpinning it. In *Within the Walls*, beauty itself, like needlepoint, is Egyptian, represented by her cat, Nefert, "an Egyptian word [that] means beautiful" (129). The cat, synonymous with the Sphinx, outlasts human destruction, its endurance (physically and in the collective unconscious) gives hope. Historical or geographic distance becomes less important during the bombings, which H.D. elaborates on as the Deleuzian fold of war in which "Time and space were the same thing, accordion-pleated sensations could be

[30] In addition to questioning how and why one goes on during war, H.D. also reflects on Woolf's recent suicide: "The late Mrs. Woolf who walked into a river, but a few weeks ago, was real. She was real. Her death was a sign of failure, or not?" (141).

folded close together, then by some miracle time and space could be unfolded" (143). The historical moment, 1941, expands temporally, a psychological phenomenon she describes in terms of embroidery: "1941 or 1914 or, if you begin juggling with the figures, 1419 or 1491 made really the same pattern. A small vine-leaf, an out-size paquerette, a large violet curved earthward; the numbers could resolve themselves, the curved head of the budded 9 could be plucked from the pattern" (143). Embroidered flowers, arranged via a pattern, are as unmoored as history itself, capable of both recording nature in its order and in its disarray. H.D. also directly connects modernism to needlepoint's most energetic period—the 15th century. H.D. owned a book on the Bayeaux Tapestry[31] (actually an embroidery of wool thread on linen) published in 1945, and as we saw earlier, approached her craft work in direct conversation with some panels she had seen at the Musée de Cluny in Paris.[32] Needlepoint's historicity perforates modern experience, illuminating both the struggles and the successes of the past in thread.

Invested in new designs for living and understand this past, H.D.'s narrator maps these temporal slippages onto a dream vision in a section entitled "Pattern." In this dream, H.D. and her mother examine one of H.D.'s needlework canvases, and the art reunites them at a crucial time her life. She writes,

> Now, my mother is showing me a piece of tapestry embroidery. It is apparently my own. I am not satisfied with it, but 'see,' she says, 'the pattern is not broken.'

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[31] See also, *White Rose and the Red* in which two men discuss "a comet that is woven on the Bayeux tapestry" (187).

[32] See Lisa Simon's work on "H.D.'s Anthropoetics," Dissertation Abstracts International, Section A: The Humanities and Social Sciences, 2008 Aug; 69 (2): 609-610. U of Washington, 2008.

> I am sure the stitching is slip-shod and badly done but she says, 'no, look, there is the one line running through it all. There is a somewhat vague tapestry edge to the centre picture. I do not see the picture. We are concerned with the border. It is a wave pattern, the curves meet and run along symmetrically the whole length. Then the wave pattern seems to dissolve or resolve into a fleur-de-lys. The last two flower-heads in their separate sections are done most carefully; they are clearer and firmer than the rest and beautifully finished. (111)

The pattern, the medium, the design, and the quality are more important than the content, to the extent that "the picture" is entirely secondary to the "border." At the borders of conscious experience, the tapestry's curious symmetry lingers between dissolution and resolution, what Sedgwick describes as mysticism "made up out of dailiness; a mysticism that doesn't depend on so-called mystical experiences; that doesn't rely on the esoteric or occult, but rather on simple, material metamorphoses as they are emulsified with language and meaning" (113). While H.D.'s visions certainly were mystical experiences, at least to her, this moment with the embroidery suggests that perhaps the material thing itself, combined with language and meaning, engender transcendence. Furthermore, her concern with the border maps onto geographical space in *Within the Walls*. As the borders of domestic space, walls, fall, external barriers shape daily life in new ways, often characterized by violence. For example, H.D. writes about the younger women, including her daughter, who work as ambulance and canteen drivers: "Do you without the walls, know what this means? […] But we watch them as they stride across barriers, marked clear for all to read, no admission, dangerous, land-mine or time-bomb or just demolition squad and dynamite. They are pushing out the borders" (110). When words

fail—the keep out signs do not apply here—women transgress the borders, not only as female war workers but in a "new dance" of active participation in modern experience (110).

H.D.'s narrator, fearing death, contemplates the tapestry in the passage above as an act of consolation through matriarchy, craft, and the dreamworld. The unbroken line running through the image likely alludes to Clotho's thread of life, but her fate is not entirely out of hand—she has worked this image like a Penelope, and she reads a fate ending in regeneration rather than destruction there. Even on a sloppy canvas, beauty and flowers (the new growth from dead ground) weave a strong picture. To sew flowers is also to sow flowers, a vision of hope and peace equally bound up in the fragile thread of life and the agency of women's making. The thread, like H.D., becomes the medium for artistic and ethical expression. She continues, "'Look,' my mother says, 'the pattern runs right to the end,' as if she wanted to assure me that the pattern of my life was right, that the thread would not be cut abruptly, that I was weaving toward an established end" (111). Both metaphor and material object, the thread on the canvas reassures her that he will not die "abruptly," that the surreal experience of WWII London would reach "an established end." And indeed, she ends the story cycle/memoir with a proclamation of both rebirth and the war's end: "I am safe now. We built a great fire, brought back a dead log to life, we got warm, she and I together brought back the spring. This war is over, I tell you" (151). She ends the war on the page, an extension of the needlepoint's "established end" wherein time and space compress, not just psychologically, but also artistically. The sublayers of latent content (what we might think of as the knotted, abstract back panel) end up reinforcing the loose fabric. Needlepoint's sturdy stitches,

long history, and durability fortify the traumatized mind and hands. It is comforting to know that the life, like the war, has an "established end"—it won't go on forever, but to also see the beauty in the whole and the artistry in continuity, which provide security amidst the rubble and ruin of modernity's ugliest war.

In her iconic study of embroidery as the making of Victorian femininity, Rozsika Parker labels embroidery, particularly the needle's prick, as "a weapon of resistance" ("Foreword"). If Victorian embroidery conditioned the feminine ideal, modernist needlework exploited the so-called domestic medium to "transform the relationship of art to society, and the place of women within society" (189). In *Paint it Today*, H.D. defines the sweeping terms of art and society through the sometimes inelegant meanderings of needle and thread:

> I know that the important things in the tempering of a soul are perhaps the rough, the commonplace, that seem to youth and early maturity unimportant, stifling, even inhibiting surroundings or conditions. But at the moment, I am attempting, not so much, to reproduce an atmosphere, a medley of conditions and circumstances and surroundings, and to show how a single being pierced through them, or slung its tenuous way across them (the invisible, glistening thread, that counts for intuition and valor in the darkness of the impenetrable forest). (6)

By focusing on the individual experience of valor and intuition in the dark age of world war, H.D. specifies the important soul work of the commonplace. By extension, this narrative pierces through more nebulous accounts of "circumstances and surroundings," guided by the glistening thread of her singular, alternative perspective. Friedman, always attuned to H.D.'s particular cadence, echoes and affirms the aesthetic revolution caught

in the threads of H.D.'s web, writing that many of her letters "are free-associational, woven haphazardly out of disparate threads that clash and jostle each other in patterns that revel in the irregularities of everyday life" (*Analyzing Freud* xxii). Certainly the same can be said for her actual needlework pieces, a fresh and enlightening union that enriches our reading of art and war, both writ large, across H.D.'s endlessly rewarding canon. In pitting the material against the psychoanalytic, art against war, and modernity against antiquity H.D. makes new the craft of survival.

CHAPTER THREE: **Mina Loy's 'Contours of Collapse': Assemblage and the Class Politics of Trash**

And in these dark cells,
packed street after street,
souls live, hideous yet—
O disfigured, defaced,
with no trace of the beauty
men once held so light.
—H.D. "Cities," *Collected Poems* 39

This epigraph, from H.D.'s "Cities," attests to the feeling that it is easier to see the city from a safe poetic distance than to confront the souls living there. Impoverished, disfigured, boxed in, hideous souls deny the onlooker a happy celebration of so-called progress. The modern city, packed as it is with the unassimilated, makes the "light" of modernity hard to detect. In his *Futurist Manifesto*, Umberto Boccioni calls attention to this underclass by taking the "so-called nobility" of tradition to task: "We must destroy the so-called nobility, wholly literary and traditional, of marble and bronze […] The sculptor may use twenty or more different materials if he likes […] glass, wood, cardboard, iron, cement, hair, leather, cloth, mirrors, electric lights, etc" (qtd. in Whiteley 36). He evokes the raw materials of sculpture to advance an artistic revolution, a multimedia accumulation of found objects, building materials, and the human body. This chapter argues that the avant-garde writer, designer, and artist Mina Loy similarly looks to assemblage sculpture as a primary mode of social critique in her late works. In the late-1950s, Loy constructed masterful trash sculptures while living in the Bowery neighborhood of New York City. She often collaborated with the homeless population that lived near her, recycling their collections and found objects for her artworks. These assemblages critique class inequality and homelessness directly, and when these visual

works are put in conversation with her writings (especially the more recently published works of fiction), a new and striking perspective on Loy emerges along three lines: art, activism, and the archive.

In elevating art beyond the imaginative realm, Theodor Adorno situates art and craft in relation to key physical and political contexts and his *Functionalism Today* has shaped my exploration of these working pieces in key ways. Like Walter Benjamin, he argues that craft—as a practice—encapsulates certain power structures surrounding the artist figure. For Adorno, the tension between the raw materials of artistic production and "the invention of artificial products" denies the artist easy access to the innate "magic" of art's raw elements (398). Rather, the artist must imbue his work with the traces of self-understanding, an introspective and analytical stance that places the artist, her work, and her role as participant at the center of a particular critique. The materials of making, whether raw or industrial, hinge on what he calls the "innate problematic of the material" in which an important "interaction takes place between purpose, space, and material" (401). This chapter explores Loy's political purpose, spaces of making and activism, and craft materials (cardboard in particular and trash more generally) in order to show how Loy invites readers to see trash in a new light. In her assemblages and in her texts, she remediates the discarded remains of midcentury urban personhood, extending the innate problematic of the material from the gutter to the gallery.

Loy's critical reception has been vexed by limited access to her poetry, manifestos, and satires. While I discuss reactions to her design work (especially her lampshade business) in some detail later, it should be noted that much of her artwork is lost or kept in private collections with limited or entirely restricted access. Following the

limited fine press edition of *Insel* in 1991, Loy's prose has only recently emerged from the archive with Sara Crangle's publication of *Stories and Essays of Mina Loy* in 2011. This chapter relies heavily on these understudied prose works, which often conceptually make use of assemblage media (cardboard, glue, cloth, trash, food, etc.) to advance Loy's class critique. In what follows, I provide an overview of her personal and political relationship to class, economic inequality, and human suffering. Then, I connect that political impetus to Loy's place within the modernist and midcentury avant-garde as an artist, maker, and designer, paying particular attention to the reception of her art at the end of her life (she died in 1966). My argument also takes a slight, but necessary, detour into a discussion of assemblage media. In paying special attention the physical properties of this unique, complex art form, this chapter suggests that Loy's prose engages with the media of assemblage to condemn prevalent treatments of society's so-called degenerates. Finally, I read Loy's assemblages (including some that have not been in circulation since they were created) alongside her poetry in order to show how artistic form and activist content weave throughout her work, crossing aesthetic boundaries, making apparent the political dimension of her late work. In particular, I study New York photographer Berenice Abbott's photographs of Loy's assemblages, which I recently discovered in a newly-acquired Abbott archive and show here for the first time. These contemporary records of Loy's work that not only bring to light new assemblages by Loy but further embed her aesthetic activism in an enlarged archive of midcentury Bowery art.

From the Body to the Bum: Loy and Class Politics

Loy's thorny "Feminist Manifesto" has, to a limited degree, aligned her with feminism in literary studies. In particular, her emphasis on the role of the body in women's experiences opens a productive line of inquiry between the public performance of womanhood and the domestic negotiations of motherhood and muse. Sarah Juliet Lauro underscores one dimension of this aesthetic in her discussion of Loy's childbirth poetry—"Parturition" being the most famous example. Critics such as Rochelle Rives and Christina Walter also make a compelling case for deeper study of physicality in Loy's work, such as in her Loy's "Auto-Facial-Construction" pamphlet, which advertises her regimen for aligning face, voice, and personality. In "Modernist Prosopopoeia: Mina Loy, Gaudier-Brzeska and the Making of Face," Rives argues that the face, as a plastic entity, functions "not as a mask, a one-dimensional performance, but a prosopopoeic effacement of face that reconfigures speech" (154). Walter, on the other hand, reads this pamphlet in the "scientific vernacular of vision" of Loy's time (128). Although primarily concerned with the "psychophysiological forces" of ocular science, Walter offers a thorough reading of the clochard at the center of *Insel*, Loy's novel about the dispossessed German artist based on Richard Oelze (128). Narrowing in on an unpublished fragment from the book, she argues that "Loy describes *clochards* as having been 'disinherited' by 'sane society'" (155). She continues, calling attention to "the value of the *clochards'* particular perspective, Loy goes on to suggest that their meager existence on the margins and in the dirt allows them to make visible those places in the 'human psyche' where 'individual auras' merge with the 'collective aura'" (155-56). In other words, he body and mind merge in the artist figure's suffering, but not without purpose, at least for Loy.

Other critics such as Virginia Kouidis note a similar tendency in Loy's later work to beautify or elevate human suffering to new levels of surrealist insight and psychological exceptionality. Her interactions with the Bowery community,[33] especially its homeless population, further this compassionate affect, with critics noting, "She did not think of the bums as hopeless victims, but beautific and fallen angels who had miraculously survived. Together with the poets, sacerdotal clowns, and 'lepers of the moon,' they had been dispossessed" (Conover qtd. in Zelazo 60). Looking at a few of Loy's collages, Zelazo further asserts that her democratic use of materials provocatively dissolved barriers of class and consciousness" (Zelazo 65). As we will see, Loy does incorporate religious depictions of the bums quite explicitly, but I would resist the suggestion that these works "dissolve" class barriers. Rather, Loy emphasizes the class barriers at work in her environment, calling attention to the lived reality of capitalism, marginalization, and homelessness. Helen Jaskoski has gone so far as to suggest that Loy reverses the power structure of helpless victim and bad world by positioning the outsider as genius or artist. She suggests, "Above all, the artist is Outsider because of superior insight, craft, or talent; he or she is exiled from the conventional, philistine society which cannot tolerate difference and so repulses it. The poor, the disfigured, and the ill share with the creative genius an alienating condition of difference" (351).

These issues of alienation, difference, and creativity hit close to home for Loy, who, although from a comfortable family, knew the hardship of socioeconomic inequality fairly early in her life. As an expatriate in Florence, Loy identified with the "social

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[33] For more on literary responses to the Bowery See *On the Bowery: Confronting Homelessness in American Society* by Benedict Giamo Stephen Crane for an account of additional literary responses to the Bowery, from the nineteenth-century to the present. Crane examines literary aesthetics and literary history to map the vicissitudes of Bowery experience in the period.

outcasts" and frequently noted the economic disparity she saw around her, recalling in an interview, "I remember we were much poorer after the wars" (Burke, *Woman and Poet* 206, Interview with Paul Blackburn and Robert Vas Dias 223). In 1936, Loy returned to New York where she would spend most of the rest of her life. Carolyn Burke's biography details this period, especially focusing on Loy's interaction with the homeless population in the Bowery where she lived with other creative types in a lodging house. These accounts are worth quoting at length because they offer a different picture of Loy's political motivations for her art. Burke writes,

> To the residents of Klemp's house, the derelicts were fellow humans down on their luck. Used to seeing groups of men slumped in doorways, passing cheap wine in paper bags, or stretched out on the sidewalk, Mina and Klemp pronounced them harmless. The bums took good care of them when the women went out at night, demonstrating a gallant humor even in their weakened condition. One day when Mina was sketching a derelict sprawled on the pavement, his companion asked boozily, 'Is that your girlfriend?' On another occasion, after a bum lurched at Mina and Stevie from a doorway, his companion slurred, 'Leave them alone, they're ours. (Modern 412).

This window into Loy's life suggests that she perceived an innate human equality that surpassed traditional socioeconomic hierarchies and that she herself depended on the bums in certain ways. A protective community, the Bowery offered Loy and her circle both privacy and camaraderie, in addition to artistic expression and mutual respect. Burke also claims that "the bums represented her lifelong fear of 'outcasting.' To most people they were human wreckage, indistinguishable in their grime and degradation, but

in her eyes they were individuals with habits and histories" (Modern 412). Writing to her daughters, she expressed her fascination with the Bowery and makes note of the health of the bum population living on the streets. Loy's own background and expatriate experiences certainly account her for ability to sympathize with a diverse, outcast, population. So, too, does her closeness to the most radical art movements of her time: futurism, surrealism, and Dada. These aesthetic and biographical cornerstones support a further dimension of social activism in Loy's work across various media—that the suffering and oppression of the lower class outcasts affected her deeply and shaped her work, especially her fiction and late assemblages, in response.

Assemblage and the Creative Economy of Art

Loy's career began and ended with the visual arts. Jessica Burstein emphasizes the centrality of art in her work, suggesting that "Loy is most readily known as a writer, with her poetry holding a privileged place, but her aesthetic is embedded in a creative economy that stemmed from her lifelong engagement as a visual artist and designer" (Burstein 152). As a teenager, Loy studied painting in Munich, later continuing her studies in London and Paris. In 1904, she was accepted to the Salon d'Automne, an exhibit that put her at the very heart of modernist art like few other female artists of the time. In Paris, she rubbed elbows with Picasso and Rodin, in addition to all of the avant-garde luminaries in the Stein circle. By 1923, Mina Loy's lamp designs had developed into a flourishing business in Paris backed by Peggy Guggenheim. She collected unique glass bottle and antiques from flea markets to construct lamps in the shape of globes,

ships, and lilies.[34] Julie Gonnering Lein theorizes this design work in the context of technology, gender, and interior design. Reading the "electro-sexual metaphor[s]" in Loy's poetry, she argues "light is not so much a metaphor for power and penetration as an actual substance at work in the world—including the world of art and literature" (621, 618). Her electric currents conduct a range of phenomenological and psychoanalytic interpretations, but interestingly, class consciousness does not figure into Gonnering Lein's analysis. The found objects that often formed the basis of Loy's designs, in addition to the essentially DIY nature of her marketing and aesthetic, depended on discarded or repurposed materials. This dimension of her work often gets overlooked as critics locate meaning in the work without giving much thought the greater significance of her process. Such is the case in Suzanne Zelazo's "'Altered Observation of Modern Eyes': Mina Loy's Collages, and Multisensual Aesthetics." The only critic to look at Loy's late art in detail, Zelazo argues that her assemblages are "multisensual" works that challenge "normative conceptions of dimensionality" (47-8). However, rather than read the content of these assemblages as I propose, she uses their aesthetic to reorient readings of language in Loy. Her claim that the assemblages essentially absorb the ephemeral materials of their making further evades considerations of Loy's critique of class hierarchies, social inequality, and human suffering by misreading the medium itself.

For Loy, the materiality of assemblage went hand in hand with the lower classes she depicted. To be thrown out, discarded, or trashed manifests in both medium and content. Considering Loy's deeply ingrained modernism, it's not a radical idea: form *is*

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[34] See Jessica Burstein's *Cold Modernism* for a further account of how Loy conceived of and marketed her lamps (188-89). Her children recount their mother's insistence on finding materials for lamp making in places other than department stores (187).

substance, and the avant-garde political commentary emerges quite strikingly along these lines. The difference is that Loy's late assemblages manifest this relationship in an unfamiliar way—as we will see, these trash sculptures were unlike anything of their time.

It could also be argued that her interaction with the homeless population was a further extension of her art, a kind of class-based performance art. Burke writes of a particularly complex set of exchanges observed by Loy's nephews:

> When Mina's nephews came to visit, they understood the pleasure she took in her surroundings. Pointing out the 'beauty' in the derelicts' faces, she sketched them from her window and sent them on errands so that she could given them a quarter. After one man thanked her, said he'd get himself a sandwich, then headed straight for Al's, Mina said tolerantly, 'Yes, I know, a glass sandwich.' Because she sometimes gave the men bottles of wine on the understanding that the empties would be returned for her collection, some of them also called on her at home. But they made no claims beyond the occasional quarter and accepted her as their local Duchess. (412)

Loy's appreciation for the Bowery involves both the recording and observation of the community outside her window. Its also an economic exchange of both money and materials—a quarter to run errands and the exchange of choice glass bottles for her art. Company and humor also circulate between Loy and her unlikely friends, with inside jokes and pet names. These details more cogently contextualize "her rags, bottles, clothespins, and egg crates […] Mina's plans for her 'trash.' Gradually they came to understand that she was assembling 'objects'—three-dimensional constructions" (Burke, Modern 413).

Even though Loy moved to Colorado in 1953, her Bowery constructions continued to make waves in New York. Left behind, the artworks collected dust until they were exhibited and sold in a one-woman show coordinated by Loy's longtime friend and fellow charismatic outsider, Marcel Duchamp.[35] Roger Conover, her literary executor, writes that Loy and Duchamp were "Drawn together by their distrust of doctrine and their distaste for bourgeois values, their bond was both immediate and lasting. Forty years later, they were still friends. He would curate and write the copy for an exhibition of her collages in a Manhattan gallery […] Their attraction to trash and found objects preceded Dada" ((Re) Introducing, Woman and Poet 257). Known as the Bodley Gallery Show, Loy's constructions were described in similar terms in a contemporary *New York Times* review: "In the other corner are Mina Loy's shocking and macabre big collages, composed most graphically of refuse, and inspired by scenes near the Bowery where Miss Loy 'saw the frustrated excess of love by which the derelict has drunk, dreamed and died.' The alliance between Dada and social comment is downright sinister" (Preston, n.p.). From the beginning, her sinister assemblages were deeply entrenched in revealing the struggle of homelessness and poverty. This history rewrites Loy's involvement with "social comment" in powerful terms that suggestively bind literature to activism, art, and craft.

In 1961, two years after Loy's assemblages were exhibited in the Bowery, Metropolitan Museum of Art Curator William Seitz published the catalog for *The Art of Assemblage*. Of course Loy's assemblage art was not included in the exhibit (very few women were represented at all), but it is interesting to consider her work in light of this

[35] For a detailed account of the show, see Carolyn Burke's *Becoming Modern* pp. 433-35.

tremendous multimedia event. It's also necessary to situate Loy's particular medium in not only the avant-garde aesthetic of her time but in relation to popular attitudes about objecthood, value, and craft as sites of power struggle and social stratification. Seitz introduces assemblage by way of poetry writ large; in particular, he aligns the medium with Apollinaire's fascination with popular culture and advertisements as inspiration for new a new poetics of aesthetic disharmony. As if speaking directly about Loy, he notes that "the proper backdrop for recent assemblage is the multifarious fabric of the modern city—its random patchwork of slickness and deterioration, cold planning and liberating confusion, resplendent beauty and noxious squalor" (73). The juxtaposition of noxious squalor and resplendent beauty exactly capture the evident tension in Loy's work between celebrating the castoff classes and critiquing the capitalist machine. As we will see, there is no getting around the material in Loy's prose and visual art; Seitz similarly claims the historical significance of materiality, connecting every facet of modern existence to materiality: "In the past, the great determinants of the arts were nature, man, and God. For the twentieth century a fourth must be added: the artifact" (74). The city as a place (especially New York City) meets the artifact, producing, he claims, an "entirely new relationship between the work and spectator" in assemblage (81). Seitz does not explicitly talk about assemblage as an activist medium, but he does point out the way it, unlike dada, surrealism, and abstract expressionism, becomes "an appropriate vehicle for feelings of disenchantment with the slick international idiom that loosely articulated abstraction has tended to become, and the social values that the situation reflects" (87). In what follows, I want to attempt to define these "social values" in relation to assemblage's media of making, both theoretically speaking and more specifically to

Loy's art. As the MOMA exhibit demonstrates, Loy's art, although understudied and perhaps underappreciated during her time, was very much a part of midcentury avant-garde art practices: the city as creative environment for critique and appreciation, assemblage as a radical juxtaposition of opposing ideals, and the artifact as the primary vehicle for conveying nonviolent resistance, especially in terms of class inequality, poverty, and human suffering.

LIVING THINGS: CRAFTING THE FOUND ARTIFACT

In a 1978 letter to Loy's biographer, Berenice Abbott recounts photographing Loy's "rag paintings" (Beinecke Burke Coll. YCAL MSS 778 Box 4). Assemblage, constructions, rag paintings, collage, objet trouvé, trash sculptures—the labels proliferate, each one unable to capture the full complexity of Loy's craft. Sara Crangle notes "Loy's insistent treatment of language as a vital, living thing," offering a clue as to how literature and art inform Loy's craftivist dialectic (xviii). Made from living, once living, or life giving matter, Loy's materials bookmark the discarded traces of life in their use of banana peels, eggshells, tin cans, rags, and—perhaps most importantly—cardboard.[36] Live trees, pulped, pressed, and processed—cardboard looms large in these midcentury creations. Cardboard also makes the perfect street medium, the cardboard box as shelter and also, paradoxically, an emblem of industrialization's inevitable turn to decomposition. As trash, assemblage media makes a statement about cast-offs of many stripes while also succumbing to its own inevitable ephemerality. Following this line of

[36] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari are useful here for understanding the theoretical dialectic of what they call the "concrete assemblage": "The assemblage negotiates variables at this or that level of variation, according to this or that degree of deterritorialization, and determines which variables will enter into constant relations or obey obligatory rules and which will serve instead as a fluid matter for variation" (111 *Thousand Plateaus*).

thinking, Burstein makes a compelling case for Loy's dual relationship to the materials of her making: "A devout believer in originality at the level of production, Loy sought to preserve her work's status as one of a kind even as the commitment implied the object's eventual extinction" (156). Although she speaks primarily of Loy's "fashion objects," the same could certainly be said for her late assemblages—and perhaps even more so (152). Using trash makes Loy's art vulnerable to decay, but her subject matter also deteriorates the divide between high and low art on multiple levels.[37] The embodied aesthetic of craft conveys more than narrative alone, bringing the living world into contact with the imagination. Thus, "Craft as a mode of activity translates into craft as power, an obscure power, nestling in the imaginatively conceived object" (Leslie 392). In what follows, I want to explore how trash as a craft medium translates into power in more and less obscure ways. An exchange takes place between the maker, subject, and spectator in Loy's work made possible by the medium of trash. This vexed relationship between things and ownership extends from Loy's class critique to her own archive and emphasizes the dislocation of context, use, and value inherent to found object art in the twentieth century more generally.

Such questions about class have always been inherent to considerations of trash and found object art. Lucy Lippard writes that hobby books from the 1960s, such as *How to Make Something from Nothing*, slips between class identifications using craft as a gendered practices. She writes, "The book itself is concerned with transformation—of tin cans, beef knuckle bones, old razor blades, breadbaskets and bottlecaps into more and

[37] Reading Benjamin, Esther Leslie understands this relationship as Dadaist found object art; she writes, "Authenticity rests on the incorporation into culture artefacts of real-life fragments—cigarette stubs, cotton reels, bus tickets, scraps of textile […] Dada frames a found segment of the world" (Leslie, Craft Reader 392).

less useful and decorative items" (483, Craft Reader). The decorative item points to a certain (higher) class, but its medium, trash, complicates that participation. In particular, the idea of transformation becomes especially applicable to the ethics of homelessness and poverty in the post-war years. In *Junk: Art and the Politics of Trash*, Gillian Whiteley devotes much of her analysis to this period of art and aesthetic transformation. Cutting to the heart of the matter, she writes, "Waste is, of course, an adjunct of luxury. Junk, trash, garbage, rubbish, refuse—whatever we call it—is dependent on economic wealth and excess production" (4). She also argues that assemblage art speaks directly to this paradox of excess: "With its deployment of the ephemeral, the discarded and the filthy, [assemblage] has been viewed as a disruptive, transgressive art form which engaged with narratives of social and political dissent, often in the face of modernist condemnation as worthless *kitsch*" (8). The artistic authority of the object gained traction during the modernist period as a result of Duchamp's readymades and Picasso's 1912 cubist *Still Life with Chair Caning*. And yet, especially for female artists, trash assemblage was a derided practice. But rather than appreciate this artistic heritage, Loy's family was particularly annoyed with her purported hoarding, and her friends often wondered at her eccentric trash collecting practices. Loy's craft was highly performative—not just in her earlier years (she wore a lampshade-themed dress to a fancy ball) but also in these later trash works as she reclaimed status for the bums and critiqued capitalist consumption. Loy's trash media lives on in spite of its devaluation.

Loy's media ecology represents the struggles of marginal members of society while also attempting to rewrite the nature of suffering itself. In the case of Loy's close friend and collaborator Marcel Duchamp, Dalia Judovitz has developed the concept of

"mirrorical returns" to describe this relationship between media and the representation of agency for suffering subjects (219). Her reading of the "nature of spectatorship and its creative impetus and potential […] explore[s] how the social and institutional scaffolding of spectatorship is driven by a critique of commodification implied in visual consumption that brought into play considerations of the work's exposition, that is, its physical and institutional modes of presentation and display" (219). The spectator plays an essential role in constructing the work's "critique of commodification" on the level of content and consumption. Duchamp had his own reasons for this collaborative process, but for Loy, the display of trash in its various forms of art demarcates a new kind of activism, or a language of resistance that involves the spectator in its translation. Judovitz explains, "By requiring the spectator to partake in the creative process along with the author, he implicated him or her in the process of artistic making, understood no longer simply in terms of self-expression but now as an act of critical responsibility" (220). What is this act of critical responsibility in Loy? Her works are deeply entrenched in "the process of artistic making," as her collection practices and Bowery community alone attest. So, too, does her medium underscore the process of assimilating disparate elements into a cohesive whole. On the level of content, Elaine Scarry's work helps us identify the nuances of expression as critique in Loy's assemblages. Suffering itself pivots on the place between "an external image of internal events" (8). Loy participates in the critique of class-based human suffering in bringing together her own internal events with the external images of the Bowery. Scarry explains, "there is also the danger that because artists so successfully express suffering, they may themselves collectively come to be thought of as the most authentic class of sufferers, and thus may inadvertently appropriate

concern away from others in radical need of assistance" (Scarry 8). It has been necessary, to some degree, to position Loy's craft work in the context of her life, but in what follows, I want to shift our attention to her literary works and art objects so that new perspectives emerge on how she represents those in "need of assistance" in conversation with, but also beyond, her personal circumstances.

Settling Up with Loy's Street People

In "Mi & Lo," Loy begins with an examination of form from two perspectives. In what could be a dialogue between Judovitz and Scarry, form and suffering emerge as the dominant themes. Lo asserts that the repetition of formlessness results in form itself, while Mi argues for a purer duality, a "union of identicals [sic.]" that constitutes form (265). A few pages later, this discussion turns to the stuff of flesh and soul, starvation in particular. Perhaps drawn from her own near-starvation in Mexico, Loy interrogates the difference between empathy and first hand experience. She writes, "If I read of a woman starving to the point of death I get an intense concrete impression all wrapped up in the parcel of one moment of the agony of starving to death—I may weep over the social injustice—at least it entirely holds my attention" (275). Even just reading the account of starvation produces as "concrete impression," a highly materialist account of the speaker's concern for "social injustice." Totally absorbed, this experience takes a certain kind of form, even at a remove. However, Loy's speaker continues, "But if I myself experience the process of starving to death—I go through none of this agony of mind—there is no similarity between the simple poignancy of conception of starving and the complex protractedness of the inside information on starving to death" (275). Here we

learn a great deal about Loy's politics, and her treatment form itself, especially in the visual arts, conveys a great deal about her activist lens. Starving to death distills cognition to a fundamental experience of survival. Alternatively, sympathizing with someone starving involves the "agony of mind" rather than body, a simple, even if painful, recognition unfolds for the spectator. Loy divides these responses into complex and simple. Her medium, assemblage, is complex. Rather than using a more monochromatic medium, such as painting, her works require a diverse set of materials, joined in new and unusual relationship, disguised and revealed to varying degrees. In her prose, this material complexity (as social activism) demonstrates Loy's commitment to reaching beyond a simple empathetic experience to the more complex, bodily ranges of human suffering.

Written in 1926 for her daughter, "The Crocodile Without Any Tail," is an allegorical fable. Grandpa the Crocodile is a lonely outcast who nearly bites off a little boy's leg. The children, who would like to play by the river in safety, ask a fairy what they should do. She offers to pull out Grandpa's teeth painlessly with a magnet: "[Grandpa] awoke to find that a deep change had come over his nature. Somehow or other he felt much more tender and when later in the morning the little children passed him on their way to school, he felt that in the future he could only want to kiss them" (18). Given this tenderness, he finds himself surrounded by adoring children, making "another crocodile with teeth so jealous he bit off his tail" (18). The children (obviously from a higher class since they have a "maid to clear up after them") are overcome with sympathy for their suffering friend and decide to build him a kite tail (19). They craft "him a tail of tufts of lovely pink and yellow paper" (18). Grandpa is turned into a craft

object, "both useful and ornamental" when their mother, a knitter, suggests attaching a Christmas tree to him (19). At the same time, "The crocodile was growing more human every day. In this democratic household where all who chose to come and live were sure to be accepted on terms of perfect equality, the crocodile's better nature expanded under the sympathetic treatment" (21). Recalling the socialist improvement writings of William Morris, Grandpa's good nature flourishes in this environment of happy usefulness and community. Economic benefit naturally follows: "One day the children had a fine idea. They cut two fine rows of teeth out of white cardboard and fixed them in the crocodile's mouth" as a money making scheme "to make their fortune as well as the crocodile's" (24). The crocodile-as-assemblage takes form to comment on both this humanitarian project of personal equality and to generate revenue. The children stick their heads in the crocodile's mouth for money. Exhibition and spectatorship, certainly exploitative, also depend on the mutual performance of threat and fear. By looking fierce, the crocodile performs a role, now antithetical to his nature, so that the children may perform both fear and heroism for profit. The prosthetic cardboard teeth, made from Loy's primary assemblage medium, engender a dynamic performance. Cardboard, from the teeth to the "big sign" on the tent, mediates spectators' experiences in tension with reality (24).

Financial transactions based on fantasy also arrive in "Hush Money," which tells of a son who goes home to see his dying father. The son, Daniel, is modeled on Loy herself and an imagined final encounter with her father (she gave this story to Freud). Taking a sudden compassionate turn, the story concludes with Daniels' conversation with a male nurse about his father's suffering—in body, mind, and heart. The nurse calls attention to the double standard of wealth and status under capitalism: "You bet, they

want to be so nice—got into serciety they have, they 'ave to prasoom that these 'ere married men wot shrieks at nothing at all, 'as been sitting all their lives in a angel's lap, while they just 'appened to rot away" (35). Speaking in dialect, he pronounces their economic privilege irrelevant in the end, the patriarch overtaken by his own precarious ethical existence. The father rots away and thus exists between the living and the dead. Loy's critique of both the patriarch and the capitalist system he succumbs to pivots on the decomposition process.

In Loy's little known "Street Sister," shifts from the male nurse's working class perspective on social status in "Hush Money" to a prostitute's point of view.[38] A wealthy woman opens the vignette with a reflection on deprivation at the fringes of society. She recalls, "on the draughtiest stretch in Paris, a bitter wind blew me towards a blank wall. While regaining my breath I became aware that something had fallen to the ground, and in the arresting manner of living things detected in unusual relationship to the inanimate, a few belated stragglers had drawn up to peer at it" (41). A tired, cold, deranged prostitute has been blown to the ground, and Loy's description bears a striking resemblance to her assemblages. The "blank wall," or background, absorbs the abstracted heap of rags. By conflating "living things" with the "inanimate," spectators draw closer to get a better look. As if the scene were mounted on a wall, they "draw up" to look at the painting—to "peer" at it. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, to peer has its origin in the very inanimateness she identifies in this complex exchange of stares: "Of an inanimate thing: to appear to be peeping or looking out; to be just visible,

[38] For more on how class worlds collide in modernism, see Michael Trask's *Cruising Modernism: Class and Sexuality in American Literature and Social Thought* explores "cross-class contact in the early twentieth century and the representational problems such contact raised" (1). For Trask, these issues center on the changes in the "psychology of sex" fundamental to modernist aesthetics (2).

esp. from behind something; to protrude a short distance into view" (*OED* "peer"). Given this definition, it is actually the rumpled mass of the person that peers out onto the crowd. The narrator pulls the woman up, gives her some money, orders her to get a hot meal, and turns to leave. Then, she notices the woman is denied service in the "low-class little cafe restaurants along the Boulevard" (42). As in "Mi & Lo," sympathy takes over: "In that absent-minded way I have of finding myself identified with other people's problems, I proposed I should go along with her to present a stronger front" (42). Their stronger front fails when they are once again denied service, this time together; however, "This common defeat established us on the footing of absolute equality which seemed to warm her" (42). As the title might suggest, these women, "Street Sisters," are similarly devalued *as women*. Despite their difference in social class, cleanliness, and confidence, they are united in their shared marginality.

Loy literalizes the metaphor of equality in the story's final lines as the narrator decides to patronize the place where she buys cigarettes since they will want to keep her business: "The half-delirious dead-eyed wreck I picked up had vanished, and a perfectly normal human being, with light in her friendly eyes, laid a hand on my arm. 'But, my dear,' she said, 'do you think you had better? I hate you to have unpleasantness on my account'" (42). Such an ending raises the question—how does (in)equality shape perspectives of social class? Sisterhood wins in the end. The prostitute's "unoccupied" eyes are suddenly made "friendly," echoing Loy's earlier account of sympathy versus experience in "Mi & Lo" (42). Even though the women unite here, and the prostitute is humanized and dignified to some extent, there is still a gap in their experiences—and it is a financial one. The prostitute's only spoken reply ends with her "account," which is not

merely a matter of responsibility. Her account her is her (unspoken) narrative, but it is also a transaction. Having already exchanged money, the women navigate a newly complex layer of debt and accountability as the desired results become more difficult to attain. Grandpa in "The Crocodile Without Any Tail" and the nurse in "Hush Money" work for their money with the body as currency. So, too, in "Street Sisters" where the prostitute's account intensifies her low class station while also bringing attention to their shared gendered narrative, or account, since they are oppressed in spite of higher class status.

Working voices continue to pierce the fabric of social class in Loy's "The Three Wishes," which has a passing reference to Eugene Debs, a famous socialist and antiwar activist who founded the International Workers of the World. Although only a passing mention, the allusion to Debs calls political attention to issues of social class, crime, and money in the story. It follows three children born to different classes and social situations: Ian, born to rich parents, Jacky, a ragman's son, and Hyde, a child of thieves. The story begins with a brief account of each child's first material surroundings. Ian is surrounded by luxury, attended by "a young woman with serenely braided hair [who] was winding white and pink and blue wool round the radius of a cardboard circle with a hole cut in its center" (109). From this description, it would seem the young woman makes pompoms, meant to soothe and entertain the child. The second child, Jacky, struggles to survive as the most basic material necessities fail him—even trying to kill him: "Under the scrap of burgundy coloured carpet for a cradle-cover, the ragman's infant rehearsed the battle of live with his feeding bottle, to which was attached an India-rubber tube aged to the colour of seaweed" (111). This bottle, Loy explains, is so broken down that the

tube flattens and won't allow the "cold mixture of water and condensed milk" to flow through. It also threatens to choke the baby, and yet, "it was this child's destiny that he should live" (111). Hyde, "[t]he third was born in that addressless household, known as a den of thieves" (111). What luxuries Hyde has are "unaccountable" since they have been stolen" (112). Ian decides to rebel against authority, but only in thought. His contempt for his life and social standing fail to materialize outwardly, exposing instead a latent rage. However, he does increasingly associate with "the husky dregs of a population," since, as a budding artist, he is drawn to "limn souls that were not smeared over, smoothed out, made unrecognisable to the creator by the footling ritual of civilization" (115). Then, it seems most of the story will focus on Hyde, who, being abused and kicked out of his home, laments being "outcast," experiences a holy conversion, and is adopted by Mrs. Switheringham Bates (116). Jacky, meanwhile, takes up the banner of worker's rights but also falls into a life of crime. One night, he breaks into Mrs. Bates house and encounters the beautiful Hyde, sleeping angelically. After a transformative conversation with the kind Mrs. Bates, Jacky becomes critical of the difference between price and value—the old rags of his parents' shop have little value; therefore, their occupation reinforces the cycle of oppressive labor.

In art school, Ian enjoys "spiritual indulgence," developing his philosophy that "Everything of *superlative* value must be formed from nothing" (135, Loy's emphasis). He develops an artistic sensibility that could be called the aesthetics of sagging: "At the art school he found the first latitude for his rearrangements where the actual that had been lacking to him revealed itself malconformed by denutrition and inactivity. He regarded the poor bare man" (136). The nude male model prompts Ian to return with a clothesline,

clothespins, a pair of drawers, and a shirt. The professor draws the other students' attention to "the lamentable being who hardly appears to hold together at all. He talked a good deal of sensing the bourgeois structure beneath the masses, of noting how the leaning torso sagged into the pelvis" (137). Ian describes his alternative representation of the human form as follows:

> "I feel," he rumbled ponderously, "for the contours of collapse, the bony structure to be, er, misleading.
>
> "That is, that every issue, aesthetically should be kept—pure—absolute.
>
> "If you get me?
>
> "And that the degeneration of form, if it must be considered, be followed to its inevitable—ah—conclusions.
>
> "That for instance, I can perhaps put it more clearly—the essence of drooping is a lack of inner support."

Loy captures this "degeneration of form" through the human body in her assemblages, suggesting that Ian's aesthetic musings speak beyond the story's boundaries. By drawing the empty clothes on the clothesline, he emphasizes absence and collapse over and beyond the classed body. The "lack of inner support" is of course not only a matter of bones and form but a comment on the degraded selfhood engendered by poverty. Ian replaces the spectacle of human suffering with a larger philosophical commentary on structures of aesthetic fullness, visibility, and authority. Bones themselves are a misleading, or insufficient, construct when the larger forms of mind and body suffer. Notably, the story's most privileged son inherits the role of avant-garde artist, bucking against aesthetic convention as a result of his ability to explore such terrain. It is, as Loy

says in "Aphorisms on Modernism," "ANARCHISTS in art are arts' instantaneous aristocracy" (311, Loy's caps). The aristocracy of conceptual and visual art hinges on Ian's observations about class from a place distinctly outside that space, physically and politically.

Loy's "Universal Food Machine" further extends Ian's artistic perspective into the political realm. Indeed, in her notes to the story, Crangle labels it a "political commentary […] The thematic concerns—hunger and war—suggest that this work is a product of the World War II period, when Loy was living in New York City, and was increasingly writing about the homeless people who inhabited her streets" (413). In Loy's other prose works, there is often a back-and-forth debate surrounding political issues, and "Universal Food Machine" is no exception. Productively at odds with herself, she writes:

> How much would be saved by calling in the vast sums in disseminated charity and pooling them for a national distribution of general welfare. How easily would such an overhaulment occupy the millions of unemployed […] As by all the laws of psychology—the equality clamoured for by the socialist is an obvious impossibility—and as such equality is the desire of a type of mind whose experience has been too rude. (290, 291)

The notion of equality, she argues, it itself too deeply entrenched in a class-based perspective to gain any traction. A socialist redistribution of resources requires a psychological outlook that she labels "too rude," or idealistic. It is an idealism cultivated by suffering—an almost divine relationship to need, unsustainable in the modern world. However, Loy herself tries to find some balance between capitalism and socialism:

"There may be an inevitable social ladder—and consequently a lowest rung—but it is a matter of merely humane decency that the lowest rung should be lifted higher up" (291). Social hierarchies undeniably exist, but she inserts the "humane decency" factor as a means for improving the situation. Decency, as an abstract category, formally matches the nature of suffering, which, she argues, exceeds its boundaries. In section titled "Effluvia of decomposition of the Spirit," Loy offers a final contradiction:

> All evil thought, all cruelty, the paralysed vitality of loneliness, the crushed vibrations of drudgery and the bewilderment induced by enigmatic injustices […] and like a poison gas enfeeble the survivors. The decomposing bodies are buried to avert contagion, but the decomposition of the spirit, impalpable to our senses, is an inconfinable and a lasting corruption […] Yet history reveals our race intent on the manufacture of so dangerous a psychic chemical that the world in the end will succumb to its effluvia if we cannot succeed in evolving an ethical antidote. (292)

This powerful account not only catalogs the vicissitudes of human suffering but argues that such suffering cannot be buried when a war ends, that its putrid effluvia infects the entire world. While not normally thought of as a pacifist or human rights activist, Loy offers an account that positions her unexpectedly as a passionate campaigner for a new "ethical antidote" to human degradation, war, and widespread injustice. What is perhaps most interesting about Loy's critique is the tension between its materialism and anti-materialism. The human body, decomposing, buried, and releasing noxious gas into the universe, communicates Loy's insistence that the political machine drives the inhumane treatment of living people.

The discarded body is an important aesthetic construct across Loy's art and writings, a motif she elaborates through the medium of trash, food, and the artfulness of detritus. In her play, "The Pamperers," Loy's artist-collector character, Loony, collects trash, a practice justified by Somebody with "Picasso uses all sorts of odds and ends" (163). Another voice, Ossy, replies, "No critic dare anticipate the masterpiece this man may stack […] There's a revival in THE THING being a patron" (163, Loy's caps). Loony insists he will "make *Life*" out of his found objects, evoking the creation story directly (170, Loy's italics). This living art is of course tongue-in-cheek as Loony's name itself might suggest. On the one hand, he accesses THE THING as supportive of art, creation, and life itself while also noting the impossibility of a trash masterpiece—unless the artist is Picasso. Loy's fascination with Picasso as the king of high art trash assemblage emerges again in an early draft of a short sketch entitled "Gate Crashers of Olympus." Crangle reproduces a poem in this earlier version from 1925:

> In the beginning Picasso
> broke a wine glass—
> disrupted a guitar
> As his things were very nice
> They have now gone up in price—
> Thus has the soul of man become a triangle'" (376).

Breaking up material objects revalues them. Picasso's cubist visions not only become commodities, going "up in price," they shape perceptions on human existence itself. Loy reverses the terms of artistic representation in order to show how life reflects art when art reflects life. This two way exchange between the aesthetic/material and

political/economic puts the maker (and the spectator, for that matter) in a new, triangulated relationship. This overview of Loy's political critique of homelessness, poverty, injustice, outcasting, and hunger demonstrates, for the first time, the extent of Loy's complex and insightful nonviolent protest emanating most powerfully from her Bowery years.

"Contours of Collapse": Assemblage as Poetic Activism

Loy's assemblages bring her politics into relief. In addition to the works themselves, firsthand accounts of Loy and her work during this period reveal how the visual, material, and political coalesce around her artworks, which are deeply engaged with specific media and processes. One particularly striking firsthand account is included in Burke's research archive for her biography, recently placed at the Beinecke Library at Yale. The archive includes Burke's phone interview notes and written correspondence with Stephen Ferris, who was a young artist in New York when he knew Loy. They lived in the same house on Stanton Street. He describes Loy's intense artistic concentration during the period, interrupted only by the occasional social interaction with modernist luminaries such as Sylvia Beach and T. S. Eliot (MSS778 Box 10). Interestingly, Ferris compares her constructions to da Vinci's inventions: "She seemed to have such an affinity with this artist; more than any other" (MSS778 Box 10). In addition to her design work, Loy developed many sketches for unique inventions during her lifetime. But the assemblages hold a far more central place in her oeuvre than generally understood. Ferris suggests Loy had been doing assemblage series since the 1920s. The comparison to da Vinci underscores Loy's fascination with the technical interworkings of objects. Da Vinci, a gifted polymath, refocuses our attention on Loy's numerous talents,

not relegating her to the marginal status of experimental female poet alone. In her inventions, Loy gets creative with technology, and we see a similar creative energy driving the use of materials in her assemblages. Ferris also mentions Loy's account, in summary, of her even later assemblage work while living in Aspen, a series she humorously called "Mina Loy—Litterbug" (MSS778 Box 10). From Ferris we learn that Loy had also done "a construction that had in it sculpture, clay & fabric, called The Machine: it had her visions in it abt 30" high & 22" wide. It must have gotten lost in Aspen. He sent it fr N.Y. bec. she had planned to do a whole series based on it, out there" (MSS778 Box 10). Other accounts note her use of rags, egg cartons (which she lacquered), and her experiments with different types of glue (MSS778 Box 10). These various accounts, combined with Ferris's observation that for Loy "cruelty was the greatest sin," clearly illustrate the ethics of craft in her work (MSS778 Box 10). Craft itself—the media and processes at the heart of art—convey Loy's political activism in addition to the bums, suffering, and injustice she visually depicted in the final products. Furthermore, using the media of assemblage, Loy reverses the hierarchies of art materials. For example, in an interview with Louis M. Eilshemium, she describes her working surface: "I always paint on cardboard, that's new! You can't get such quality on canvas" (303, Last Lunar). Fine art canvas is replaced in her works with cardboard and rags—used up human waste that becomes both medium and content at the same time.

As mentioned briefly earlier, Loy's friend, the famous New York photographer, Berenice Abbott, photographed her Bowery assemblages in her Stanton St. apartment. Until now, these photographs have been lost, but I was able to recently locate them in the

Ryerson Image Centre's newly acquired Abbott archive. To date, I have been able to locate nine Loy assemblages total; these are their titles and locations:

- Househunting: private collection of Carolyn Burke
- Communal Cot: private collection of Marianne Elrick-Manley
- Christ on a Clothesline: private collection of Roz Jacobs
- Bums Praying: unknown, possibly in the private collection of Roger Conover
- No Parking: unknown, possibly in the private collection of Roger Conover
- Tinman: private collection of Roger Conover
- [Bait to the Stars] (my title, from "Virgin plus Curtains"): unknown
- [Erotic Garbage] (my title, from "Songs to Joannes"): unknown
- [Luminous Busts] (my title, from "On Third Avenue"): unknown, previously owned by Goody Taylor

Of these nine assemblages, I located six photographs by Berenice Abbott and have been able to find images of all of them in other places, with permission, except for Tinman (which can, however, be seen on p. 249 in Donald Friedman's *The Writer's Brush: Paintings, Drawings, and Sculpture by Writers*). Loy's literary executor, Conover, has chosen to withhold his own collection. While the politics of archiving Loy are beyond the current scope of this project, it is worth nothing the complexity surrounding Loy's visual works.

The first three listed above have received some critical attention and should be familiar to most scholars working on Loy. The following three are available in limited circulation. The last three on the list have not received attention ("Luminous Busts" does appear online as a very small, grainy file in a *Jacket* interview with Burke). Abbott's

contemporary documentation adds a fascinating layer of interest for these works, captured as they are in black and white hanging from the walls of Loy's apartment. Abbott shared not only Loy's passion for the visual but also a close relationship to social justice in the American context. In one Abbott photograph, "Encampment of the unemployed, New York City, 1935," makeshift shelters lined with picture frames and fabric emerge from the image like one of Loy's backdrops. Their shared commentary on economic inequality and homelessness comes at the viewer with a matter-of-fact, but also otherworldly, quality.

Fig. 3.1 *Househunting assemblage by Mina Loy*
Reproduced with permission of Carolyn Burke

The *Househunting* assemblage has been in wide circulation, and for good reason, thanks to its owner [see fig. 3.1]. Carolyn Burke encountered it during research for her biography when she interviewed Peggy Guggenheim in Venice. Later, after Guggenheim died, her son gave it to Burke. In her biography and elsewhere, Burke argues that Loy

felt "outcasted" her entire life, which, in turn, created a difficult relationship to the concept of home, both in her art and life (Woman and Poet, Burke 594). Additionally, Burke reads Loy's "house poems" in great detail, noting how house and home coalesce around female (and feminist) identity across Loy's poetry (Becoming, 199-208). *Househunting* puts the subjectivity of home at its center while also bringing the material reality of habitation to life. Exterior facades pepper the background, illustrating various architectures and levels of privilege. The woman's headdress, however, contains the domestic contents of home: a teapot, clothesline with a few garments (Abbott's photo shows more clothing on the line than Burke's version), a ladder, and a ball of yarn (knitting needles visible in the original). These items blend the necessary with the decorative, and notably place craft at the center of the piece. Her warrior-like appearance makes clear that hunting for home is no easy task, especially when matters of gender, money, and culture are at stake. As Burke suggests, home and shelter matter so much in these assemblages because "she was aware that she, too, could become as 'unhoused' as her Bowery neighbors" (422, Becoming).

Fig. 3.2 *Communal Cot assemblage by Mina Loy*
Reproduced with permission of Marianne Elrick-Manley

Communal Cot [see fig. 3.2] dramatizes this unhousing by depicting ten homeless figures sleeping on the sidewalk. Critics have observed these figures as the twelve apostles, a characteristic elevation of bums to modern day prophets in Loy's work (although a bit off mark since there are ten, not twelve). The title comes from Loy's long poem about the aesthetics of the Bowery, "Hot Cross Bum." She writes,

> And always on the trodden street
> --the communal cot—
>
> embalmed in rum
> under an unseen
> baldachin of dream
> blinking his inverted sky
> of flagstone
>
> prone
> lies the body of the flop
> where'er he drop. (Lost, 143)

Having seen this construction in person, I can say for certain that it places the bum figures in a curious perspectival relationship to the flat ground. The viewer looks ahead at the piece, but the bums are seen from above. Thus, Loy's "inverted sky / of flagstone" not only switches the bum's perspective but also the viewer's. Additionally, their faces are delicately detailed and raised slightly from the background [see fig. 3.3].

Fig. 3.3 Detail from *Communal Cot assemblage by Mina Loy*
Reproduced with permission of Marianne Elrick-Manley

Asleep on their communal cot, the men are "embalmed" in their drunkenness and in their inability to escape the bad dream (ironized by likening it to an "unseen baldachin") of their lives. These "flops" have dropped in the street, finding rest in the only place accessible to them. The street's grid encases them in urban shame, framing their difficult death-in-life.

In Abbot's photo (not reproduced), we can see that Loy had the construction oriented vertically rather than its current horizontal position. This view destabilizes the figures even further by disrupting the piece's overall symmetry. Abbot's image also shows the figure on the far left (or bottom right of Loy's original orientation) has been rotated counterclockwise by 90 degrees. Indeed, in the original, there are two noticeable 90 degree angles on the right side of the piece, which creates a more dramatic wave of bodies along one side in tension with the more linear arrangement of bodies on the left side. These juxtapositions call attention to Loy's argument that your street is their bed,

that the communal thing about the "trodden street" is that we're using it together, if in different ways. Loy supposedly composed the background of old t-shirt boxes, suggesting that the rags the homeless wear emerge from the piece in tension with popular circuits of consumerism. The figures' faces are made from the same material, cardboard, as the clothes they can't afford, rags symbolically—and literally—on their bodies instead.

Fig. 3.4 *Christ on a Clothesline assemblage by Mina Loy*
From the private collection of Roz Jacobs

Loy's most striking body hangs from the center of *Christ on a Clothesline* [see fig. 3.4]. Burke explains the model's origins: "the tubercular, Scandinavian fisherman who hung around the Bowery. Mina had chosen him as the model for Jesus, she explained, because of his trade and his emaciation, but as he posed, his expression had become ecstatic at the idea of the money he was earning" (Becoming, 421). This account demonstrates Loy's seriousness about her art, choosing a particular model that embodied her concerns and "put[ting] her outrage at the world's injustices into this accusatory figure" (Becoming, 421). It also shows her awareness of how a financial incentive

shapes affect in artistic representation. *Christ on a Clothesline* combines the housing motif of *Househunting* with *Communal Cot*'s emphasis on the suffering figure clothed in rags. The man's figure is harrowing—he is not only literally 'hung out to dry' but figuratively alienated by his illness, social class, and foreignness. In "Hot Cross Bum" Loy writes about the "impious mystics of the other extreme / shrunken illuminati / sunken / rather than arisen" (Lost, 139). The irreverent mystic is "shrunken," metaphysically and physically as the model's gaunt face and cheeks suggest. Interestingly, the face is made out of cardboard even though it looks as if Loy carved it out of clay. In using a low medium for such a carefully constructed sculptural face, she problematizes her viewers' expectations using trash. Loy makes the low high, a reversal of the "sunken /rather than arisen" state of the man. His hair, textured and broken in the same way as the tenement housing in the background, draws another striking parallel between the head and the houses the homeless can't inhabit.

The detailed faces emerging from Loy's assemblages are three-dimensional portrait paintings of actual people she knew. In *Bums Praying* (also called *Bums in Paradise*), her housemates "recognized local derelicts: Mina had used them as models for the ragged men shown at prayer around a jukebox that resembled a cathedral window" (Burke, Becoming 421) [see fig. 3.5].

Fig. 3.5 *Bums Praying assemblage by Mina Loy, photographed by Berenice Abbott*
Ryerson Image Centre Archives, used with permission of Getty Images

These hunched figures, emerging from their rag cloaks, hold their hands in the prayer position as if worshipping at the alter of consumer culture. Loy's "Hot Cross Bum" similarly captures the devastating underbelly of capitalism:

faces of Inferno

peering from shock-absorbent

torsos

alternate with raffish saints'

eleemosynary innocence

Blowsy angels

lief to leer

upon crystal horizons

shelves of liquiescent 'beef'
--staple fodder of their fanciful fall
a Brilliance of all bottles (Lost, 134)

Although the bums seem ardent in their worship, their faces are weathered by the trauma of their fall from grace. Their "shock-absorbent / torsos" are obscured in the assemblage by the wings made of rags. Raffish in appearance, they possess what Loy calls an "eleemosynary innocence"—they rely on charity but don't mean any harm. These "blowsy angels" depend on their "staple fodder" of beef, or beer. Loy invokes the slang here, which preserves the complexity of the bums' lives. She elevates them above human trash, a humane and literary allegory for their plight; and yet, she also represents the reality of their illnesses, from tuberculosis to alcoholism. The hands emerging from the rags, especially in the top corners, look more like begging than praying. It could be argued that some of the bums pray to the cathedral window, while others beg at the jukebox—a machine that is fed money more readily than the actually poor and starving. The shape behind the central figure also resembles a tombstone, foreshadowing their eminent death, no matter how devout or angelic they may be.

Loy's assemblages shuffle between realism and fantasy. *No Parking* brings those extremes up against larger issues of regulation and control. Two figures lean up against a trashcan with a sign that reads "No Parking" above their heads. This was the

construction selected for the cover of the Bodley Gallery's exhibit of Loy's work in 1959 [see fig. 3.6].

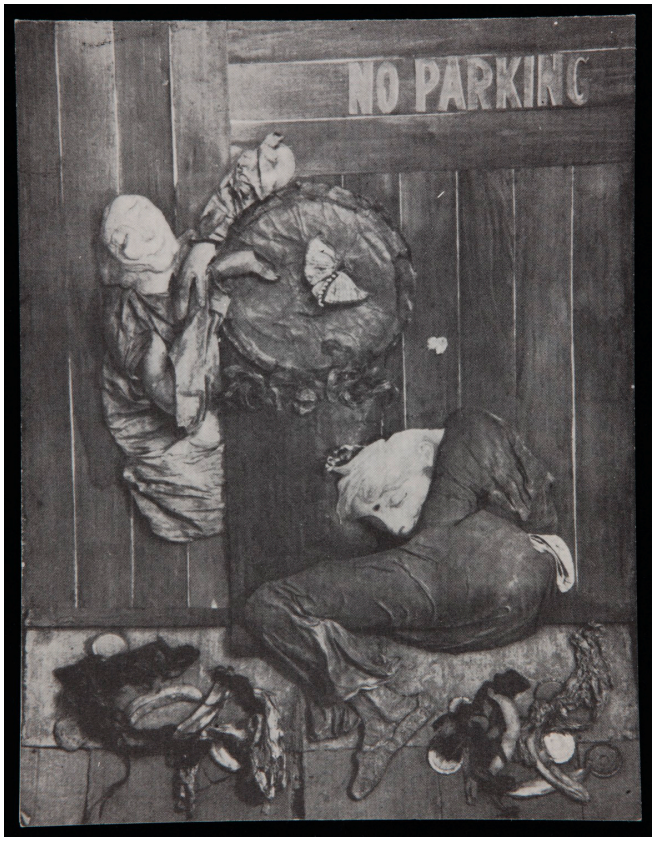

Fig. 3.6 *No Parking assemblage by Mina Loy from the Bodley Gallery Exhibition Announcement*, 1959
Beinecke Library Collections, Za Van Vechten, Photograph by Carl Van Vechten
Used by permission of The Van Vechten Trust

The announcement champions Loy's glorification of the bums, but I would suggest that she does not neglect a pointed social critique. The figures in *No Parking* have parked their bodies on the lowest spatial rung, in the alley with the trash. As outcasts, nowhere is home, and she flattens the dingy scene—from the trashcan to the wall and ground. This perspective carries into the medium itself, in particular the flattened paper cup used to make the butterfly's wings (Burke, Becoming 421). Loy's poem "Ephemerid" takes the butterfly as its central metaphor:

The Eternal is sustained by serial metamorphosis,

even so Beauty is

metamorphosis surprises!

Low in shadow
of the El's
arboreal iron

some aerial, unbeknown
errie-form
of dual mobility (Lost 116)

In the urban forest, the unbeknown Beauty embodies the "dual mobility" of transformation. The serial shape shifter, be it bum or butterfly, is flattened in the low shadows of the city. Loy uses actual litter and decomposing food in the assemblage to illustrate the cyclical decomposition of life on the streets. Loy's *Tinman* assemblage (not reproduced) uses a similar composition—a face and two hands emerge from the top of a long, vertical panel. The man looks both like a puppeteer and as if he's gazing down into a trashcan. Below his face, actual trash, mostly tin cans, is embedded in the background. He wears a shocked expression whereas the bums in *No Parking* seem lost in a delirious euphoria. These "eerie-form[s]" convey the ranges of experience (from suffering to transcendence) as life is made among the refuse.

Fig. 3.7 *Bait to the Stars (bottom)* and *Sensorium (top) assemblages by Mina Loy, photographed by Berenice Abbott*
Ryerson Image Centre Archives, used with permission of Getty Images

Abbott's photograph of Loy's *Bait the Stars* assemblage offers a different arrangement of figures in space but retains the tension between pain and escape [see fig. 3.7]. Using crinkled paper, Loy has created an ethereal world of clouds and celestial bodies. In the center of the frame, she appears to have created a liquor bottle out of cardboard with two slits, or windows. From this area emerge two figures—a trumpeter and a person with a looking glass. This feudal sketch is held together with a large safety pin—the materials of repair (and craft) at the center of this piece, which merges the

history of the royal herald with stargazing. Up in these strange heavens, trash rearranges sensory experience. In "Apology of Genius," Loy writes,

> Ostracized as we are with God—
>
> The watchers of the civilized wastes
>
> reverse their signals on our track
>
> […]
>
> We are the sacerdotal clowns
>
> who feed upon the wind and stars
>
> and pulverous pastures of poverty (Lost 77-8)

The "sacerdotal clowns," or priestly jesters consume the highest realms of being, the stars, while grazing from the "pastures of poverty" below. This ability to transcend is, however, compromised by the liquor bottle that "reverse[s] the signals" of survival. How do people cope with poverty? What are the stakes of surveillance in the homeless population? Both poem and construction draw attention to the difficulty of these extremes. Hunger becomes even more urgent if we read the bottle as body interrupted by a diaper pin. It's a strange disembodiment that enacts the terms of the bums' vulnerability, and we have an additional fractured portrait in the small artwork hanging above it [see fig. 3.7]. While not characteristic of the other assemblages in size or content, this triptych of an eye, ear, and mouth can be clearly attributed to Loy. It is a peeling, visual blazon that comments on the sensory performance depicted in *Bait the Stars*: the heightened vision suggested by the looking glass, the sound of the trumpet, and the bottle's orifice.

Observing beauty beyond or in spite of suffering is a phenomenon Loy calls "the compensations of poverty" ("On Third Avenue," Lost 110). And yet, in depicting both the transcendence and the suffering, Loy calls into question this compensation as such. In her *Erotic Garbage* construction, Loy uses carefully joined egg cartons to form a dramatic backdrop for two figures who appear asleep or perhaps grieving [see fig. 3.8].

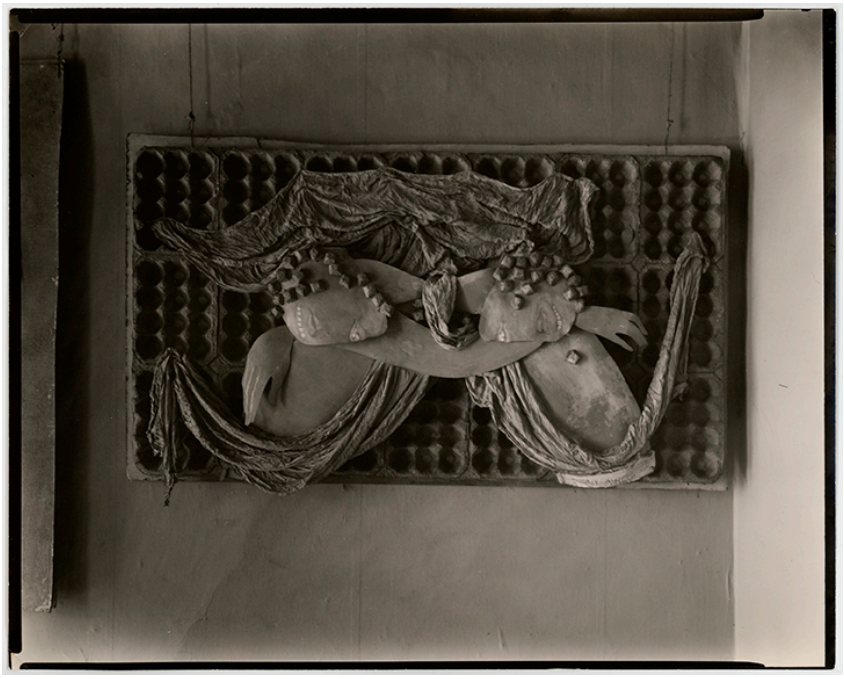

Fig. 3.8 *Erotic Garbage assemblage by Mina Loy, photographed by Berenice Abbott*
Ryerson Image Centre Archives, used with permission of Getty Images

The hair, possibly representative of bantu knots or in curlers, has come undone. The hands, more painterly than sculptural, resemble a William Blake painting and stand out from the background in limp contrast to the solidity of the other shapes. Loy connects the figures and backdrop with cloths, recalling both the low culture of rags and the high culture of togas. Similarly, her poem, "Chiffon Velours" makes use of these strange oppositions:

She is sere.

Her features,

verging on a shriek

reviling age,

flee from death in odd directions

somehow retained by a web of wrinkles.

The site of vanished breasts

is marked by a safety-pin.

[…]

Hers alone to model

the last creation,

original design

of destitution.

Clothed in memorial scraps

skimpy even for a skeleton.

Trimmed with one sudden burst

of flowery cotton

half her black skirt

glows as a soiled mirror;

reflects the gutter—

a yard of chiffon velours. (Lost, 119)

Chiffon velour is a contradiction. A chiffonier is a ragpicker in French, his chiffon a cheap rag, discarded or best suited to cleaning; velour is velvet, considered luxurious and high quality. Benjamin, reading Baudelaire's famous rendering of the chiffonier, contends that "the chiffonier as an extended metaphor for poetic activity itself" (Whiteley 17). Combining the scraps of daily life into something beautiful applies here, as Loy's resting beauties strain against the background of trash. Loy's poem unpacks the assemblage's visual details, as the aging woman suffers beneath her wrinkled, and then vanishing, body. Barely clothed, she holds onto her pride by fashioning a simple, cotton calico bustle. However, she imagines "a yard of chiffon velours," or transparent velvet, instead. Yet even this moment of self-fashioning is foiled when her frock "glows as a soiled mirror." By reflecting the gutter that produces her shame, the women cannot find material or imaginative escape. So, too, in Loy's assemblage wherein the two sides of the image mirror each other, reproducing a double sadness. The bodies intertwine like the skimpy rags that encircle them, creating an oddly intimate portrait of suffering.[39]

[39] See *Contextual Practice: Assemblage and the Erotic in Postwar Poetry and Art* by Stephen Fredman. He argues that assemblage is a regenerative mid-century practice: "In a time that seemed evacuated of meaning by the devastating experience's of the Great Depression and World War II, contextual practice involved drawing together discarded or unremarked fragments (whether visual or verbal) from daily life in order to reveal 'secret' meaning and to insist on the regenerative potential of everyday experience" (xi).

Fig. 3.9 *Luminous Busts assemblage by Mina Loy, photographed by Carolyn Burke*
Reproduced courtesy of Carolyn Burke

Fig. 3.10 *Man Ray photograph of Mina Loy*

Loy's *Luminous Busts* assemblage continues this theme of examination [see fig. 3.8]. The location of the piece is currently unknown, but it was evidently done at the very end of Loy's life when she was living in Colorado near her daughters. Burke, having seen the image years ago, took a photograph of it. It is less sculptural than the earlier works, seeming to use paper, paint, and fabric almost exclusively. A woman in profile gazes up at the withered face of an old man who turns slightly and crosses the vertical barrier dividing the work into two sections. The female figure's torso, neck, and jawline are strong and chiseled, while the man's figure emerges weakly from his clinging rags. His red hair and large, vacant eyes contrast with her full head of hair made in relief out of paper as she meets his shame with an admiring look. This assemblage comments more directly on Loy's relationship to the outcasts she depicts, and it bears a striking resemblance to Man Ray's photograph of Loy with the famous thermometer earring [see fig. 3.10]. Her hair is similarly textured, and her head it tilted at a similar angle, displaying her strong jaw and pronounced nose. In casting herself in this work, Loy makes visible her concern for the lower classes, aged as they are by poverty, suffering, and social injustice.

In his recollections of Loy during the Bowery years, Ferris notes: "As I said before, one was not always aware of the brilliance of her work, but everyone that met her felt this great presence—from the green grocer to the Bowery bums to all of my friends" **(**MSS778 Box 10). The young and the old, the rich and the poor, friends and strangers were drawn to Loy as a presence; and yet, so little is known about her late work, especially her art. In recovering these aesthetic histories, including the media and processes Loy employs, I propose an expanded view of her work's activist impulses. In

his “Political Position of Surrealism” Breton calls artists to “measure our participation” in system of corruption (216). Loy scrutinizes the systems of unjust poverty and suffering at work in her community, producing a body of assemblage artwork that traverses a range of complicated experiences and affects. Breton continues, “In these conditions, thus, art is no longer a question of the creation of a personal myth, but rather, with Surrealism, of the *creation of a collective myth*” (Breton 216). Loy’s personal myths loom large over her work—and rightly so with dramas ranging from mixed race identity to her pugilist lover lost at sea. And yet, her assemblages tell a rather different story of activism, collectivity, and compassion at the end of her life. Discarded, trashed, decomposing—her medium wasn’t made to last; however, it endures, made things that have managed some sort of strange preservation. Even in their abstraction, Loy’s organic, sculptural, and visually harrowing activist art tenaciously confronts systems of oppression with vital portraits of human experience.

CHAPTER FOUR: **"Draw deep from your palette": Lorna Goodison's Earthly Modernity**

Mina Loy, as the last chapter showed, was fascinated by the relationship between art media and cultural critique. As an elderly woman, she was interviewed by Paul Blackburn and Robert Vas Dias, two poets from the Black Mountain School who were taken with her poetry. Throughout the Aspen interview, Loy tries to steer the conversation towards her art, but the plucky poets consistently return to her writing. In a particularly telling moment, though, Loy reflects on how art left her life:

> Then I never did any more paintings, they threw away all the stuff I had. They threw away all my dried paint, and I'd kept them, they were good expensive oil paints, and they were very old and very dry. And they threw them all away! I was going to use them. I used to do a lot of transparent painting in the—white stuff. So that was all lost. I haven't got the money now, to buy a lot of oil paint. (238)

Paint is valuable, even when it has exceeded its traditional, intended use. Despite being old and dried out, it seems Loy had plans for the tubes of paint. Her "transparent painting in the—white stuff" likely refers to her earlier paintings of ethereal detached heads floating in space, as in her important work, "Teasing a Butterfly" (see fig. 4.1). But we can imagine her appropriating the tubes of paint in her later assemblages, camouflaging them in experimental designs or perhaps keeping them intact as cherished relics. The paintings themselves, in her mind, depend on the endurance of the materials used to create them. Art is not divorced from the tools of its creation.

Fig. 4.1 *Teasing a Butterfly*, Mina Loy. 1902 Oil on canvas, 33 x 45 inches.
Private Collection; reproduced courtesy of Francis M. Naumann Fine Art, New York.

Fig. 4.2 Lorna Goodison Book Cover for *I Am Becoming My Mother*
Reproduced courtesy of Lorna Goodison

It has become something of a critical commonplace to evoke painting and its media when talking about Caribbean writers. For example, when Michael Gilkes writes about LeRoy Clarke he posits painting as a metaphor for Clarke's Caribbean language.

He writes, "Using language as if working with tubes of paint, [Clarke] has shaped an idiosyncratic, imaginative, metaphorical, poetic discourse…of a rooted Caribbean sensibility" (Gilkes qtd. in Robinson-Walcott 602). Gilkes's painting metaphor is perhaps more felicitous than he realizes, in that a surprising number of Caribbean writers, especially poets, are also experienced painters, and many feature their paintings on their book covers. Born in Kingston in 1947, Lorna Goodison is one such author—and a talented artist whose work, we might note, resembles that of Mina Loy [see fig. 4.2]. Critics have been keenly interested in the significance of painting as a metaphor in Goodison's work but have largely neglected in-depth study of how the actual practice of painting might inform her literary texts as crafted objects. This chapter addresses the conversation between her literary work and her artistic practice in order to show how she attempts to recuperate certain elemental, earthly aspects of post-colonial womanhood without indulging in an essentialist vision of cultural identity.

I recently asked Goodison about the significance of color in her work, in her books as well as in her paintings. Without a moment of hesitation, she replied, "I'm a colorist." At the root of all color is the science of pigment, and this chapter argues that pigment—painting's most fundamental structure—provides Goodison with a rich signifying resource with which to dramatize the complexities of the Jamaican female experience. Using art historical accounts of pigmentation, in addition to theoretical approaches to Caribbean feminist and collective identity formation, I argue that "color changes everything," as bell hooks has it, because it is, at a constitutive level, fundamentally changeable. Color's fundamental properties destabilize reality as a concept, even as pigment, sourced as it is from the earth, locates painting in a specific

history of the land. As such, this troubled earthiness defines Goodison's poetics in a way that comments more broadly on the political aesthetics of contemporary Jamaican nationhood as both defined by and outside the traditional boundaries of art as social justice.

This chapter begins with an overview of color theory as it relates to literature and painting. Goodison paints primarily with brown/black ink, watercolors, and oil paints. All of these media are formed by mixing pigment with a liquid such as oil or water. A close examination of this unassuming mixture reveals that color theory and the history of painting media chronicle crucial cultural tropes having to do with race, progress, and gender. As Charles A. Riley II puts it, "It is almost as though colors are dangerous" (7). For as long as people have been writing about color, there has been an ongoing tension between, on one side, attempts to fix its properties in formats such as spectrums, wheels, and tables and, on the other side, a theoretical fascination with the fluidity of color, physically and conceptually. The list of theorists engaging with color is a long one. These theorists, to name just a few, include Goethe, C. S. Pierce, Derrida, Oswald, Spengler, Adorno, Kierkegaard, Husserl, P. M. S. Hacker, Wittgenstein, Pater, and Blanc. And then there are the greatest hits of color theory developed by modern painters such as Kandinsky, Seurat, and Matisse. For the purposes of this chapter, I turn primarily to Merleau-Ponty and Benjamin, in conversation with bell hooks and Wendy Steiner on the ways in which art shapes modernity, especially with color on the mind. These thinkers exist outside the usual camps but offer variously rich ideas on medium specificity, the cultural history of art, and the role of the artist.

Beyond Metaphor and Mimesis: Painting and Literary Craft

Steiner's *The Colors of Rhetoric* asks the tough questions about aesthetic comparisons between art, especially painting, and literature. In readings of verbal-visual intersections, critics most commonly rely on metaphor, a process of "iconic thinking" that facilitates deep analysis while also running the risk of distancing the original object from its source. Steiner explains,

> It is this potential for both growth and decay that makes iconic thinking the dynamic process that it is. This dynamism is particularly evident in the metaphor that concerns this book, the likeness between painting and literature. For this is a privileged case: it is metaphor about resemblance itself and, even more significantly, about the resemblance between reality and the systems man has developed to represent it […] The need to discover the mimetic potential in literature has been the underlying motivation for the long history of critical comparisons between the two arts" (1-2).

Steiner's formulation underscores how literary—and painterly—representations of modernity constitute a dynamic aesthetic exchange, especially when those systems of iconic thinking are put into conversation with each other.

Authors who paint provide critics with the opportunity to read painting/literature metaphors as richer, deeper wells of symbolic experience but also to think more analytically about the craft of literature through the lens of painting media—the physical properties of artistic craft, from brushes and canvas to water and pigment. In Goodison's case, water and pigment especially proliferate in her work and take the form of color. Color, both visible and invisible as it is, must be situated according to its fundamental

complexity. The physical reality of color can never be extricated from its pure dependence on context, or perception.

The elusive quality of color, that it can never be "naked" or fully accessible as a real thing, informs how writer-painters conceive of meaning making in the context of fluid sign systems and ephemeral perception. In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty underscores color's dual nature and embeddedness in a system of signs. Steiner's fascination with "the resemblance between reality and the systems man has developed to represent it" emerge in Merleau-Ponty's theory as he excavates the similarly complex terrain of reality and perception. He claims:

> [A] naked color, and in general a visible, is not a chunk of absolutely hard, indivisible being, offered all naked to a vision which could be only total or null, but is rather a sort of straits between exterior horizons and interior horizons ever gaping open, something that comes to touch lightly and makes diverse regions of the colored or visible world resound at the distances, a certain differentiation, an ephemeral modulation of this world— less a color or a thing, therefore, than a difference between things and colors, a momentary crystallization of colored being or of visibility. (132)

In other words, we might best understand color as something in-between "exterior" and "interior," both "visible" and "ephemeral." Color defines things through its visibility, but that visibility is itself modulated by invisibility.

These explanations of color render any sort of categorical impulse fruitless, if not impossible. Walter Benjamin supports this dynamic view of color in his "Aphorism on Imagination and Color," an unpublished fragment from 1914-1915. He writes,

> Color must be seen. It is not possible to establish a theory of harmony for colors, because in such a theory number is merely the expression of an infinite range of possibilities that are just systematically assembled. For each basic color there is an octave through to the ninth, and so forth on an ever more diversified scale. The harmony of color is a single thing within a particular medium; it lacks multiplicity, because it is undefined and exists only in perception. A theory of harmony is possible only in the transition from light to shade—that is to say, with reference to space. (48)

It's only when light and shade are captured in space does any kind of harmony emerge around the idea of color. This spatial design, described as "a particular medium," defines color harmony—it is perception made tangible. The expression of color takes the form of "an infinite range of possibilities," which is why, according to Benjamin, it's necessary to understand color's multiplicity in terms of its imaginative presentation in space.

Thus, color is imbued with an aesthetic of displacement, its fluid depths of perception dependent on categories, boundaries, and rubrics imposed by the human imagination. hooks, most famous as a black feminist critic, was also a painter. Her writings on the visual politics of painting have gone underappreciated but bring the theories outlined above into stark focus in our (and Goodison's) modern moment. Her descriptions of painting convey the limitlessness of color as a frame of mind:

> Art, and most especially painting, was for me a realm where every imposed boundary could be transgressed. It was the free world of color where all was possible. When I studied de Kooning's use of paint, those broad brush strokes, the thick layering of color, I was in paradise. To be able to work with paint and

> create textures, to try and make color convey through density and intensity of feeling—that was the lesson I wanted to learn. (xi)

Color, hooks's chosen medium of expression, goes beyond the metaphorical dimension of "density and intensity" with its "broad brush strokes" and "thick layering" of paint. Her narrative about the "free world of color" runs counter to dominant narratives of struggle, enslavement, and oppression. Goodison studied painting in the "free world" of New York City at the Art Students League in the late 1960s. During this period, she took classes under Harlem Renaissance luminary, Jacob Lawrence, and started to write poetry. The confluence of these events held great significance for Goodison, who reflected in an interview that "at that point I became conscious of the power of the craft…of knowing what you are doing and being able to manipulate it, and do things, make things work as you want as opposed to being at the mercy of them" (Fiet 11). Her agency, clearly expressed here, emerges at the critical nexus of poetry and art. Marija Bergam, in "Transplantations: Vegetation Imagery in the Poetry of Derek Walcott and Lorna Goodison," calls on Edouard Glissant's theory that creolization hinges on dislocated "linguistic processes" to communicate "the particular agency of the Caribbean environment" (114). What does post-colonial agency look like, written on the page, but also, we might ask, sketched on the canvas?[40] As Bergam's title suggests, imagery gets at the heart of this question, and there is certainly something to be gained by reading imagery in a less-metaphorical register.

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[40] For a comprehensive survey of contemporary issues in Caribbean art, see *Caribbean: Art at the Crossroads of the World* (eds. Cullen and Fuentes) and *Infinite Island: Contemporary Carribean Art* (ed. Mosaka)

PAINTING THE CARIBBEAN

With one exception, Goodison's paintings have been neglected by her critics, despite attention to other notable painter-writers from the Caribbean. Derek Walcott is of course the most prominent of these figures. T. J. Cribb uses the reception of Walcott's paintings to better understand the aesthetic of his poetic production, and he examines tropes of modern art to underscore recognition (as a performance) in the poems. In *Modernism, the Visual, and Caribbean Literature*, Mary Lou Emery further politicizes Walcott's poetic production, writing "In his ekphrastic poems, Walcott reveals interconnected patterns in global histories of conquest and migration, especially those of the Mediterranean and the Caribbean, through which figures of his own poetic persona emerge, refracted through the past, imaged on canvas, and ekphrastically framed in verse" (181).[41] In "Ways of Seeing: Visual/Verbal Expressions—Caribbean Writers Who Paint," Kim Robinson-Walcott adds Goodison's name to list of notable Jamaican writers who also make art, including Ralph Thomson, Earl McKenzie, Jacqueline Bishop, Roger Mais, and Walcott. Turning her attention to the landscape, Robinson-Walcott aligns Goodison's landscape paintings with other painterly descriptions in Jamaican literature, such as this passage by Mais: "It came dusk quickly and light flushed the sky with a nice palette of colours where some thin transparent clouds spread in the west took the reflections of late sunlight and mixed them and made broad splotched and stippled

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[41] See "Painting the Sublime in Visible Syntax: Derek Walcott's *Tiepolo's Hound*" by Sarah Fulford for a more detailed survey of critics on Walcott's art. She contends that Walcott, while seemingly influenced by the high European tradition of painting, actually reads these artists as culturally hybrid figures of influence. Her argument follows on Clara Rosa de Lima's claim in "Walcott: Painting in the Shadow of Van Gogh" that "Walcott's vision of the artist as revolutionary, in the sense of one who changes people's perceptions, who might *englighten* the world, may be seen to derive from several aspects of Van Gogh's practice, though as I shall argue later it perhaps roots further back in art history to the idea of the Renaissance artists, who were more self-consciously determined to open the eyes of the world" (181).

horizontal lines of wash against a paper sky" (Mais qtd. in Robinson-Walcott 600). Not only does this example foreground color, including its texture and transparency, it also calls readers' attention to the tools of the craft, the palette and paper.

In the theories and examples above, the heightened attention to painting's materiality, especially to the complexity of color, aligns Jamaican visual/verbal works with the political landscape. Identity is not easily locatable, and language itself becomes a loose exchange of traditions, places, and patterns. Maria Cristina Fumagalli's reading of Walcott's paintings significantly expands on his aesthetic by framing it in terms of Caribbean modernity. In *Caribbean Perspectives on Modernity: Returning Medusa's Gaze*, she redefines modernity by delineating Eurocentric modernity from a new, more balanced definition: "positing modernity as the outcome of exchange, negotiation, and transculturation" (4). Underpinning this definition is Baudelaire's "contrasting visions of modernity," who, using painting as his primary referent, developed new ways of reading exploitation, commodification, and high/low aesthetic divisions in "The Painter of Modern Life" (3). As I suggest in the Introduction, in linking a complicated reading of modernity with painting, Baudelaire brings the modern, ordinary, and artistic in line with larger questions of conflict, canonization, and personhood. In the postcolonial context, color, writ large, becomes the iconic medium for late-twentieth and twenty-first century representations of Goodison's woman-centered, pro-peace writings on hybrid racial identity.

When Goodison retired from the creative writing department at the University of Michigan in 2014, the Wolverine Press, headed by Fritz Swanson and staffed by MFA writers, turned one of her poems into a retirement gift. A hand-printed broadside of "To

Make Various Sorts of Black" is encased in a light brown envelope featuring the colophon and five swatches of ink: Scorched Stone of Peach, Scraped Shell, Soft Stone, Vine-Twig, and Lamp Black (See fig. 4.3).

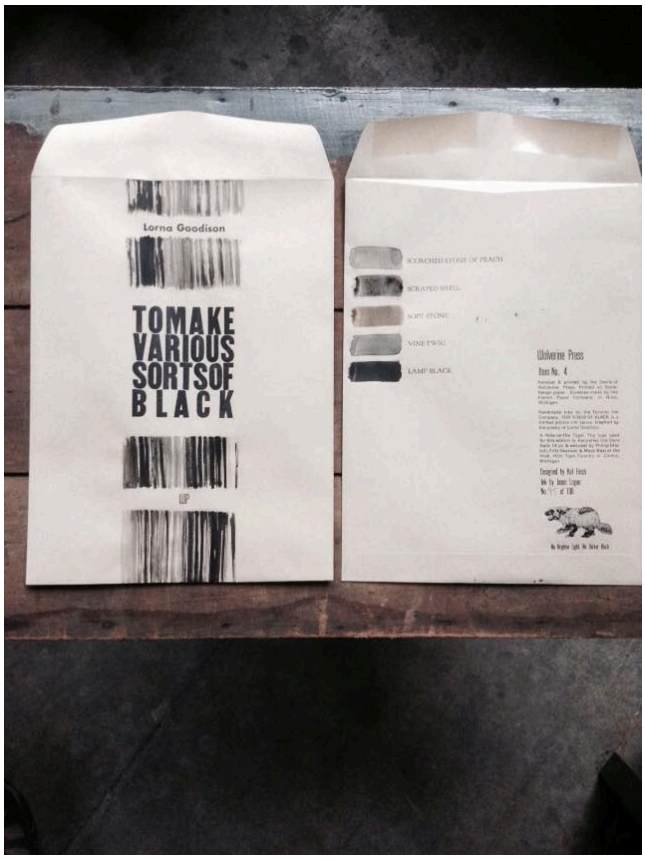

Fig. 4.3 *Wolverine Press edition of Lorna Goodison's poem*, "To Make Various Sorts of Black" Reproduced courtesy of Fritz Swanson, Wolverine Press

Goodison's poem, discussed in more detail below, describes five different saturations of black ink. Using *The Craftsman's Handbook* by Cennino d'Andrea Cennini from 1443, Goodison makes poetic meaning from art history, bringing literary craft and artistic craft into direct, brilliant, contact. Experimenting with Goodison's poetic pigments, the Press recruited Toronto-based artisan ink maker Jason Logan to make the inks in the poem according to Cennini's recipes. It was a successful experiment. In Swanson's words, "the really satisfying discovery, which you will see when you receive a copy of the

edition, is that the inks perform exactly as described in the poem" (email exchange May 21, 2015). The envelope includes Logan's reflections on ink making for the project, photos of the finished jars and of the ingredients, along with additional descriptions of the materials, processes, and color saturation (see fig. 4.4).

Fig. 4.4 *Wolverine Press edition of Lorna Goodison's poem*, "To Make Various Sorts of Black" Reproduced courtesy of Fritz Swanson, Wolverine Press

For example, "Scraped Shell Black" was made from "Manilla clam shells baked, blackened and crushed powdered and re-cooked. Mixed with overcooked Indian shellac flakes, iron-sulfate-darkened hand-harvested Canadian sumac fruit and water" results in "Grey-black and glossy." Or the "Scorched Peach Stone Black" produced with "Oven-charred peach stones ground in water bound with gum Arabic" resulting in "Matte greyish blue-black." Now that I own all five ink pots, I can further attest that not only are the inks made from natural, living matter, they bubble, smell, and change texture. Logan credits Goodison's poem entirely for leading him to Cennini's handbook and helping "to

solve the problems of black ink." In the end, Logan comes to the conclusion that "without question each ink contains a story."

With the Wolverine Press making use of Renaissance printing methods, Logan sourcing Cennini by way of Goodison, and Goodison drawing on Cennini, her own art, and Jamaican racial identity, this small press project effectively illustrates, on several levels, how craft shapes the rich contours of hue, shade, and tone in her work. The poem opens:

> According to *The Craftsman's Handbook*, chapter XXXVII
> "Il Libro dell' Arte" by Cennino d'Andrea Cennini
>
> who tells us there are several kinds of black colours.
> First, there is a black derived from soft black stone.
> It is a fat colour; not hard at heart, a stone unctioned.
>
> Then there is a black that is obtained from vine twigs.
> Twigs that choose to abide on the true vine
> offering up their bodies at the last to be burned,
>
> then quenched and worked up, they can live again
> as twig of the vine black; not a fat, more of a lean
> colour, favoured alike by vinedressers and artists. (lines 1-12)

Goodison's speaker begins the poem by positioning it squarely in line with art history. Not only does she identify Cennini's book, but she also specifies the chapter. The poet-as-researcher marks her path back across the historical landscape of color in order to

convince her reader "there are several kinds of black colours." The black of "soft black stone," soft in texture and affect, ushers in the leaner "twig of the vine black." Vines, "offering up their bodies at the last to be burned," sacrifice their lives for art, but all is not lost since their rebirth as black pigment allows them to "live again." Vinedressers (pruners) and artists come together over this wild harvest, delighting in nature's rebirth in another medium. In his descriptions, Logan describes Soft Rock Black as "silty" and Vine-Twig Black as "grainy." The earthiness of their sources, vine and stone, are preserved in the ink's essential properties.

In the next stanza, Goodison continues, "There is also the black that is scraped from burnt shells. / Markers of Atlantic's graves. / Black of scorched earth, of torched stones of peach; / twisted trees that bore strange fruit" (lines 13-16). "Burnt shells" black needs very little explanation by Goodison's estimation; these "Markers of Atlantic's graves" represent the transatlantic slave trade, the fifteenth century origins of which coincide with Cennini's handbook. The next ink, made from burnt peach stones, emerges from the "scorched earth" of slave labor in Jamaica. The famous American anti-lynching song, "strange fruit," popularized by Billie Holiday, resonates in Goodison's poem. The peaches, hung on "twisted trees" are the fruit of slave labor in the Caribbean, burnt into the minds of oppressed people and expressed in art forms ranging from Jazz to Jamaican poetry. The peach stone ink is notably the lightest of all the blacks, perhaps suggesting that these painful histories should be allowed to evolve and fade—or that they are not marked starkly enough in history books.

Goodison turns to the darkest black in the second half of the poem, a meditation on blackness out of light, worth quoting at length:

And then there is the black that is the source of light

[…]

A lamp you light and place underneath — not a bushel —
but a good clean everyday dish that is fit for baking.
Now bring the little flame of the lamp up to the under

surface of the earthenware dish (say a distance of two
or three fingers away) and the smoke that emits
from that small flame will struggle up to strike at clay.

Strike till it crowds and collects in a mess or a mass;
now wait, wait a while please, before you sweep this
colour — now sable velvet soot — off onto any old paper

or consign it to shadows, outlines, and backgrounds.
Observe: it does not need to be worked up nor ground;
it is just perfect as it is. Refill the lamp, Cennini says.

As many times as the flame burns low, refill it. (lines 17, 20-33)

These stanzas instruct the reader in how to use ordinary objects to make pigment from soot. "[T]he smoke that emits from that small flame," she writes, "will struggle up to strike at clay." Goodison stages a protest in miniature, this "strike" carried out by the bright, but small, light. As "crowds" collect in a "mass," she calls for a light touch and more thought at this point in the process, imploring "now wait, wait a while please." In

the space between art and political violence, the slave rebellions that mark Jamaica's history emerge here in the form of "colour." This pigment, "perfect as it is," is a pure, opaque dark ink, which renews itself though the craftsman's patience and persistence.

AFRICA'S EYES: PASSING AND PIGMENTATION

Goodison puts black at the center of her work, rather than "consign[ing] it to the shadows, outlines, and backgrounds" of history (Various Sorts, line 30). Her first volume of published poetry, *Tamarind Season* (1980) features her own cover illustration along with two charcoal sketches inside. Several poems explore the issue of color by way of racial passing, black identity, and fetishization of blackness and whiteness. She begins "My Late Friend," with "My friend is on the surface, black. / Africa's eyes and lips. / My friend is softest midnight black" (lines 1-3). Her features and pigmentation connect her to her black African ancestry, but she wants to pass as white:

> She's fled the tropics
> because the sun darkens her
> my friend wants to be one with the snow.
>
> She's disciplined her hair till it lies
> in exhausted submission (lines 5-9)

Changing her skin color is akin to leaving her tropical home, a literal separation from place but also a more metaphorical cutting of ties. She also trains her hair straight, which Goodison delineates with a punning enjambment—her hair "lies" flat against her head

but also "lies" about her racial heritage. She sleeps in "sheets of white" and "has a white lover" until, the speaker notes, "each day my friend grows whiter" (10, 12, 14). She is beat into "exhausted submission" by her own attempts to pass as white. Given the poem's title, the "Late Friend" passing is also a kind of death. The speaker, completely at peace with her "love for the sun / and the eternal peace / I can find only on islands," laments her friend's relationship to whiteness, but also to color (24-26). Blackness *is* color by the poem's account: "She never wears colours like ghettogreen / or Colouredpeoplepurple" (20-21). Goodison may be mocking the pejorative, primitive associations between black culture and color (mentioned briefly earlier in this chapter), but she also mocks her friend's shallow attempt to distance herself from the "ghetto" or coloured people."

In the same volume, Goodison offers a masculine version of racial passing in "Hymn to Blanche" and "Blanche Replies." In the first poem, the black (or mulatto) speaker recounts his sexual affair with a white woman named Blanche. Blanche, or Blanc (white), has been wooed by the black speaker, who instructs in the first stanza, "Let this room admit no sun / no vulgar rays of vengeance / to burn me darker" (lines 8-10). In contrast to her ivory, pearl skin, the speaker's "brown skin" becomes his mark of shame, "for I hate the slave that seeded me / I have covered that marron tint / with education's sheepskin" (lines 26, 27-9). His maroon (brown) tint has been figuratively covered by his education, a passing by way of high culture. Much of the poem is French, and the speaker remarks, "Je t'aime mon Renoir" (line 31). Renoir, a stand in for canonical modern art, permits him access to a higher class, a white lover, and perhaps most importantly, the ability to deny his "mother's lost descendants" (line 38). Having

sung the titular Hymn to whiteness, he worships and fetishizes the white woman as a marker of white culture. To have her is to, in some sense, belong—or at least pass successfully. It is also to overmaster the master and to manifest one of the master's darker fears.

However, in "Blanche Replies," Blanche complains that her lover "worships the white of me" (line 13). Having fetishized *his blackness*, she is left feeling disappointed: "I thought he'd be the mutant / the marron statue sucking the / lip of the conch shell…" (5-7). Blanche craves the thrill of a so-called savage erotic counter and is thwarted by her lover and his social ambitions. The description of the statue and conch shell similarly straddles blackness and whiteness. On the one hand, Blanche seems to allude to Haiti's "Le Negre Marron" (The Black Maroon), a statue that commemorates the slave uprising against French colonization commissioned in 1968-69 (the same years Goodison studied art in NYC). In dark bronze, a powerful black man breaks free from his shackles and blows into a conch shell, his head tilted back. On the other hand, Goodison's image of the conch shell figure finds its sculptural predecessor at the Trevi Fountain in Rome. Triton holds a conch shell to his lips. The cultural and color opposite of "Le Negre Marron," the ivory Triton statue is the cultural icon one lover embraces and one rejects.

Fig. 4.5 Illustration from *Tamarind Season* by Lorna Goodison
Reproduced courtesy of Lorna Goodison

This divisive eroticism, rooted as it is in racial passing, emerges in one of Goodison's sketches included in the volume (see fig. 4.5). The nude woman's figure is divided by black and white shadows, and she appears to be sleeping. Her traditionally black features (recalling "My Late Friend") are drawn with a heavier line than any other part of the image. In her short story "House Colour," Goodison introduces a character that is not passing but who finds herself similarly divided by racial tension. The main character, a painter looking for design work, meets a rich landowner who is "too handsome" at a party full of "'DBPD—de brown people dem.' Wealthy, light-skinned Jamaicans who lived in mansions" (90, 93). At one of his farms, she overhears him talking to his workers: "'You people.' DBPD always said things like 'you people' when they were talking down to dark-skinned Jamaicans" (95). The issue of race is further

complicated when the unnamed protagonist goes to a jewelry store where she encounters a woman who "had what Jamaicans call 'house colour,' that is, she looked as if she spent most of her life indoors" (97). Color, for Jamaicans, is not just a matter of black and white but the middle ranges of tone explored in "To Make Various Sorts of Black." Goodison reveals how constructed these racial categories are while also exploring their real consequences—especially in the case of self-acceptance and class.

WATER/COLOR, OR THE BODY ON PAPER

In a chapter called "Facing Difference: The Black Female Body," hooks identifies water as a transformative property, a metaphor for black female agency. Goodison's poems and fiction use art processes, materials, and icons to both complicate and call attention to the female body as it connects to Jamaica as a place, liberation, and feminism. hooks highlights the importance of this particular relationship between perspective and agency. She writes, "In the accepted version of black female reality that predominates in mainstream images there is no subtlety to our experience. We are always portrayed as lacking in complexity, as transparent. We are all surface, lacking in depth" (97). Goodison's visual art, combined with hooks's ruminations on imagery, transparency, and surface/depth, provides the key to reading the aesthetic of female agency across her work: water. Watercolors (and inks) are her primary medium in the paintings. Several critics have noticed and begun to theorize the prevalence of water in Caribbean literature and culture, but these readings do not extend to the media of Goodison's art-making. For example, Sarah Phillips Castell, thinking about the Middle Passage, argues, "The association of the sea with constant flux and cyclical time and the

rejection of History as a linear narrative of progress and achievement are also developed in Brathwaite's concept of 'tidalectics'" (483). Also thinking across Brathwaite and tidalectics, Elizabeth DeLoughrey offers an overview of oceanic criticism in the Caribbean context: "The ocean has long been imagined as a space of evolutionary and cultural origins. Since the peopling of any island demands the crossing of water, Caribbean literary theorists across the region have been concerned with pluming the fluid spaces of the Caribbean and Atlantic as a source of cultural, ethnic and regional origins" (164). Water becomes physically important for its place in the history of forced migration but also conceptually important for its aesthetic fluidity. Volatile, variable, and deep—the ocean marks an aesthetic space where revolution seems possible. Goodison's hopeful poetics thrive on this liminal space of activism and history that also, importantly, connects women to the land of their ancestors.

Goodison's memoir, *From Harvey River: A Memoir of my Mother and Her Island* starts its family tree with William and Francis, her great grandmother and grandfather on one side and George and Leanna on the other side. Both great grandfathers were white, William being English and George staunchly Irish. Their wives were black; Frances a Jamaican woman, and Leanna of African descent (called the "guinea woman"). Harvey River, where Goodison's mother grew up, was settled by her great-grandfather, William. Robinson-Walcott connects this sense of place to Goodison's watery poetry, suggesting "Perhaps this wateriness is a conscious or subconscious reference to Harvey River, the home of her maternal ancestors and seemingly Goodison's own creative home" (603). Such a reading makes sense, especially when Goodison's medium, watercolor (or water mixed with pigment, or earth) comes into conversation with her writing. Edward Baugh

ties the notion of creation, albeit not artistic creation, to regeneration and rebirth in her work: "the metamorphosis involves a descent into watery depths. And the sexual, generative and recreative connotations of the water imagery are a significant characteristic of Goodison's poetic vision" (5). These perspectives usefully situate water in her vision, but I want to use watercolor in particular to offer a more theoretical reading of this medium as embodied activism, especially in the memoir.

Autobiographical writing and watercolor come together in their mutual aesthetic of showing some background. Benjamin argues that most paintings obscure their background—the markings, sketches, and base colors. Watercolor's transparency, however, makes the background visible, literalizing what we might understand as historical narrative. He explains, "The only instance in which color and line coincide is in the watercolor, in which the pencil outlines are visible and the paint is put on transparently. In that case the background is retained, even though it is colored" (85). When I spoke with Goodison, she described her watercolor process as drawing first, adding a light wash of color, drawing some more before adding additional "veils of color." Watercolor's visual rhetoric is distinguished by its ability to let the background show, revealing traces of the artist's process. For Goodison, this play between background and foreground, process and finished painting, unfolds around women's bodies in space, a particularly Jamaican space.

In *Harvey River*, she recalls her Mother's experience at the riverbank where women wash "white clothes" and "coloured clothes" separately (58):

> There was a more secret 'small clothes' washing that took place there too, small clothes being the term for menstrual cloths. This washing was done in pails of

> water drawn from the river, off to the side, under the shade of the bamboo which screened the river. Young women were told not to pour this 'small clothes' water back into the river, so they used it to water the roots of the flowers growing on the riverbank. The bright red hibiscus and the red water grass seemed to benefit from this, and in turn they became useful, nurturing plants. The pulp of the hibiscus can be used to blacken shoes and to make ink for poor schoolchildren. (59)

Women wash their menstrual cloths separate from the other laundry, using separate water and washing in a separate space. The water, dyed red, is reused in the flower beds around the river. Goodison's female-centered watercolor paintings take on new meaning in light of this embodied pigment. The female body gives color to the landscape, helping the "bright red hibiscus and the red water grass" to flourish. But it does not stop there: menstruation gives greater life to the "pulp of the hibiscus," which is turned into ink. The medium of literacy (and of pen and ink sketches) has a further socioeconomic dimension since "poor schoolchildren" are provided for. The background—women's history in Jamaica, tradition and custom, and issues of progress—emerges with the delicate strokes of Goodison's watercolor brush, dipped deep in the red pigment of her female ancestors.

In her short poem, "So Who Was the Mother of Jamaican Art?," Goodison goes even deeper into Jamaican history and makes art a more literal presence:

> She was the first nameless woman who created
> images of her children sold away from her.
> She suspended those wood babies from a rope
> round her neck, before she ate she fed them,
> touched bits of pounded yam and plantains

to sealed lips; always urged them to sip water. (lines 1-6)

The poem focuses on the relationship between a female slave and her children as she tries to preserve the "images of her children sold away from her." It is a heart wrenching account of her attempt to keep them close, hanging them around her neck, nurturing them even though they've been reduced to ersatz replicas. In portraying the inner life of this "nameless" mother of Jamaican art, Goodison rewrites the history of the title, which is usually given to Edna Manley. She credits Manley with igniting her early passion for art; writing in *Harvey River*, Goodison remembers "From the time I was five or six years old, gazing in wonder at the black Christ carved by Edna Manley above the alter of All Saints Church, I knew I was going to be an artist" (281). Manley, an incredibly gifted painter and sculptor, was half Jamaican, born in England, and married Jamaica's first prime minister. While she did a great deal, politically and artistically, to support Jamaican liberation on many levels, she was a professionally trained, fair skinned artist who may have not been the most accurate "mother of Jamaican art." A world apart from Manley's fine art training, Goodison's enslaved mother chisels her children from memory, using whatever she can find:

She carved them of heartwood, teeth and nails
her first tools, later she wielded a blunt blade.
Her spit cleaned face and limbs, the pitch oil
of her skin burnished. When the woodworms
bored into their bellies, she warmed castor oil;
they purged. She learned her art by breaking
hard rockstones. She did not sign her work. (7-13)

Her own body, “teeth and nails,” reproduce the lost children before the mother finds a weapon, the “blunt blade,” a sinister reminder of the violence she (and they) have suffered. Her spit is the polish and her skin, the color of “pitch oil,” becomes the pitch black polishing cloth. However, pitch oil, now known as resin, was traditionally used in the colonial period to caulk wooden ships—an allusion to the Middle Passage slave vessels. She “learn[s] her art by breaking / hard rockstones,” which conjures the image of hard labor—rockstone a Jamaican word (rakstone) that translates to rock or stone in English. However, the mother of Jamaican art may also hone her craft by breaking the tombstones of dead slaves. In an account book, Thomas Jefferson mentions plans to use some “rough rockstone” for the grave of a dead African slave (qtd. Soll 155). This poem, seemingly about motherhood and mourning on its surface, is a more expansive protest against the horrors of slavery. By putting art and the female experience at the center of this poetic dissent, Goodison reveals art’s potential to recover lost voices. An unrhymed sonnet, “So Who Was the Mother of Jamaican Art?,” breaks the traditional form while also showing how artists, across traditions, express common themes of nationhood and mourning.

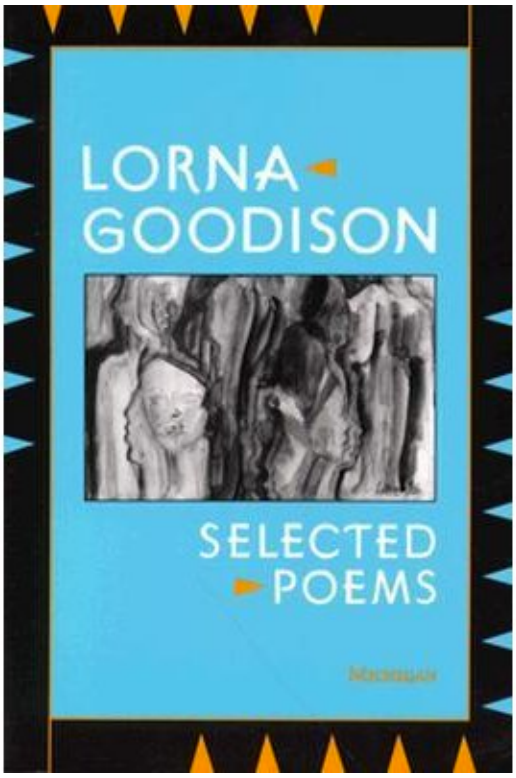

Fig. 4.6 Book cover of Lorna Goodison's *Selected Poems*
Reproduced courtesy of Lorna Goodison

Fig. 4.7 University of Toronto, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library. Original watercolor by Lorna Goodison (MS Coll 1000342, Box 23). Used with permission from Lorna Goodison

The cover of Goodison's *Selected Poems* visualizes the duplication of these lost children (see fig. 4.6). From the folds of a shroud, faces in profile peer out, empty and eyeless. This dark poem, about how Jamaican art has been shaped by displacement, slavery, and mourning, resonates with several of Goodison's images of mother figures and women. In the drafts of her volume *Turn Thanks* is a haunting figure of a nude woman done in light brown and black ink (fig. 4.7). She confronts the viewer directly, her gaze unmoving even as she is shrouded in darkness. And in 1976, Goodison did twelve illustrations for Mervyn Morris's *On Holy Week*. Some of these drawings, done in pen and ink and black markers, feature female figures in deep contemplation. In one [see fig. 4.8], a woman cradles her head as the boundary fence behind her encroaches on her body in scribbles around her elbow. The clear sky is literally blotted out, suggesting a stain on her mental clarity and wellbeing.

Fig. 4.8 Illustration by Lorna Goodison from *On Holy Week* by Mervyn Morris
Reproduced courtesy of Lorna Goodison

These poems and illustrations emanate from a dark place that, in many ways, gets at the complexity of post-colonial mourning, especially from the perspective of a female artist. Adorno suggests that "art may be the only remaining medium of truth in an age of incomprehensible terror and suffering" (27). The range, depth, and overall complexity of Goodison's vision certainly speaks to the postcolonial modernity and the "incomprehensive terror" of that history. Furthermore, Adorno locates this dark aesthetic in "Black as an ideal" (58). His argument unfolds along two lines: the literal use of dark colors in contemporary art and the affective darkness informing art by artists, "the stored-up and speechless suffering of the dead" (59). And yet, this darkness creates a space for light; he writes, "All the same, black art has certain features which, if hypostatized, would perpetuate our historical despair. Therefore, as long as there is hope for change, these features may be regarded as ephemeral, too" (59). In other words, it is one thing to represent the despair of modernity, and it is another thing to let it override, define, and literalize other experiences. For Goodison, light, vivid color, and depictions of happy women coexist with these dark figures. Like color, the spectrum is varied, and what seems like black nothingness may be the ultimate source of light in the end.

Goodison's Color Activism

Goodison locates these light sources in the artist's studio. Her Studio poems feature four artists, ranging from the Rastafari folk artist in "Studio I: Brother Everald Brown" to the classically trained portrait painter in "Studio IV: Barrington Watson." In the latter poem, she describes Barrington's *Mother and Child (1958)* in a quintessential ekphrastic poem that, in the end, connects the work of art to the artist—ekphrasis twisted

into Künstlerroman in verse.[42] Barrington is "another son, a master / who immortalized / his own mother / with a nod to Whistler" (from *Goldengrove* lines 11-14). The mother and son extend beyond the painting's frame to the Barrington and his own Jamaican mother—connected, as they are, to Whistler and his famous maternal portrait. Another of the artists in the studio poems resides in "Studio II: Seymour L." or Seymour Leichman. Leichman recurs in many of Goodison's poetry, beginning with "For Seymour" in her first published volume, *Tamarind Season*. She describes him as,

> my friend who paints rooms within his rooms
> and chases the devil because Van Gogh's sun
> bored him.
> […]
> He will need a different palette
> now that summer is gone—
> the winter palette of a restless giant[.] (lines 5-7, 11-13)

Bored by Van Gogh, Leichman is the "restless giant" chasing his vision. His "winter palette" connects Van Gogh to Picasso when he appears again as Goodison's friend-in-art in "Guernica." The poem begins with some context: "On the third day I went with Seymour Leichman / to the Museum of Modern Art, there to see Picasso's / Guernica […]" (lines 1-3). She then briefly describes aspects of Picasso's famous mural in protest of the Spanish civil war; in particular,

---

[42] In "The Koshering Process: Images of Redemption and Reconciliation in Lorna Goodison's Turn Thanks," Serafín Roldán Santiago notes, "It is peculiar how Goodison writes poetic 'art criticism.' A few of the imagists also wrote these 'art-critical-poems,' such as Williams in a 'Portrait of a Lady' in which there is reference to Watteau and Fragonard" (5). Goodison's art poems often straddle art criticism, ekphrasis, and magical realism.

[…] the woman bearing a lit lamp burst

through the casement at the upper left-hand corner

of the canvas; the disemboweled horse screamed.

Swift sleight of hand; Basque woman dropped fire

in the niche Coltrane split with the lip of his horn. (lines 3-7)

The poet-speaker analyzes Picasso's canvas, noting how his "sleight of hand" composes the iconic abstract warscape. It is another riff on the traditional ekphrastic form, as the female poet allows her own complex perspective to guide the description. She also maps Coltrane, 60's icon of jazz culture, onto the piece, crossing visual and musical aesthetics, suggesting that avant-garde art makes a space for women to protest the brutality and injustice of war. Her companion, Leichman, is a fitting one since he is most famous for his mural, *The Good Shepherd*, commissioned by the Jamaican government in 1968. The headline about the painting in the *Sunday Gleaner* of June 30, 1968 reads: NY Artist does Concrete Mural for Jamaica: Inspiration from Pocomania. Picasso's mural gives way to Leichman's Jamaican masterpiece, which features historical revolutionaries from Kapo and Marcus Garvey to Paul Bogle and Martin Luther King, Jr. (who, as it happens, was shot and killed as Leichman was doing the mural).

In a reflective mode on Leichman, Goodison continues to explain how she came to study art in New York:

It was originally my ambition (that is why I'd come)

to become a maker of most marvellous [sic.] pictures.

So I apprenticed for a time in the studio of Brachman [sic.],

and then under master painter Jacob Lawrence. Great man.

Don't look to left or right, just do the work, do the work. (lines 10-14)

Goodison does not shy away from her education. She claims her training with Robert Brackman and Jacob Lawrence, emphasizing how this period was characterized by a deep devotion to the work itself.[43] And yet, despite not looking "left or right," Goodison does a lot of looking at and commenting on art—as noted above, from the very high to the very low, from Harlem to Kingston.[44] In her volume *Turn Thanks* and her visual art, these networks of artistic influence develop around the issue of bright color. She trades Leichman and Picasso's "winter palette" for a vibrant, colorful palette of innovative pigments. For example, in her draft manuscripts of *Goldengrove*, Goodison has done a bright ink sketch that, in some ways, resembles a Picasso piece, with women in profile, lush foliage emerging around them, and various layers of abstraction (see fig. 4.9).

[43] In *Harvey River*, Goodison writes, "Besides, I had dreams of becoming a great painter, and after spending a year at the Jamaica School of Art I decided that I wanted to be trained according to the old system; I wanted to paint wit a 'master,' and at the Art Students League there were masters like the brilliant African American painter Jacob Lawrence. So I came to New York in the hope of working with him; and after painting for one term with portrait painter Robert Brachman, I was fortunate enough to get a place in Jacob Lawrence's class in the winter of 1969. I credit my time in New York City for force-feeding my senses, its extraordinary sights and sounds overtaking me on a regular basis and producing that spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings that William Wordsworth called poetry" (280).

[44] Myriam Chancy describes the ways in which leaving home can lead to a greater crucial perspective: "And it is in exile that such awareness of the limitations imposed upon the body becomes much clearer; for 'out there' women have the opportunity to speak out against their marginalization" (5).

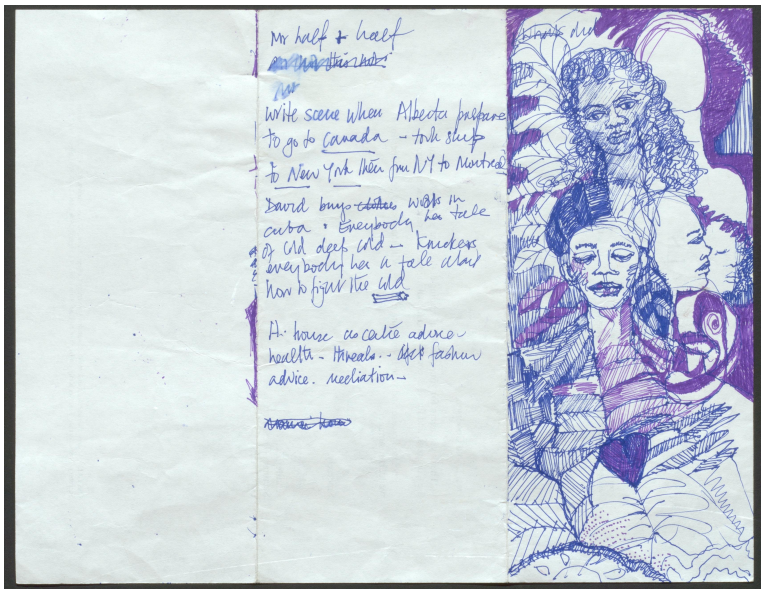

Fig. 4.9 Original ink drawing by Lorna Goodison for *Goldengrove*
University of Toronto, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library (MS Coll 00524, Box 9), Reproduced courtesy of Lorna Goodison

Turn Thanks is Goodison's most artistically colorful collection. In particular, the books' third section "The Mango of Poetry" includes poems rich with pigments, art histories, and conversations with other artists. The section's titular poem brings together memory and literary craft through the image of a "yellow ochre" mango (line 10). Goodison paints her poetic images using specific pigments, a painterly aesthetic that makes complexity visible. She is especially concerned with the complex histories of oppressed populations, histories she not only voices but visualizes. For example, in "Song of the Burnt Gypsy of the City of Erlangen," Goodison offers a harrowing account of artistry as mourning practice:

Her husband is an artist.

He paints upon her skin

with a tempera that he himself

has mixed, grinding block
of color which he blends
with egg albumen.

He stays within the ochre range.
Burnt sienna for her.
He wakes at dawn,
stretches her flat
like a warm canvas,

then masterfully
he paints upon her.
Always the same painting.
Painting of a Gypsy woman
with scorched face and limbs. (lines 1-16)

This artist paints a painful, tragic picture, a burned Gypsy woman with his wife's body as his canvas. Goodison may be referencing the German (Erlangen located in Bavaria) Gypsy population, which, second to the Jews, were most persecuted by the Nazis. In "grinding blocks / of color," the artist prepares his statement from its most authentic source. Goodison's modernity is scorched earth, and the body as canvas becomes a larger, more difficult narrative about human suffering to be witnessed by "horrified citizens, / conscience stricken" (lines 19-20). In resurrecting history visually—"Everyday [the artist] recreates / the same painting"—the poet emphasizes the value of a

collective monument. She argues that art has the potential to heal, even as it, paradoxically, memorializes the victims of injustice, persecution, and violence. This is perhaps the "ochre range" of the poem's paradox meant to fix the image in the reader's mind. Cennini, in his *Handbook*, describes ochre through a bodily metaphor: "There is a natural yellow called ochre. This pigment is found in the mountainous country, where there are viens of it" (37). This bodily pigment reminds him of his father and a trip in which they discover pigments that Cennini tests for "the colouring of flesh […] This colour [ochre] is, in its nature, of good body (*grasso*)" (37, 38). Pigment embodies memory, grounding human experience in both the land and flesh.

Goodison takes these aesthetic and historical concerns to 1940s Jamaica in "Hungry Belly Kill Daley" and "The Jerboa of John Dunkley." The embodied experience of making art connects issues of nationhood and race, and these poems recuperate Jamaica's nearly forgotten modernist painters. In "Hungry Belly Kill Daley," she tells Henry Daley's moving story:

> I fancied that I could paint
> a still life with food,
> and my rendering of victuals
> would be so good
> that I could reach into the canvas
> and eat and fill my belly.
>
> Cadmium yellow could spread
> butter impasto over white lead

of a brown loaf baked of sienna.
Scarlet and vermilion, the wine
would flow, otaheiti apple
is a deep, dark, rose madder.

If I could fill my hungry belly
with painted wine and bread
but they shock my visions from my head
at Bellevue, where Louis Q. Bowerbank
sends madmen or black men mad enough
to think that we could be artists, in 1940. (lines 1-18)

According to the poem, Daley, a Jamaican folk painter, was sent to Kingston's infamous insane asylum, Bellevue. Louis Q. Bowerbank, the asylum's so-called reformer, was a local celebrity figure and politician who did not, in reality, do very much to improve Bellevue's treatment of Jamaicans—a problem that persisted well into the twentieth-century.[45]

Goodison connects these points of political and artistic history through vivid descriptions of the still life convention and specific pigments. The speaker, Daley, describes how art nurtures his hungry soul—it is the food for his "hungry belly." The artist aspires to "be so good" that food materializes on the canvas, allowing him to "fill [his] belly" with "painted wine and bread." Daley longs so deeply for this vision that

[45] See *Insanity, Race and Colonialism: Managing Mental Disorder in the Post-Emancipation British Caribbean, 1838-1914* by Leonard Smith (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) for more on Bowerbank and the Jamaican asylum reform scandal.

Goodison conveys the material substances of painting, his pigments. "Cadmium yellow" becomes his butter, spread with impasto texturing over "white lead," which, when mixed with cadmium, makes the pigment more durable. The "brown loaf" is made of sienna, the raw material of umber pigment. Goodison then introduces various shades of red. The wine is "[s]carlet and vermilion," vermillion being a deep red pigment made from ground cinnabar. Vermilion was valuable, and as Cennini explains, varied widely in hue, quality, and processing. Daley's "otaheiti apple" is a traditional Jamaican fruit, depicted in a "deep, dark rose madder." Rose madder is made from the pigment madder lake, a famously complex and difficult pigment. In naming these specific pigments, Daley establishes his artistic authority, only to have it stripped away in the third stanza. His painted Eucharist does not provide salvation. Misunderstanding his art, "they shock [his] visions" at Bellevue. His crime is that he is one of many "black men mad enough / to think that we could be artists, in 1940." Subjected to electroshock, his artistic visions are obliterated, suggesting that his physical starvation is also a spiritual death. Jamaica's history of racial censorship in the arts emerges in the poem as a material legacy—symbolized by the processes and tools of painting.

"The Jerboa of John Dunkley" describes a painting known as *Jerboa* painted by the Jamaican artist and barber, John Dunkley, in 1950. Goodison offers a surreal account of how Dunkley, who covered his barbershop with paintings, and was (in her mind) inspired by the tiny African mammal to make art: it yielded hairs for brush bristles / and you covered the canvas with gray (lines 13-14). The jerboa's fur provides the material for paintbrushes, and the gray in its coat provides the background color. Goodison continues,

Draw deep from your palette somber,
pure palette brooding chiaroscuro.
Dark greens and silver, muted
like the voice of the sing-slow Barber.
[…]
Marsupial jerboa leaps from shoe polish tin
blue rabbit roots at banana tree
when Barber takes a walk down the road
of captured collective memory. (21-24, 29-32)

Dunkley embodies his palette, the dark and somber tones of his "sing-low" voice mirrored in the hues and tones of his muted painting. But his "muted […] voice" carries the additional connotation of excluded, marginal voices. His trade supplies the content for his art as the jerboa emerges from the "Shoe polish tin," even as he ventures out of the space of one labor into the imaginative labor of his art. This "walk down the road" alludes to Duckley's careful attention to depth in *Jerboa*. Set in a lush forest at night, the painting is faintly divided by a road winding up the canvas. Using various shades of black, he conveys distance in addition to emotional intensity. This road becomes the artist's journey to "captur[e] collective memory." Goodison's ekphrastic poems are about the artist-creators, too; in recovering the art, and in particular the tools and pigment of painting, she also recovers the lost stories of Jamaica's folk artists.

Dunkley and Daley's works were exhibited posthumously together in 1960 at the Institute of Jamaica. Goodison's collective memory spans geographies and historical periods—a movement between spaces and times that draws on a breathtaking range of art

historical influences. She frequently and sympathetically turns her art poetics to Van Gogh. She is drawn to his use of color, especially light, as a force for good in the world, as in "Letter to Vincent Van Gogh":

> Then too, it is now clear that it was you who penetrated
> the mystery of gold.
> You saw how it had its origins in the sun, how gold on earth
> is really imitation.
> You found it useful for lighting wheatfields and dyeing daffodils
> and to thin it with longing as a medium to wash the walls of your room.
> The medium of longing, the golden hope exploding across the
> wheatfields with crows [.] (lines 22-28)

Gold, the pigment of the sun, makes light and dyes the flowers. The artist's longing thins the gold enough to make it "a medium to wash the walls of your room." To inhabit this divine, creative space is to long for "golden hope," Goodison's ultimate goal for the poetic palette. Outside Van Gogh's room are the heavens:

> Stars of forbearance. Galaxy of endurance.
> Vincent, true and magic alchemist, this is your constellation.
> A company of stars dedicated to you,
> who give light to dreamers who create and weep
> and recreate and wait their turn and savor their salt and weep. (lines 33-37)

Through the alchemy of his pigments, Van Gogh creates a night sky studded with the will to endure. His constellation is the "golden hope" that "give[s] light to dreamers who create and weep." The artist's eye captures the difficult tragedy of modernity, while also

patiently crafting a vision for hope. Goodison's own palette for *Turn Thanks* captures this artist's sky, studded as it is with symbols for a more peaceful future (see fig. 4.10).

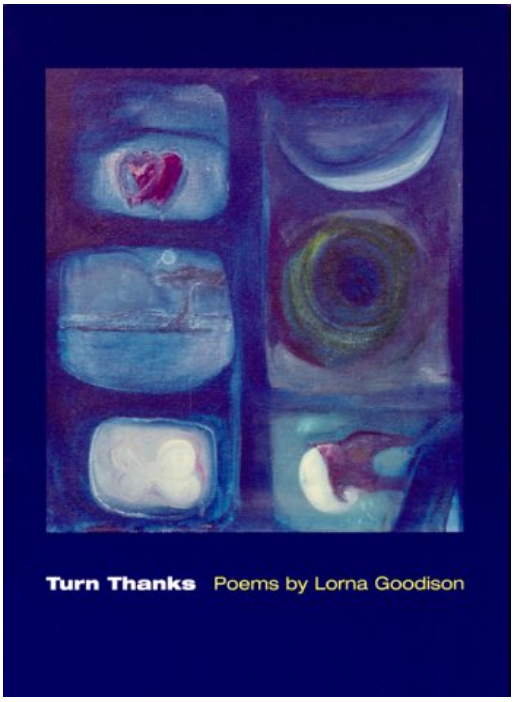

Fig. 4.10 *Turn Thanks* book cover illustration by Lorna Goodison
Reproduced courtesy of Lorna Goodison

Her indigo watercolor palette contains pools of color, each with its own pictorial significance: going clockwise from the top left, two hearts, the crescent moon, the eye of a peacock feather, a dove, a white butterfly, and a landscape. Taken together, these symbols bring together the night sky (an allusion to Van Gogh's starry night, perhaps) with the swirling blues and whites around the moon imagery with the white butterfly and birds, all of which are steeped deep in symbolism having to do with love, peace, and transcendence. The palette format places the tools of painting's craft in the reader's hand, allowing them to experience an encounter with art and its media before even opening the book. Jamaica's landscape, represented in the last frame, forms a connection

to the other symbolic, intuitive aesthetic properties, a further allusion to Jamaica's folk artists, called "the Intuitives."

But, in the end, it is Goodison's watercolor palette, pigment and water mixed with history and a call for peace, which speaks loudest. Her *Turn Thanks* book cover is perhaps most evocative of her own poem, "Blue Peace Incantation":

Within blue of peace,
the azure of calm,
beat soft now, bright heart,
beat soft, sound calm.
By cobalt of love deep
indigo of perception
by waters of sky blue
by need's incantation
by measure
blue measured
in verdant balance
of green
heart be rocked calm now
light we have seen.
By meditations of clear waters,
all strivings cease,
within all,
illumination,

forever, lasting blue peace. (lines 1-19)

Her magenta "bright heart" beats out from the "azure […] cobalt […and] indigo" shades of blue, a mixing of "love" and "perception" that meditates on the art of peace. This "illumination, forever, lasting" permeates the landscape of Goodison's poetry, suggesting that color's complexity binds elements of human suffering to the need for continued hope, activism, and love.

Color enables this aesthetic and ethical crossing in the Jamaican context. Jahan Ramazani has explained this translocated aesthetic in Goodison's poetry as "crossing boundaries between the living and the dead, between times, places, cultures. The space of a poem is neither local—a securely anchored signifier of Jamaican authenticity—nor global—a placeless, free-floating noumenon. It is a translocation, verbally enabling and enacting—between specific times and places—cross-cultural, transhistorical exchange" (Ramazani, Bricolage 289). The same could be said for a history of color, the ranges and complexity of perception and composition providing the medium for visual exchanges across time and space. Goodison's poetic, artistic, and political knowledge spans these terrains, making a multimedia approach most fitting to her overall aesthetic. hooks would agree, arguing that "[r]epresentation is a crucial location of struggle for any exploited and oppressed people asserting subjectivity and decolonization of the mind" (3). Racism, the history of colonization and slavery, and the oppression of women come under the pressure of Goodison's brush and pen, and her critique crosses the media of writing and of art to more fully expose a range of experiences and to demonstrate, in practice, the complexity of the creative critique. In making various sorts of black, she

breaks new ground in the representation of Jamaican history—a history as dark as it is hopeful.

CODA: **Out of Line: Disorientation, Craft, and (Multi)media in the Multicultural Present**

In her essay entitled, “That Crafty Feeling," Zadie Smith puts forward a provocation about literary craft:

> …there’s an important difference between the way a writer thinks about craft, and the way critics and academics think about craft. Critics and academics are dedicated to the analysis of craft *after the fact*. Their accounts are indispensable for anyone who reads fiction and cares for it, but they are not truly concerned with craft as it is practiced (6).

In this dissertation, I have worked to show the significance of craft during the fact for writers and for the production of literary aesthetics. I explore the historical and cultural implications of particular types of craft (not just literary or metaphorical), such as assemblage, textile arts, and photography, and the ways in which authors incorporate craft aesthetics into their texts and social critique. To reveal how literature has engaged with the other arts across the long twentieth-century, I read literary texts and artworks with deep attention to medium specificity and process. Rather than understanding a work of art—in literature or in the world—as a fully formed *product*, I read for the layers of creation involved in its making, responding in particular to issues of materiality and histories of visual culture.

In the course of my research, I developed an archive more substantial—and more suggestive—than I could have anticipated. The artistic objects I studied, and in some cases discovered, suggest that writers' sensitivity to art-making as a locus of agential craft has fundamentally shaped the aesthetics of British and diasporic literature. Following

this line of thought, this Coda explores the intersection of multicultural politics and multimedia textual production. I argue that the multimedia is a visual and literary phenomenon that has come to be a dominant mode for the expression of multicultural identity. In what ways do the signifying resources latent in art processes and mediums enable new forms of political resistance in British and Caribbean literature? And how might modernist literary experimentation, especially the work of Virginia Woolf, give rise to these new, layered mediations? With an eye to these hybrid objects and genres, I also want to ask how art might inform a range of theoretical approaches to issues of agency, technology, and activism in British women's and queer literature.

Although they are outside the scope of this Coda, works such as Jeanette Winterson's *Art Objects* and *The Powerbook*, A.S. Byatt's *The Matisse Stories*, and Andrea Levy's *Fruit of the Lemon* examine how identity is embedded in histories of making and visuality. In an interview, Byatt describes seeing literary craft in "three-dimensional structures," calling her writing "the project of making a thing" (Interview, The Guardian). Similar instances occur in Edna O'Brien's 1966 novel *Casualties of Peace* in which a glass sculpture artist's fragile life shatters unexpectedly, and the reader becomes a helpless observer of the narrative's irretrievable pieces—as if behind glass. And more recently, meditations on sexuality and the history of art arrive powerfully in Grace Nichols' collection of poems, *Picasso I want my Face Back* and Ali Smith's novel in (-her words-) "fresco form," entitled *How to Be Both* (*Guardian*, Clark). These works across the twentieth century and contemporary era add a valuable chorus of voices to the established canon of British writer-artists such as Wyndham Lewis and the Vorticists,

D.H. Lawrence, and Evelyn Waugh—or writer-doodlers in the case of Samuel Beckett and Dylan Thomas.

New perspectives on the interplay between literature and visual culture require an expanded definition of media and benefit from understanding multimedia practices and aesthetics in light of literature's social efficacy, especially in the contexts of gender activism and multiculturalism. Cambridge-based artist Kabe Wilson, and Jamaican-British writer Zadie Smith use Virginia Woolf's literary legacy to simultaneously orient and disorient readers in an arc of social critique, experimental narrative, and race consciousness. In the cases of these authors, disorientation—its aesthetics, ethics, and affects across media—provides a useful starting place for analysis of familiar terrain made strange or unrecognizable. For both Wilson and Smith, the terrain is in fact a spatial or geographic phenomenon, but it's also the mental, or psychological landscapes of modern experience. My thinking about disorientation has, in part, been informed by Sara Ahmed's writing on Queer Phenomenology in which identity is constituted by bodies moving in space and time rather than existing only in the mind. Ahmed's queer theory shuttles between the material and theoretical, or the real and the metaphorical, in ways that are both challenging and productive and that have influenced this project's methodology as a whole.

She asks important questions about orientation, especially the idea of having a home, in order to point up the political stakes of disorientation. I interpret her definition of queer orientation to unfold along three lines: 1) sense of self, 2) direction, and 3) recognition. The first of these categories moves beyond sex and gender orientation to encompass the totality of selfhood as such, suggesting that the self is less stable or under

erasure in the phenomenological experience of being than it is queered or experienced variously along a spectrum. Queer directionality refers to the loss of fixed coordinates in one's pursuit of self, which can certainly lead to a type of disorientation that turns even the compass on its side. And queer recognition refers to the possibilities engendered when we acknowledge experiences of recognizing oneself in some other in a manner that fundamentally alters the shape of the self as a phenomenal being.

I find these categories of sense of self, direction, and recognition useful in defining a multimedia aesthetic and in showing how disorientation functions within multimedia objects to suggest their critical energy (560). Being 'out of line' queers normative spatiality, and it is possible to read this disruption as political. As Ahmed puts it,

> Moments of disorientation are vital. They are bodily experiences that throw the world up, or throw the body from its ground. Disorientation as a bodily feeling can be unsettling, and it can shatter one's sense of confidence in the ground or one's belief that the ground on which we reside can support the actions that make life livable. Such a feeling of shattering, or being shattered, might persist and become a crisis. Or the feeling itself might pass as the ground returns or we return to the ground. (157)

The interaction between embodied phenomenology, geographical sense, and trauma suggest how we might read the relationship between multiculturalism and multimedia textualities. Following Ahmed, the *Oxford English Dictionary* is clear about the two sides of "shatter": on the one side is a material fracturing, breaking into pieces; on the other side is the psychological expression of shatter, such as 'shattering his spirit.'

Disorientation can indeed be traumatic, but it is also a "vital" (to use Ahmed's word) phenomenon, especially in a political present characterized by war, violence, and mass immigration. In unsettling bodily orientation and its literal ground, Ahmed evokes the multicultural identity "crisis" alongside the dynamic instability of queer sexual orientation. These dialogues between mind and body, between geographic location and queer transgressions of the mind are descriptive, I want to note, of a particularly Woolfian aesthetic. Ahmed would seem to agree, citing Woolf's 1929 long essay, *A Room of One's Own* in her "Introduction" as a particular inspiration for how she approaches the process and spatial dimension of academic writing.

Black British writer, artist, and academic Kabe Wilson also draws inspiration from "A Room of One's Own," literally undoing the book's binding as his medium. Woolf composed her feminist manifesto after she (having been denied a formal education), eventually gave a series of lectures at Cambridge University. Almost 100 years later, Wilson, as a student at Cambridge, reorganized all 37,971 words of Woolf's text into a new book entitled, *Of One Woman or So* under the pseudonym Olivia N'Gowfri, anagrams of both Woolf's title and name. The text exists in several forms [see figs. 5.1 and 5.2]: the clean, word-processed version of the story, a 4x13 foot cut and pasted artwork, and the two paperback copies he cut up to compose "Of One Woman," which can be read as a kind of negative space, or what Craig Dworkin would call "no medium." In these terms, the conceptual space of the page persists, ghostly, behind the erasures, excisions, and transparencies. For Wilson, the remix is meant to reflect "cultural changes in race, sex, class, and the role and power of literature" (Wilson qtd. in Flood).

Fig. 5.1 *Kabe Wilson's 4x13' version of Of One Woman or So*
Reproduced courtesy of Kabe Wilson

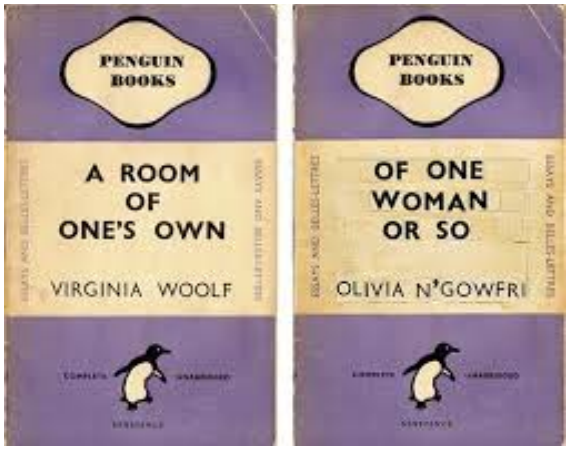

Fig. 5.2 *Penguin cover for Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own and Kabe Wilson's assemblage cover for Of One Woman or So*
Reproduced courtesy of Kabe Wilson

In the text of *Of One Woman or So*, Olivia, a mixed-race girl studying at Cambridge struggles with racism and microagression in her college community alongside her growing fascination with Woolf's work and with the writings of American black power activists and intellectuals. She reads "A Room of One's Own" in preparation for a secret literary society initiation and goes to see the original manuscript, locked in a case

and on display. Her frustration with the book's shortcomings as a progressive tract expands when she is labeled with the racially offensive word, negress, by the group's patriarch during the initiation. Convinced she must take action, Olivia attempts to burn down several of Cambridge's libraries in protest of racial oppression and sexism. While she works, she listens to Philip Glass's score entitled "Something She Has To Do" from *The Hours*, the film version of Michael Cunningham's Mrs. Dalloway-inspired novel. Wilson represents the series of commands she inputs into her iPod, a significant textual moment that indicates the kind of technological layering that is so fundamental to the project's composition.

Olivia finally arrives at the manuscript of "A Room of One's Own," which she liberates from its case…with an ax. As she tries to set the manuscript on fire, her lighter fails, and she is suddenly confronted with a kind of material nostalgia: Wilson writes, "*Something about the physical presence of the letters on the precious yellowing paper brought back all that had gone through her mind when reading it*" (130-131, Wilson's italics). In this encounter with the primary literary artifact, Olivia realizes that Woolf's work inspired her to action, even as she critiqued its diluted activism, especially with regard to racial justice. However, realizing that destruction isn't the answer, she declares, "*Its value was in its inquiry, not its conclusion*" (Wilson 131, his italics). As a black feminist, her mission becomes not to destroy the original text but to rewrite the story of Woolf's critique through a contemporary lens.

Olivia mounts this revision through craft, creating a new orientation to Woolf's work. Wilson writes, "I could take some scissors to it, counting them all out, and add my own commas…Bound together in a way that fixes them, and gives them new life. As my

opinions of 'women' have been inextricably assembled by those of the women I have read…Sewed together; this being I must create! A composite, and I must compose it. An elemental craft. And write, by Miss A. Grammar. So they understand" (131-32) [see fig. 5.3]. Olivia's "elemental craft" uses a variety of media elements to craft an expression of political protest that accounts for the experiences of gendered and racialized bodies throughout literary history.

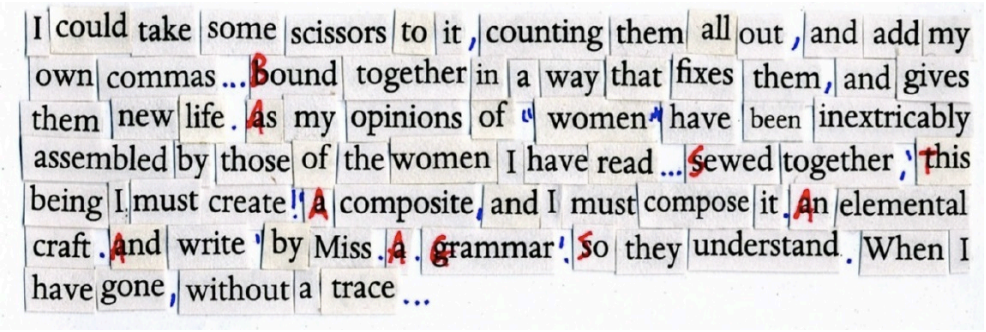

Fig. 5.3 Detail from handmade version of *Kabe Wilson's Of One Woman or So*
Reproduced courtesy of Kabe Wilson

This assemblage, or re-assemblage as it were, of Woolf's words paradoxically performs Wilson's own queer multiculturalism. On his first visit to Monk's House, Woolf's adult home in the countryside, he recalls being singled out by the gardener as a suspicious intruder on the property. The gardener remarks, "you don't look like a Virginia Woolf fan" (interview, 1:16). To an uncanny extent, this spatial censorship echoes the opening pages of *A Room of One's Own*. Woolf recounts being ushered off the Oxbridge turf by a frantic Beadle since "Only the Fellows and Scholars are allowed here" (6). She proceeds to a "famous library" to read some Charles Lamb. As a woman, she is not allowed in. These moments become the catalyst for the book's meditation on women's work, creativity, education, and liberation. Wilson's encounter with the gardener at Monk's House underscores the racial implications of cultural gatekeeping

that surround the British literary institution today and that inspired him to write another chapter in the project as a whole. As a literary tourist 'out of line,' he enacts a kind of racial trespassing that speaks to the larger position of black British identity. The experience, a disorienting one for all involved, also becomes the incentive for calling attention to racial code switching. As he thought through these issues, Wilson was inspired to deliver a talk in drag as Virginia Woolf [see fig. 5.4]. In this performance piece, he delivered a reorganized version Woolf's 1937 talk entitled "Craftsmanship" at Woolf's Bloomsbury home. He uses the remixed essay to explain *Of One Woman or So*'s composition. In making his political engagement with Woolf's work personal, Wilson embodies media experimentation as an activist practice.

Fig. 5.4 *Kabe Wilson's as Virginia Woolf*
Reproduced courtesy of Kabe Wilson

Taken together, these instances of visual, literary, and gendered revision highlight the experience of multicultural selfhood as an aesthetic phenomenon with political potential. Wilson revises the canon by destabilizing selfhood, going so far as to multiply selves, in a disorienting performance of authorship, curation, and criticism. He not only remaps Woolf's writings but transposes his image onto hers. Or, put another way, he

attempts to embody the textual aesthetic in which encounters with Woolf manifest queerness of being and moving in the world on multiple levels.

The entire series of texts and performances began with a photographic project in which Wilson reassembled pixels of his self-portrait into Woolf's iconic profile shot using both computational and manual processes [see fig. 5.5].

Fig. 5.5 *Kabe Wilson's Dreadlock Hoax portraits*
Reproduced courtesy of Kabe Wilson

The positive and negative spaces of the images emerge through media manipulation, calling attention to issues of race and color alongside discrepancies in representation and celebrity. This photomosaic was the beginning of Wilson's ongoing project, called the Dreadlock Hoax, a reference to Woolf's 1910 cross-racial cross-dressing political protest known as the Dreadnought Hoax. In this famous incident, Woolf, her brother, and some of his friends from Cambridge dressed up as Abyssinian royalty and fooled the British royal navy into giving them a tour of their state-of-the-art warship, the HMS Dreadnought. Woolf's involvement is especially significant since she not only passed as an African, but also as a man. Woolf's brother wrote a firsthand account of the Dreadnought incident, and in a 1983 reprint of that account, her nephew and biographer,

Quentin Bell uses a craft metaphor to explain how the Hoax was received: "It was a nine days wonder; it was noticed and embroidered in the press" (8). The tactile aspect of cross-cultural cross-dressing embroiders itself literally on Wilson's work through both text and texture in his multimedia revisions.

In blurring his image with Woolf's, both in photographic form and drag performance, Wilson reverses the terms of racial appropriation and reorganizes the literary hierarchy to include marginalized voices and images. The Dreadnought Hoax was meant to subvert the authority of the British military and critique imperialism, to be sure, but its execution and legacy remain problematic. The Hoax's Abyssinian context, present day Ethiopia, resonates strongly with Wilson because he is half-Ethiopian. By incorporating his mixed race heritage and androgynous appearance into the project, Wilson makes a particularly interesting scholarly and artistic inroad to race and gender in Woolf.

As Sonita Sarker and others have pointed out, scholars have been largely without consensus on how to approach the topics of race and class in Woolf's work. In *Hearts of Darkness*, Jane Marcus began postcolonial and feminist readings of Woolf and her sometimes confusing relationship to class and race hierarchies in her writings. More recently, in a chapter entitled "Orienting Virginia Woolf," Urmila Seshagiri attends to "The 'question of the West & the East' [that] pervades many of Virginia Woolf's major works, transforming Englishness and modernity into sites defined by racial difference, imperialism, and Orientalism" (140). Her chapter title puns on Orientalism of course, but it suggests a further engagement with orientation that interests me. In tracking with

Woolf's multicultural characters, Seshagiri underscores what Rebecca Walkowitz calls Woolf's critical cosmopolitanism (*Bad Modernisms*).

I opened with Zadie Smith's thoughts on the crafty feeling of authorship, and several critics and reviewers have noted the affinities between her 2012 novel *NW* and Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*. Both are formally experimental, end with a death, and describe London's landscape in vivid visual detail. Smith's intense examination of social organization in northwest London speaks to the queerness of "direction" in a phenomenological sense—expressed here as an active form of disorientation in the text. 'Losing one's way' is arguably the novel's primary metaphor, but the book's spatial orientation throws identity politics, represented in disorienting narrative forms, into relief. You'd be hard pressed to find a more multicultural novel set in one location, and this geographic containment, paradoxically diverse as it is, becomes the novel's central tension. NW, the postcode for northwest London, serves as the backdrop for three main character's stories as they intertwine. They are all in their early 30s and grew up in the same council estate, or housing project. Leah is half-Irish and white, and her best friend growing up, Keisha, is of Afro-Caribbean descent. Leah still lives in the project with her husband, Michel who is a French-Algerian hairdresser. Felix enters the story as an ex-drug dealer with a heart of gold and new lease on life since falling in love with Grace, a "half Jamaican, half Nigerian" waitress (178). The narrative follows Felix's last day on earth before he's murdered.

Smith's novel relies on a wide range of media to represent the multiple national identities at work in *NW*: an internet chat exchange, different fonts and dialogue typographies, text messages, and a set of Google map directions. Other genres include

stream-of-consciousness episodes, a half-downloaded law website, a google search URL, song lyrics, dreamlike conversations with the dead, and a poem about an apple tree in the shape of an apple tree. The reader, like northwest London's inhabitants, is overwhelmed with the din and buzz of modern life even in familiar spaces, a paradox which Smith captures on the page by turning the familiar conventions of fiction into experiments in multimedia communication forms.

What are we to do with this dizzying assembly of genres and cultural markers? Readers are ushered into an affective experience of disorientation, a form of literary realism since our familiarity with a place does not guarantee a stable experience of it; in fact, it's sometimes the most familiar landscape that has the greatest potential to disorient. Smith would seem to offer this point of stability in the form of the number thirty-seven. She provides an address, a particular place on the map, that becomes not only the catalyst for the story's various dramas but a kind of leitmotif, bringing the reader back to a fixed point of reference at 37 Ridley Avenue. At the beginning of the novel, a disheveled crack user comes to Leah's door described as "In the textured glass, a body, blurred. Wrong collection of pixels to be Michel" (5). The woman, Shar, produces an envelope marked with the address 37 Ridley Avenue and explains that she lives nearby, a promise of familiarity that ultimately leads to Leah getting cheated out of 30 pounds. As a point of recognition and common experience, 37 also represents deception, poverty, and chaos. The number 37 continues to show up, with a chapter mis-numbered 37 after 23 and a description of Felix's Rastafari father on page 37 of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (123). Then, in the episodic section of the novel, 37 shows up again, this time in

episode 24. 37's multiple showings suggest a particular significance for how we read fixed points on a map, or in a codex.

Two moments in the novel framed by 37 extend beyond the bounds of the book into another media space on Penguin U.S.A.'s webpage. Celebrity photographer Andrew Meredith was commissioned to photograph *NW*'s locations, and his still images have been turned into four short videos with Smith reading sections of the novel as script runs across the photographs [see fig. 5.6]. These interactive videos are plotted on London's map.

Fig. 5.6 Screenshot of Penguin U.S.A. website

One of the videos, Camden Lock, centers on the episode number 24, which is entitled "The number 37," a mundane account of Leah's trips on the 37 bus to the hip Camden markets. The other significant instance of 37 in the novel and the Penguin project is a section labeled 37 with door number typography in between chapter 11 and 12. Leah reflects on the significance of the number 37 vis-à-vis a former female lover:

> Lying in bed next to a girl she loved, years ago, discussing the number 37. Dylan singing. The girl had a theory that 37 has a magic about it, we're compelled toward it. Websites are dedicated to the phenomenon. The imagined houses found in cinema, fiction, painting and poetry—almost always 37. Asked to

> choose a number at random: usually 37. Watch for 37, the girl said, in out lotteries, our game-shows, our dreams and jokes, and Leah did, and Leah still does. Remember me to one who lives there. She once was a true love of mind. Now that girl is married, too. Number 37 Ridley Avenue is being squat. Squatted? The front door is boarded up. A window is broken. Human noise from behind torn gray nets. Leah moves from the shadow of a hedge to the forecourt. Nobody spots her. Nothing happens. She stands with one foot hovering off the ground. What would she do with 37 lives!" (46).

This account mingles history with the present and suggests that Leah has visited the address on Shar's envelope. The house at 37 Ridley Avenue refuses to be interpreted with the usual tools: as Leah's internal dialogue multiplies the number 37, so too does the house multiply its queer signifiers. It refuses entry but is clearly inhabited. The usual barriers (window, curtain, door) are all made from alternative or shattered media—broken glass, nets, and boards. Leah pauses in the shadow, one leg lifted in anticipation of movement as she evokes a cat, an animal trespasser with 37 lives. The detailed novelistic landscape invites the reader to visit these places as well, and the Penguin mapping project further attempts to orient the reader to Smith's complicated multicultural landscape. But all this site-specificity in a novel can feel equally disorienting, especially when it's filtered through the subjective perspectives of variously troubled characters.

With the confluence of technology and the cityscape in mind, I attempted to map 37 Ridley Avenue in Google maps, matching up the flat fronts and bushes in Meredith's photos to Google Map's street view. Trying to orient myself to *NW*, this impulse towards mapping seems profoundly suggestive about the authoritative nature of some kinds of

media in works of fiction. With specific geographic markers, such as the fixed point of 37 repeated throughout the novel, Smith calls on an orienting measure that ultimately—and paradoxically—stands in for disorientation. As I've been trying to suggest, the "phenomenon" of 37 is perhaps less about a number on the map than the idea of home, place, sexual orientation, and language. Thus Leah's reflection on her own queerness is bound up in the multiple referents for the number 37, the flat at 37 Ridley Avenue being the latest. Her own queer orientation exists in the realm of multiples, her identity represented in the text (and on the Penguin site) through multimedia.

Penguin's catalog of geographical markers in *NW* is suggestive of a recent trend in Woolf scholarship and pedagogy. In the last few years, several online mapping projects have emerged, plotting the locations in *Mrs. Dalloway* (other similar projects have sprung up around James Joyce's *Dubliners* and *Ulysses*). Following the locations mapped in the multimedia *NW* Penguin project, it would at first seem that the worlds of *NW* and *Mrs. Dalloway* do not intersect. And that would seem to make sense, given the very different worlds these characters inhabit. However, as a case study, I first located Septimus Smith's route. In *NW*, Felix is most like Septimus. Both men struggle with an illness—Septimus with flashbacks and hallucination from his war trauma and Felix from alcoholism and drug addiction. And tragically, both men die at the end of the novels, leaving the other protagonists to speculate and comment on their fates.

With this in mind, I also explored certain points on Felix's route, to see if he ventured beyond the points mapped by Penguin. In fact, their routes do intersect. Septimus crosses through the intersection at Oxford and Regent's Street on his way home after a distressing meeting with Dr. Bradshaw who decides he must be exiled to a rest

home. In *NW*, Felix also passes through the intersection at Oxford and Regent's streets at the beginning of a meeting with Tom, a man selling a vintage car. Felix looks to Tom to navigate this busy and unfamiliar part of town, but even he finds it disorienting. Smith writes, "But he did not seem to know how to negotiate the corner crush between Oxford and Regent streets; after a few false starts he was half a foot further back than he had been a moment ago" (137). Negotiating the intersection, the two men meet to "negotiate" about a car. Felix's false starts suggest a kind of self-questioning and negative movement—in the double senses of space and self-orientation—in a strange space that becomes increasingly small as his sense of direction begins to fail. Tom, an adman, looks down on Felix, recalling Septimus's encounter with Dr. the condescending Bradshaw just a few blocks over. In both cases, these are cultural clashes fueled by fear and misunderstanding. Smith disorients Woolf's canonical literary landscape, making new paths visible in the British literary tradition.

Teagan Zimmerman has suggested that Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* requires a new reading in the digital age. The room, she argues, must be rethought with new attention to "technology, and an e-feminism of online spaces and women's online writing" (35). I want to suggest that the room, as a space of queer possibility, virtually expands in Smith and Wilson's works. In these works, contemporary cosmopolitan spaces disorient along the three axes of queer phenomenology I outlined earlier: sense of self, recognition, and direction. Writing on black British poetry, Jahan Ramazanni argues that such work "reconceives widely disparate geocultural spaces and histories in relation to one another [… it] is neither homebound or homeless, neither rooted or rootless" (163). While Ramazani focuses exclusively on poetry, my analysis here extends his

claims to black British writing in other genres and forms an important locus for thinking through the nature and stakes of queer phenomenology.

In closing, I want to return briefly to the concept of craft. I want to suggest that we have arrived at a moment in the history of media in which we are actively reprioritizing the role of the made thing. In *NW*, Smith calls attention the creation of media objects through maps, which are embedded in the ancient craft of cartography and other art forms concerned with place making and nationhood. Designed by Jon Gray, the British edition of *NW* features a striking cover design. Inspired by a pop art color scheme, Gray notes in his pencil sketches that "maps in back" should appear in the title and author name lettering (Lamot n.p.). Thus we might also note the ways in which the novel, as a literary artifact, remains a multimedia object, entrenched in processes of visual information. Its hybrid media parallel the use of hybrid genres, such as *NW*'s concrete poem describes a "network of branches," pointing up the ways in which technology and the written word intersect with the physical world in literary craft.

At its core, however, my argument here is perhaps a more modest claim about representation in this particular context of multiculturalism in British literature—especially engagement with multimedia modes and processes. To bring things to a close, then, I would simply note that concepts based on our experiences of self, recognition, and direction—concepts that help us organize our visible and social worlds—are not necessarily shared. Moreover, awareness of this diversity in phenomenal experience is a fundamental precursor to social justice. In these texts, paths intersect across time and space, experiences between people merge, and recognition—of the self and others—direct narrative trajectories that, in an ironic twist, orient us to a common struggle. And

they accomplish this by representing the fragmentation inherent in multicultural experience and allowing disorientation to feature in showing how people map their conceptual and material worlds. Smith's crafty feeling helps us rethink the boundaries around art forms, seeing how literary craft comes alive on the page, both critically and creatively, in new ways.

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