Beyond Ekphrasis: Visual Media and Modernist Narrative

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Abstract

"Beyond Ekphrasis" argues that literary modernism's convergence with visual media drives its formal experimentation and integrally structures its narratives. Reading texts by Henry James, Mina Loy, Virginia Woolf, and Gertrude Stein in dialogue with sculptures, paintings, and photographs, this dissertation offers a capacious account of the intersection between the verbal and visual arts in the early twentieth century. My study encompasses references to fine-art objects and evocations of painterly genres, as well as visual motifs and modes of viewing visual and plastic art, and in so doing, my account departs from the longstanding critical focus on ekphrasis—the verbal representation of an artwork—which has so often guided discussions of the "sister arts." Instead, I examine more diffuse forms of inter-mediation, which may escape the strict confines of the term ekphrasis because they are, for example, verbal representations of no real-world art object. These unframed, unhung pictures are scattered throughout literary modernism, and they demonstrate that modernists' formal experiments do not merely include inter-mediation as one kind of play among others, but are instead centrally determined by it.

Specifically, I contend that modernist *narratives* are informed and even structured by moments of engagement with the fine arts. In this way, "Beyond Ekphrasis" counters the established understanding of the relationship between the visual and verbal arts, which holds that on those occasions when literature borrows from or evokes the visual and plastic arts, the progress of narrative halts, and the passage of visual-verbal imbrication becomes a static object in its own right. In a related fashion, I question the common theorization of

description—perhaps the most common way in which literature seeks to imitate painting—as a narrative stoppage or interruption. As I demonstrate, visual-verbal encounters prompt modernists' experiments in a variety of narrative genres, including the novel, the long poem, and the autobiography. The works at the heart of my study show how textual passages inter-mediated by the visual arts—and many passages of description more generally—can be fully integrated into the plot, inflect subsequent events in the *fabula*, and even structure the overall form of the narrative. Re-viewing modernist narratives from the frustrated circularity of James's late-period novels to the chatty, wandering anecdotes of Stein's *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, "Beyond Ekphrasis" thus insists upon the capacity of visual media to shape literary forms.

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Introduction

"Now undoubtedly we are under the dominion of painting," declared Virginia Woolf in 1925, in an essay simply titled "Pictures." "Were all modern paintings to be destroyed," she went on, "a critic of the twenty-fifth century would be able to deduce from the works of Proust alone the existence of Matisse, Cézanne, Derain, and Picasso; he would be able to say with those books before him that painters of the highest originality and power must be covering canvas after canvas, squeezing tube after tube, in the room next door."[1] Woolf's claim about the sway of painting over the aesthetic world probably comes as little surprise to readers familiar with the state of the visual arts in 1925, when Woolf's essay was published in *The Nation & Athenaeum*. After all, by then, in Britain alone, Roger Fry had introduced the public to Post-Impressionism and Cubism with his two exhibitions in 1910 and 1912, and within the Bloomsbury circle, there were frequent artistic visits to Europe and discussions with artists working on the continent: in fact, Clive Bell, Virginia's brother-in-law, was Picasso's intimate friend and frequent correspondent.[2] But the reign of painting over the creative life of Woolf's family and friends—to say nothing of its dominion over all of modernism—was far from secure, and upon closer inspection, Woolf's certainty about pictures reveals itself to be something more like ambivalence. On the one hand, in the essay Woolf admits that "pictures are very pleasant things," and that "there is a great deal to be learned from them"; she even concedes that writers have already learned from painters, since

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[1] Virginia Woolf, "Pictures," in *The Moment and Other Essays* (New York: Harcourt, 1974), 173, originally published in *The Nation & Athenaeum* 25 April 1925, 101-2.

"the eye [. . .] has fertilised their thought."[3] But on the other hand, by the end of "Pictures," Woolf has abandoned such concessions in favor of a mocking tone, in which she bemoans her fate: "the most extreme of penalties, the most exquisite of tortures—to be made to look at pictures with a painter."[4] Moreover, her initial assertion of painting's supreme status is predicated on an example that describes its annihilation, and even in her future critic's re-imagination of painting, it remains separated from the world of writing, confined to "the room next door" with its tubes of pigment.

I begin with Woolf's essay not in order to reiterate the familiar characterization of the relationship between the visual and verbal arts as a *paragone*, a battle for primacy.[5] Nor am I interested in retracing or extending the other longstanding line of criticism that underwrites her comments in "Pictures": the *ut pictura poesis* argument, which holds that "as is painting, so is poetry," and which has been employed to demonstrate the kinship of the so-called "sister arts," usually on the basis of their related capacities for image-making and their shared visual appeal.[6] Instead, my aim in this dissertation is to investigate the questions that Woolf's essay

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[2] Mary Ann Caws and Sarah Bird Wright, *Bloomsbury and France: Art and Friends* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 80-88, 155.
[3] Woolf, "Pictures," 175-76.
[4] Ibid., 178.
[5] James Heffernan specifically casts this rivalry in gendered terms: see James A. W. Heffernan, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 1, 6-7, 23, 33, 108-10, 136. And for other key examples of this kind of interarts analysis, which emphasizes the conflict between the visual and verbal arts, or their differing modes of sensual appeal, see W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 3, 43-52, and Mitchell, "Ekphrasis and the Other," in *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 151-81; and Grant Scott, *The Sculpted Word: Keats, Ekphrasis, and the Visual Arts* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1994), xiii-xiv, 29-44.
[6] For useful discussions of the term and tradition of *ut pictura poesis* and analysis of literature and the fine arts as "sister arts," see Wendy Steiner, *The Colors of Rhetoric: Problems in the Relation between Modern Literature and Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 1, 7-10; Jean Hagstrum, *The Sister Arts: The Tradition of Literary Pictorialism and English Poetry from Dryden to Gray* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958); Mario Praz, *Mnemosyne: The Parallel Between Literature and the Visual Arts* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974); Diane Gillespie, *The Sisters' Arts: The Writing and Painting of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1988), 4; G. G. Starr, "Ekphrasis," in *The Princeton Encyclopoedia of Poetry and Poetics*,

raises, particularly for scholars of modernism: how has the eye "fertilised" the thought of modernist writers, and how has the influence of the visual and plastic arts operated on literature such that one might deduce their existence from a book? What I am pursuing, in short, is less a categorical prescription for what we should call the relationship between literature and visual media like painting and photography (or plastic media like sculpture), and more a finely textured description of exactly how this relationship functions within modernist texts.

To this end, my study encompasses a variety of literary genres and ranges across landmark texts from the first four decades of the twentieth century, specifically Henry James's *The Golden Bowl* (1904), Mina Loy's *Songs to Joannes* (1917), Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927), and Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933). My central contention is that literary modernism's convergence with visual media drives its formal experimentation and integrally structures its narratives. Embracing golden bowls and golden birds, dishes of fruit and dishy stories about portrait-making, modernist inter-mediation determines narrative forms from the frustrated circularity of James's late-period novels to the chatty, wandering anecdotes of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*.

My argument is prompted in an important regard by the limitations of a key classifying term in the discussion of the visual and verbal arts: ekphrasis. A word from the Greek meaning "to speak out," ekphrasis (or ecphrasis) refers traditionally to a mode of poetry that speaks for, or gives voice to, a mute art object, or to a literary passage that

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4th ed., ed. Roland Greene et al. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012): 393-394; Stephen Cheeke, *Writing for Art: The Aesthetics of Ekphrasis* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2008), 21-22; and Leonard Barkan, *Mute Poetry, Speaking Pictures* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 29-30, 43, 45, 49.

describes an art object or re-creates an artwork in language.[7] As G. G. Starr writes, ekphrasis can be defined as the "detailed description of an image, primarily visual"; "in specialized form," the term is "limited to description of a work of visual art."[8] The term arose in classical rhetoric and eventually became "a key part of the art of description in poetry, historiography, romance, and novels," where it appears, among other places, in "landscape description" as well as in the description "of objects of beauty."[9] Two famous examples of the strategy are Homer's description of Achilles's shield in *The Iliad* and W. H. Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts" (a poem about Pieter Breughel's painting *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*), and both of these texts remain in keeping with some of the principal contemporary attempts to further elucidate the mode, like James Heffernan's definition of it as "the verbal representation of visual representation."[10] (Other recent descriptions have come from Leonard Barkan—"the verbal presentation of a visual object inside a literary work," or "words-about-pictures"—and Stephen Cheeke: "poems about paintings," "poems for paintings," and "writing for art."[11])

The practical definition of ekphrasis has been further enlarged by other interventions in the critical conversation. Influential work by Murray Krieger, for instance, has suggested "an increasingly expansive reach for the verbal manifestations of the ekphrastic principle," such that the principle "may operate not only on those occasions on which the verbal seeks

[7] *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "ecphrasis," etym., accessed April 4, 2014, http://dictionary.oed.com/. The emphasis on the ability of ekphrasis to "speak" for a visual art object arises, in part, from an influential classical description of the relationship between the arts by Simonides of Ceos, which holds that "painting is 'mute poetry' and poetry a 'speaking picture.'" For a discussion of this formulation, see Steiner, *Colors of Rhetoric*, 5-6; Cheeke, *Writing for Art*, 20-21; and Barkan, *Mute Poetry, Speaking Pictures*, 28-30.
[8] Starr, "Ekphrasis," 393.
[9] Ibid., 394. As Starr notes, modern ekphrasis has never been restricted to any particular genre, so I will refer to it as a mode or strategy.
[10] Heffernan, *Museum of Words*, 3-4.
[11] Barkan, *Mute Poetry, Speaking Pictures*, 2, and Cheeke, *Writing for Art*, 1-3.

in its own more limited way to represent the visual but also when the verbal object would emulate the spatial character of painting or sculpture."[12] This expansion might seem to allow the term ekphrasis to cover and account for all visual-verbal interactions in literature, or to convert the term into "a new name for formalism," which is what Heffernan claims Krieger does with his definition of ekphrasis.[13] But the scholarship on ekphrasis does not actually rest upon a broad range of case studies; despite the possibilities for a wide application of the term authorized by Krieger's theoretical expansion of the category, ekphrastic studies nevertheless maintain a fairly narrow focus by attending to texts like Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts" that demonstrate a more-or-less one-to-one correspondence between visual and verbal media.[14] In these texts, an artwork exists—either in the world outside the text, like *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, or in the imagination of an author or character—and literature re-presents it for the reader, so that, as Elizabeth Bergmann Loizeaux writes, "the ekphrastic poet always responds to someone else's work."[15] Or to put it another way, in this scholarship, ekphrasis (like other kinds of literary description) always refers to an image or an art object "which is located elsewhere, whether or not it 'exists'" in the real world, so that the function of ekphrasis might be considered largely deictic.[16]

This tacit assumption of the deictic function for description in general and for ekphrasis in particular is perhaps why so much of the scholarship on the intersection

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[12] Murray Krieger, *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 6-10. Stephen Cheeke usefully tracks the way in which in the usage and meaning of the term have shifted over time. See Cheeke, *Writing for Art*, 19.
[13] Heffernan retains a much more narrow definition of ekphrasis, insisting upon its restriction to representations of representation. See Heffernan, *Museum of Words*, 2-4
[14] Cheeke, for instance, aims "to stretch the subject […] in what we are actually prepared to think of as ekphrastic writing," but he only stretches so far as to include poems written about photographs and prose descriptions of artworks. See Cheeke, *Writing for Art*, 7.
[15] Elizabeth Bergmann Loizeaux, *Twentieth-Century Poetry and the Visual Arts* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 5.

between the visual and verbal arts begins with (and sometimes remains limited to) the biographical arena. It proves difficult to move beyond the common-sense inference that literary representations of visual art must have real-world referents—that Lily Briscoe's painting in *To the Lighthouse* ought to be explained in terms of Vanessa Bell's art, for example, or that Gertrude Stein's portrait poems must be labeled "Cubist" and interpreted in light of her friendship with Picasso. This mode of interarts criticism is strongly related to what Rosalind Krauss has described as "an art history of the proper name," which locates "an exact (historical) referent for every pictorial sign, thereby fixing and limiting the play of meaning."[17] Although I will certainly note the biographical and historical relationships that James, Loy, Woolf, and Stein possess to particular works, practitioners, and movements in the visual and plastic arts, these relationships are not the central subject of my study.

Rather, I mean to preserve what Michel Foucault has called "the infinite relation" of language to the visual arts and to keep this relation as flexible as possible by heeding his critical advice: "if one wishes to keep the relation of language to vision open, if one wishes to treat their incompatibility as a starting point for speech instead of as an obstacle to be avoided, so as to stay as close as possible to both, then one must erase those proper names

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[16] Mieke Bal,"On Meanings and Descriptions," *Studies in Twentieth Century Literature* 6 (1981-82): 145.
[17] Rosalind E. Krauss, "In the Name of Picasso," in *Art in Modern Culture: An Anthology of Critical Texts*, ed. Francis Frascina and Jonathan Harris (New York: Phaidon Press, 1992), 212, 220. Another, more general mode of insisting upon real-world referents in interarts scholarship is to employ what we might call the zeitgeist model of analysis, in which the visual and verbal arts are seen to respond independently, but in parallel, to the same cultural stimuli. For one example of this kind of study, see Murray Roston's *Modernist Patterns in Literature and the Visual Arts*, in which the author tracks "the ways in which writers, often oblivious of the changes being introduced in the painting or sculpture of their day or unaware of their relevance to their own work, developed their own independent reactions to the stresses of the time and, although tailoring their responses to the needs of their verbal medium, frequently in that process paralleled innovations being introduced in the plastic and visual media." Murray Roston, *Modernist Patterns in Literature and the Visual Arts* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 9.

and preserve the infinity of the task."[18] Foucault here refers to the proper names of the players in Diego de Velázquez's *Las Meninas*, but I intend to drop the proper name of ekphrasis because the critical exploration of the visual and verbal arts has tended to presume that the one-to-one correspondence and the deictic function typical of strict ekphrases are also operative for most cases of visual-verbal integration. The problem here is that we have lost a more nuanced sense of the other forms of inter-media influence. We do not have the critical vocabulary to describe texts that do not point clearly to definable images or works of art, or texts that do something other than re-present visual art in literary terms, and this is where the title of my project comes from: I want to extend our analysis beyond ekphrasis to examine the wide variety of ways in which the visual and the verbal intersect, interpenetrate, and inter-mediate each other.

Moving beyond the strict delimitations of ekphrasis will, I hope, allow us to account first for what we might consider to be a range of ekphrastic positions that we can find in modernist literature. All of the authors that I discuss at length in this dissertation do unmistakably re-present works of visual art in their texts in one way or another. Henry James gives us his titular golden bowl, of course, and Mina Loy responds in poetry to Constantin Brancusi's sculpted *Golden Bird*. Woolf centers *To the Lighthouse* on Lily Briscoe's painting, and Gertrude Stein presents her portrait by Picasso (and a host of other paintings) in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. But these representations vary widely in method and in the quantity of detail that they include. Loy's work, for instance, is the most traditional ekphrasis, both because it is a poem and because it attempts to describe an artwork in language and recreate its effect on the viewer. And we might consider James's extended,

[18] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Pantheon, 1970), 9-10.

highly visual descriptions of the bowl to be examples of relatively conventional ekphrasis in prose. But Woolf gives us very little in the way of concrete description of what appears on Lily's canvas, and although Stein constantly presents artworks to the reader, she offers less description than she does reference. I explore all of these ekphrastic positions in greater detail in the chapters that follow, but for now, I want simply to note that these texts demonstrate that there are multiple kinds and degrees of "the verbal representation of visual representation," and that verbal objects may present and invoke visual artworks without necessarily emulating "the spatial character of painting or sculpture."[19] The singular category of ekphrasis can hardly do justice to the varieties of representation with which modernist writers experiment.

Moreover—and more important—moving beyond ekphrasis altogether can allow us to bring into view those kinds of inter-mediation that do not depend on pre-existing, definable works of visual or plastic art. As I shall argue, we can find this kind of inter-mediation in pictures which cannot be identified by names like "Matisse, Cézanne, Derain, and Picasso," but which remain in literature, unframed and unhung. Littered as they are about the rooms of the house of modernism, these pictures include such unacknowledged artworks as the still life centerpiece of fruit and a seashell that Rose Ramsay has carefully arranged for the dinner table in *To the Lighthouse*, or the statues that constitute the vehicles for some of James's elaborate metaphors in *The Golden Bowl*. These forms of inter-media influence and integration may escape the confines of the term ekphrasis by refusing to represent real-world art objects, or by refusing altogether to describe an image in detail. In

[19] In this way, I seek to account for a range of kinds of inter-mediation that escape the boundaries established by both Heffernan and Krieger for the category of ekphrasis. See Heffernan, *Museum of Words*, 3-4, and Krieger,

fact, these forms are precisely those that earlier, more categorically-minded critics explicitly declared to be beyond the scope of their own studies: Heffernan, for one, distinguishes ekphrasis from pictorialism, which "generates in language effects similar to those created by pictures," and also from iconicity, which "apes the shapes of pictures in order to represent natural objects."[20] But by restricting his analysis specifically to ekphrasis and its representation of "representation itself," Heffernan misses the opportunity to examine what all of these strategies for inter-mediation (all of which are operative in modernist literature) share.[21] Furthermore, as Lisa Siraganian has so rightly noted, a study focused on ekphrasis cannot account for the ways in which "many writers abstracted aesthetic problems."[22] And as I shall argue, the more diffuse, abstract forms of visual-verbal interactions like those we find on the Ramsays' dinner table make them particularly useful.

Ekphrasis, 6-10.

[20] Heffernan also distinguishes ekphrasis proper from "what John Hollander has usefully called 'notional ekphrasis'—the representation of an imaginary work of art." See Heffernan, *Museum of Words*, 3-4, 7. Heffernan would also be sure to distinguish ekphrasis from painterliness—an effect that is certainly related to (and to some extent overlapping with) pictorialism, but which lacks pictorialism's assumption that an image must be representational. The painterly aspects of literature have been discussed most notably by scholars of twentieth-century poetry, who have tended to employ an admirably flexible understanding of the ways in which the verbal and visual might interact, which admits of "a functional symbiosis between avant-garde poetics and painterly techniques," as well as a "reverberating or ricochet influence between disciplines" that includes "the epistemological dispersions [in literature] of technical and theoretical concepts promoted and exemplified in the plastic arts." For notable examples of this kind of study of twentieth-century poetry, see David Sweet, *Savage Sight/Constructed Noise: Poetic Adaptations of Painterly Techniques in the French and American Avant-Gardes* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), especially 13, 24; Barbara Fischer, *Museum Mediations: Reframing Ekphrasis in Contemporary American Poetry* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Stephen Scobie, *Earthquakes and Explorations: Language and Painting from Cubism to Concrete Poetry* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997); Charles Altieri, *Painterly Abstraction in Modernist American Poetry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), especially 12-41; Loizeaux, *Twentieth-Century Poetry*; and Marjorie Perloff, *The Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), and *The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant Guerre, and the Language of Rupture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

[21] Again, even if more recent studies do not share Heffernan's strict definition of ekphrasis, they do reproduce its narrow focus in the examples that they select. See Heffernan, *Museum of Words*, 4, and for examples of this kind of more recent study, see Cheeke, *Writing for Art*, and David Kennedy, *The Ekphrastic Encounter in Contemporary British Poetry and Elsewhere* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012).

[22] Lisa Siraganian, *Modernism's Other Work: The Art Object's Political Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 5.

Crucially, a fine-tuned discussion of visual-verbal intersection—occurring across both a range of literary genres and a range of types of inter-mediation—can answer what Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz have described as one of the primary charges of the new modernist studies: "a heightened attention to continuities and intersections across the boundaries of artistic media."[23] Most recent examples of this kind of attention have, like Mark Goble's persuasively argued *Beautiful Circuits: Modernism and the Mediated Life*, focused primarily on the continuities and intersections between literature and "novel technologies for transmitting information"—among them "telegraph, radio, cinema" and others—with the desire to "locate literary modernism in a rhetorical arena transformed by media's capacity to disseminate words and images in less time, across bigger distances, and to greater numbers of people than ever before."[24] But I submit that we can use "the turn toward media" in the new modernist studies not only to probe literature's interactions with "new communication technologies" and "mass media," or to open up works by lesser-known modernist writers like Mina Loy, but also to revisit some of the texts and truisms of the old, high modernism.[25]

One such modernism that is especially resonant for scholars of inter-media influence is Imagism, most commonly associated with Ezra Pound, who sought to present "an

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[23] Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, introduction: "Modernisms Bad and New," in *Bad Modernisms*, ed. Mao and Walkowitz (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 2.

[24] Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, "The New Modernist Studies," *PMLA* 123.3 (May 2008): 742-43. In keeping with the emphasis on media that gain widespread use in the early twentieth century, Goble's study focuses on the telegraph, the telephone, film, the phonograph, the player piano, and photography. See Mark Goble, *Beautiful Circuits: Modernism and the Mediated Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 20-23, and for further analysis of modernism and media, see Julian Murphet, *Multimedia Modernism: Literature and the Anglo-American Avant-garde* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[25] Mao and Walkowitz, "The New Modernist Studies," 742, 744-45. Some of the recent studies that have used interdisciplinary analysis or a focus on media to revisit these texts, authors, or sites of "high" modernism include Miranda B. Hickman, *The Geometry of Modernism: The Vorticist Idiom in Lewis, Pound, H.D., and Yeats* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2005), and Rebecca Beasley, *Ezra Pound and the Visual Culture of Modernism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time."[26] Imagist poets, Starr asserts, "sought to renew the power of poetry to set objects before the reader's eyes and used stripped-down forms of description to attempt to create a sense of visual immediacy" in works that experimented with what we might consider a kind of minimalist ekphrasis.[27] These poets' emphasis on the insistent visual presence of the suspended moment has resulted in their continuing identification with an especially static kind of poem. With its absence of active verbal forms, Pound's "In a Station of the Metro" is one such poem: its two-line picture—"The apparition of these faces in the crowd; / Petals on a wet, black bough"—even seems to epitomize Krieger's famous description of ekphrasis as "the still movement of poetry."[28] Pound's poem also seems to put forward the model of modernist poetry that Yvor Winters (who was himself an imagistic poet as well as a polemical critic) identified as characteristic of the title poem in Mina Loy's 1923 volume *Lunar Baedecker*, in which the images were, he said, "frozen into epigrams."[29]

All of these formulations of the poetic project center on images sketched as a brief appeal to the eye and left isolated for the viewer to contemplate, and there is little wonder that this vision of poetry contributed to the development of, and reached its apotheosis in, the New Criticism, which advanced an understanding of the literary work "as an autonomous, highly coherent, dramatic artifact (a "well-wrought urn") separate from and

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[26] Ezra Pound, excerpt from "A Retrospect" (1918), in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature, Volume D: 1914-1945*, 7th ed., ed. Mary Loeffelholz (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 1506.
[27] Starr, "Ekphrasis," 393.
[28] Ezra Pound, "In a Station of the Metro," in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature, Volume D: 1914-1945*, 7th ed., ed. Mary Loeffelholz (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 1482, and Krieger, *Ekphrasis*, 263, 266-68. Barkan offers a similar description of ekphrasis in terms of its traditional place within the epic, "as a moment of stasis inside a larger dynamic *telos*." See Barkan, *Mute Poetry, Speaking Pictures*, 63.
[29] Quoted in Carolyn Burke, *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1996), 323.

above the life of the author and reader as well as separate from its social context and from everyday language."[30] As W. J. T. Mitchell writes, in this view, "the entire poem or text is regarded as an image or 'verbal icon,' and this image is defined, not as a pictorial likeness or impression, but as a synchronic structure in some metaphorical space."[31] And if the image is identical to "a sort of crystalline structure," then we might consider formalist criticism to be "both a poetics and a hermeneutics for this kind of verbal image, showing us how poems contain their energies in matrices of architectonic tension."[32] That is, for the New Critics, a poem is composed of "a set of 'organic' relationships of literary elements (images, symbols, tropes, features of genre and style, settings, and tones), whose overall unity often depends on ambiguity, paradox, or irony" in such a way that the poem's meaning coincides with, or is identical to, a "special state of aesthetic suspension."[33] In short, what these conceptions of poetry—and modernism and literature, all of which are conflated to a high degree by the New Criticism's value system and mode of reading—share is a "desire to endow literature with the spatiality of the art object [. . .] as an attempt to preserve text from context."[34] And one of the central objectives of the new modernist studies has been to thwart this desire, to reject the New Criticism's putatively myopic focus on the self-contained, autotelic art object, by reexamining modernist literature within a context that, as Mao and Walkowitz note, has expanded temporally, spatially across the globe, and vertically, so that the former "boundaries between high art and popular forms of culture have been reconsidered,"

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[30] Vincent B. Leitch et al., introduction to *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, 1st ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 3.
[31] Mitchell, *Iconology*, 25.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Leitch et al., introduction to *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, 17.
[34] Brian Glavey, "Dazzling Estrangement: Modernism, Queer Ekphrasis, and the Spatial Form of *Nightwood*," *PMLA* 124.3 (May 2009): 751.

"canons have been critiqued and reconfigured," and "works by members of marginalized social groups have been encountered with fresh eyes and ears."[35] (The New Formalism has had a related intention, to renovate the understanding of literary form so that we do not understand it as entirely separate from context in the first place.[36])

But if we look at this imagistic model of literature not only with the "fresh eyes" of the new modernist studies—which strive to see beyond it, to survey previously neglected contexts—but also with the fresh eyes of a nuanced interdisciplinary perspective, we can focus in on the specific ways in which this model unduly emphasizes the qualities of motionlessness and atemporality in literature. These qualities correspond to the New Critical location of literary meaning in a "state of aesthetic suspension," and the scholarly attention to them derives from a centuries-old theoretical commonplace, dating back at least to the distinction put forward by G. E. Lessing in his *Laocoön* (1766) between literature as a temporal art and sculpture (or painting) as a spatial art.[37] Following Lessing, scholars have contended that on those occasions when literature borrows from or evokes the visual and plastic arts—as both Pound and Loy do in their poetry, and as a novelist like James does when Lambert Strether, in *The Ambassadors*, looks at a riverbank outside Paris as though it

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[35] Mao and Walkowitz, "The New Modernist Studies," 737-38. Recently, Siraganian has offered a persuasive account of the way in which the current critical "aversion to all things New Critical" has resulted in lack of attention to "the actual workings of aesthetic autonomy," which she examines at length. See Siraganian, *Modernism's Other Work*, 15-16.

[36] Although I am emphasizing the strain of New Formalist criticism that does not establish itself in a "standoff" with historicism, it is vital to note that the New Formalism is more a movement "than a theory or method": it "does not advocate for any particular theory, method, or scholarly practice." See Marjorie Levinson, "What Is New Formalism?" *PMLA* 122.2 (2007): 558, 560, 562, and Susan J. Wolfson, introduction to *Reading for Form*, ed. Susan J. Wolfson and Marshall Brown (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2006), 5, 12-13.

[37] Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, trans. and ed. Edward Allen McCormick (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), especially 77-79. For more on this distinction, see Mitchell, *Iconology*, 95-115, and Cheeke, *Writing for Art*, 5-6, 22-24.

were a landscape painting[38]—literature is forced to suspend the narrative function, so that passages of visual-verbal imbrication become static objects in their own right.[39] This understanding of the relationship between the arts was certainly strengthened by the New Criticism, which "privilege[d] freestanding spatial form over temporal flow," and we can see it at work in the titles of the two exemplary New Critical volumes to which I have referred—Cleanth Brooks's *The Well Wrought Urn* and W. K. Wimsatt's *The Verbal Icon*.[40] It has also been particularly influential for critics of modernism since 1945, when Joseph Frank noted the suspension of narrative progress and syntactic flow in the work of T. S. Eliot and James Joyce, and asserted that these features defined a new "Spatial Form in Modern Literature."[41]

This concentration on stasis and spatiality—especially as an aesthetic achievement of modernist literature at its most intermedial—has significant overlap with theories of description, which is, as I have hinted, perhaps the most common way in which literature seeks to imitate the visual and plastic arts. (Critics readily acknowledge that ekphrasis demonstrates the influence of other arts on literature, and as I have already noted, the ekphrastic mode is considered "a key part of the art of description" across genres. Ekphrasis

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[38] Henry James, *The Ambassadors* (New York: Penguin, 2003), 452-61.

[39] In one influential example of this line of thought, Krieger "claim[s] that the ekphrastic dimension of literature reveals itself wherever the poem takes on the 'still' elements of plastic form which we normally attribute to the spatial arts." See Krieger, *Ekphrasis*, 266, and for other notables instances of this argument, see ibid., 8-11, 265-68; and the reading of Wallace Steven's "Anecdote of the Jar" in Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, 166-68. It is worth noting, however, that the emphasis on the stasis of ekphrasis—and on its limitation to the description of a work of art—is an entirely modern development. As Janice Hewlett Koelb has shown, the classical understanding of ekphrasis centered on neither of these categories, and some recent critics have mounted related cases that strive to complicate the temporality of ekphrastic poetry. These critics acknowledge that the poem isn't entirely still, but neither have they insisted that these poems possess a strongly narrative character. See Janice Hewlett Koelb, *The Poetics of Description: Imagined Places in European Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 1-5; Kennedy, *The Ekphrastic Encounter*, especially 3-6; Cheeke, *Writing for Art*, 19-29, 51; and Heffernan, *Museum of Words*, 5-6, 18, 91, 113-14.

[40] Leitch et al., introduction to *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, 3.

[41] For Frank's recapitulation of this idea and further efforts to define this form, see Jeffrey R. Smitten, and Ann Daghistany, eds., *Spatial Form in Narrative* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), and for more on the connection between the ideas of Lessing and Frank, see Mitchell, *Iconology*, 96-97.

also gains "new prominence with the realist novel," as Starr notes, because "the proliferating objects of the modern world populate the nineteenth-century novel, and the details of nineteenth-century interiors or the clutter of the city form the backbone of realism."[42]) Modernism hardly abandons all the tenets and conventions of realism, and insofar as modernist literature pursues its desire to capture fleeting moments of lived, daily experience, it allows for a dilation of description, as critics like Liesl Olson have recently shown, to such an extent that descriptive passages, which were merely "filler" in earlier periods, become "autonomous" in modernist texts.[43] In this way, as modernist literature increases the quantity of descriptive passages and amplifies their impact, it might be seen to multiply digressions from the supposedly primary thrust of the *fabula*, "the real stuff of narrative literature," or to purposefully court a kind of plotlessness.[44]

Indeed, description has always had only a tenuous foothold in the realm of narrative theory, and it has often been theorized in opposition to narrative. Most foundational works of narratology hold that description and plot are forces working in opposite textual

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[42] Starr, "Ekphrasis," 394. For more on the connections between ekphrasis and description in the realist novel, see Mack Smith, *Literary Realism and the Ekphrastic Tradition* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 10-12, and Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, 159.

[43] Liesl Olson, *Modernism and the Ordinary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 18. This preoccupation with daily life and a related interest in the workings of consciousness animate, for instance, the single-day structures of novels like James Joyce's *Ulysses* and Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, both of which allow for extended explorations of their protagonists' thoughts and ruminations on mundane matters alongside extraordinary moments of insight. For a specific discussion of the changes in modes of description in the period before modernism, see Franco Moretti's "Serious Century," which acknowledges the narrative potential of bourgeois everyday life and charts the nineteenth-century expansion of description and weakly narrative "filler." Even more recently, Caroline Levine and Mario Ortiz-Robles's *Narrative Middles* has offered an attempt at sustained investigation of this supposed "filler," and John Reed has engaged in a specific effort to examine the narrative capacity of description in his work on Dickens and "social purpose." See Franco Moretti, "Serious Century," in *The Novel*, ed. Franco Moretti, 2 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 1:364-400; Caroline Levine and Mario Ortiz-Robles, eds., *Narrative Middles: Navigating the Nineteenth-Century British Novel* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2011); and John R. Reed, *Dickens's Hyperrealism* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2010), 11-24.

directions, so that descriptions of all kinds constitute narrative stoppages: Gérard Genette, for instance, formulates descriptive pause as one extreme on the spectrum of narrative movement.[45] More specifically, as Seymour Chatman writes, "what happens in description is that the time line of the story is interrupted and frozen. Events are stopped, though our reading- or discourse-time continues, and we look at the characters and the setting elements as at a *tableau vivant*.[46] Similarly, Franco Moretti has asserted that "descriptions interrupt the flow of events—literally: in order to describe, one must stop narrating."[47] In other words, events are what we can narrate, and description is what happens in between them. Or we might say that, from a classical narratological perspective, what happens in a description is nothing at all: happening and describing are incommensurate activities.

This position has been complicated, of course, beginning with Genette's remarks immediately after his formulation of description as an extreme pause. Because he bases the insights of *Narrative Discourse* on Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*, Genette acknowledges that in Proust's work, description can actually be considered part of narrative because it recounts and analyzes the perceptual activity of the character contemplating the described object.[48] Other narratologists have also allowed description to squeak into the category of narrative event on this technicality, when they consider description through the lens of motivation: description, they concede, can constitute a narrative event when it

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[44] This understanding of description as a digression from the plot is one that Mieke Bal reiterates in order to dispute. See Mieke Bal, "Over-Writing as Un-Writing: Descriptions, World-Making, and Novelistic Time," in *A Mieke Bal Reader* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 102.
[45] Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 93-94.
[46] Seymour Chatman, "What Novels Can Do That Films Can't (and Vice Versa)," in *On Narrative*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 119. See also Marie-Laure Ryan, introduction to *Narrative across Media: The Languages of Storytelling* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 7-8.
[47] Moretti, "Serious Century," 1:389.
[48] See Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 100, 102, 105-6.

reproduces an object that a character sees. Since "looking at something requires time," the description can be "incorporated into the time lapse caused by the interruption."[49] In this view, of course, description remains subservient to narrative, incapable of generating plot on its own. In Mack Smith's words, the "digressive description" is "used as an appeal to narrative credibility."[50] Description, in sum, simply doesn't seem necessary, and it seems useful only as a reality effect—as something to flesh out a fictional world and help us believe in the events of a story.[51]

An even more important interrogation of the classical narratological position on description has been sustained in the recent work of Mieke Bal. For example, if Bal, in both the first and second editions of *Narratology*, worked from "the premise that descriptions interrupt the line of the fabula,"[52] then her revisions to the third edition attest to her revised stance, which acknowledges that "the premise that descriptions interrupt the line of the fabula […] is somewhat problematic" and characterizes description as "both narrative's 'other' and an integral part of it."[53] And elsewhere, she has questioned narrative theory's casting of "description in the role of 'boundary of narrative,' a Derridean supplement both indispensable to, yet lying outside of, narrative 'proper.'"[54] But her elaboration of a "description-bound narratology of the novel" continues to emphasize description's otherness—the "problem" that it has always constituted for narrative theory because its

[49] Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 42.
[50] Mack Smith, *Literary Realism*, 5, 26-28.
[51] For more on description as a reality effect, see Peter Brooks, *Realist Vision* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 16-17.
[52] In an additional article, Bal rephrases this same same point as follows: "description interrupts the fabula not only in practice but also in principle." See Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 130, and for the rephrased point, "On Meanings and Descriptions," 104.
[53] Bal, *Narratology*, 3rd ed., 39, 41.

fundamental arbitrariness and potential endlessness present a threat to the coherence of the novel.[55]

In sum, those interventions that have sought to compensate for the neglect (or casting out) of description by narrative theory have nevertheless demonstrated that description remains a thorny subject—not only for narrative theory, but also for literary criticism and for modernist studies, where description possesses a particularly vexed status.[56] Moretti, for example, has argued that descriptive passages become particular hindrances for modernism because they "lose even their 'weak' narrative function to become simply—*style*."[57] And although Brian Glavey has recently offered a renovation of the term ekphrasis, he has aligned the mode with a "refusal of narrative temporality in favor of simultaneity and presence" and gone on to trace some of the implications of Joseph Frank's spatial-form thesis, opining that "looking for narrative in a modernist work is like reading for plot in a Picasso."[58]

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[54] Bal, "Over-Writing as Un-Writing," 96.
[55] Bal, "Over-Writing as Un-Writing," 96, 137-8. For an example of her discussion of description's arbitrary nature, see Bal,"On Meanings and Descriptions," 108.
[56] Recently, several literary critics have confronted description's vexed status by engaging in sustained historical analysis of the changes in modes of description—and the scholarly discourse on it. In addition to the studies by Olson, Moretti, Levine and Ortiz-Robles, and Reed mentioned above, also see Cynthia Sundberg Wall, *The Prose of Things: Transformations of Description in the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 6-40, for a lucid, thorough account.
[57] Moretti, "Serious Century," 1:379 (emphasis original). Heffernan makes much the same point in relation to the status of ekphrasis in the twentieth century, writing that "the ekphrastic poetry of our time completes the transformation of ekphrasis from incidental adjunct to self-sufficient whole, from epic ornament to free-standing literary work." Heffernan, *Museum of Words*, 137.
[58] Glavey, "Dazzling Estrangement," 754. Glavey's witty comment alludes to a related, more abstract line of thought holds that, generally speaking, paintings cannot really be narrative. As Marie-Laure Ryan notes—in an introduction to a collection that questions this commonplace—paintings lack both the capacity to "make propositions" and the capacity to "express abstract ideas, such as causality." The topic of narrative remains contentious for art historians; for one important entry in the debate, see the conversation between Bal and James Elkins in the pages of *Critical Inquiry* on the extent to which graphic marks can be analyzed with the same tools as linguistic signs. Elkins demands that scholars "resist the temptation to slide away from the picture and toward symbolic or narrative meanings" and bristles at the thought that art historians are "anxious to turn pictures into narratives." Elkins's formulation implies that pictures themselves contain no narrative meaning, that narrative is somehow outside the picture altogether, and that to discuss narrative in conjunction with

Yet I want to do precisely this kind of looking, and as I will demonstrate, visual-verbal encounters prompt modernists' experiments in a variety of narrative genres from the first four decades of the twentieth century, including the novel, the long poem, and the autobiography. These genres are represented by my landmark texts—*The Golden Bowl*, *Songs to Joannes*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*—and I examine them with the lenses of narrative theory, visual-verbal criticism, and a kind of close reading attentive to the iconographical and generic conventions that are usually the subject of art history. Thus I participate in the work of the New Formalism by reinstating close reading "as the opening move" and demonstrating a "sensitivity to the complexity of literary form: its various and surprising work, its complex relation to traditions, and its interaction with extra-literary culture."[59] Like other New Formalists, it is my object to demonstrate that "forms matter […] as constituitive of the works at large."[60] And an interdisciplinary mode of re-viewing, I argue, can allow us to see the ways in which textual passages inter-mediated by the visual arts—and many passages of description more generally—are fully integrated into the plot, can inflect

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painting is to work counter to the ontology of the picture, to turn painting into something other than what it is—in short, to overread. His resistance to this discussion seems typical of what W. J. T. Mitchell characterizes as "ekphrastic fear," and the line of thought in which his argument participates has been strongly countered by the work of Wendy Steiner, who has also questioned the commonplace that ekphrasis achieves a kind of atemporal stasis. See Ryan, introduction to *Narrative across Media*, 10-11; Wendy Steiner, "Pictorial Narrativity," in Ryan, *Narrative across Media*, 146; Mieke Bal, "Semiotic Elements in Academic Practices," *Critical Inquiry* 22.3 (Spring 1996): 573-589; James Elkins, "Marks, Traces, 'Traits,' Contours, 'Orli,' and 'Splendores': Nonsemiotic Elements in Pictures," *Critical Inquiry* 21.4 (Summer 1995): 822-860, and "What Do We Want Pictures to Be? Reply to Mieke Bal," *Critical Inquiry* 22.3 (Spring 1996): 590-91; Mitchell, "Ekphrasis and the Other," in *Picture Theory*, 151-81; and Wendy Steiner, *Pictures of Romance: Form against Context in Painting and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

[59] Levinson, "What Is New Formalism?", 560, and Wolfson, introduction to *Reading for Form*, 14. I do wish to clarify that my emphasis will be less on "the the critical (and self-critical) agency of which artworks are capable […] when they are released from the closures they have suffered through a combination of their own idealizing impulses, their official receptions, and general processes of cultural absorption" than is true of some other examples of the New Formalism. In this way, my project engages with the extent to which the New Formalism is less a coherent theory to be applied and more a movement with diverse participants, such that its "force is in practical readings." See Levinson, "What Is New Formalism?", 560, and Wolfson, introduction to *Reading for Form*, 22.

subsequent events in the *fabula*, and may even structure the overall form of the narrative. A renewed commitment to nuanced interdisciplinarity, in other words, can help us to redefine the established limits of narrative theory, even as it also allows us to complement the new modernist studies' emphasis on new media technologies with a revision of how we understand a group of modernist texts to relate to older media.

My engagement with inter-mediation and modernist narrative begins with Henry James's *The Golden Bowl* (1904), and I take up a topic almost entirely unexamined by scholars of James's major phase: sculpture. I argue that the novel's sculptural aesthetics revolve around the titular bowl, which demands that we view it in the round: its inscrutable gilt overlay prevents visual access to its interior and forces our eyes to circle it repeatedly. The bowl attests to the reach of the novel's sculptural aesthetics, which encompasses both sculptural objects (like statues and pagodas) and the viewing practices and temporalities associated with sculpture. Such viewing in the round, with its frequent retreading of old ground, contributes to the surface texture of James's at times almost impenetrable prose and to the arc of the entire narrative, as James makes use of a strategy that I call narration in the round. This kind of viewing also generates the three-dimensionality of his characters' dilemma—the "vicious circle" of "their mutual consideration, all round."[61] This chapter brings together considerations of epistemology, ethics, narrative, and metaphor, which are often treated separately in discussions of James's oeuvre, in a new comprehensive account of the novel. Moreover, at the same time that my reading of the novel's plastic form presents a significant renovation of our understanding of the novel's relationship to visual and material

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[60] Wolfson, introduction to *Reading for Form*, 17.
[61] Henry James, *The Golden Bowl*, ed. Virginia Llewellyn Smith (New York: Oxford World's Classics, 1999), 289.

culture, it also reminds us of the extent to which the world of fine art, and its influence on literature, cannot be reduced to mere visuality.

My second chapter situates the poetry of Mina Loy in relation to the furor of the early twentieth-century avant-garde, especially Futurism. I contend that Loy's extensive play with Futurist concepts and tropes allows her to develop a bold aesthetics of nudity and denuding that ultimately challenges the movement (and resists its sexual politics). Specifically, I argue that the genre of the female nude, conceptualized in art schools as the conversion of matter into form,[62] can help us to understand Loy's use of recognizably mainstream Futurist techniques (such as an evocation of dynamism, "the lyrical conception of forms"[63]) in the pursuit of anti-Futurist ends (such as an emphasis on the body and emotional intimacy). In poems like *Songs to Joannes* (1917) and the ekphrastic "Brancusi's Golden Bird" (1922), Loy reshapes our understanding of modern abstraction by using the principles and terms of Futurist aesthetic doctrine to demonstrate that abstraction need not be entirely sterile. Loy's abstraction, instead, attends to the denuded body and self, text and art object, reveling in the possibilities of essentialized form and the erotics of this formal purity. In this way, I offer an alternative to the "mongrel aesthetics" described by other Loy scholars,[64] and I show how the fine arts shape the narratives of modernist poetry just as much as they inform prose texts.

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[62] Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 18.
[63] Umberto Boccioni, "Absolute Motion + Relative Motion = Dynamism," in *Futurism: An Anthology*, ed. Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi, and Laura Whitman (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 190.
[64] For descriptions of Loy's mongrel aesthetics, see Elisabeth A. Frost, "Mina Loy's 'Mongrel' Poetics,'" in *Mina Loy: Woman and Poet*, ed. Maeera Shreiber and Keith Tuma (Orono, ME: The National Poetry Foundation, 1998), 151-152, and Marjorie Perloff, "English As A 'Second' Language: Mina Loy's *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose*," in Shreiber and Tuma, *Mina Loy: Woman and Poet*, 134.

I turn next to Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927), which I read in conjunction with paintings by Paul Cézanne and a book-cover design by Roger Fry. Departing from the critical commonplace that aligns the novel's form with Lily Briscoe's painting, I claim instead that *To the Lighthouse* unfolds the iconographic implications of the still life that we find on the Ramsays' table during the dinner party scene, in the carefully arranged dish of pears, grapes, and a seashell. I argue that this composition is no mere decorative "Window"-dressing but rather a vital verbal-visual form, a still life that signals the novel's interest in minor, everyday objects and also establishes a *vanitas* motif—a reminder of mortality and the impermanence of human life. Metamorphosing into various *vanitas* forms throughout the novel, Woolf's still life simply won't stay still, and I contend that it precipitates the narrative that follows the dinner party—most notably in the haunting object-world of the empty house in "Time Passes." *To the Lighthouse* thus also suggests a revision of the art historical theorization of still life as a non-narrative genre.

"Beyond Ekphrasis" concludes with a chapter that revises previous accounts of Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933). I complicate the longstanding critical dichotomy about *The Autobiography*—that it is all superficial gossip in the pursuit of fame, or, alternatively, all serious experiment in narrative voice and queer identity—in order to stake a claim for its avant-garde status in new territory. Contending that Stein's superficiality *is* the experiment, I show how three key formal features of her gossipy style—the proper name, the witticism, and the anecdote—urge us to look at people looking at pictures, in the scenes of the exhibition and sale of artwork that structure Stein's memoir as she revisits the birth of artistic movements like Cubism. By examining pictures in this mediated way, Stein makes them products of and invitations to narrative, and *The*

Autobiography also inter-mediates its account through its interleaved photographs, which allow us to heed Stein's call to "return to the pictures."[65]

"Beyond Ekphrasis" enacts this return by reversing the tongue-in-cheek indifference that Stein attributes to Toklas on the first page of *The Autobiography*: "I like a view but I like to sit with my back turned to it."[66] Rotating us around to face writers' interactions with the visual and plastic arts, I argue for a nuanced, capacious account of modernist inter-mediation that encompasses references to fine-art objects and evocations of painterly genres, as well as visual motifs and modes of viewing visual and plastic artworks. As I demonstrate, modernists' formal experiments do not merely include inter-mediation as one kind of play among others, but are instead centrally determined by it. And just as moments of engagement with the fine arts inform the progression of modernist narratives, so too do these works suggest a necessary reconceptualization of the relationship between description and narrative more broadly. "Beyond Ekphrasis" thus insists upon the capacity of visual media to shape literary forms.

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[65] Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (London: Penguin, 2001), 13.
[66] Ibid., 7.

CHAPTER 1
Plastic Form and Viewing in the Round: Sculpture and *The Golden Bowl*

In a letter written on August 10, 1904, Henry James professed his terror about a sculptural group of nude figures around a fountain. Their scale, he said, struck him as evidence of "*madness* (almost)," and he "yearn[ed] too, for the *smaller* masterpiece; the condensed, consummate, caressed, intensely filled-out thing."[1] James's intense distaste for artwork executed on such an ambitious scale and his corresponding desire for a smaller masterpiece seem ironic now, since James was mere months away from the publication of *The Golden Bowl* that autumn. His own immense masterpiece had been at the forefront of his mind, and as he wrote in a letter to Scribner's that would be incessantly quoted in advertisements for and reviews of the novel, he extolled *The Golden Bowl* as "the most done of my productions—the most composed and constructed and completed. […] I hold the thing the solidest, as yet, of all my fictions."[2] As James's assessment of his novel makes clear, despite the curious echo of the earlier letter in his alliteration, his final major work is no small masterpiece. *The Golden Bowl* may be solid, but it is not at all condensed.

Indeed, the novel remains tremendous, unwieldy—it is the most difficult and most figure-laden novel of James's major phase. According to Robert Gale's count, in fact, it contains 1,092 images, about two hundred more than appear in any other work by James.[3] More to the point, perhaps, is the way in which the figurative language of *The Golden Bowl*

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[1] Quoted in Millicent Bell, "James and the Sculptor," *Yale Review* 90.4 (2002): 32 (emphasis original).
[2] Quoted in Leon Edel, *Henry James: A Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 585.

makes itself felt. James's figures in *The Golden Bowl* are many and lengthy, perplexing and persistent, and they—more than the thematic "substance" of marriage, adultery, and incest—constitute the heart of the novel. Yet despite the novel's famous articulation of Adam Verver's "aesthetic principle"—"the idea […] of plastic beauty, of the thing visibly perfect in its kind"—there exists no extended examination of sculpture, the classic art of plastic beauty and "the solidest" of the fine arts, among the many critical considerations of the novel's images and metaphors.[4] Indeed, the only significant mention of sculpture in the scholarship on James's oeuvre and its relationship to the visual arts comes in the early, largely descriptive work of Viola Hopkins Winner and Adeline Tintner.[5] It seems worthwhile, then, to consider the extent to which James himself is, as he wrote of the sculptor Paul Dubois, an artist who "sees things as a sculptor—sees lines and forms and contours."[6]

The paucity of interest in James's relationship to sculpture in his major phase seems not only to be an oversight in a critical conversation so vast that seemingly every aspect of James's work has been covered, but a particular anomaly given that James had not abandoned his interest in the medium after the 1875 publication of *Roderick Hudson*, his first

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[3] Robert L. Gale, *The Caught Image: Figurative Language in the Fiction of Henry James* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964), 250-54.
[4] Henry James, *The Golden Bowl*, 146 (see introduction, n. 61). All subsequent references to this text will appear in parentheses.
[5] See Viola Hopkins Winner, *Henry James and the Visual Arts* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1970), 36-38, and Adeline R. Tintner, *The Museum World of Henry James* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1986), 35-45. Jennifer Eimers has made a more recent contribution to the study of James's work and the visual arts, but she examines sculpture only briefly, most notably in conjunction with *The Portrait of a Lady*, and her analysis concludes with *The Wings of the Dove*. Moreover, her aim is largely to demonstrate that "visual art is a privileged site for exploring consciousness" in James's work. See Jennifer Eimers, *The Continuum of Consciousness: Aesthetic Experience and Visual Art in Henry James's Novels* (New York: Peter Lang, 2013), 3.
[6] Winner, *Henry James and the Visual Arts*, 37.

novel, which presents a sculptor as its title character.[7] In the early years of the twentieth century, around the time that *The Golden Bowl* was being composed, we find repeated suggestions that sculpture retained some significance for James. To begin with, one of James's few recurring characters, the sculptor Gloriani, who first appeared in *Roderick Hudson*, turns up twice in these years, first in *The Ambassadors*, at which James was at work in 1900–1, and then again in "The Velvet Glove," which he published in 1909. Gloriani's reappearance can be no accident, Tintner contends, because his later incarnation is based on Auguste Rodin, who was perhaps the most famous artist in the world in the first years of the century.[8] Moreover, James was at work in these years on a biography of a sculptor, William Wetmore Story, whom he had met several times in Rome between 1873 and 1894.[9] The biography appeared in 1903, the year before *The Golden Bowl*, and Tintner even suggests that the Story family offers a clear source for some of James's characterization in the novel: specifically, Story's Italian son-in-law might have sparked his imagining of Prince Amerigo,

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[7] Marianna Torgovnick contends that Roderick Hudson's occupation constitutes something of a "red herring" in any conscientious interdisciplinary study of James and the visual arts, and she is not incorrect. Roderick's sculpture is more or less incidental to the development of the novel, and as she argues, he might well have been a "young man of inspiration in other fields as well—poetry, science, mathematics, music—without that changing the novel very much": what matters most is his artistic, Romantic temperament. Yet as I hope to demonstrate by my position in this chapter, there are ways of reading for the sculptural—a broader term than Torgovnick would allow, I think—that reveal moments of James's interplay with the visual arts that are not at all incidental to the conception and development of *The Golden Bowl*. See Marianna Torgovnick, *The Visual Arts, Pictorialism, and the Novel: James, Lawrence, and Woolf* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 70-75.
[8] Among her other explanations for this assertion, Tintner details the ways in which the portrait of Gloriani presented in *The Ambassadors* strongly suggests Rodin, with whom James was highly likely to have been familiar not only because of his general fame but also because of his monumental sculpture of Balzac (perhaps James's favorite author), which caused a scandal upon its original exhibition at the Salon of 1898. See Adeline R. Tintner, *The Twentieth-Century World of Henry James: Changes in His Work After 1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 117-20.
[9] Sheila Teahan, "Autobiographies and biographies," in *Henry James in Context*, ed. David McWhirter (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 59.

and something of the sculptor's intimacy with his daughter may have inspired the relationship of Adam and Maggie Verver.[10]

Most important, however, is the relationship that James maintained in the first decade of the twentieth century with the young sculptor Hendrik Andersen, whom he first met in Rome in 1899. After being introduced to Andersen by some mutual acquaintances, James visited the sculptor at his studio and purchased "a small terracotta bust" in order "encourage" the artist.[11] Andersen agreed to ship the bust to James's home in London, and as Fred Kaplan writes, "within two weeks of [James's] return from Italy in July 1899, 'the beautiful bust' had arrived at Lamb House, where he placed it in a position of prominence on the corner mantelpiece in the dining room."[12] James then wrote the first of what were to be many letters to Andersen, saying of the bust, "I shall have him constantly before me, as a loved companion and friend. He is so living, so human so sympathetic and sociable and curious, that I foresee it will be a lifelong attachment."[13] James went on to tell Andersen of his "tremendous intimacy with dear little Conte Alberto": "we literally can't live without each other. He is the first object that greets my eyes in the morning, and the last at night."[14] In this letter, as in those that were to follow, James "used Andersen's sculptures to mediate his own desire for the sculptor himself."[15] James's biographer, Leon Edel, contends that the remainder of their correspondence is "the saddest and strangest perhaps in his entire

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[10] Tinter, *Twentieth-Century World*, 95-99.
[11] Edel, *Henry James: A Life*, 489-90. For an account of James's relationship with Andersen, see Millicent Bell, "James and the Sculptor," 18-47.
[12] Fred Kaplan, *Henry James: The Imagination of a Genius* (New York: William Morrow, 1992), 448. See also Edel, *Henry James: A Life*, 494.
[13] Kaplan, *Imagination of a Genius*, 448. For the entirety of the correspondonce, see also Henry James, *Beloved Boy: Letters to Hendrik C. Andersen, 1899–1915*, ed. Rosella Mamoli Zorzi (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004).
[14] Kaplan, *Imagination of a Genius*, 448.

epistolarium," "notable for the quantity of physical, tactile language employed": "James repeatedly offers his *abbraccio*—puts out his arms to embrace the younger man, pats him tenderly on the back—in words. […] there is a quality of passion and possession" in the letters.[16] Indeed, James's language is insistently physical, despite his distance from Andersen and their highly infrequent meetings: he writes, "I hold you close," "I feel, my dear boy, my arms around you," and "I meanwhile pat you affectionately on the back, across the Alps and Apennines, I draw you close, I hold you long," among other lines.[17] Though their correspondence does include discussions of actual sculpture—usually with James's criticism of the younger artist's work—for the most part, the conversation about sculpture seems transfigured into James's emphasis on the gesture throughout his letters.[18] The correspondence with Andersen suggests, in sum, that at the same time that James remained conscious of sculpture and sculptors while he was at work on *The Golden Bowl*, he also repeatedly evoked a strong sense of the intimacy of touch,[19] in what we might consider a more broadly sculptural language.

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[15] Leland S. Person, *Henry James and the Suspense of Masculinity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 48.
[16] Edel, *Henry James: A Life*, 497 (italics original).
[17] Ibid.
[18] In the quotation with which I began, the group of large nude figures to which James reacts belongs to a work by Andersen, which he photographed for James, who then replied with his criticism of sculpture. For further examples of James's increasing dislike for Andersen's work, see Millicent Bell, "James and the Sculptor," 31-6, and Person, *Suspense of Masculinity*, 48.
[19] Recently, Jonathan Freedman has engaged in an extended examination of the importance of touch to *The Golden Bowl*, but without connecting touch to the question of sculpture. Quite rightly, though, he argues that touch challenges the primacy of vision in the novel, taking us "outside the familiar Jamesian dialectic of consciousness and vision into a different relation between being and world, one organized by the feeling-and-being-felt hand." For James's characters, touch demands "a different, more fluid model of inwardness and outwardness" and brings "us as bodily beings into close contact with a world that defies our attempts at mastery." See Jonathan Freedman, "Hands, Objects and Love in James and Hitchcock: Reading the Touch in *The Golden Bowl* and *Notorious*," in *The Men Who Knew Too Much: Henry James and Alfred Hitchcock*, ed. Susan M. Griffin and Alan Nadel (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 127-28.

With these historical and biographical details in mind, then, we can engage in a sculptural reading of *The Golden Bowl*, which not only offers a necessary reinvigoration of the discussion of James and the visual arts, but also presents a significant renovation of our understanding of the novel's relationship to visual and material culture, which has recently been described in terms of collection, connoisseurship, and commodity culture, virtually to the exclusion of other possibilities.[20] In the most persuasive of these accounts, Bill Brown has expanded his consideration of the novel's "objectification of people as possessions" to include the mechanism of this objectification, the metaphors which turn people into things and allow thought to "assume a physicality of its own."[21] This notion is a useful one—and undoubtedly the most lucid description of the curiously insistent presence of the novel's figurative language, which critics have struggled to account for since its publication. Yet Brown's focus on "things"—characterized by "underdetermined or indeterminate specification," by the way in which they all, like the titular bowl, "signify so much" while also signifying "so little, precisely because" they seem to signify so much—prevents his account from attending to some supposed "things" which are actually highly specific in their reference to the world of visual and plastic art.[22] Though Brown treats them as things, James's golden bowl and his fascinating metaphorical pagoda, which opens the second volume of the novel, are exactly this kind of art object, and through a sculptural reading, we can better understand not only them but also the narrative that contains them.

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[20] See, for prominent examples, Jonathan Freedman, *Professions of Taste: Henry James, British Aestheticism, and Commodity Culture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 228-45, and Bill Brown, *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 136, 156-60.
[21] Brown, *A Sense of Things*, 156, 160-61.
[22] Bill Brown, "Now Advertising: Late James," *The Henry James Review* 30.1 (Winter 2009): 13, and Brown, *A Sense of Things*, 171.

Indeed, as I will try to show, this kind of reading allows us to see both the sculptural objects in *The Golden Bowl* and the ways in which the novel draws upon the viewing practices and temporalities associated with sculpture. As I will demonstrate, statues, golden bowls, and pagodas exist alongside moments of visual and tactile apprehension—or even instances of thought, or arcs of narrative progression—that activate the complicated practice of viewing in the round, the standard mode of appreciating sculpture in the modern museum era. Such viewing acknowledges that sculpture "intrudes on the surrounding space, and has to be walked round rather than just looked at," for, unlike painting, it does not face the viewer "as a surface hung flat against the wall." [23] In this way, no investigation limited only to visuality or the gaze can suffice to address the complexity of the encounter with sculpture—either in the gallery or in the pages of *The Golden Bowl*—because the art form activates not only "a disembodied gazing, but a process involving the viewer spatially and kinaesthetically and intellectually, as well as visually."[24] I contend that art historians' theorization of viewing sculpture offers literary critics an invaluable way of reconceptualizing the play of relationships and the processes of thinking and talking in *The Golden Bowl*. At times, descriptions of the viewer's encounter with sculpture can even sound exactly like the reader's experience of *The Golden Bowl*, or its characters' struggle with their own knowledge: Alex Potts, for example, writes that "our sense of the work as a whole is partly defined through the ever changing and variously focused partial views we have of it, and can never entirely be condensed in a single stable image."[25] This instability brings with it "a heightened sense of temporality," and though it may seem counterintuitive to emphasize temporality in a

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[23] Alex Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), ix.

discussion of such a fundamentally spatial art, work by both Potts and Rosalind Krauss on the temporality of viewing sculpture can help to renovate our understanding of the temporality and narrative progression of *The Golden Bowl*.

In these ways, a sculptural reading of *The Golden Bowl* offers a useful reminder here, at the beginning of my dissertation, that the world of fine art, and its influence on literature, cannot be reduced to mere visuality. As "an art of *palpation*—an art that gives satisfaction in the touching and handling of objects," sculpture reminds us that sight is often haunted by touch, and both senses prove vital to the novel."[26] Peter Brooks has suggested that the management of knowledge constitutes the central matter of James's fiction, which offers "a nearly epistemological drama, where what we think we know is always open to contest and reversal, without any sure principle for finding a firm, immovable optic," but the remarkable language of *The Golden Bowl* suggests that "optic" might be the wrong word here.[27] In James's oeuvre, and especially in his late novels, epistemology is tied to two frequent turns of phrase—"I see" and "I feel," which characters use to declare and describe their knowledge. These phrases are dead metaphors that James brings back to life by repetition and vibration. In some ways, they suggest competing epistemological modes: "I see" gives us the evidence of the visual fact, whereas "I feel" offers an assertion of certainty in the absence of evidence. ("I feel" is usually what James's characters say when they are attempting to predict future actions: "There are times when I seem not to mind a bit what I've done, […] when I feel

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[24] Ibid., 3.
[25] Ibid., 9.
[26] Herbert Read, *The Art of Sculpture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 49.
[27] Brooks, *Realist Vision* (see introduction, n. 51), 181. For excellent readings of the problems of knowledge, consciousness, and meaning in the novel, see Hilary Schor, "Reading Knowledge: Curiosity in The Golden Bowl," *The Henry James Review* 26.3 (Fall 2005): 237-45, and Sharon Cameron, *Thinking in Henry James* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

that I'd do it again," asserts Fanny Assingham in the long conversation that concludes the first volume, in contrast to the alternative connotations of her earlier declaration, "I did see—I *have* seen. And now I know" [269, 273].) But the radical move of *The Golden Bowl* is to combine the two modes through its deployment of sculptural images and moments of viewing in the round, which prompt both senses, even perhaps the synesthesia of the two. (This epistemological combination amounts to a major change even in the late period, for the grand moments of realization in *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Ambassadors* are still purely visual, inter-mediated by paintings—the Bronzino portrait before which Milly Theale confronts her own mortality, and the Lambinet landscape through which Lambert Strether realizes Chad Newsome's affair with Madame de Vionnet.) In the end, as I hope to demonstrate, reading *The Golden Bowl* with an eye for sculpture allows us to bring together considerations of epistemology, ethics, narrative and metaphor, which are so often treated separately in discussions of James's oeuvre, in a single reading of the novel's plastic form.

Novel Statuary: Pygmalion and the Beginnings of Plastic Form

As perhaps James's most metaphor-obsessed novel, *The Golden Bowl* teems with passages that are, as J. Hillis Miller notes, "adorned by some of James's most baroque extended metaphors for consciousness, or for how things seemed to a consciousness," and as James's consciousnesses ruminate, they continually tinker with the metaphors through which they apprehend the world.[28] As a result, James's figures frequently undergo mid-

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[28] J. Hillis Miller, *Literature as Conduct: Speech Acts in Henry James* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 262. For more on these baroque metaphors, and on early and influential critical responses to their

passage metamorphoses, and occasionally, when they shift, they allow us to glimpse figural sculptures. When Charlotte Stant first arrives at Cadogan Place, for example, Prince Amerigo is struck by how familiar her appearance is to him, and her entrance prompts him to conduct a visual inventory of her attributes, which includes her statue-like arms:

> [I]t was, strangely, as a cluster of possessions of his own that these things, in Charlotte Stant, now affected him; items in a full list, items recognised, each of them, as if, for the long interval, they had been 'stored'—wrapped up, numbered, put away in a cabinet. […] He saw the sleeves of her jacket drawn to her wrists, but he again made out the free arms within them to be of the completely rounded, the polished slimness that Florentine sculptors, in the great time, had loved, and of which the apparent firmness is expressed in their old silver and old bronze. (35)

Charlotte makes her first appearance in the novel as a statue unpacked after storage and unwrapped for the viewing pleasure of its owner. Significantly, though, this unwrapping remains incomplete: Charlotte's sleeves extend all the way to her wrists, covering her arms entirely, so that the Prince cannot see them and must instead infer their shape, "rounded" and "slim." In addition, despite her jacket, the Prince senses what we might call the finish of her arms, their "polished" surface. These features—as tactile as they are visual—make it seem insufficient to say that the Prince is merely looking at Charlotte. I want, then, to contend that the Prince engages in a kind of looking-as-if-touching, a nearly synesthetic mode of apprehension that characterizes most of the characters' real and imagined interactions with sculptural objects in *The Golden Bowl*. Here, looking and touching prove so intertwined that Charlotte's appearance, as James describes it, becomes inseparable from the material aspects of the Florentine statues. We slide easily from her "polished slimness" to the statues' "apparent firmness," so that, by the end of the sentence, her flesh disappears,

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"arbitrariness," see Ruth Bernard Yeazell, *Language and Knowledge in the Late Novels of Henry James* (Chicago:

replaced by the Prince's perception of "old bronze."[29] This effect reverses Galatea's change in Ovid's *Metamorphoses:* the Prince's tactile vision transforms the living woman into a statue—at least in part—and, as a sculpture, she is more easily included in his mental tally of his possessions.

We find another woman transfigured by a reverse-Galatea metaphor later in the novel, when James describes a similar female statue in order to give us Adam Verver's image of his daughter—his most prized possession. Like the Prince's vision of Charlotte, Adam's picture of Maggie emerges from the aesthetic sensitivity of the collector:

> [Maggie] stood there before him [Adam] with that particular suggestion in her aspect to which even the long habit of their life together had not closed his sense, kept sharp, year after year, by the collation of types and signs, the comparison of fine object with fine object, of one degree of finish, of one form of the exquisite with another—the appearance of some slight, slim draped "antique" of Vatican or Capitoline halls, late and refined, rare as a note and immortal as a link, set in motion by the miraculous infusion of a modern impulse and yet, for all the sudden freedom of folds and footsteps forsaken after centuries by their pedestal, keeping still the quality, the perfect felicity, of the statue; the blurred, absent eyes, the smoothed, elegant, nameless head, the impersonal flit of a creature lost in an alien age and passing as an image in worn relief round and round a precious vase. (138-39)

If Charlotte evokes a Renaissance statue, then Maggie recalls, for her father, a classical sculpture from late antiquity.[30] Though Adam might have become accustomed to her appearance over time, his museum-building project and his connoisseur's eye prevent his

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University of Chicago Press, 1976), 40-48.

[29] This same kind of metamorphosis—of people into art objects and art objects into people—occurs elsewhere in James, most prominently in his early story "The Last of the Valerii," published in 1874, in which Count Valerio falls in love with a classical statue of Juno unearthed on the grounds of his villa in Rome. James's anonymous first-person narrator reports that the statue's "marvellous beauty gave her an almost human look, and her absent eyes seemed to wonder back at us." As Count Valerio devotes more attention to the statue—including moonlight blood sacrifice—he neglects his wife, and the narrator must tell him that, "to rival the Juno, she's turning to marble herself." See Henry James, *Complete Stories 1864–1874* (New York: Library of America, 1999), 808, 821, and for a complete reading of the story's deployment of prosopopoeia, see J. Hillis Miller, *Versions of Pygmalion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 212-36.

overlooking Maggie, whose particular "form of the exquisite" arises from her silent "suggestion" of "some slight, slim draped 'antique' of Vatican or Capitoline halls." James's language here is more explicit in its reference to the story of Pygmalion: the "rare," "immortal" statue to which Maggie is compared has been "set in motion by the miraculous infusion of a modern impulse," liberated from its pedestal "after centuries," and possessed of a new "sudden freedom of folds and footsteps." Like the Galatea of Ovid's story, this statue comes to life, with "veins [that] throb under the thumb" and may be proclaimed "real indeed."[31] Both cold and warm, Galatea seems an apt figure for Maggie, who evokes for her father (and other observers like Mrs. Rance) both "nymphs and nuns" (139).[32]

Despite this eruption into modernity and this capacity for movement, though, the statue's metamorphosis proves incomplete. Unlike Galatea, this statue does not leave the chill of marble completely behind for the warmth of human flesh: even as she moves, she retains "the quality, the perfect felicity, of the statue; the blurred, absent eyes, the smoothed, elegant, nameless head, the impersonal flit of a creature lost in an alien age." (James's prose

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[30] For a brief analysis of the different qualities James associated with Renaissance art and with classical art, see Winner, *Henry James and the Visual Arts*, 164-66.

[31] Ovid, *The Metamorphoses*, trans. Rolfe Humphries (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 243.

[32] This story is, of course, a particularly appropriate one for the relationship between Adam and Maggie Verver, with all of its incestuous overtones, since Pygmalion has made the statue himself: "He made, with marvelous art, an ivory statue, / As white as snow, and gave it greater beauty / Than any girl could have, and fell in love / With his own workmanship." As J. Hillis Miller writes, "Pygmalion is Galatea's fathering maker as well as her husband." The identity of artistic manufacture with lovemaking becomes particularly clear in the process of Galatea's transformation: Pygmalion "kissed her, / And stroked her breast, and felt the ivory soften / Under his fingers, as wax grows soft in sunshine, / Made pliable by handling." The tense then shifts into the present: "The lips he kisses / Are real indeed, the ivory girl can feel them, / And blushes and responds, and the eyes open / At once on lover and heaven." As Miller notes, this is a moment of reflection: "for Pygmalion, the other is not really other. […] It is a reciprocity in which the same loves the same." The implied incest of Pygmalion and Galatea's story finds its fruition, Miller argues, in the story that immediately follows in *The Metamorphoses*, in which Pygmalion and Galatea's great-granddaughter, Myrrha, repeatedly tricks her father into incest: "Pygmalion too, Myrrha's story implies, is guilty not only of Narcissism and of a strange kind of onanism but also of incest." *The Golden Bowl* remains far less explicit than Ovid's stories, of course, but the slippage between the fatherly gaze, the eye of the collector, and the implied hand of Pygmalion render Adam's

even encourages us to pause briefly before we reach these parts of the sentence, to rest on our sense that the statue is "keeping still.") The statue remains anonymous, unanimated by consciousness, and incapable of full human existence. And with the final, subtle phrase of James's sentence, as he turns the metaphor once again, the "creature lost in an alien age" ceases even to be a freestanding statue in the round: she becomes instead a figure "passing as an image in worn relief round and round a precious vase." Rather than being apprehended in her own roundness, the figure is subjugated to the roundness of the vase—not transported into modernity but trapped in a timeless loop, condemned always to circle the object. (This last twist of the metaphor also comments, quietly, on the impermanence of art, by countering the "happy, happy boughs" and "forever young" marble maidens that remain eternally on Keats's Grecian urn with a picture of decay over time, in which the "late, and refined, rare" features of the classical female image become less distinct, eroded by the ages into a "worn relief"—a very cold pastoral scene indeed.)

Furthermore, as the metaphor continues into the next sentence, the vehicle comes to dominate the tenor so that, even though this classical statue attains some measure of humanity, Maggie herself is transformed into a figure of cold stone:

> She had always had odd moments of striking him, daughter of his very own though she was, as a figure thus simplified, 'generalised', in its grace, a figure with which his human connection was fairly interrupted by some vague analogy of turn and attitude, something shyly mythological and nymph-like. (139)

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view of his daughter no less uncomfortable. See Ovid, *The Metamorphoses*, 242-43, and J. Hillis Miller, *Versions of Pygmalion*, 4, 10-11.

Adam attributes his inconstant "human connection" with his daughter to her particular sculptural "attitude," but it is his vision that drains her of humanity.[33] The metaphor of the classical statue, intended to evoke Maggie more completely—and especially to describe her specific relationship to her father—concludes by doing precisely the opposite. Instead of presenting a picture of Maggie in her particularity, Adam's vision gives us "a figure thus simplified, 'generalised.'" This vague statue replaces any previous sense we might have had of Maggie, and gives the lie to Adam's insistence that he cares "for special vases only less than for precious daughters" (139).

Yet rather than describing the difficulty of these two statue metaphors as troubles arising from the patriarchal, possessive visions particular to Prince Amerigo and Adam Verver, I want to suggest that they dramatize a peculiar characteristic of *The Golden Bowl* by returning briefly to the story of Pygmalion and Galatea. For J. Hillis Miller, this tale, like all of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, shows us "what aberrant figurative language can do" by giving us "a change of shape that in its most general form can be defined as the literalization of a metaphor."[34] The story of Pygmalion and Galatea is, he argues, a "literalizing allegory" of prosopopoeia, the trope which "ascribes a face, a name, or a voice to the absent, the inanimate, or the dead," in which Galatea is "brought to life by the urgency of prosopopoeia."[35] If we follow Miller, then, a statue that comes only partially to life may be

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[33] This passage is typical of Adam's easy confusion of people and art objects, which many critics have noted. See, for example, Kevin Ohi, *Henry James and the Queerness of Style* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 53; Jonah Siegel, *Haunted Museum: Longing, Travel, and the Art-Romance Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 164-65; and Alan Rose, "The Spatial Form of 'The Golden Bowl,'" *Modern Fiction Studies* 12.1 (Spring 1966): 104.
[34] J. Hillis Miller, *Versions of Pygmalion*, 1. Barkan seconds Miller's point: "Ovidian metamorphosis represents an attempt, as literal as possible, to turn language into image or, to put it another way, to turn words into things." See Barkan, *Mute Poetry, Speaking Pictures*, 51-52.
[35] J. Hillis Miller, *Versions of Pygmalion*, 3-4.

seen as an instance of incomplete prosopopoeia, and I want to claim that this partial metamorphosis may be strongly linked to the stylistic complexity, density, and opacity of *The Golden Bowl.*

As I have already mentioned, *The Golden Bowl* is often treated as the apotheosis of James's late style, and while recent critics have engaged in a more studied consideration of its features, early and influential scholars of James contended that the novel evinced an author who was not at the height of his powers, but past his prime. For these scholars, the metaphors of *The Golden Bowl* "provoke a feeling of arbitrariness and extravagance, a sense of an uncomfortable break in the organic connection of things," and perhaps the most notable registration of this discomfort occurs in F. R. Leavis's assessment of the late metaphorical style: "We are conscious in these figures more of analysis, demonstration and comment than of the realizing imagination and the play of poetic perception. […] the imagery is not immediate and inevitable but synthetic."[36] Such critical discomfort with the late style—and especially with its manifestation in *The Golden Bowl*—centers on its difficulty, its labored quality, and these characteristics remain undeniable. These metaphors offer the reader no easy access to the world of the text but only a "break in the organic," something neither "immediate and inevitable but synthetic." Contemporary reviewers of *The Golden Bowl* criticized its "unreality," and they were not wrong: the metaphors of the late style are artificial, and elaborately so.[37] Indeed, for the reader, they are akin to the Galatea-esque statue to which Maggie is compared: incompletely alive, a bit cold and stiff. Despite all their

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[36] Yeazell, *Language and Knowledge*, 40.
[37] Virginia Llewellyn Smith, introduction to *The Golden Bowl*, by Henry James (New York: Oxford World's Classics, 1999), viii. Jonah Siegel seizes upon a similar quality and links it to the books roots in the nineteenth-century tradition of the art romance, and Viola Hopkins Winner describes a similar parabolic, fairy-tale quality

ostentatious embellishment, in other words, the metaphors of *The Golden Bowl* are not easily integrated into the reader's vision of the characters' world in London, but this is hardly an authorial error or a stylistic shortcoming. The figures in the novel—including the metaphors that describe Charlotte and Maggie as statues—suggest that description, metaphorical expansion, and allusion to the plastic arts may have a purpose other than the creation of reality effects.[38] In *The Golden Bowl*, as I shall demonstrate, these stylistic features do not contribute to the creation of the novel's fictional world but instead begin to reinvent the novel as an experiment in plastic form.

"To the enhancement of its happy curve": Viewing Sculptural Objects in the Round

Despite James's early play with the story of Pygmalion in *The Golden Bowl*, the novel's central sculpture is not a "precious daughter" but rather a "special vase"—the titular bowl, which we first encounter in a Bloomsbury antique shop as Charlotte and Prince Amerigo search for a wedding present that she might give him. The shopkeeper shows them a profusion of unsuitable items, including "ornaments, pendants, lockets, brooches, buckles, pretexts for dim brilliants, bloodless rubies, pearls either too large or too opaque for value; miniatures mounted with diamonds that had ceased to dazzle; snuffboxes presented to—or by—the too-questionable great; cups, trays, taper-stands," and so on (80). Only after the dealer has displayed these objects does he tell Charlotte that she has "seen […] too much"

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of the work, its emergence from "an art of unease and precariousness." See Siegel, *Haunted Museum*, 170, and Winner, *Henry James and the Visual Arts*, 163, 168.

[38] For an account of the way that description has traditionally been understood to operate as a reality effect, see Brooks, *Realist Vision*, 16.

and produce the bowl (83).[39] The bowl's appearance is theatrical: it arrives not only as the singular answer to the mass of smaller objects that the shopkeeper has already shown the pair, but also as the answer to Charlotte's pointed questions about his linguistic fluency. For the shopkeeper has interrupted the conversation between Charlotte and the Prince—carried out in Italian, in order to "cover" what their words reveal about their relationship—with his assertion that Charlotte has "seen […] too much," and his interjection in Italian makes plain that he has understood the implications of their exchange (82-3). Charlotte asks him whether he is Italian, and he replies negatively, in English; she asks whether he is English, and he replies affirmatively, in Italian, while simultaneously "waiv[ing] the question" (84):

> The dealer waived the question—he practically disposed of it by turning straightaway toward a receptacle to which he had not yet resorted and from which, after unlocking it, he extracted a square box, of some twenty inches in height, covered with worn-looking leather. He placed the box on the counter, pushed back a pair of small hooks, lifted the lid and removed from its nest a drinking-vessel larger than a common cup, yet not of exorbitant size, and formed, to appearance, either of old fine gold or some material once richly gilt. He handled it with tenderness, with ceremony, making a place for it on a small satin mat. 'My Golden Bowl,' he observed—and it sounded, on his lips, as if it said everything. He left the important object—for as 'important' it did somehow present itself—to produce its certain effect. Simple, but singularly elegant, it stood on a circular foot, a short pedestal with a slightly spreading base, and, though not of signal depth, justified its title by the charm of its shape as well as by the tone of its surface. It might have been a large goblet diminished, to the enhancement of its happy curve, by half its original height. As formed of solid gold it was impressive; it seemed indeed to ward off the prudent admirer. Charlotte, with care, immediately took it up, while the Prince, who had after a minute shifted his position again, regarded it from a distance. (84)

The bowl thus arrives as a revelation and, simultaneously, as a secret, corresponding both to the antique dealer's disclosure of his understanding and to his silence about what, exactly, he

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[39] Jonah Siegel also reads the bowl as "a relief from excess." See Siegel, "Speed, Desire, and the Museum: *The Golden Bowl* as Art Romance," *The Henry James Review* 23.3 (Fall 2002): 242.

has understood. Emerging from a box within a box, the bowl is "impressive," "important," capable of "produc[ing] its certain effect." It seems wholly obvious, and as the dealer describes it—"My Golden Bowl"—his words seem to say "everything" that we might need to know about the object.

But even in its round self-containment, the bowl proves less than fully discernible: with its "happy curve" and its "circular foot," it somehow seems "to ward off the prudent admirer" and to force the Prince to "regard it from a distance." There remains something uncomfortable about the bowl; it "disrupts the ideal of a self-sufficient and fully realised wholeness," as Alex Potts suggests that most sculpted objects do.[40] Like the sculpture that Potts describes, the bowl's "mode of address is a little ambiguous, the pose both confidently at ease and cautiously guarded" so that the bowl seems not to be "set apart in its own world, but aware of being constituted in someone else's gaze."[41] This ambiguous mode of address prompts the bowl's viewers to engage in a particular kind of interaction with it—they retreat for a better view, then approach it again, indirectly, attempting to surround the object with astute questions from different angles, or to suss it out with repeated glances. In the shop, for example, the Prince backs up to a safer distance and then exits the store entirely before "finally fac[ing] about" for a last glance (88).

For her part, Charlotte tries to touch the object's secrets repeatedly in her conversation with the dealer, only to be rebuffed again and again. He tells her that the bowl is presumably—though not certainly—"cut out of a single crystal" and that its gilt covering was "put on I don't know when and I don't know how. But by some very fine old worker

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[40] Potts, *Sculptural Imagination*, 5.
[41] Ibid.

and by some beautiful old process" (85). This ambiguity about the bowl's making is matched by his artfulness in challenging Charlotte's insistence that the bowl must have some flaw which explains its low asking price:

> [The dealer, playfully but pointedly:] 'What is the matter with it?' [Charlotte:] 'Oh, it's not for me to say; it's for you honestly to tell me. Of course I know something must be.'
>
> 'But if it's something you can't find out, isn't it as good as if it were nothing?'
>
> 'I probably *should* find out as soon as I had paid for it.'
>
> 'Not,' her host lucidly insisted, 'if you hadn't paid too much.' (86; emphasis original)

Here the dealer voices Charlotte's unspoken question—which he knows that she cannot answer—and when she tries to turn the question back against him, he parries her thrust with another question: "But if it's something you can't find out, isn't it as good as if it were nothing?" Couching his response in the negative and the conditional, he craftily refuses to allow that the bowl has any fault and, as their exchange continues, similarly rejects the premise that she might find any such flaw after her purchase. In short, each time that Charlotte attempts a new line of questioning, the shopkeeper prevents her from gaining access to the bowl's secrets, and she must try again.

For both Charlotte and the Prince, then, the bowl presents epistemological difficulties that prompt a particular mode of viewing. On its own, the bowl is far from fully legible, since it appears to have been hewn from a single block of crystal and covered with gilt overlay but doesn't manifest the process of its creation in its final form. This ambiguity produces uneasiness in its viewers, who find their eyes forced to circle it repeatedly, draw back, and find a new angle of vision. In this way, the bowl seems to prompt a sculptural mode of viewing and to be constituted in the novel as "something activated in the

phenomenal encounter between viewer and work," which is, as Potts argues, exactly how sculptures become manifest.[42] And precisely this kind of encounter between the bowl and its beholder occurs when we next see it, at Portland Place, after Maggie has purchased the bowl, been visited by the antique dealer, and learned about its previous viewing by her husband and Charlotte. She has realized the extent of their relationship and invited Fanny Assingham to view her evidence:

> The piece now recognised by Fanny as new to her own vision was a capacious bowl, of old-looking, rather strikingly yellow gold, mounted, by a short stem, on an ample foot, which held a central position above the fireplace, where, to allow it the better to show, a clearance had been made of other objects […] Mrs. Assingham took it, the bowl, as a fine thing; but the question was obviously not of its intrinsic value, and she kept off from it, admiring it at a distance. (415-16)

Just as it did in the shop, the bowl "produce[s] its certain effect" in the room at Portland Place, where the central position and space given to it by Maggie permit it to establish itself as "impressive" and "important." The bowl is "striking"—clearly "a fine thing" to Fanny's eyes—but it leaves her unsettled, so she stays away, "admiring it at a distance," exactly as the Prince did in the Bloomsbury shop. Indeed, the very space that the bowl has been given—ostensibly "to allow it the better to show," to stand out on its own—suggests that the bowl holds some significance other than itself, beyond its "intrinsic value."

Accordingly, Fanny attempts to understand it in much the same way that Charlotte did—by mentally circling it, attempting to understand it in context and from new angles of approach:

> Her eyes rested on this odd acquisition and then quitted it, went back to it and again turned from it: it was inscrutable in its rather stupid elegance, and yet, from the moment one had appraised it, vivid and definite in its

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[42] Ibid., xi.

> domination of the scene. Fanny could no more overlook it now than she could have overlooked a lighted Christmas tree; but nervously and all in vain she dipped into her mind for some floating reminiscence of it. At the same time that this attempt left her blank she understood a good deal, she even not a little shared, the Prince's mystic apprehension. The golden bowl, put on, under consideration, a sturdy, a conscious perversity; as a 'document', somehow, it was ugly, though it might have a decorative grace. (419-20)

The bowl cannot be "overlooked," for it seems to organize the space of the room around it. "Vivid and definite in its domination of the scene," the bowl asserts itself and demands Fanny's visual attention. Yet at the same time, the bowl also repels her glances repeatedly by refusing to explain itself: it remains "inscrutable in its rather stupid elegance," possessed of "a sturdy, a conscious perversity." In other words, its impenetrable gilt overlay prevents visual access to its interior and does not disclose its identity, which forces Fanny's fascinated eyes to circle it. Indeed, as Miller writes, Maggie and Fanny's long conversation "circles around the bowl, which is spoken of as 'the incriminating piece,' as 'her damnatory piece,' as 'representing' the Prince's infidelity, as 'that complicating object on the chimney,' as 'evidence.'"[43] The bowl's stubborn but elegant plasticity prompts a necessarily three-dimensional practice of viewing in which eyes that cannot penetrate its "stupid" surface—whether they belong to Fanny, to Charlotte and the Prince, or to we readers—must go around, tracing the contours of its "happy curve" again.

In fact, being viewed in the round does just as much to characterize the bowl as a sculptural object as does its composition—its origin in a single piece of crystal. The bowl is a sculpture "staged so as visibly to confront the viewer, and force her or him to attend to a dynamic of encounter that is now too vivid to ignore."[44] Fanny's encounter with the bowl

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[43] J. Hillis Miller, *Literature as Conduct*, 241.
[44] Potts, *Sculptural Imagination*, 19.

manifests an engagement "with a sculpture for what it is, a physical thing intervening in our space."[45] As Fanny's nervous glances—and Maggie's highly calculated, emotionally charged actions—attest, the intervention is an anxiety-producing one. The golden bowl creates "a psychic dynamic […] by its physically intruding on or reshaping the viewer's sense of ambient space, and from the vague feelings of contact the viewer has with the shaping and texturing of the stuff from which it is made."[46] Made from the "intimate" history between Maggie's husband and her stepmother, from the extent to which "Amerigo knew Charlotte—more than [Maggie] ever dreamed," the bowl becomes "proof," "witness," "document," and "evidence" (416-21). Its very existence fills the room with "queer torment" (421) that mounts until Fanny cannot tolerate it any longer: "she dashed it boldly to the ground, where she had the thrill of seeing it, with the violence of her crash, lie shattered" (430). The bowl, in short, is hardly a mere decorative object or an unspecified thing. Not "inertly object-like," it prompts and sustains attention as a sculpture that requires viewing in the round.[47]

This mode of viewing emerges in *The Golden Bowl* not only in relation to actual sculptural objects, like the bowl, but also in relation to the imagined sculptural objects that constitute the vehicles for some of James's extended metaphors. For example, Adam Verver's impression of his son-in-law as "a great Palladian church" dropped into the piazza of his relationship with his daughter has traditionally been understood as an exclusively

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[45] Ibid., 1.
[46] Ibid., 8.
[47] Ibid., 1. As Jonathan Freedman has noted, the degree to which the bowl is handled and touched reminds us that objects in this novel exist not just as static *things* to be read and reread, interpreted and reinterpreted, but as concrete objects that can be—and are—held, touched, moved about, lifted in the air (twice), broken, put back together." See Freedman, "Hands, Objects and Love," 126.

architectural metaphor,[48] but James's emphasis on the external features of the structure might also be considered sculptural:

> At first, certainly, their decent little old-time union, Maggie's and his own, had resembled a good deal some pleasant public square, in the heart of an old city, into which a great Palladian church, say—something with a grand architectural front—had suddenly been dropped; so that the rest of the place, the space in front, the way round, outside, to the east end, the margin of street and passage, the quantity of overarching heaven, had been temporarily compromised. Not even then, of a truth, in a manner disconcerting—given, that is, for the critical, or at least the intelligent, eye, the great style of the façade and its high place in its class. […] The Palladian church was always there, but the *piazza* took care of itself. The sun stared down in his fulness, the air circulated, the public not less; the limit stood off, the way round was easy, the east end was as fine, in its fashion, as the west, and there were also side doors for entrance, between the two—large, monumental, ornamental, in *their* style—as for all proper great churches. By some such process, in fine had the Prince, for his father-in-law, while remaining solidly a feature, ceased to be, at all ominously, a block. (99-100; emphasis original)

Here James focuses the metaphor on the church's site in the cityscape and the extent to which it affects the circulation of the air and the public. In fact, despite James's brief mention of the possibility of "entrance," the church never materializes as a building with an interior that might actually be entered. He stresses, instead, the surface of the church and its interaction with outside viewers so that it becomes little more than a very large sculptural object to be apprehended in three dimensions: the key question here, as with the bowl, is "the way round." And as Adam's consideration of Prince Amerigo continues, the extent to which James has rooted the image of the church in that of the smaller, more obviously sculptural bowl becomes clear.[49]

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[48] See, for instance, Winner, *Henry James and the Visual Arts*, 163.

[49] We might link James's emphasis on the sculptural features of the church here to Herbert Read's discussion of the ways in which "the temple and the cathedral […] evolved from the monument, which was originally a solid sculptured object," "an integral form" that could not be described "as essentially architectural or essentially sculptural." See Read, *The Art of Sculpture*, 5-6.

Rather than impressing Adam with "the sharp corners and hard edges, all the stony pointedness, the grand right geometry of his spreading Palladian church," the Prince instead offers "a contact that, beguilingly, almost confoundingly, was a contact but with practically yielding lines and curved surfaces" (101). Like the bowl, then, Prince Amerigo offers up to the viewer a "happy curve," which prompts his father-in-law to proclaim, "'You're round, my boy, […] you're all, you're variously and inexhaustibly round, when you might, by all the chances, have been abominably square'" (101). Somewhat to his own surprise, then, Adam has found his son-in-law to be a pleasant and easy addition to the family, and James continues the metaphor's transition from the architectural to the sculptural by suggesting the ways in which the round figure representing the Prince attracts Adam's touch.[50] "'You're inveterately round,'" Adam tells the Prince, "'It's the sort of thing, in you, that one feels—or at least I do—with one's hand'" (101-2).[51] Rather than being "formed, all over, in a lot of little pyramidal lozenges like that wonderful side of the Ducal Palace in Venice," with all its "cut diamonds that would have scratched one's softer sides," the Prince is made of more amiable stuff (102). As Adam exclaims, he is nothing less than "a pure and perfect crystal,"

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[50] Some of this shift to the smaller scale might be explained by what Adeline Tintner identifies as the source of the Palladian church metaphor—a "South German eighteenth-century table" with a "marquetry top" picturing a Palladian church. The table constituted one of the antique furnishings in Waddesdon Manor, the home of Ferdinand de Rothschild, which James visited several times and which contained a collection of works of art that bears some resemblance to the growing collection of Adam Verver at Fawns. See Tintner, *Museum World*, 209-16.

[51] Adam's diction here calls up the terms developed by E. M. Forster for his theory of characterization in the novel, which distinguishes between "flat" characters, which may be encapsulated in a single sentence, are never really developed by the author, and operate like "little luminous disks of a pre-arranged size, pushed hither and thither like counters across the void," and "round" characters, like Flaubert's Emma Bovary, who are "capable of surprising in a convincing way" and have "the incalculability of life" about them. Forster's terminology rests on a distinction between two and three dimensions, between the immediately legible flat surface and the invisible, unpredictable side of the round object. And although Adam's diction implies more that the Prince is accommodating—easier to get around—and less that he has proven capable of surprising his father-in-law with his unsuspected complexity, the entrance of the term into the novel seems apt, since *The Golden Bowl* is, after all, the work in which the Jamesian heroine achieves a new kind of Forsterian roundness, in the person of Maggie. See E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (New York: Harcourt, 1955), 68-69, 77-78.

with a surface over which "golden drops" flow evenly: "They caught in no interstice, they gathered in no concavity" (102).

James's extended metaphor for Adam's understanding of Prince Amerigo thus slides, over the course of several pages, away from the architectural and toward the sculptural. The figure emphasizes viewing and interacting with the Prince-as-Palladian-church in the round and attends to the detail of the Prince-as-church's round surface. Then James uses the specific quality of roundness to shift the comparison: no longer a church with "yielding lines and curved surfaces," the Prince becomes "a pure and perfect crystal" with an impervious surface of "uniform smoothness" exactly like that of the golden bowl (102). Like both the bowl and the statue metaphors, this description of the Prince exhibits the connection between being viewed in the round and possessing an impenetrable surface, the two qualities associated with all sculptural objects in the novel.

Indeed, we find these qualities in the novel's most celebrated metaphor, the ivory tower or pagoda that appears at the beginning of the novel's second volume, as Maggie contemplates the complexities of her domestic situation. Like the sculptural metaphors that come before it, the pagoda invites its viewer to experience it in the round and rebuffs any attempt to penetrate its secrets with an impenetrable surface. In many ways, the passage is a rewriting of the Palladian church metaphor, and it merits quoting in full:

> This situation had been occupying, for months and months, the very centre of the garden of her life, but it had reared itself there like some strange, tall tower of ivory, or perhaps rather some wonderful, beautiful, but outlandish pagoda, a structure plated with hard, bright porcelain, coloured and figured and adorned, at the overhanging eaves, with silver bells that tinkled, ever so charmingly, when stirred by chance airs. She had walked round and round it—that was what she felt; she had carried on her existence in the space left her for circulation, a space that sometimes seemed ample and sometimes narrow; looking up, all the while, at the fair structure that spread itself so

> amply and rose so high, but never quite making out, as yet, where she might have entered had she wished. She had not wished till now—such was the odd case; and what was doubtless equally odd, besides, was that, though her raised eyes seemed to distinguish places that must serve, from within, and especially far aloft, as apertures and outlooks, no door appeared to give access from her convenient garden level. The great decorated surface had remained consistently impenetrable and inscrutable. At present, however, to her considering mind, it was as if she had ceased merely to circle and to scan the elevation, ceased so vaguely, so quite helplessly to stare and wonder: she had caught herself distinctly in the act of pausing, then in that of lingering, and finally in that of stepping unprecedentedly near. The thing might have been, by the distance at which it kept her, a Mahometan mosque, with which no base heretic could take a liberty; there so hung about it the vision of one's putting off one's shoes to enter, and even, verily, of one's paying with one's life if found there as an interloper. She had not, certainly, arrived at the conception of paying with her life for anything she might do; but it was nevertheless quite as if she had sounded with a tap one or two of the rare porcelain plates. She had knocked, in short—though she could scarce have said for admission or for what; she had applied her hand to a cool, smooth spot, and had waited to see what would happen. Something *had* happened; it was as if a sound, at her touch, after a little, had come back to her from within; a sound sufficiently suggesting that her approach had been noted. (299-300)

Here James presents a pagoda as the figure for the complicated domestic situation that Maggie now faces, but he deploys the metaphor in a highly peculiar way. To begin with, he offers what several critics have interpreted as multiple vehicles: we have here a "tower of ivory," a "pagoda," and a "Mahometan mosque."[52] As several critics have shown, all of these possibilities can be traced to historical structures with which James would have been familiar.[53] Yet as I believe my reading of the Palladian church metaphor has shown, James's

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[52] See, for example, Rose, "Spatial Form," 105, 112.

[53] Amy Ling suggests that the source for the metaphor might be found in an 1887-88 article by C. F. Gordon Cummings in *The English Illustrated Magazine*—where James had been published—called "Pagodas, Aurioles, and Umbrellas," which contains many details coincident with those in the passage. Tintner suggests several additional sources, including "the pagoda and mosque built […] in the Royal Gardens and Kew for the Princess Augusta around 1760," a pagoda at Alton Towers, an estate in Staffordshire that James might have visited, and two Chinese porcelain pagodas, which James might well have read about. See Amy Ling, "The Pagoda Image in Henry James's The Golden Bowl," *American Literature* 46.3 (1974): 386, and Tinter, *Museum World*, 171-72.

style aims less to give us three distinct metaphors than to offer what is functionally a single comparison, which James twists and turns to examine from different angles. The effect is something like that of a renovated metaphysical conceit, and with these shifts in emphasis in the vehicle, the strategy results in a particularly opaque figure.

Of course, "situation" is an equally opaque tenor. It describes Maggie's marriage to Prince Amerigo, Adam's marriage to Charlotte, the Prince and Charlotte's past and present affairs, Adam and Maggie's incest, and all of the ways in which each of these relationships licenses, or accommodates, or covers, the transgressions of the others—yet at the same time, the word refuses to name any of these subjects.[54] This refusal to name constitutes a refusal both to ground the metaphor in any specific referent from the world of the novel and to admit that any of these matters are real.[55] "Situation," in other words, operates in the same way as those characteristic Jamesian exclamations—like Maggie's assertion near the end of the novel that Charlotte is "too splendid" —which are bottomless in their meaning (often having equally applicable contradictory connotations, none of which is positively the best one) and also, collectively, constituitive of the impenetrable surface texture of the late style (567). (The word encapsulates a particular difficulty with the late novels that Yeazell diagnoses: writing about them "demands that we implicitly summarize what is said and draw inferences from what, in late James at least, so often is not," but this critical act results in a "translation" that risks "doing violence to what is most idiosyncratic and exciting" about these novels and "making their peculiarly fluid and unsettling reality something far more

[54] Most critics are, I think, too quick to say that the pagoda has a solid referent and too quick to identify it. See, for instance, Ling, "Pagoda Image," 387, and Laurence Bedwell Holland, *The Expense of Vision: Essays on the Craft of Henry James* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964), 337. With my reading, I want to let the vehicle rest for a moment, to allow the opacity, difficulty, and sheer expansiveness of James's metaphors to affect not just our reading experience of the novel but also our understanding of it.

stable and conventional."[56]) Both tenor and vehicle thus forestall easy discussion, impressing the reader with their individual opacity in a metaphor that is, in fact, all about opacity.

For the single most apparent feature of the pagoda here is its impenetrable surface. James underscores for the reader Maggie's frustrated attempts to apprehend the structure and find any opening at all. Though the question here is more explicitly one of entrance than was true of the Palladian church metaphor, this structure raises the possibility only to deny it. As Maggie looks, she finds that "no door appear[s] to give access" and "never quite mak[es] out, as yet, where she might have entered had she wished." Thus at the same time that the pagoda might appear to be a more narrowly architectural figure,[57] James reasserts his interest in its sculptural features again and again. (Moreover, as Adeline Tintner has suggested, the source for James's pagoda metaphor might very well be a smaller decorative pagoda, used for interior decoration in places like "Mrs. Norman Grosvenor's drawing room at Moor Park," which James visited.[58]) In fact, the pagoda seems to possess a kind of surface armor: "plated with hard, bright porcelain, coloured and figured," it offers a "cool, smooth" exterior to Maggie without divulging any of its secrets. Like the opaque metaphors of the novel itself, the pagoda's "great decorated surface" remains "consistently impenetrable and inscrutable." Maggie's only recourse is to attempt to understand the pagoda exactly as James's characters grapple with the golden bowl—by circling it, viewing it in the round, touching it, and constantly attempting to find new angles of purchase.

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[55] For a related point, see Cameron, *Thinking in Henry James*, 84.
[56] Yeazell, *Language and Knowledge*, 2. For an extended, highly compelling reading of *The Golden Bowl* in terms of a kind of particularly Jamesian "communication that takes a certain satisfaction in refusing to communicate," see Goble, *Beautiful Circuits*, 29-84, especially 30-44 (see introduction, n. 24).
[57] For representative references to the pagoda as architecture, see Rose, "Spatial Form," 105; Holland, *Expense of Vision*, 336; and Edwin T. Bowden, *The Themes of Henry James: A System of Observation through the Visual Arts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1956), 107.

This viewing in the round strongly echoes that of the metaphor of the Palladian church. Like her father, with his considerations of "the way round" and the circulation of the air and the public around the "grand architectural front," Maggie also must discover how to navigate the presence of the pagoda. She opts "to circle and to scan the elevation," to "tap one or two of the rare porcelain plates," and to "appl[y] her hand to a cool, smooth spot." Like the sculptures analyzed by Potts, in short, the pagoda has prompted a "directly physical and bodily engaged response" from Maggie.[59] In all "the physical, sensual and affective dimensions of the encounter," Maggie attempts to gain a greater understanding of the pagoda, and the sculptural object simultaneously rebuffs these attempts, preventing Maggie from interacting with it on her own terms.[60] Having "reared itself" up in front of her, the pagoda takes dominion in much the same way as the golden bowl, organizing the space around it and placing Maggie on the defensive: "She had walked round and round it—that was what she felt; she had carried on her existence in the space left her for circulation, a space that sometimes seemed ample and sometimes narrow." Maggie's circulation here "in the space left her" attests to the extent that the pagoda has come to dominate her field of vision, and it echoes her narrow existence in an earlier metaphor, when her father's sculptural vision transforms her into an image "passing […] in worn relief round and round a precious vase" (139).[61] Moreover, Maggie's "walk[ing] round and round" the pagoda, with

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[58] Tintner, *Museum World*, 172.
[59] Potts, *Sculptural Imagination*, ix. And as Jonathan Freedman has noted, the metaphor actually "has Maggie give up on seeing before she is able to approach the pagoda" so that this juncture between her hand and the pagoda's surface is "mediated by the sense of touch between things in the world and the bodily being that touches them, one that takes us outside the familiar Jamesian dialectic of consciousness and vision into a different relation between being and world." See Freedman, "Hands, Objects and Love," 127.
[60] Potts, *Sculptural Imagination*, 4.
[61] This kind of trapped pacing also foreshadows the movement and tension of the later figure in which Maggie "walk[s] round" a cage, gilt like the golden bowl, which contains Charlotte in "eternal unrest" (465-66). For Theo Davis, in fact, all of these are instances of the novel's interest in the circle as an abstract form. See Theo

her attempts to assess its surface from different angles, also echoes James's constant elaboration of the metaphor, including the shifts in vehicle that I have already discussed. These apparently arbitrary shifts represent, for Yeazell, "a world in which connections are not easily made," so that as Maggie "circles around the tower, so she circles around the metaphor itself—tentatively exploring each of its implications in turn, only to shrink back in fear when that exploration leads her in directions more dangerous than she is yet prepared to move."[62] Viewing in the round, in other words, is perhaps the only way for Maggie to grapple with—or for James to evoke—such a difficult object.

A "Way Round" the Novel: Narrative Temporality and Construction

Though James stops short of attributing some sentience or animation to the pagoda that has "reared itself" and occupied the garden, it seems somehow insurgent, or insubordinate, as though it could not possibly belong in the subservient state proper to a sculptural object or a metaphorical vehicle, even though that is precisely its function. In fact, the pagoda's stubborn domination of the garden proves so inescapable that critics have referred to a "pagoda scene" in *The Golden Bowl*, as though Maggie's "walk[ing] round and round" the pagoda were one of the events in the novel's diegesis.[63] This scholarly slip of the tongue seem symptomatic of the novel's strangest effect—the degree to which it is constituted by its metaphors. The pagoda conceit is "an odd form of catachresis—the arbitrary, performative representation of something for which no literal representation

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Davis, "'Out of the Medium in Which Books Breathe': The Contours of Formalism and 'The Golden Bowl,'" *NOVEL* 34.3 (Summer 2001): 419-20.
[62] Yeazell, *Language and Knowledge*, 46, 48.

exists," but it nevertheless seems highly physical, insistently present.[64] This status means that, as Bill Brown writes of another metaphor, "it isn't easy to determine whether the image should be read, on the one hand, as a figure for Maggie's thinking or, on the other, as that thinking's own figure."[65] In other words, if, as I have already argued, the metaphors of *The Golden Bowl* are artificial, inadequate as description or as reality effect, then we might now attribute this stiffness to their uncomfortable position, their suspension "between diegesis and simile" in a novel characterized by "the blurring of registers," the interpenetration of the literal and the figurative.[66] The images and metaphors of *The Golden Bowl* only *seem* to describe and explain the substance of its fabula: "James embarks upon images as if they will illustrate something in the primary story, but he gradually edges away from the subject and begins to examine his metaphors and similes themselves, and even to imagine seeing those illustrative images rather than what they illustrate."[67] In sum, then, these metaphors assert their own dominion over the image-world of the novel, and the pagoda functions less to illuminate Maggie's "situation" than to create something else to apprehend—a difficult sculptural object to be assessed in three dimensions.

But despite the fact that the pagoda conceit rears itself up in front of the reader just as the pagoda rears up in front of Maggie, demanding our attention and blocking out all else—including the novel's diegesis—its effect is not static. The pagoda, like the novel's other sculptural objects, demands to be viewed in the round, and the circling in which Maggie engages presents an image for processing over time. Viewing in the round therefore

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[63] See, for example, T. J. Lustig, *Henry James and the Ghostly* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 220.
[64] J. Hillis Miller, *Literature as Conduct*, 263.
[65] Brown, *A Sense of Things*, 165. For more on the physicality of thought, see also 160-71.
[66] Ohi, *Queerness of Style*, 53.
[67] Theo Davis, "Out of the Medium," 414.

also describes a particular kind of temporality. Indeed, as Rosalind Krauss has written so eloquently, "the history of modern sculpture is incomplete without discussion of the temporal consequences of a particular arrangement of form," for "sculpture is a medium peculiarly located at the juncture between stillness and motion, time arrested and time passing. From this tension, which defines the very condition of sculpture, comes its enormous expressive power."[68] Potts expands this notion to argue for an "insistently temporal dimension of viewing sculpture," since "taking in a sculpture is manifestly not just a matter of looking and scanning but also, as Serra emphasised, of taking time to walk round it too."[69] Though Maggie's pagoda is no *Snake* or *Tilted Arc*, it nevertheless activates, with its monumental intrusion into the garden, a temporality not unlike that of Richard Serra's work, which makes the question of viewing sculpture into precisely what the title of Serra's grouping at the Guggenheim in Bilbao says it is: *A Matter of Time*.

Continuing further with Krauss and Potts's notions, we might even go so far as to say that viewing in the round describes a narrative strategy in which we can locate an analogy for the novel's scenic construction. To begin this consideration of this narration in the round, we can simply expand our reading of the pagoda metaphor to the pages around it. The long passage which I have already quoted is followed by an interjection from the narrator, who notes that the image "may represent our young woman's consciousness of a recent change in her life" (300). As Dorrit Cohn has argued, the sentence appears to suggest that "the narrator seems to agree both with Maggie's tendency to think imagistically and with the specific image she has chosen," but in short order, the narrator offers several strikingly

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[68] Rosalind E. Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (New York: Viking, 1977), 4-5.
[69] Potts, *Sculptural Imagination*, 9.

"unusual interventions […] in certain turns of phrase in which he adopts a prescient attitude toward his material that is clearly at odds with Maggie's role as the central consciousness of volume 2 as a whole and especially with her focalizing role in the chapters with which we are concerned."[70] These turns of phrase include "She was to remember afterwards," "she was to preserve, as I say, the memory," and "Such things, as I say, were to come back to her"—all interjections in a peculiar verb tense (311-12). Cohn identifies the form as "future in the past," or what we might "call analeptic prolepsis," in which "the narrator looks forward to a future moment when the experience described will have come to lie in the past for the remembering consciousness."[71] That is, these interjections emphasize the fact that the entirety of the opening of the second volume—including the pagoda metaphor—is "experienced from the temporal perspective of a later moment" so that, as Cohn argues persuasively, we have chapters "built on a double temporal scheme," with James giving us "by turns the retrospective perspective of the remembering Maggie and the focalized perspective of the experiencing Maggie."[72] We see "the immediacy of Maggie's experience," which she apprehends in a "precognitive" stage "without drawing definitive conclusions," as well as the later "moment of full comprehension" and cognition.[73] These two moments do not occur sequentially, exactly, but in a curious, mutually imbricated fashion, so that we see Maggie in both moments almost at once.

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[70] Dorrit Cohn, "'First Shock of Complete Perception': The Opening Episode of *The Golden Bowl*, Volume 2," *The Henry James Review* 22.1 (Winter 2001): 5.
[71] Cohn, 5, 7. Leo Bersani also comments at length on this phenomenon noting that in James's work, "taking place is projected […] toward a future in which it is absorbed into a character's retrospective reflection on it." See Leo Bersani and Adam Phillips, *Intimacies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 20-21, 23.
[72] Cohn, 6-7.
[73] Ibid.

Cohn's analysis of the opening of the novel's second volume thus offers a narratological description for what I have called narration in the round. That is, James's narrator presents Maggie as if she were always somehow circling the pagoda. She moves around her object—whether pagoda or bowl, or the method by which she will confront her husband, or the steps she will take to ensure that her father remains ignorant of his wife's betrayal. And as she circulates, considering and reconsidering, she retraces her own steps so that her vantage point at any one moment embodies both that of "the remembering Maggie" and that of "the experiencing Maggie." Viewing in the round offers James a means of presenting these perspectives in the narrative jointly, so that we are always impressed simultaneously with Maggie's naiveté and her knowledge, her frustrated helplessness and her calculated, even cruel machinations. This ethical valence of viewing in the round has important implications for the novel (and I shall examine it in my next section), but I want now to take Cohn's insights one step further in my discussion of the narrative construction of *The Golden Bowl*.

Like all of the novels of the New York Edition, *The Golden Bowl* follows a preface by James, and I want to contend that the "double temporal scheme" activated by viewing in the round is thematized in the preface to *The Golden Bowl*, which takes revision as its central topic. The preface begins, unsurprisingly, with James's reflections upon the importance of perspective. He opens with a reassertion of confidence in his use of focalizing characters: "among many matters thrown into relief by a refreshed acquaintance with *The Golden Bowl* […] is the still marked inveteracy of a certain indirect and oblique view of [the] presented action" (xli). He remains pleased that he has hewn closely to his favorite method, ensuring that "the whole thing remains subject to the register, ever so closely kept, of the

consciousness of but two of the characters," the Prince in the first volume and Maggie in the second (xlii). (Here James does overstate the case to some extent, since his narrator does allow glimpses through the perspectives of other characters, like Adam Verver and Fanny Assingham.) For James, then, the selection of point of view constitutes the most important compositional decision for any novel, and he cannot help but remark upon his own in the course of writing the preface. The viewpoint at issue is not merely that of "refreshed acquaintance" with this particular novel but also that of this preface's position in the production of the New York Edition—at the end of years of revision and preface-writing.

Indeed, for James, the preface to *The Golden Bowl* provides the opportunity to reflect at length upon the experience of reviewing all of his oeuvre, and its language is saturated with words of repetition—not only "reflect," "review," and "repeat," but also "re-perusal" (xlviii), "re-representation" (xlix), "re-appropriation" (l), "reappearance" (l), "renewal" (liv), "re-issue" (liv), "reviving and reacting" (lvi), "re-dreaming" (lviii), and "reconstituted" (lxi), among others. The proliferation of hyphens attracts our eyes to the repetition of the syllable "re," which itself constitutes a kind of refrain for the preface, and for James the work of revision necessarily possesses a highly visual component. As he writes, with uncharacteristic simplicity, "to revise is to see, or to look over, again—which means in the case of a written thing neither more nor less than to re-read it" (lii). To reread, to revise, to re-see—these are the kinds of looking compatible with the practice of viewing in the round. An encounter with a sculpture in the round "dissipates the fixed image we might have of it because of the different aspects it presents from different angles," as Potts notes, and when we come close to scrutinize a sculpture with the same attention that James devotes to revising the New York Edition, "our sense of the work as a whole shape literally gets displaced by the

spectacle of continually shifting partial aspects it presents."[74] Though Adam Verver might profess to uphold his "aesthetic principle," "the idea […] plastic beauty, of the thing visibly perfect in its kind" (146), then, Potts's insistence on the partiality of our view, as well as James's revision process, suggests that no sculpture—or novel—of plastic beauty could ever be seen as "visibly perfect" all at once.

And just as James evokes viewing in the round through an emphasis on what he sees, he also seems, at other moments in the preface, to evoke this mode of viewing through hints of the "vividly embodied physical and perceptual responses activated by viewing three-dimensional work."[75] For him, rereading becomes an act of retreading old ground, like Maggie's examination of the pagoda by "walk[ing] round and round" it along the same path: "the march of my present attention coincides sufficiently with the march of my original expression" (xlix). His prior authorial self leaves tracks for him to follow: "Into his very footprints the responsive, the imaginative steps of the docile reader that I consentingly become for him all comfortably sink" (xlix). Even James's syntax here underscores his sentiment, with his authorial footprints leading the way and his readerly steps obligingly sinking into them. Rereading, he relives the process of its original composition: "The 'old' matter is there, re-accepted, re-tasted, exquisitely re-assimilated and re-enjoyed" (liii). With diction that so strongly emphasizes sensual, even gustatory, experience, James's language escapes the confines of mere repetition to suggest revived visceral experience so that he becomes, like Maggie, both the remembering James and the experiencing James. From this vantage point, he may "retrace the whole growth of [his] 'taste,'" to explore "the how and

[74] Potts, *Sculptural Imagination*, 8.
[75] Ibid., 5.

the whence and the why these intenser lights of experience come into being and insist on shining" (liii). Thus revision allows James not only to see his work again but also, in the process of re-reading it, to recall simultaneously the experience of writing it and the growth that has occurred since then. The task of revision concretizes, in other words, the unconventional temporality that operates at the beginning of the second volume, and James's thematization of this temporality draws our attention finally to the odd temporality of the preface itself, which is situated both before and after the novel, before *The Golden Bowl* as it appears in the New York Edition (and all other editions that reprint its text) and after the time of its composition and James's revision of all of his work.

James's preface thus suggests that the narrative strategy of viewing in the round, with the attendant odd "double temporal scheme" that Cohn identifies, may prove typical of more than the beginning of the second volume. Indeed, I want to claim that this kind of temporality informs the entirety of the novel's construction. James's design for *The Golden Bowl* can be divided, as Miller suggests, into two primary "modes of representation, the scenic and the perspectival."[76] The scenic mode offers us "a series of face-to-face encounters, […] intense, slow-motion tête-à-têtes of two of the characters at a time, the Prince with Fanny, Fanny with her husband or with Maggie, Maggie with her father, the Prince with Charlotte, Maggie with the Prince, Charlotte with Maggie, and so on" presented to the reader in "more or less uninterpreted dialogue," with minimal comment from the narrator.[77] By sharp contrast, the perspectival mode creates episodes like the opening of Book 2, with Maggie's slow cogitation and the pagoda metaphor: this kind of representation

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[76] J. Hillis Miller, *Literature as Conduct*, 262.
[77] Ibid., 261-62.

appears largely in free indirect discourse.[78] It is worth noting that neither of these modes of representation is, as I have hinted, characterized by what we might consider to be an investment in the stock events of the genre: neither Maggie's marriage to Prince Amerigo nor her father's to Charlotte occurs onstage, and the existence of the Principino is acknowledged almost as an aside. Kevin Ohi summarizes this disinterest in his analysis of the novel's "reticence," which leaves these events "unnarrated," or "skipped over" and then "described, or sometimes only referred to, in retrospect."[79] In *The Golden Bowl*, "events do not occur; occurrences are reflected upon, which creates an effect of temporal delay, as if happening lagged behind itself in time."[80] James himself acknowledges this oddity partway through the novel, when, after setting the scene for Mrs. Rance's aggressive pursuit of Adam Verver with page upon page of backstory, his narrator finally voices his arrival "at Fawns, with the billiard-room and the Sunday morning, on the occasion round which we have perhaps drawn our circle too wide" (111). In neither its scenic nor its perspectival mode, then, does *The Golden Bowl* demonstrates an interest in an overall scheme dotted with easily recognizable milestone events; instead of punctuation, James offers us a narrative rhythm built on revision, on looping back around to view something again.

Both of the representative modes that Miller identifies depend on such revision and repetition. As I have already suggested, in the perspectival mode, this revision emerges not only in relation to the practice of viewing in the round encouraged by the sculptural objects that populate the characters' ruminations, but also in relation to the double temporal

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[78] Ibid., 262.
[79] Ohi, *Queerness of Style*, 37-38. For Bersani, this strategy constitutes almost a wholesale elimination of event: it is the method "by which James empties his stories of any actual, or actualized content." See Bersani and Phillips, *Intimacies*, 20.
[80] Ohi, *Queerness of Style*, 38.

construction of these episodes. The scenic mode offers a different kind of revision, which we can locate in what Miller calls its "repetitive stichomythias."[81] These dialogues, composed mostly of single lines alternating between two characters, crop up throughout James's oeuvre and with greater frequency in his late work, but they are more typical of *The Golden Bowl* than of any other novel, since *The Golden Bowl* is, as Yeazell remarks, "the novel in which his dialogue is at its most complex and seemingly perverse."[82] In fact, in *The Golden Bowl*, these dialogues are also more repetitive than they are elsewhere. Here, the circularity of the Jamesian dialogue reaches its apotheosis in the conversations of the Assinghams, which have often been remarked for their absurdity.

Some of this conversational comedy (or irritation) arises solely from the risible character of Fanny Assingham, who is "the classic Jamesian character carried to a farcical extreme."[83] James indicates the extremity of her desire to review every person and possibility aloud, "her obsessive and seemingly endless analysis of character and motive," with additional turns of phrase that emphasize viewing in the round: confronting "a situation with such different sides" (52), Fanny must turn it over in extraordinary detail, and as she thinks aloud, "she turn[s] about the room" (57), continuing "to circulate" (62).[84] Her tendency to think in circles is only exacerbated by her husband's presence. As Yeazell notes, Bob Assingham's "questions repeatedly take up points which his wife has left unexplained, forcing her to elaborate still further—or else of course simply to give up, which she steadfastly refuses to do. Demanding definitions of words like 'romance' and 'facts,' he thus

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[81] J. Hillis Miller, *Literature as Conduct*, 230.
[82] Yeazell, *Language and Knowledge*, 87, and for extended analysis of the perversity and absurdity of dialogue in *The Golden Bowl*, see also 76-99.
[83] Ibid., 88.
[84] Ibid.

prompts her to respond with ever more convoluted arguments."[85] Their interactions offer variations on a single theme—the question of who knows what about whom and how, in consequence, someone (usually Maggie) will act, and whether, as a result, Fanny will really be at all culpable for having caused the Verver family mess in the first place. In this way, we might say that all of the Assinghams' conversations are repetitions, opportunities for Fanny to revisit and review, in frustratingly round fashion, her own supposed guilt.

The Assinghams' conversations are also, moreover, repetitive in the literal sense at which I have hinted: Fanny and Bob often echo each other. In the first of the domestic exchanges at Cadogan Place reported by the narrator, Fanny explains that, in the early stages of the relationship between Prince Amerigo and Charlotte, before his marriage to Maggie, Charlotte might well have become his lover:

> "She might have been anything she liked—except his wife."
> "But she wasn't," said the Colonel very smokingly.
> "She wasn't," Mrs. Assingham echoed. (54)

Here Fanny's echo of her husband's statement serves as a confirmation, a response to a question posed without an interrogative inflection. At other times the echo occurs in the opposite direction, with the Colonel echoing his wife's previous statement in a question in which he asks for clarification or expansion, as he does when Fanny tells him later in the novel that Maggie's will act for the benefit of her father, not her son:

> "Oh, bother her child! […] To live, you poor dear, for her father […] She'll have to save *him*."
> "To 'save' him——?"
> "To keep her father from her own knowledge." (283; emphasis original)

[85] Ibid., 89.

Both of these echoes involve some slight alteration of the preceding phrase, but very occasionally, the conversations that involve Fanny will include an instance of exact repetition, like that which we find when Fanny explains that Charlotte's marriage to Adam Verver has allowed her to remain close to Prince Amerigo:

> "[Her marriage has] kept her within his reach, as she could never have remained either as a single woman or as the wife of a different man."
> "Kept her, on that sweet construction, to be his mistress?"
> "Kept her, on that sweet construction, to be his mistress." (394)

All of these cases of repetition seem to involve a relatively simple distinction in tone, between the uncertainty of a question and the declaration of a sure statement. But the scarcity of such proclamations in *The Golden Bowl*—with all of its circling around what exactly its characters know about each other—means that they may operate with greater force in this linguistic universe. They even seem, at times, to bring the very facts that they convey into being—so that Amerigo hardly seems to have managed his mistress on the basis of her marriage to his father-in-law until Fanny declares him to have done so. As Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan notes, this kind of "constructive repetition emphasizes difference."[86]

An extreme example of this phenomenon emerges in the final extended conversation between Fanny and Maggie in the novel, which contains an extended passage of exact repetition, that, as usual, concerns the varying degrees of knowledge belonging to the characters. Maggie begins by asking Fanny whether she knows how far Amerigo and Charlotte's relationship has proceeded:

> [Maggie:] "Then do you yourself know?"
> [Fanny:] "How much——?"
> [Maggie:] "How much."
> [Fanny:] "How far——?"

[86] Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, "The Paradoxical Status of Repetition," in *Poetics Today* 1.4 (Summer 1980): 153.

> [Maggie:] "How far." (542)

As their conversation proceeds, this repetition becomes not only a question of knowledge but also a matter of manipulation:

> [Fanny:] "And she doesn't know anything?"
> "If she did," Maggie answered, "Amerigo would."
> "And that's just it—that he doesn't?"
> "That's just it," said the Princess profoundly.
> On which Mrs. Assingham reflected. "Then how is Charlotte so held?"
> "Just *by* that."
> "By her ignorance?"
> "By her ignorance."
> Fanny wondered. "A torment——?"
> "A torment," said Maggie with tears in her eyes.
> Her companion a moment watched them. "But the Prince then——?"
> "How is *he* held?" Maggie asked.
> "How is *he* held?"
> "Oh, I can't tell you that!" And the Princess again broke off. (543; emphasis original)

As J. Hillis Miller argues in his compelling analysis of this conversation, James's overwhelming repetition "isolates the words for the reader's inspection, as though they were free for a moment from any context or referential vector and allowed to function with a naked verbal force"; this powerful isolation gives these phrases "a performative as opposed to constative function."[87] Thus at the same time that each phrase appears to echo, almost exactly, the one that precedes it, the very act of repetition in the rarefied linguistic air of *The Golden Bowl* means that no repeated phrase can enter the same world that its predecessor did. That is, just like each circuit that Maggie makes around the pagoda, or each re-perusal of a novel that James undertakes in his compilation of the New York Edition, each phrase here revises the view of the situation substantially—even as it seems to offer, with its repeated language, an identical viewpoint. Like the sustained viewing of sculpture in the round, this

repetition does not give "a solid grounding" to the characters'—or our—understanding, but instead activates "changing sensations of surface and texture and depth that give us a quite different, more indeterminate sense."[88] Repetition offers circularity, then, but it instantiates a new state of affairs and thereby alters the course of the narrative.

Ethics in the Round

If we take a broader view of *The Golden Bowl*, we might also say that the viewing of sculpture offers a potent analogy for the treatment of ethics across the arc of its entire narrative. As I have already noted, Potts's descriptions of viewing sculpture in the round occasionally seem to have been written about *The Golden Bowl*, and this particularly the case with his explanation of the ways in which the viewing of sculpture is not, because of its materiality, "somehow more stably anchored" than the viewing of painting.[89] As Potts argues, sculpture makes us "more aware of instabilities inherent in our perceptual encounter," and our kinaesthetic viewing over time means that "our sense of the work as a whole is partly defined through the ever changing and variously focused partial views we have of it, and can never entirely be condensed in a single stable image."[90] These "ever changing and variously focused partial views" not only accurately describe the kind of sense that Maggie gains as she moves around the pagoda, but also the characters' "epistemological drama" and the terms of their knowledge.[91] As Amerigo tells Maggie near the beginning of the novel, "You see too much—that's what may sometimes make you difficulties. When you

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[87] J. Hillis Miller, *Literature as Conduct*, 264.
[88] Potts, *Sculptural Imagination*, 9.
[89] Ibid., 8.

don't, at least, […] see too little" (9). The rest of *The Golden Bowl*, of course, bears his warning out and manifests the extraordinary degree to which these characters will only ever possess a fleeting sense of the entirety of their difficulties.

Much of the partiality of their view arises from the fact that, as Miller phrases it, "the ethical life, for James, is made up of solitary confrontations of one person with another person," in the stichomythic conversations which I have already examined in brief.[92] These two-person encounters can hardly do justice to the complexity of an ethics that should accommodate the many intersecting relationships among the characters, which Fanny Assingham classifies as inescapable in her first conversation with her husband: "Our relation, all round, exists—it's a reality, and a very good one; we're mixed up, so to speak, and it's too late to change it. We must live *in* it and with it" (65; emphasis original). Fanny's colloquial use of "all round" nudges the characters' relations to each other toward materiality, as though it were something like a house, or Maggie's pagoda, a "reality" that they must live "in" and "with." This relation of people who have been "mixed up" also suggests the extent to which *The Golden Bowl*, as so many critics have noted, highly incestuous.[93] Indeed, the novel's attribution of multiple familial roles to the same character—with Charlotte in relation to Maggie, for example, as friend, stepmother, and mistress of Maggie's husband—almost seems like a economy of design. After all, as James writes in the preface to the New York Edition of *Roderick Hudson*, "Really, universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within

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[90] Ibid., 9.
[91] Brooks, *Realist Vision*, 181.
[92] J. Hillis Miller, *Literature as Conduct*, 272.
[93] For an excellent summary, see Ohi, *Queerness of Style*, 33.

which they shall happily *appear* to do so."[94] Perhaps the best way to draw the circle around relations that stop nowhere, in other words, is to make them incestuous, so that they always lead to other persons and relations within the same, very small circle.

Later in the novel, at the end of the first volume, Fanny offers another formulation of the same idea when she articulates the difficulty of the characters' ethical dilemma. Their problem, she tells the Colonel, is "the vicious circle": "It's their mutual consideration, all round, that has made it the bottomless gulf; and they're really so embroiled but because, in their way, they've been so improbably *good*" (289; emphasis original). This image, of the characters "embroiled" in a "bottomless gulf" of their own making, trapped in "the vicious circle" created by "their mutual consideration, all round," seems to foreshadow the image of Maggie circling the pagoda in her constant attempts to understand her "situation," which comes after the Assinghams' conversation, at the beginning of the next volume. But the circle is vicious not only because the characters remain trapped in it, but also because, as Miller contends, "it generates its own endless and fruitless self-compounding circulation," as the characters continue "their mutual consideration," their "good" behavior to one another that both is and isn't good in any conventional sense of the term.[95] Miller expresses the problem eloquently, writing that Fanny's use of the term "vicious circle" "expresses the way each one-on-one relation forms a separate 'case' incommensurate with all the others" so that "my fulfillment of my obligations to one person, in a given case, causes me to neglect and betray my obligations to all the others."[96] The partial view, in other words, helps to contribute to the circle and to enlarge it: the circle "leads those caught into it to betray one

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[94] Henry James, *Literary Criticism: French Writers, Other European Writers, The Prefaces to the New York Edition* (New York: Library of America, 1984), 1041 (emphasis original).

another, to perjure their oaths of fidelity, to act viciously […] through their efforts to fulfill their equally exigent obligations to the others in the circle" so that, paradoxically, "the effort to act justly causes the others to act viciously."[97] All of these efforts ensure that the given configuration of the circle at any one moment is in flux, much like the viewer's "visual and kinaesthetic engagement" with a sculpture, which "is continually changing and shifting register."[98] In *The Golden Bowl*, then, the establishment of a stable ethics in the round proves practically impossible.

The ending of the novel seems to manifest exactly this conclusion. Here, Maggie stresses the fact that Charlotte is splendid in her discussion with her husband:

> "That's our help, you see," she added—to point further her moral.
> It kept him before her therefore, taking in—or trying to—what she so wonderfully gave. He tried, too clearly, to please her—to meet her in her own way; but with the result only that, close to her, her face kept before him, his hands holding her shoulders, his whole act enclosing her, he presently echoed: "'See'? I see nothing but *you*." And the truth of it had, with this force, after a moment, so strangely lighted his eyes that, as for pity and dread of them, she buried her own in his breast. (567; emphasis original)

These final lines prevent any easy delineation of James's moral, since it seems equally possible that Maggie benevolently extends her forgiveness for her husband's adultery and that—in a reading that draws on the possibility that "wonderfully" ought here to be read as evoking awe and terror—she has simply completed the last of her machinations. Amerigo might see only Maggie because he attempts to pledge his fidelity, or because he understands the extent of her calculated behavior, her status as the prime manipulator. In either case, this ending echoes, as Miller reminds us, the conclusion of James's disquieting early story, "The

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[95] J. Hillis Miller, *Literature as Conduct*, 253.
[96] Ibid., 252-53.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Potts, *Sculptural Imagination*, 1.

Last of the Valerii," in which a wife buries the statue with which her husband has become obsessed in order to regain his love. With the marble mistress buried, Count Valerio "returns all affection to his wife in a long look into her eyes and in an act of obeisance that repeats his earlier gesture of bowing before the statue."[99] In *The Golden Bowl*, with Charlotte shipped off to a figurative burial in America, the Prince's difficult "taking in" what his wife presents—and what she *represents* as well—suggests an expanded treatment of the challenges of viewing another person, all round. Something like a sculpture that cannot be apprehended in its entirety, Maggie here is "a little strange and elusive as well as being insistently present."[100] Indeed, Maggie's final action in *The Golden Bowl* evokes a kind of sculptural experience. Her burying of her eyes in Amerigo's breast gives the reader, here at the end, a last moment entirely dependent upon gesture and posture.[101] Sight and touch coexist in the space of James's final sentence, and the characters' bodily connection places them into something like a mutually dependent sculptural pose. Like Maggie's, our view here at the end remains partial, and James leaves us, wonderfully, with only an "elusive and provisional sense of wholeness,"[102] as he gives us a novel concluded in the round.

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[99] J. Hillis Miller, *Versions of Pygmalion*, 219.
[100] Potts, *Sculptural Imagination*, 1.
[101] Jonathan Freedman has also read this final moment of *The Golden Bowl* in terms of touch—arguing that the final embrace results in "the hypostatization of vision" as "a newly restored relationship opens out into the space of sheer potentiality"—but his interpretation possesses a much more positive undertone than I would employ. Even so, I would echo his assertion that James's emphasis on touch here at the end allows *The Golden Bowl* to move beyond its "own form of representation." See Freedman, "Hands, Objects and Love," 140-41.
[102] Potts, *Sculptural Imagination*, 13.

CHAPTER 2
"The form on which form is based": The Aesthetics of Nudity and Denuding in the Work of Mina Loy and Constantin Brancusi

In the final years of the nineteenth century, Mina Loy enrolled at the St. John's Wood School in London. Undeterred by the Evangelical misgivings of her mother, Mina planned to study art, and her parents had finally permitted her enrollment at the "Wood," as it was called, since it possessed a reputation as a more respectable establishment than the Slade School.[1] They were anxious not to compromise their daughter's marriage potential: as Virginia Woolf—born the same year as Loy—writes in *Three Guineas*, women were permitted only those artistic pursuits which would not diminish their marriageability: "It was with a view to marriage that she tinkled on the piano, but was not allowed to join an orchestra; sketched innocent domestic scenes, but was not allowed to study from the nude; read this book, but was not allowed to read that."[2] Loy's mother, Julia, soon found her worst fears confirmed when Mina brought home an example of her work, which had begun to attract the praise of her teachers and the occasional visiting artist from the Royal Academy: faced suddenly with Mina's drawing of "a naked Andromeda lashed to rock," Julia called her teenaged daughter a "vicious slut" and "ripped up the drawing."[3] Julia's objections rested on

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[1] See Carolyn Burke, *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1996), 35-39, for the full set of reasons that led Loy's parents to decide on the Wood, which centered not only on location, prestige, quality instruction, and connectedness to the Royal Academy, but also on its differentiation from schools that were insufficiently respectable, or that would imply a lower class status (either because they were design schools or because the drew primarily on the working class for their student populations). The calculus is quite complex.

[2] Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas*, ed. Jane Marcus (New York: Harcourt, 2006), 48.

[3] Carolyn Burke, *Becoming Modern*, 37-38, 42. For more on Loy's relationship with her mother, especially as it informs her unpublished autobiographies *The Child and the Parent* and *Islands in the Air*, which reflect upon Loy's

her conviction that the drawing attested to her daughter's "knowledge that sex existed," which was morally condemnable and socially indecent—notwithstanding the fact that Andromeda was frequently painted by Victorian artists.[4] In her fit of iconoclasm, Julia sought to destroy both the brazen display of nude female flesh and the sign of Mina's sexual knowledge.

Little wonder, then, that fifteen years later, in her best-known poem, *Songs to Joannes*, Mina Loy should react by brandishing this knowledge. Chronicling the encounters of two lovers modeled on herself and the Futurist writer Giovanni Papini, Loy writes explicitly about sex. Her lovers shed "petty pruderies / From slit eyes" and "sidle up /To Nature / — — — that irate pornographist," and she explores all the dimensions of their relationship, from trickling bodily fluids to egos colliding "in seismic orgasm."[5] And although we might presume that the end of the Victorian era would herald a new openness in the reception of art, *Songs to Joannes* attracted denunciation not unlike that which Loy's drawing had prompted from her mother. Disapproval mounted quickly after its publication in *Others*, as the poems "created a violent sensation" and provoked "public derision."[6] Indeed, not only the public but also "critics almost unanimously expressed derision, confusion, or outrage."[7] The Imagist poet Amy Lowell threatened to withdraw her support from the magazine because of

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position in both the Victorian and the modern eras, see Sandeep Parmar, *Reading Mina Loy's Autobiographies: Myth of the Modern Woman* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 18, 85-108.

[4] Carolyn Burke, *Becoming Modern*, 42, and Alison Smith, ed., *Exposed: The Victorian Nude* (New York: Watson-Guptill Publications, 2002), 96. For Smith's discussion of the ways in which the female nude was a particularly vexed topic in the English art world at the end of the nineteenth century, when British artists and critics sought to propagate the idea of "the English Nude" in art schools, see Alison Smith, ed., *Exposed*, 11.

[5] Mina Loy, "Songs to Joannes," in *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, ed. Roger L. Conover (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1997), 63, 66. All subsequent references to this text will appear in parentheses.

[6] Alfred Kreymborg, *Our Singing Strength: An Outline of American Poetry (1620–1930)* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1929), 488.

Loy's poetry, and Loy's friend Carl Van Vechten, who was acting as Loy's literary agent in New York and had placed the poems with *Others*, suggested that she try to write "something without a sex undercurrent."[8]

But the undercurrent had already made its way to the surface, and Loy's poetry managed to scandalize both the polite patrons of the art world and more avant-garde readers. As the editor of *Others*, Alfred Kreymborg, later recalled, Loy's "clinical frankness" simply "horrified our gentry and drove our critics into furious despair":

> The nudity of emotion and thought roused the worst disturbance, and the utter nonchalance in revealing the secrets of sex was denounced as nothing less than lewd. […] Had a man written these poems, the town might have viewed them with comparative comfort. But a woman wrote them, a woman who dressed like a lady.[9]

Though Loy might dress something like the lady her mother wanted her to become, her poetry disdains such propriety and offers exposure instead—"lewd" revelations of "the secrets of sex" accompanied by a "nudity of emotion and thought." In Kreymborg's analysis, Loy lays it all bare, and even Loy herself hints at the explanatory power of the genre to which Kreymborg alludes—the nude. Writing in reply to Carl Van Vechten about the controversy over *Songs to Joannes*, Loy declared that writing "something without a sex undercurrent" would be impossible, since she knew "nothing about anything but life—& that is generally reducible to sex!": "I think the anglo saxon covered up-ness [*sic*] goes hand in hand with a reduction of the spontaneous creative quality … life can only evolve something more ample for us—if we help it by getting right into our emotions … We

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[7] Roger L. Conover, introduction to *The Last Lunar Baedeker*, by Mina Loy, ed. Roger L. Conover (Highlands, NC: Jargon Society, 1982), xxxvi. For additional details surrounding the publication of *Songs*, see Conover, editorial notes to *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, by Mina Loy, 188-90, 224.
[8] Quoted in Carolyn Burke, *Becoming Modern*, 191.
[9] Kreymborg, *Our Singing Strength*, 488-89.

moderns have hardly a proscribed psychic area."[10] Rejecting "anglo saxon covered up-ness," Loy suggests that all modern poets should try "getting right into" the entirety of their psyches, all for the sake of their art.

In these ways, then, the language that makes up and surrounds *Songs to Joannes* suggests that we ought by now to have engaged Loy's oeuvre through the genre of the nude. The topic remains unexplored in considerations of Loy's literary and fine-art production,[11] even though there has been some scholarly interest in adjacent topics, like those of obscenity, or kindred avant-garde efforts to *épater le bourgeois*, which call up public controversies and challenges to the viewer or reader that remain associated with those prompted by the nude.[12] Critics have also long recognized the centrality of the human body to Loy's poetry: as Peter Quartermain writes, "Loy's vocabulary is notable for its reference to body-fluids and to body-parts," and Andrew Michael Roberts argues at length that her "poetry and thought consistently work in bodily terms."[13] These related investigations indicate that an analysis of the nude can enlarge the critical conversation on Loy, which demands expansion despite the recent publication of three new volumes on the poet.[14]

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[10] Quoted in Carolyn Burke, *Becoming Modern*, 191.

[11] The only substantive reference to the nude outside of Carolyn Burke's biography of Loy occurs in an essay by Lucia Re: for her discussion of Loy's poetry as part of a more complex Futurism and her alignment of Loy's work with the Futurist rejection of the nude—in which, notably, she does not link the genre to any specific text by Loy—see Lucia Re, "Mina Loy and the Quest for a Futurist Feminist Woman," *The European Legacy: Toward New Paradigms* 14.7 (2009): 802.

[12] See, for example, Rachel Potter, "Obscene Modernism and The Wondering Jew: Mina Loy's 'Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose,'" in *The Salt Companion to Mina Loy*, ed. Rachel Potter and Suzanne Hobson, (London: Salt, 2010): 47-70, and Suzanne W. Churchill, *The Little Magazine* Others *and the Renovation of Modern American Poetry* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 179.

[13] Peter Quartermain, "'The Tattle of Tongueplay': Mina Loy's Love Songs," in *Mina Loy: Woman and Poet*, ed. Maeera Shreiber and Keith Tuma (Orono, ME: The National Poetry Foundation, 1998), 80, and Andrew Michael Roberts, "Rhythm, Self, and Jazz in Mina Loy's Poetry," in Potter and Hobson, *The Salt Companion to Mina Loy*, 122.

[14] I refer to Rachel Potter and Suzanne Hobson's *The Salt Companion to Mina Loy* (London: Salt, 2010); Sara Crangle's *Stories and Essays of Mina Loy* (Champaign, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 2011); and Sandeep Parmar's *Reading Mina Loy's Autobiographies: Myth of the Modern Woman* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013).

Indeed, the nude represents a vital strain in Loy's biography, particularly her training as a visual artist, as my opening anecdote is meant to imply.[15] And the nude is also a frequent subject of avant-garde innovation in the early twentieth century. For these reasons, the nude can serve us in two ways: first, as a genre, a class of images with examples that we can identify in Loy's oeuvre and use, among other things, to bridge the gap between her verbal and her visual output—this last of which is often referred to but seldom studied seriously. Considered as a genre, the nude is "a category with clear parameters" that prompts us to view Loy's work as a group of visual and verbal images that disdain "covered up-ness" and celebrate provocation. (I must note that, for art historians, the nude both is and isn't a fully codified genre, even though many refer to it in that way: as we might infer from Loy's experience, the nude image has been central to "academic theory" and "studio practice" since the Renaissance, but it has no special place in "the organisation of knowledge […] in the systems of museum classification."[16] With the nude's complicated status in mind, I shall use the term "genre" to describe it only when I am referring to the class of images—visual or verbal—of nudity.)

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[15] When Loy entered art school, the nude constituted an established part of the curriculum, yet despite art schools' widespread conviction in the importance of the subject, the means that they recommended and provided for its study were hardly uniform: the philosophy and training espoused by the Wood differed from that of the Slade. These both differed from the system on the continent, where Loy moved to study in Munich in 1900 and in Paris in 1902. For further discussion of the curricula of the Wood and the Slade and Loy's artistic education in England and on the continent, see Carolyn Burke, *Becoming Modern*, 38, 62-63, 74-77; Alicia Foster, "Gwen John's Self-Portrait: Art, Identity, and Women Students at the Slade School," in *English Art 1860–1914: Modern Artists and Identity*, ed. David Peters Corbett and Lara Perry (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 171; and Stuart Macdonald, *The History and Philosophy of Art Education* (London: University of London Press, 1970), 34-35, 273-74, 277-8.

[16] Marcia Pointon, *Naked Authority: The Body in Western Painting 1830–1908* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 12. Although she makes this point, Pointon nevertheless still refers to the nude as a genre throughout her text (ibid., 3, 14).

Second, the nude can also work, as Marcia Pointon has discussed in detail, as "a form of visual rhetoric," a group of strategies and tropes.[17] Rhetoric can be defined as a set of "structural elements, compositional techniques, and modes of expression,"[18] and we can identify these formal elements—which are less representational than the images that make up the genre of the nude—throughout Loy's work. Such "modes of expression" include what Kreymborg called her "nudity of emotion and thought," which might be more accurately described as a kind of confessional denuding—an ongoing process rather than a static image of a nude figure. In this way, as rhetoric, denuding provides us with a means of "getting right into" her system of figurative language in all of its complexity, in order examine strands of her life and work that are often considered to be separate, or even irreconcilable.

Crucially, I want to argue that the nude can aid us in identifying key continuities between areas of Loy's poetry that are usually treated as entirely disjunct. At one extreme lie her long autobiographical poems, *Songs to Joannes* and *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose*, which have garnered the lion's share of the critical attention to her work and form the evidentiary basis for most general conclusions about her oeuvre.[19] (The latter poem, published from 1923 to 1925, recounts the union of Loy's Hungarian Jewish father and her English Protestant mother and her own development as an artist.[20]) In both poems Loy presents sexual

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[17] Ibid., 120.

[18] *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. "rhetoric," 4.b., accessed March 28, 2013, http://dictionary.oed.com/.

[19] In Maeera Shreiber and Keith Tuma's *Mina Loy: Woman and Poet*, which was until very recently the only collection of essays on Loy, over half of the articles address either *Songs to Joannes* or *Anglo-Mongrels*, and the subjects of essays published elsewhere remain in keeping with this trend. Rachel Potter and Suzanne Hobson's *Salt Companion to Mina Loy* has helped to fill in this gap by addressing other poems by Loy as well as her nonfiction and fiction writing.

[20] In these years the poem appeared in three unchronological parts in *The Little Review* and Robert McAlmon's *Contact Collection*, and it was not published as a unit in sequence until after Loy's death. See Burke, *Becoming*

encounters that have messily human emotional dimensions, and to give these accounts, she employs poetic forms that prove no less complicated than the narratives they convey. Bringing together seemingly opposed allegiances, Loy demonstrates the creative tension between them, or reveals their capacity to generate productive hybrids, and such boundary-crossing hybridity has led scholars to adopt Loy's word "mongrel" as the label for her pioneering aesthetics.[21]

Quite differently, Loy's shorter lyrics have been much more sparingly discussed, and her art poems have been particularly neglected, perhaps because they seem to disdain mongrelized mixing for a new interest in purity and a cluster of related values, including abstraction, essentialism, absolutism, formalism, and autotelism. These are the poems that led Yvor Winters to write that the signal characteristic of Loy's 1923 collection *Lunar Baedeker* was the extent to which its images were "frozen into epigrams."[22] The aesthetics of Loy's art poetry would therefore seem incompatible with those of her autobiographical long poems, yet as I will argue, their apparently antipathetic programs can actually be considered together, as constituent parts of the avant-garde aesthetics of nudity and denuding that Loy develops throughout her work. In the longer, more narrative poems, like *Songs to Joannes*, which I shall examine at length, Loy presents bold images of the nude and explores the process of personal denuding, which requires removing layers of cultural conditioning in order to reach the nearly atomic level at which selves may interact with the greatest honesty

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Modern, 350, and Roger L. Conover, textual notes for *The Last Lunar Baedeker*, by Mina Loy, ed. Conover (Highlands: The Jargon Society, 1982), 326.

[21] On Loy's mongrel aesthetics, see introduction, n. 64. And for examples of similar discussions of creative tension between opposing allegiances, or boundary-crossing hybridity, see Parmar, *Reading Mina Loy's Autobiographies*, 18-19, 109-34; Paul Peppis, "Rewriting Sex: Mina Loy, Marie Stopes, and Sexology," *Modernism/Modernity* 9.4 (2002): 574-75; and Aimee L. Pozorski, "Eugenicist Mistress & Ethnic Mother: Mina Loy and Futurism, 1913-1917," *MELUS* 30.3 (Fall 2005): 41-69.

and vitality. And in her shorter art poems, she reveals the denuded art object as the essence of form, as when, in "Brancusi's Golden Bird"—which will serve as my primary example of her art poetry—she describes an abstract sculpture as "The absolute act / of art" (79). An emphasis on essential form thus lies at the heart of this distinct poetic mode, which runs throughout her autobiographical work *and* her art poems and remains just as vital to an overall picture of her oeuvre as her mongrel mode.

Indeed, a very closely related emphasis on form has been indispensable to the conceptualization of the nude throughout the history of modern western art. To a much higher degree than other genres, including the portrait and the still life, the nude has been defined as a special site for the artist's creation of form. This singularity arises from the centrality of the nude to the curriculum of art schools since the Renaissance, and also from the discourse that has circulated around it, in both critics' defenses and art historians' theorizations of the genre. As Lynda Nead has argued so persuasively, the nude, particularly the female nude, "is not simply one subject among others, one form among many, it is *the* subject, *the* form."[23] And as I will demonstrate, it is this conceptualization of the nude, as the apotheosis of form, that can illuminate the common concerns of Loy's autobiographical poetry and her art poetry.

Furthermore, because this status of the nude has special resonance in the first decades of the twentieth century, it can help us to place Mina Loy in the furor engendered by various avant-gardes and iconoclasms. At the same time that Loy is submitting her own work in the genre to the Salon d'Automne—with a nude male figure surrounded by women

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[22] Quoted in Carolyn Burke, *Becoming Modern*, 323.

in *L'amour dorloté par les belles dames*[24]—the nude female body is becoming the raw material for some of the most celebrated formal experiments of modernist and avant-garde artists. In works like Matisse's *Blue Nude* and Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, the nude plays a leading role in the birth of Fauvism and Cubism, and artists' frequent recourse to the genre within these movements underscores, in ways particularly unsettling for feminist viewers and scholars, the ways in which these movements are buoyed by the contemporary development of the "notion that the wellsprings of authentic art are fed by the streams of male libidinous energy."[25] If "so many 'seminal' works of the period are nudes,"[26] then the genre attests to women's exclusion from both the production of avant-garde art and the contemporary theoretical apparatus developing with it—and even worse, the nude seems to enact this very exclusion.

Yet at the same time that the nude appears to achieve a new prominence and power in the early twentieth century, these years also constitute a period of violence to the nude as an established genre of high art. Works like *Blue Nude* and *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*—and perhaps more perceptibly, Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase*—may be seen to flagrantly violate the conventions of the genre, and as I will discuss at greater length, Futurism rejects it altogether. Dismissing art museums as "cemeteries,"[27] Futurists fight against all they find "tedious" in art, and they locate the worst kind of "monotony" in the

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[23] Nead, *The Female Nude*, 18 (see introduction, n. 62), emphasis original. And for more on the centuries-long centrality of the nude to the training of artists, see Nead, *The Female Nude*, 46, and Pointon, *Naked Authority*, 12-14.
[24] Mina Loy, *L'amour dorloté par les belles dames*, oil on canvas, c. 1913 (private collection), in Loy, *The Last Lunar Baedeker*, illustration 27.
[25] Carol Duncan, "Virility and Domination in Early Twentieth-Century Vanguard Painting" in *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany*, ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 306.
[26] Ibid.
[27] F. T. Marinetti, "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism," in *Marinetti: Selected Writings*, ed. R. W. Flint, trans. R. W. Flint and Arthur A. Coppotelli (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1972), 42.

genre of the nude.[28] They refer to images like one in which Loy herself participated, a nude photograph taken by her first husband, Stephen Haweis.[29] To alleviate this kind of monotony, the Futurists call for the eradication of the nude, and specifically, in the "Technical Manifesto" of Futurist painting, they demand "*for ten years, the total suppression of the nude in painting*."[30] To this outright repudiation we can add the assault on the genre of the nude made by militant feminism, with its violent attacks on artworks, like Mary Richardson's slashing of Diego Velázquez's *Rokeby Venus* in 1914.

None of these circumstances would seem to favor Loy's development of an avant-garde aesthetics of nudity and denuding, yet I want to argue that an examination of her rhetoric of denuding in particular allows us to identify areas of convergence between Loy's work and seemingly antagonistic modern movements. The elucidation of Loy's relation to Futurism has proven especially thorny for critics, with some arguing that she adopts the aesthetics and philosophy of Futurism wholesale, and others claiming that she rejects Futurism entirely, or does nothing but subject its tenets to satire. None of these positions is, as my argument will bear out, really accurate, and perhaps the best articulation of the relationship between Loy and Futurism lies in Rowan Harris's examination of the intersection between Loy's Futurism and her feminism: "Futurism offered Loy the exciting vision of a transformed culture and spoke to her own desire for a 'renovated consciousness.' […] Yet in the Futurist discourse the Futurist woman is, in fact, inconceivable—as Loy was

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[28] Umberto Boccioni et al., "Futurist Painting: Technical Manifesto," in *Art in Theory 1900-2000*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 152.
[29] Stephen Haweis, *"Dusie" (Mina nude)*, photograph, c. 1905 (Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University), in Carolyn Burke, *Becoming Modern*, following 176.
[30] Ibid. (emphasis original).

abundantly aware."[31] In this way, Loy must move outside Futurist discourse to realize the aesthetic vision and to pursue the conceptual possibilities that Futurist theorization underwrites.

I shall argue that the emphasis on fundamental form at the center of the rhetoric of nudity and denuding marks a primary intersection of Loy's work with that of the Futurists. In fact, the conceptualization of the genre of the nude, especially as "the conversion of matter into form,"[32] occurs in terms that overlap to a surprising degree with Futurist aesthetic doctrine. So although Loy's deployment of tropes of nudity can never be sanctioned by Futurism, and although her relationship to the movement remains vexed, the aesthetic and philosophical nexus created by the related concepts of nudity and denuding can begin to account for Loy's simultaneous use of recognizably mainstream Futurist techniques—such as an evocation of dynamism, "the lyrical conception of forms"—and her pursuit of anti-Futurist ends, such as an emphasis on the body and emotional intimacy.[33] Loy's work thus offers a counterweight to the colder modernism of Marinetti, Ezra Pound, and others, but not merely by opposing their abstraction with her mongrelism. In the end, as I hope to demonstrate, she challenges these Men of 1914 on their own ground: Loy reshapes our understanding of modern abstraction by using the principles and terms of their doctrines to demonstrate that abstraction does not also necessitate sterility. Loy's abstraction, instead,

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[31] See Rowan Harris, "Futurism, Fashion, and the Feminine: Forms of Repudiation and Affiliation in the Early Writing of Mina Loy," in Potter and Hobson, *The Salt Companion to Mina Loy*, 24-25.
[32] Nead, *The Female Nude*, 18. Nead focuses on this theorization in order to unpack the assumptions and justifications compounded in the academic theory and discussion of the nude, which she views as culminating in Kenneth Clark's *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form*, which remained the only serious survey of the nude for decades. For one example of the discourse that Nead analyzes, see Kenneth Clark, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form* (New York: Pantheon, 1956), 348, and for Nead's extended discussion of Clark's language, as well as the critiques of his view by John Berger and others, see Nead, *The Female Nude*, 11-33.
[33] Boccioni, "Dynamism," 190 (see introduction, n. 63).

attends to the radically denuded body, self, and art object, simultaneously reveling in their essentialized forms and relishing the erotic dimension of this very purity.

"Shedding our petty pruderies": Nudity, Denuding and *Songs to Joannes*

Reading Loy's poetry *for* nudity is no difficult feat, but it seems worthwhile to establish the range of images and tropes of nudity that surface in her oeuvre. To that end, I want to begin with the most concrete examples of the nude, which we can find in the autobiographical long poem *Songs to Joannes*, and then move, in the second half of this chapter, to the increasingly abstract rhetoric of nudity and denuding that underlies her art poetry, in works like "Brancusi's Golden Bird." To begin with the particular, then, we must note that *Songs to Joannes* abounds with imagery of the body, much of it unmistakably sexual. It is a poem that, as Rachel Potter contends, consistently underscores "the undeniable fleshiness of sexual relations."[34] By one critic's count, in fact, fourteen of the poem's thirty-four sections (which together comprise forty percent of the poem) are "centered on different occasions of/acts of sexual intercourse, or may be said prominently to mention sex," and these lines include "imaginatively graphic descriptions of specifically sexual apparatuses."[35] One frequently quoted example of this kind of graphic description surfaces in the opening lines of the second section, in which the speaker reflects upon her lover's genitalia:

The skin-sack
In which a wanton duality

[34] Potter, "Obscene Modernism," 49.
[35] Rachel Blau DuPlessis, "'Seismic Orgasm': Sexual Intercourse and Narrative Meaning in Mina Loy," in Shreiber and Tuma, *Mina Loy: Woman and Poet*, 57.

> Packed
> All the completion of my infructuous impulses
> Something the shape of a man
> To the casual vulgarity of the merely observant (53)[36]

These lines dramatically reject "covered up-ness" in their presentation of the naked male body to the reader, and as Rachel Blau DuPlessis notes, they offer our "first view" of the speaker's lover and establish "his genitalia as a metaphor for him."[37] In this way, Loy signals that nudity will not surface merely as an incidental detail in *Songs*; instead, nudity will prove to be an integral part of the poem's system of imagery. And in this initial picture of a male body, naked genitalia serves not only as synecdoche for the speaker's lover—"something the shape of a man"—but also as a metaphor for the speaker's "double impulse toward licentious, rebellious sex and desire for male fertilization,"[38] a "wanton duality" of compulsions that together drive much of the poem. (We might even consider the possibility that this "wanton duality" functions as a metaphor for "that arbitrary force of nature by which we are made male or female."[39]) Thus at the same time that Loy insists upon a bold image of a nude body, she uses that image as the anchor for a complex, abstract metaphor, which suggests that we ought not view instances of nudity in *Songs* as easily legible pictures: they cannot be reduced to crude expressions of vulgar sexuality or evocations of an Edenic, romantic state of bliss. In *Songs to Joannes*, as Loy's drawing class at St. John's Wood, nudity

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[36] Here, and throughout the chapter, I will attempt to reproduce Loy's unique typographic effects, including line indentations and spaces between words, when I quote longer sections of her work. I will also refer to the individual parts of *Songs to Joannes*, with are marked with roman numerals, as sections and to the entirety of *Songs* as a poem, although other critics frequently refer to its parts as poems and to the entirety as a sequence.
[37] DuPlessis, "'Seismic Orgasm,'" 54.
[38] Ibid., 54.
[39] Maeera Shreiber, "'Love Is a Lyric/of Bodies': The Negative Aesthetics of Mina Loy's *Love Songs to Joannes*," in Shreiber and Tuma, *Mina Loy: Woman and Poet*, 94.

signifies beyond the naked body, and I want to contend that the provocative images in the poem are similarly heavily tasked.

The very first part of *Songs*, in fact, opens the poem on a comparable note of provocation, but it doesn't make the body vulnerable in quite the same way that the second section does. Instead, we find bodies exposed by their base physicality:

> Spawn of Fantasies
> Silting the appraisable
> Pig Cupid his rosy snout
> Rooting erotic garbage
> "Once upon a time"
> Pulls a weed white star-topped
> Among wild oats sown in mucous-membrane
>
> I would an eye in a Bengal light
> Eternity in a sky-rocket
> Constellations in an ocean
> Whose rivers run no fresher
> Than a trickle of saliva (53)

Loy draws the reader's attention away from the usual "sexual apparatuses"—to use DuPlessis's term—that one might expect to find revealed as part of Loy's references to oral sex and orgasm. Instead, she refocuses these two strophes upon the workings of lesser bodily parts and products, like the metaphorical pig's "snout," "mucous-membrane," and "saliva." Jeffrey Twitchell-Waas argues that here Loy "is not only forcing sexuality upon the reader but quite literally sex in the gutter": her "barely euphemistic suggestions of sperm 'sown in mucous-membrane' and of oral sex and an orgasm that dies off in a 'trickle of saliva' force upon the reader the physical fact of sex—that sex is, after all, a bit messy."[40] Twitchell-Waas offers a potent description of one way in which these lines challenge the

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[40] Jeffrey Twitchell-Waas, "'Little Lusts and Lucidities': Reading Mina Loy's Love Songs," in Shreiber and Tuma, *Mina Loy: Woman and Poet*, 117.

reader, but we can take his point a bit further, too, by focusing in on the particular physical facts of these lines, which are more than merely messy. These strophes treat romantic images of naked, coupling lovers as so much garbage—exactly as they disdain the "junk pile of romantic language and cliché" called up by the references to "Cupid" and "Once upon a time."[41] If "the forms, conventions and poses of art have worked metaphorically to shore up the female body—to seal orifices and to prevent marginal matter from transgressing the boundary dividing the inside of the body and the outside, the self from the space of the other," then Loy exploits precisely this kind of boundary transgression.[42] There are no beautiful, painterly physical facts here—or even brazen images of "skin-sacks"—just ignoble bodily fluids.

Moreover, these fluids may affront the more decorous reader's sensibility not only because Loy emphasizes nude bodies and the messiness of sex, but also, as several commentators have noticed, because Loy refers to these bodily fluids in a cold, clinical way. Peter Quartermain summarizes her shifting registers and lexicons best:

> Conventional love poetry, by metaphorizing the body, makes it impossible to be explicit about the body; obliged to metaphorize the world of feeling, it evades male and female sexuality. *Love Songs* sharply distinguishes the biological from the romantic, the physical from the metaphysical. With great skill, Loy exploits the mixing of vocabularies—especially the clinical or laboratory (scientific) with the colloquial and the conventionally 'poetic.' […] This affords irony without detachment.[43]

As Quartermain hints, Loy's frequent movement between vocabularies manages to establish the voice of the poem (if it can be said to have a singular or unified voice or speaker) as

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[41] Ibid.

[42] Nead, *The Female Nude*, 6.

[43] Quartermain, "'The Tattle of Tongueplay,'" 80. Rowan Harris also notes the scientific vocabulary present in the poem and makes a point similar to Quartermain's, in order to argue that Loy ironizes the supposed clinical detachment appropriate to a sexological stance. See Harris, "Futurism, Fashion, and the Feminine," 39.

simultaneously participatory in the action it describes and situated outside this action, in the post of the commentator. Furthermore, if we consider vocabularies as modes of rhetorical orientation towards the world, then Loy's shifts between them constantly unsettles our understanding of the attitude that the poem adopts towards the scenes it depicts and the emotions it chronicles. Thus it is perhaps particularly difficult in *Songs* to identify which vocabulary has the upper hand at any given moment, or to tell whether vocabularies coexist peacefully alongside each other, or engage in conflict. (Witness Quartermain's shift, in the above quotation, between the assertions that the poem "distinguishes the biological from the romantic" and that it "exploits the mixing of vocabularies."[44])

In these initial strophes, though, we can follow the movement between vocabularies with relative ease. The first strophe adopts a fundamentally disdainful attitude towards the sentimental, deploying the vocabulary and imagery of conventional love poetry only in order to ironize it. And the strophe concludes on a final, uncomfortable clinical word, "mucous-membrane," which is generally related to the "silting," "rooting" pig, the "garbage," and the "weed," but has a much more medical, specific charge than the rest of the strophe. The second strophe, by contrast, uses a different dominant vocabulary, with hyperbolic, more conventionally poetic metaphors that describe orgasm as a variety of lights. Yet this strophe, like the first, also turns at its conclusion to a deflationary clinical word, "saliva."[45] (The turn

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[44] Paul Peppis evokes a similar readerly uncertainty, when he argues that the "vocabularies of science and rationality cohabit antagonistically with vocabularies of love and sentiment, opposing and undermining each other, enacting formally the unrealizability of union between lovers and languages." Despite the utility of this assertion, though, it remains impossible to assign one vocabulary—say, that of science—to the speaker and another to her lover. As Quartermain hints, part of the poem's tonal complexity arises from the mingling of these vocabularies within the voice of the speaker herself. See Peppis, "Rewriting Sex," 574.

[45] Although Loy's use of clinical language to deflate romantic presumption remains a characteristic move throughout *Songs*, she does not always so scorn the tropes of romance. Indeed, it is vital to note that the light metaphors in the second strophe here essentially serve to disguise the romanticism disdained by the first strophe; couched in different terms, romance can occupy an uncriticized position in the poem. For an example

here is perhaps more gradual than in the first, since the penultimate line establishes a negative comparison, and the final line uses the word "trickle.") The first two strophes, in short, operate according to the same structure, in which a dominant vocabulary is trumped with a final clinical word, and this structure makes clear that even though Loy will comfortably skewer Victorian pictures of romance, this ironized stance still will not constitute a secure vantage point from which the reader can consider love or sex. Loy ironizes *both* sentimentality *and* irony about sentimentality by strategically using scientific language, which provides her with a lexical means to lay sexual bodies bare, as exposed as if on a laboratory table.

All of these examples from the first two sections of *Songs* situate the poem firmly within the genre of the nude, but it is also important to note that we can find references to nudity and denuding in the poem that are less about sexual bodies than these early lines. Consider section XXVI, which I quoted at the beginning of this chapter:

> Shedding our petty pruderies
> From slit eyes
>
> We sidle up
> To Nature
> — — — that irate pornographist (63)

If elsewhere in the poem Loy foregrounds body parts, here she employs a more oblique manner to describe the way in which lovers encounter each other's bodies; her subject is not so much nudity—a state or a condition that can be captured in a highly visual image—as it is the action of denuding. The pair discards both their clothing and their "petty pruderies," the

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of another instance in which Loy borrows a trope and a vocabulary from romantic cliché and sidesteps their cloying potential with her amusing homonyms and comedic rhythm, see Loy, "Songs to Joannes," in *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, 56. And for some analysis of this section in terms of possession, see DuPlessis, "'Seismic Orgasm,'" 56-57.

Victorian morals that have obscured their vision, so that they can move more freely, perhaps to approach a more natural, Rousseauian state. A similar reference occurs in section XI:

> Dear one   at your mercy
> Our Universe
> Is only
> A colourless onion
> You derobe
> Sheath by sheath
>   Remaining
> A disheartening odour
> About your nervy hands (56-57)

Loy again highlights the process of denuding instead of picturing the nude body, and in this instance, denuding becomes a metaphor for the lover's mode of explaining the universe to the speaker. He reveals all by removing layer after layer, and his choice leaves no mystery or romance intact—only "a disheartening odour." Loy compounds the metaphor here, too, so that the "dear one"'s thoroughgoing explanations are described as a persistent exercise in peeling back the layers of an onion, which is then characterized as a disappointing seduction.

As the final lines of this section suggest, Loy's deployment of the tropes of nudity often comes heavily weighted with emotion and judgment, and in sections XI and XXVI, we find not only references to the removal of clothing and metaphorical treatments of this denuding, but also an additional layer of figuration in each case, since both of these processes (shedding clothes and outmoded morés in section XXVI, and derobing a lover and a philosophical mystery in section XI) are accompanied by the speaker's revelation of her feelings about her relationship. In section XXVI, the speaker is pleased to toss away the values that she finds restrictive so that she and her lover might engage in a new freedom and bareness—perhaps even a natural vulgarity. But in section XI, such denuding has far less liberatory results: the speaker is put off by her lover's bald explanations, which leave the

world "colourless," the metaphorical onion in pieces, and the air filled with discouragement after his shaky removal of her clothing (or, equally, after an overly bold denuding that leaves her cold).[46]

These complex metaphors are precisely what Kreymborg refers to as the poem's "nudity of emotion and thought," and they allow *Songs to Joannes* shift into a confessional register that is, paradoxically, highly abstract. Loy's multifaceted revelations, which are at the heart of the poem's operation, demonstrate that *Songs* not only participates in the genre of the nude—by including examples of nude bodies—but also makes significant use of a rhetoric of nudity and denuding, and in so doing, Loy challenges all of the strictures that traditionally govern visual artists' use of the nude. As Nead writes, "one of the principal goals of the female nude has been the containment and regulation of the female sexual body," and as she and Pointon have claimed, this containment has been achieved, in no small part, by insisting upon the anonymity of the female nude and by relegating the nude to a timeless space.[47] Loy's emphasis on denuding as a process, and her turn toward explicit autobiography, undercut both of these conventions, and her defiance seems of a piece with the rebellion by one of her art-school contemporaries, Edna Waugh, who wrote in her memoir "about spending a day at home in front of a bedroom mirror 'lying half dressed in awful positions, being raped', posing for her own watercolour 'The Rape of the Sabines'," and about modeling nude for another female student's composition.[48] Her actions challenged the prohibition that prevented female art students (or serious female artists) from

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[46] *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. "nervy," accessed June 25, 2013, http://dictionary.oed.com/.
[47] Nead, *The Female Nude*, 6, and Pointon, *Naked Authority*, 13.
[48] Waugh studied at the Slade in the same years that Loy studied at the Wood. See Alicia Foster, "Gwen John's *Self-Portrait*," 173.

working "from studies of their own bodies rather than from those of anonymous […] models."[49]

Waugh's anecdote enacts an uncomfortable conflation, sliding from the anonymous to the autobiographical, the epic to the self-portrait, and for these reasons, it can offer us a useful sense of just how fraught the discourse and philosophy of the life class are—and just how bold Loy's rhetoric of denuding is. The academic diction customarily used for the nude suppresses a curious tension: on the one hand, the traditional drawing class focused on the nude model is colloquially referred to as "the life class," and the skill as "drawing from life," while on the other hand, the usual defense of this class—and, indeed, the genre itself—against accusations of salaciousness is that drawing (or painting or sculpting) the nude constitutes an exercise in pure form. (For this reason, at the Slade, the model posed with "a plain grey or khaki cloth […] hung behind to ensure than no environment was considered."[50]) In academic discourse, then, the "life" in question is supposed to be nameless and context-less, and the nude must be both wholly alive and wholly artificial. Any turn away from a constrained "life" with "no environment considered" to one's own life and one's own body therefore subverts the principles under which the genre of the nude has been understood to constitute art.[51] As we have seen, Loy's own work enacts precisely this

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[49] As Alicia Foster writes, London art schools at the turn of the century tolerated no "disruption of the rigidity of class divisions within the life room" when female students shared this space with working-class female models, and other barriers and boundaries were also put in place to ensure propriety. The male model in Loy's drawing class at the Wood, for instance, was not fully nude—the genitals were covered by a "bathing drawer" and a cloth wound over that—and male and female art students had separate life classes at both the Wood and the Slade, even though they worked alongside each other in classes on the antique and the still life. See Alicia Foster, "Gwen John's *Self-Portrait*," 172-73, and Carolyn Burke, *Becoming Modern*, 38, 40.

[50] Macdonald, *The History and Philosophy of Art Education*, 277.

[51] As I have already noted, the nude both is and isn't a genre: it possesses a certain academic centrality but has "no place of its own either in the genre system or in the systems of museum classification of German origin," so that its generic precariousness thus mimics, to some degree, the precariousness of the discourse that vindicates it. And insofar as the nude "is understood to be *Art*," or insofar as, "more than any other subject,

turn, disdaining anonymity for a much more personal kind of drawing from life, and moving beyond the representation of naked flesh to the deployment of "a nudity of emotion and thought," so that the process of denuding becomes more vital to the poem than its images of nudity. In sum, then, I want to contend that as we read *for* nudity in *Songs*, seeking examples of the genre, we find ourselves immersed in a structure that makes use of denuding as a "compositional technique" and as a "mode of expression."[52]

The Denuded Self and Dynamic Form

This structure proves particularly apparent when we consider *Songs* as a narrative poem that conveys—in however fragmented a manner—the story of the female speaker's relationship with Joannes, the titular lover modeled on Giovanni Papini (and perhaps on F. T. Marinetti, with whom Loy also had an affair). Loy's narrative mode in *Songs* and in *Anglo-Mongrels* is a unique one, as Marjorie Perloff explains, and it remains one of the primary divergences between her work and that of other modernist poets:

> [U]nlike the Marinetti who invented *parole in libertà*, or the Dadaists of the Cabaret Voltaire, or the Eliot of *The Waste Land* and Pound of *The Cantos*, Loy was not a collagiste. She does not paste together disparate verbal fragments, letting their spatial juxtapositions create a complex network of meanings. Rather, hers is a temporal mode, a satiric narrative, however broken and self-interrupting, in which structures of voice and address take precedence over the 'constation of fact,' as Pound called it, of the Image.[53]

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the female nude connotes 'Art,'" Waugh's and Loy's subversion of the principles that govern the nude also endanger the philosophical ground rules for all art more generally. For more on the alignment between the nude and Art, see Pointon, *Naked Authority*, 12-14, and Nead, *The Female Nude*, 1, 18.

52 *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. "rhetoric," 4.b., accessed March 28, 2013, http://dictionary.oed.com/.

53 Perloff, "English," 144. Perloff is not the only scholar to have defended the narrativity of Loy's long poems: Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Cristanne Miller, and Suzanne Churchill have made related points specifically about *Songs to Joannes*, which both acknowledge its fragmented quality and insist upon its status as a narrative poem. DuPlessis even lists the separate events or phases that she identifies in the poem's sequence. See DuPlessis, "'Seismic Orgasm,'" 50; Churchill, *The Little Magazine* Others, 196; and Cristanne Miller, *Cultures of Modernism:*

Perloff insists here that Loy makes use of some of the tools of Imagism—and Futurism, as I shall discuss shortly—without also relying solely upon their fundamentally spatial, disjunctive poetics; her long poems prove distinctive because of the extent to which they subject striking images to the "structures of voice and address" that occur over a period of time. Or, to put it another way, in the context of my own argument, even though *Songs to Joannes* features numerous images of nudity and denuding—many of which are graphic, and often quoted in excerpts by scholars—they remain less representative of Loy's overall mode than her use of the rhetoric of denuding, which offers one of the primary "structures of voice and address" that undergird the narrative of the poem. Thus we might say that *Songs to Joannes* does not so much exemplify the genre of the nude as it invents a poetics of denuding, and the gerund form here can serve to underscore the extent to which Loy figures denuding as an ongoing process.

And one reason for this subordination of imagery to poetics—or the subjection of pictures of nudity to denuding as a mode of expression—lies in the extent to which, as DuPlessis argues, the poem "deliberately alters some of the trajectories of novelistic narrative" typical of works that center upon sexual relationships, like *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.[54] Unlike such works, which insist upon a "linkage of sexual climaxes and narrative climaxes," *Songs* offers representations of sex that "occur in a loosely structured poetic plot of connection, loss, and analytic reprise; yet they are not climactic, but various, acting to influence, and influenced by, [a] mixture of suspicion and desire."[55] And because these

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Marianne Moore, Mina Loy, & Else Lasker-Schüler: Gender and Literary Community in New York and Berlin (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 115.

[54] DuPlessis, "'Seismic Orgasm,'" 49.

[55] Ibid., 66, 71.

representations do not occupy the "narrative peaks" of the poem, they can "provide no 'crisis' in a narrative sense" and therefore "seem rather a series of repeated behaviors, conceptualized and reconceptualized, thought and rethought."[56] In other words—as I hope that my analysis has thus far indicated—the instances of sex in the poem, and the often concomitant depictions of nudity, serve primarily as grist for the mill of conceptualization and abstraction in *Songs*. As DuPlessis alludes to here, and as recent critics like Rachel Potter have noticed,[57] the key moments and turning points in this narrative—one hesitates to say "climaxes," for all the reasons that DuPlessis outlines—coincide less often with representations of sexual and bodily nudity and more often with Loy's turn towards rhetorical denuding (or a "nudity of emotion and thought") in her representations of the psychological and metaphysical dimensions of the lovers' relationship.

One such turning point occurs in section XXIX, which merits quoting at length:

> Evolution   fall foul of
> Sexual equality
> Prettily miscalculate
> Similitude
>
> Unnatural selection
> Breed such sons and daughters
> As shall jibber at each other
> Uninterpretable cryptograms
> Under the moon
>
> […]
>
> Let meeting be the turning
> To the antipodean
> And Form   a blurr

[56] Ibid., 71.
[57] Potter puts it succinctly in her analysis of obscenity and *Songs*: "The most powerful moments in these poems come when she shifts the focus of what is obscene, or unmentionable, from flesh to mind: it is not the 'trickle of saliva' that remains unspoken, but the 'subliminal flicker' of misunderstood drives." See Potter, "Obscene Modernism," 49.

> Anything
> Than seduce them
> To the one
> As simple satisfaction
> For the other
>
> Let them clash together
> From their incognitoes
> In seismic orgasm
>
> For far further
> Differentiation
> Rather than watch
> Own-self distortion
> Wince in the alien ego (65-66)

Here Loy's speaker asks evolution for a set of norms that might change how present-day lovers interact with each other. She wants "anything" other than a scenario in which one partner is "seduce[d] … As simple satisfaction / For the other" and must therefore "watch / Own-self distortion" and "Wince in the alien ego." (It is worth noting that, even as the speaker describes this troublesome scenario, in which the ego of one partner consumes the other, Loy refuses to assign the lovers distinguishing gender-based pronouns: the section conceptualizes them instead as two selves mirrored across the boundary between egos.) With an anaphoric series of hortatory entreaties, the speaker envisions an alternative reality in which the lovers encounter each other as equal and opposite forces of nature: she calls upon the powers of "unnatural selection," asking that they "Let meeting be the turning / To the antipodean / And Form a blurr" and that they "Let them clash together / From their incognitoes / In seismic orgasm." These encounters imagined by the poem are indeed climactic, yet despite Loy's use of the word "orgasm" here, they remain less sexual than tectonic, or elemental.

For Loy, all things scientific—whether the deflationary "mucous-membrane" of the poem's first strophe or the "seismic" collision imagined here—seem to offer ways of describing a state beyond, or beneath, the structures of love and sex dictated by conventional (patriarchal) romance. *Songs to Joannes* seeks to picture instead the truth of the lovers' encounter at a level that is simultaneously cosmic and atomic, and it is through this picturing, which constitutes the primary thrust of the poem, that *Songs* makes the greatest use of the rhetoric of denuding. To understand exactly how the section above deploys such rhetoric—beyond any facile inference that the "seismic orgasm" is accompanied by nude bodies—we need to consider the representation of the embodied self that underwrites both this section and the entirety of the poem. Recently, Andrew Michael Roberts has offered a superb, highly nuanced description of the kind of self that recurs throughout Loy's poetry:

> If Loy rarely represents the self as estranged from the body, this is perhaps because she represents the self as rhythmically articulated across time, language and sequential experience. The modernist cliché of the 'fragmented self' does not seem appropriate here, resting as it does on an underlying idea of a self which ideally exists outside time, but has fallen into time, or a self which ideally moves through time as a coherent agent, but is threatened with disintegration by internal or external forces. […] Her sense of self is rather a sense of process, the movement through time of a subject, existing as a node of experiences, both physical and psychic. The dynamic nature of this 'self process' can present itself as dispersal and disintegration (entropy) or as articulation and formation (energy). But the disintegration is not that of a whole which did, or will exist; nor does the articulation create something permanent; both are different modes of movement through space and time.[58]

What Roberts explains here, without quite saying so, is something akin to a model of the self as matter—a self that is deeply physical and abstract at the same time, divorced neither from the body nor the invisible work of cognition. This kind of self is precisely what Loy alluded to when she wrote to Carl Van Vechten that she had of course eschewed "anglo saxon

covered up-ness" in *Songs to Joannes*: "life can only evolve something more ample for us—if we help it by getting right into our emotions … We moderns have hardly a proscribed psychic area."[59] If Loy's poetry attempts to reject "covered up-ness," access the full range of human emotion, and explore all "psychic areas," then it does so not only by representing nude bodies engaged in sexual intercourse, or by troping upon undressing and denuding, but also by putting forward a model of the embodied self at its most naked: the nearly particulate level at which selves may interact with the greatest honesty and vitality.

And although it goes unremarked by Roberts, this notion of a "self process" is highly compatible with Futurist thought. Indeed, the Futurist influence on Loy proves especially evident in *Songs to Joannes*, even though Loy's work will always place more emphasis on human flesh, emotions, and psychology than any strict Futurist would allow. For instance, the forces described by Loy's poetry seem allied with Marinetti's call to arms in the "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature," published on May 11, 1912: he urges Futurists to focus their art-making in all media upon "the lyric obsession with matter" so that they might "divine its different governing impulses, its forces of compression, dilation, cohesion, and disaggregation, its crowds of massed molecules and whirling electrons."[60] Marinetti's vision of matter seems congruent with the kind of embodied self that Roberts identifies in Loy's poetry, which is not so much a coherent, static unit as an ongoing "self process," which "can present itself as dispersal and disintegration (entropy) or as articulation and formation (energy)." There exists no whole—nothing permanent—simply movement through space and time, or as Umberto Boccioni and the other painters who signed their

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[58] Andrew Michael Roberts, "Rhythm, Self, and Jazz," 123.
[59] Quoted in Carolyn Burke, *Becoming Modern*, 191.

technical manifesto put it, "all things move, all things run, all things are rapidly changing."[61] They argue that this understanding of matter must fundamentally change the representation of the body in art: "To paint a human figure, you must not paint it; you must render the whole of its surrounding atmosphere. […] Who can still believe in the opacity of bodies, since our sharpened and multiplied sensitiveness has already penetrated the obscure manifestations of the medium?"[62]

For these painters, of course, this rejection of "the opacity of bodies" coincides with their call for ten years' suppression of the nude in painting, which held such academic sway that Futurists found "the nude in painting, as nauseous and as tedious as adultery in literature […], since artists obsessed with the desire to expose the bodies of their mistresses have transformed the Salons into arrays of unwholesome flesh."[63] Futurist painters hold that their engagement with matter will differ from this tedious academic nude—and even from the nude as reimagined by Cubism—and Giacomo Balla, Boccioni, and others describe this distinction at greater length in their introduction to the first Futurist painters' exhibition, from February 1912:

> To paint from the posing model is an absurdity, an act of mental cowardice, even if the model be translated upon the picture in linear, spherical, or cubic forms. To lend an allegorical significance to the ordinary nude figure, deriving the meaning of the figure from the objects held by the model or from those which are arranged about him, is to our mind the evidence of a traditional and academic mentality. This method, very similar to that employed by the Greeks, by Raphael, by Titian, by Veronese, must necessarily displease us. […] We see no difference between one of those nude figures commonly called artistic and an anatomical plate. There is, on

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[60] F. T. Marinetti, "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature," in *Marinetti: Selected Writings,* 87.
[61] Boccioni et al., "Futurist Painting: Technical Manifesto," 150. For more on the Futurist emphasis on movement and change, see Stephen Eric Bronner, *Modernism at the Barricades: Aesthetics, Politics, Utopia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 67-78.
[62] Boccioni et al., "Futurist Painting: Technical Manifesto," 150.
[63] Ibid., 152.

> the other hand, an enormous difference between one of these nude figures and our futurist conception of the human body. […] In painting a person on a balcony, seen from inside the room, we do not limit the scene to what the square frame of the window renders visible; but we try to render the sum total of visual sensations which the person on the balcony has experienced; the sun-bathed throng in the street, the double row of houses which stretch to right and left, the beflowered balconies, etc. This implies the simultaneousness of the ambient, and, therefore, the dislocation and dismemberment of objects, the scattering and fusion of details, freed from accepted logic, and independent from one another.[64]

Here, the Futurist painters reject the notion that other modernist movements in the visual arts have managed to significantly reinvent the nude. Despite the translations of Picasso and Matisse, they imply, these recent paintings rely upon the same grammar of representation, the same rhetoric, as that used by Titian. (The Futurists carried this disdain for early twentieth-century nudes over to their evaluation of modern sculpture, too, maintaining that "in the intersecting planes of a book and the corner of a table, in the straight lines of a match, in a window frame there is more truth than in all the knotted muscles, all the breasts and buttocks of heroes and Venuses who still inspire so much of modern sculptural idiocy."[65])

For the Futurists, all of these nude paintings and sculptures simply testify to what Lynda Nead describes as "the transformation of the base matter of nature into the elevated forms of culture and the spirit," but the transformation has ceased to occur: all they see now

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[64] Giacomo Balla, Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, Luigi Russolo, and Gino Severini, "The Exhibitors to the Public," in Rainey, Poggi, and Whitman, *Futurism: An Anthology*, 106 (see introduction, n. 63).

[65] The similarity between the Futurists' evaluation of modern painting and their evaluation of modern sculpture is not, according to Potts, simply the result of an exceptionally sweeping adherence to avant-garde doctrine. Rather, Potts argues that, like many other modernists, Boccioni put forth a conception of plastic form that was "basically painterly," and Boccioni's disdainful tone here simply attests to the fact that "sculpture became an ideal site for imagining a Futurist revolution, not because of its specific resources as an art form, but because sculpture was such a *retardaire*, classicising art, completely out of tune with the demands of the modern art and thus in need of a total blowing apart." Umberto Boccioni, "Futurist Sculpture" (11 April 1912), in Rainey, Poggi, and Whitman, *Futurism: An Anthology*, 119, and Potts, *Sculptural Imagination*, 106.

is the "base matter" of "unwholesome flesh."[66] What the Futurists need is a new mode for "the conversion of matter into form," for turning the (female) body, which represents "pure nature" into "pure culture."[67] So they seek to replace the stale academic method with an entirely new representational rhetoric—new "structural elements" and "compositional techniques" that will account for the ways in which the body interacts with its environment.[68] In short, the nude remains "*the* subject, *the* form," even for the Futurists who dismiss it, and it spurs their drive toward a new visual and plastic rhetoric of the body that extends beyond the apparent visual limits of the body itself.

Later Boccioni would notably reformulate this idea—that one must paint a person by rendering both the human body and "the simultaneousness of the ambient"—as part of the concept of dynamism explored in his straightforwardly titled essay "Absolute Motion + Relative Motion = Dynamism." For Boccioni, as this equation makes clear, dynamism is made up of two constituent elements, with absolute motion defined, in Christine Poggi's words, as "the result of the inherent volatility of matter with its whirring electrons and propensity to 'disaggregate,'" and relative motion defined as "the displacement of one object in relation to another."[69] Understood properly, these two kinds of motion should alter how painters and sculptors conceive of artistic form, as Boccioni explains: "Dynamism is the lyrical conception of forms: forms as interpreted in their infinite self-appearance, in which their identity resides in the shifting relationship between absolute motion and relative motion, between object and environment, ultimately forming the apparation of a whole:

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[66] Nead, *The Female Nude*, 2.
[67] Ibid., 18.
[68] *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. "rhetoric," 4.b., accessed March 28, 2013, http://dictionary.oed.com/.
[69] Christine Poggi, "Introduction to Part Two," in Rainey, Poggi, and Whitman, *Futurism: An Anthology*, 317.

environment object.[70] Boccioni proposes a new kind of fundamental form, which, lyrically conceived, can give the viewer the totality of the "*environment object*," or the human figure alongside and interpenetrated by "the whole of its surrounding atmosphere."[71] In other words, as Poggi says, "for Boccioni the inherent dynamism of matter implied that all objects interpenetrate each other, shattering the apparently closed boundaries of individual forms," including the body, so that "the body's boundaries" are understood to be "permeable, shifting, and open to ecstatic fusion with the environment."[72] Translated onto the canvas or into a sculpture, this notion of dynamic form should help us to realize the extent to which the body and the objects around it are composed of constantly moving matter—the extent to which, as Boccioni writes, "objects really never come to an end, but intersect each other with infinite combinations of attraction or repulsion." What dynamic forms can communicate, in sum, is nothing less than a kind of "plastic infinity."[73]

With this in mind, then, we might well say that the embodied selves in *Songs to Joannes* are represented as dynamic forms. Just as Boccioni's manifesto does, Loy's atomic vision discards "the timeworn concept of a clear distinction between bodies."[74] When her speaker envisions a new romantic norm—"Let meeting be the turning / To the antipodean / And Form   a blurr"—she evokes Marinetti's "whirling electrons" and the possibilities of disintegration and disaggregation. (The image may even seem to call up the blurred forms in Balla's *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash* [1912], but more important, it also echoes some even more obviously Futurist-influenced lines from an earlier section of *Songs*, in which the

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[70] Boccioni, "Dynamism," 190 (emphasis original).
[71] Boccioni et al., "Futurist Painting: Technical Manifesto," 150.
[72] Christine Poggi, *Inventing Futurism: The Art and Politics of Artificial Optimism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 151, 165.
[73] Boccioni, "Futurist Sculpture," in Rainey, Poggi, and Whitman, *Futurism: An Anthology*, 119.

speaker describes the lovers' reaction to the arrival of dawn—consider it a mechanical, Futurist aubade: "We twiddle to it / Round and round / Faster / And turn into machines" [63].) The lovers' bodies and egos seem to interact at the level of matter, or the level of the particle, and at each turning point in the thought of the poem, we find this emphasis on their dynamism reinforced, as Loy consistently makes use of a rhetoric of the body that understands the body and the ego to extend beyond any conventionally apprehended boundaries.

At one extreme, this dynamism of selves constitutes the speaker's greatest fear, as she articulates in section XIII:

> Let us be very jealous
> Very suspicious
> Very conservative
> Very cruel
> Or we might make an end of the jostling of aspirations
> Disorb inviolate egos
>
> Where two or three are welded together
> They shall become god
> — — — — — — —
> Oh that's right
> Keep away from me   Please give me a push
> Don't let me understand you   Don't realise me
> Or we might tumble together
> Depersonalized
> Identical
> Into the terrific Nirvana
> Me you — you — me (58)

Here we find the same concern about a possible loss of self that the speaker expressed in section XXIX, where she strives not to "watch / Own-self distortion / Wince in the alien ego" (65-66). In this section, though, that fear takes a more cosmic, or atomic form, as she

[74] Boccioni, "Dynamism," 190.

wonders whether their relationship might "disorb inviolate egos"—knock them out of their spheres. Of course, by asking the very question, she implies that these egos have never really been inviolate, and the absence of distinguishing gender pronouns here only underscores the extent to which these selves are already "tumbl[ing] together." (This section of *Songs to Joannes* strongly echoes—perhaps even rewrites—one of Loy's "Aphorisms on Futurism," which gives us a further sense of the dynamism she evokes: "And form hurtling against itself is thrown beyond the synopsis of vision."[75])

In section XIV, though, such tumbling and hurtling movement is a more positive phenomenon, as we again find a description of bodily interaction that stresses their dynamism. The speaker presents herself to her lover, declaring that there shall be:

> No love   or the other thing
> Only the impact of lighted bodies
> Knocking sparks off each other
> In chaos (59)

These lines make use of the same strain of imagery that appeared at the very beginning of the poem, with all of its light metaphors for orgasm, but the sparks that erupt as these bodies impact one another also belong alongside the instance of lovers "clash[ing] together [...] in seismic orgasm": both seem elemental, electric. The metaphor also carries a cosmic charge; "lighted bodies" moving "in chaos" sounds like nothing so much as a description of stars striking each other in space. And we can sense yet another dimension of the metaphor when Loy rewrites these lines later in the poem, as she describes fireflies dancing among blades of grass in section XIX:

> Aerial quadrille
> Bouncing

[75] Mina Loy, "Aphorisms on Futurism," in *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, 149.

> Off one another
> Again conjoining
> In recaptured pulses
> Of light (61)

The speaker does not perceive the fireflies by viewing their bodies; rather, she registers their existence through the beats and loops of light that they create against the darkened backdrop of the grass and the sky. The fireflies interact with each other beyond their bodily boundaries by "conjoining / In recaptured pulses / Of light," just as the lovers in section XIV together produce "sparks […] in chaos." In both of these sections, just as in the strophes in which the speaker worries about the possibility that she and her lover might "disorb inviolate egos" and "tumble together / Depersonalized / Identical / Into the terrific Nirvana," sexual bodies extend beyond the margins that we can see. To paraphrase Loy, they form a blur.

"The absolute act of art": Loy's Ekphrasis of Brancusi's Denuded Object

With this reading of *Songs to Joannes*, in sum, I want to propose that there exists another mode in Loy's poetry besides the mongrelism that has been so celebrated by other critics. This alternative aesthetics of denuding encompasses images and tropes of nudity, and exploits the rhetorical possibilities of denuding as a structure of expression. It also focuses its attention on the particulate core—those elements and atoms that, like the naked body, remain behind when superficial coverings have been removed. In this way, this mode frequently makes conceptual use of the essence and the fundament, and in keeping with that emphasis, it engages with issues of conceptual and artistic abstraction and form. Investigations of the fundamental and the abstract might well seem to move in opposite directions: conventionally, the fundament is the foundation, the base, and (even

anatomically) the bottom, while the abstract floats above, "existing in thought or as an idea."[76] But as I have shown, Loy's abstraction in this poetic mode is not that of an airy superstructure opposed to the world of "physical and concrete existence."[77] Instead, she roots her treatment of the abstract in the granular: working more from the scientific meanings of the word, Loy grapples with what remains after a process of "distillation" and extraction.[78] Hers is a paradoxically solid notion of the abstract, and as such, it manages to embrace the concentrated without also insisting upon the simplified. Like both the "skin-sack" that serves as a synecdoche for the speaker's lover and the "inviolate egos" that might be disorbed by their clashes together in "seismic orgasm," Loy's abstract is an "epitome," "encapsulating in miniature, or representing the essence of, the characteristic qualities or features of something much larger."[79] Condensation, in short, never renders Loy's elemental selves and "lighted bodies" neutered or less powerful; losing none of their complexity or unpredictability, they remain dynamic and erotic.

To be sure, this mode weaves together an intricate network of tropes, concepts, and artistic values that may seem uncomfortable in their relation to one another. Yet their alliance emerges with great logic and force in Loy's art poetry, and we can better understand their interconnection—and access some of this mode's more overlooked features—by reading these art poems in conjunction with *Songs to Joannes*. Here, rather than chronicling her relationships with Futurist lovers, Loy charts her encounters with the work of other artists, including James Joyce, Wyndham Lewis, Gertrude Stein, and Constantin Brancusi, as

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[76] *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. "fundament," 1.a. and 3, and "abstract," adj., 1.b., accessed September 10, 2013, http://dictionary.oed.com/.
[77] *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. "abstract," adj., 1.b., accessed September 10, 2013, http://dictionary.oed.com/.
[78] Ibid., etym. and verb, 1.c.

well as Edgar Allan Poe and ancient Greek sculptors.[80] Offering sustained commentary on modernist art in different genres and media, these poems present none of the hybridity so favored by critics and instead allow values like abstraction and essentialism to take center stage, so that the aesthetics of nudity and denuding dominate. This mode manifests itself with greatest clarity in perhaps the most famous poem in the group, "Brancusi's Golden Bird," an ekphrasis that takes its title from a 1919 sculpture by Constantin Brancusi, a Romanian-born member of the Parisian artistic community in the first half of the twentieth century whom Loy would come to know personally.[81] (Brancusi first exhibited in Paris at the 1906 Salon d'Automne, where Loy exhibited *Love Among the Ladies*, but they did not meet until later.[82] In the 1920s, Loy visited his studio, where she was photographed with Brancusi and other prominent members of the avant-garde, and she even sketched a portrait of him.[83])

With its appearance in the November 1922 issue of *The Dial*, Loy's poem participated in a moment of extraordinary, condensed publicity for the artist, as Brancusi received significant attention from artists and journalists throughout 1921–22. The autumn 1921 issue of *The Little Review* contained photographs of his work and an essay by Ezra

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[79] Ibid., noun, 3.a.

[80] Loy's art poems were published in several different magazines and in Loy's 1923 collection, *Lunar Baedeker*. Some are ekphrases of specific works—"'The Starry Sky' of Wyndham Lewis" and "Brancusi's Golden Bird" fall into this category—while others, like "Gertrude Stein," "Poe," and "Marble," seem to offer more general analyses of the methods or qualities of particular artists. Most critics have followed Loy's biographer, Carolyn Burke, in calling these latter poems "tributes" or "homages." Regardless of their specific type, though, both kinds of poetry constitute examples of the inter-mediation that characterizes Loy's oeuvre more generally. See Carolyn Burke, *Becoming Modern*, 324-25.

[81] See Carolyn Burke, *Becoming Modern*, 328, 344, for references to Loy's relationship with Brancusi, which did not begin, according to Conover, until after the publication of the poem, which was also reprinted in Loy's 1923 collection, *Lunar Baedeker*. Conover, editorial notes to *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, 198-99.

[82] Anna C. Chave, *Constantin Brancusi: Shifting the Bases of Art* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 23.

[83] Constantin Brancusi, *Brancusi, Tristan Tzara, Berenice Abbott, Mina Loy, Jane Heap et Margaret Anderson dans l'atelier*, gelatin silver print, c. 1921-22 (Centre Pompidou), in Pontus Hulten, Natalia Dumitresco, and

Pound; the May 1922 issue of *Vanity Fair* included photographs of his work and his studio and an article about "Brancusi the man" by Jeanne Foster; and the November 1922 issue of *The Dial* contained Loy's poem and a photograph of the *Golden Bird* (as well as, of course, Eliot's *The Waste Land*).[84] As Richard Masteller has discussed at length, these three publications were hardly unrelated—Foster quoted Pound in her article, for instance, and also supplied the photograph of the *Golden Bird* that ran alongside Loy's poem in *The Dial*—and these avant-garde networks of connection, inspiration, and influence also include Loy.[85] Indeed, *The Little Review* interleaved the first group of photographs of Brancusi's work with Loy's essay "Psycho-Democracy," so it seems quite possible that she developed the idea for her poem in response to this issue.[86]

(However, to make matters quite complicated, there does exist a second *Golden Bird*, which Brancusi made at approximately the same time with the same materials and which Loy recalled seeing in 1921 at the home of her friend Mariette Mills: "at wonderful Mariette Mills' I came face to face, or rather face to flight with Brancusi's Bird."[87] No matter which 1919 *Golden Bird* directly prompted Loy's poem, though, I want to avoid confusion over the names of Brancusi's many *Bird* sculptures by noting that the *Golden Bird*s represent a distinct

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Alexandre Istrati, *Brancusi* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1987), 142, and Mina Loy, *Constantin Brancusi*, pencil on paper, c. 1924, in Loy, *The Last Lunar Baedeker*, illustration 18.

[84] Richard N. Masteller, "Using Brancusi: Three Writers, Three Magazines, Three Versions of Modernism," *American Art* 11.1 (Spring 1997): 48, 52.

[85] Ibid., 52, 59.

[86] Carolyn Burke, *Becoming Modern*, 309, and Marissa Januzzi, "Bibliography," in Shreiber and Tuma, *Mina Loy: Woman and Poet*, 520.

[87] Conover argues in favor of this second sculpture as the inspiration behind the poem, rather than the sculpture reproduced in *The Little Review*, which was owned by John Quinn, although he also notes that Loy may have seen Quinn's sculpture at his home or at the exhibition entitled "Contemporary French Art," which took place at the Sculptors' Gallery in New York in 1922. Quinn's sculpture is now in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago, and the second 1919 *Golden Bird* belongs to the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. For Conover's reasoning, see Conover, editorial notes to *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, 198-99, and Loy, *The Last Lunar Baedeker*, 300.

middle stage in between Brancusi's earlier *Maiastra* sculptures and the later *Bird in Space* series, which Brancusi began in 1923 and continued through the mid-1940s. In each iteration of the *Golden Bird*, the legs and tail are "generalized into one sleek form," and the chest is rendered as "a swelling in the now continuous shaft of the creature's body."[88])

As Burke notes, this issue of *The Little Review* was a particularly important one, since it constituted a collective rebuttal to the censorship that had been leveled against the magazine for its serialization of James Joyce's *Ulysses*: "the avant-garde rose to the magazine's aid with contributions for the autumn issue, a protest against censorship. Photographs of Brancusi's sculptures were scattered through its pages, as if these ultra-modern shapes voiced an implicit defiance of prudishness."[89] Brancusi himself had been the subject of similar censorship, when his *Princess X* (1916) was banned by the police from 1920 Salon des Indépendants on grounds of obscenity, at the behest of the salon's president, who was "offended by the bust's phallic shape."[90] The defiance embodied by Brancusi's phallic *Bird* sculptures is, I trust, quite obvious, but his work also scorns prudishness in other, slightly more subtle ways, as in his bronze *Torso of a Young Man*, which presents a highly abstract, armless male torso at the pelvic junction with the legs, all in a compacted, inverted Y-shape.[91] As Rosalind Krauss has argued, the sculpture has all the 'naturalness' of pipe fittings, and the highly polished ensemble has the sleek streamlining of an industrial part," yet despite

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[88] All of Brancusi's *Bird* sculptures are representative of the sculptor's practice, in which certain shapes and objects, like the *Cock* (or *Coq*) and the ovoid *Newborn*, among others, were, as Chave notes, "produced again and again over the course of four decades, often with only subtle variations among them." And the later *Bird*s *in Space* differ from the *Golden Bird*s primarily in that Brancusi represents the bird's tail or feet with a separate cone shape at the base of the body; these later *Bird*s *in Space* are also typically taller and thinner than the *Golden Bird*s. See Chave, *Constantin Brancusi*, 13, 112-15, and Hulten, Dumitresco, and Istrati, *Brancusi*, 294, 300-15.
[89] Carolyn Burke, *Becoming Modern*, 309.
[90] Chave, *Constantin Brancusi*, 4, and for a full account of the scandal, see 93-97.
[91] Four versions of the sculpture, executed between 1917 and 1924, exist; two are bronze, and two are wood. See Chave, *Constantin Brancusi*, 32, and Hulten, Dumitresco, and Istrati, *Brancusi*, 292, 299, 301.

such a "mechanical aura" there also exists an "erotic quality" in the sculpture's design.[92] Indeed, although the torso has no genitals, the sculpture in its entirety constitutes a phallus. Highly industrial and highly erotic, the *Torso* thus appears to prompt two distinct, discordant reactions from its viewers, as Alex Potts explains: the sculpture "at first seems to excise all trace of sex," since "the crotch area is wiped clean."[93] But such a noticeable absence "makes one more aware of what is missing than would a fig leaf […] particularly when one's sense of the clean precision of the castration flips into a recognition of the whole shape as a subtitute penis and testicles."[94] (Or, if we view this reversal in different terms, as Anna Chave suggests, we find ourselves confronted with "the torso of a young girl in the form of a stylized penis and scrotum," and in fact, Brancusi's friends, including Henri Pierre Roché and John Quinn, discussed the same shape as both a male torso and as a female torso.[95]) The complications in viewing the *Torso*, then, arise not so much because the sculpture deploys a seamless "combination of the mechanical with the erotic," although the presence of both these qualities does link Brancusi with Loy, whose Futurist aubade, as I have mentioned, envisions lovers twiddling to the dawn, "Round and round / Faster," until they "turn into machines" (63).[96]

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[92] Krauss, *Passages*, 100 (see ch. 1, n. 68). Critical interest in the complex, often contradictory evocations of Brancusi's work dates from his earliest exhibitions, and as Chave notes, they prevent any understanding of the sculptor via "a secure affiliation" with other modernist or avant-garde movements. In fact, in Alfred Barr's famous 1936 diagram of "Cubism and Abstract Art, "Brancusi was the sole artist of his generation singled out by name on the diagram": "Barr's elaborate flowchart positioned the art of Brancusi as emerging from a 'Machine Aesthetic'; but in his catalogue entry on the sculptor, he noted how most of his art 'approaches the shape of the egg which is, sculpturally speaking, organic form at its simplest.' Such confusion about Brancusi's art—Is it organic or technological, primitive or futuristic, classicizing or ethnic-looking, sacral or secular?—has prevailed from the first." Chave, *Constantin Brancusi*, 10-11.
[93] Potts, *Sculptural Imagination*, 142 (see ch. 1, n. 23).
[94] Ibid.
[95] Chave, *Constantin Brancusi*, 16, 98.
[96] Krauss, *Passages*, 100. We might also view this as a combination of "the mechanical and the biological" into forms that are as "machined-looking" as they are "organic," and for more on how Brancusi shared his interest

Rather, Brancusi's *Torso* challenges viewers because it seems, on the one hand, to be so completely mechanical, and on the other, to be just as entirely erotic: "the staging of the object and the evocative power and simplicity of shape work together to prompt these sudden reversals between reductive purism and sexual provocation."[97] And the same proves true with related Brancusi sculptures, like the *Golden Bird* which inspires Loy's poem. As Potts argues so lucidly, there exists "an oscillation in the response invited by a Brancusi sculpture between seeing it as a highly formalised art object and as an object of fantasy," and this oscillation is made particularly "remarkable because of the absence of features in the work that might mediate between these split perceptions."[98] The difficulty for the viewer, in sum, lies in the attempt to capture the sculpture's highly formal, nearly ascetic qualities at the same time as its erotic qualities, and it is in this difficulty that we can locate a vital additional way in which Brancusi's sculptures served to challenge the "prudishness" that had motivated the censorship of *Ulysses*. For Brancusi's works not only scorn such a retrograde attitude with their sexually evocative shapes; by possessing both strongly purified and strongly erotic modes, they also place pressure on very the value system that permits art objects to be categorized as totally appropriate or as wholly condemnable.

Loy's ekphrasis of the sculpture engages in the same kind of challenge. Indeed, as my analysis of her work thus far has demonstrated, Loy's poetry, in its denuded mode, strives

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in this kind of combination with his friend Marcel Duchamp (who was also Loy's friend), see Chave, *Constantin Brancusi*, 159.

[97] Potts, *Sculptural Imagination*, 142. Chave locates in this reversal a kind of violence: she writes that "however reassuringly complete and unitary his forms may look, they often represent fragments"—in this case a fragment and "a fragment of that fragment," since we see both a penis and a torso—and she argues that "the denaturalized or abstracted look of Brancusi's art […], as well as the self-contained, or whole-looking forms those abstractions often took[,] deflected attention from the violence implicit in his acts of dismemberment and disfiguration." Between the poles of purism and provocation that Potts identifies, in other words, may lie an interim stage of brutality. See Chave, *Constantin Brancusi*, 16, 32, 40, 98-101.

[98] Potts, *Sculptural Imagination*, 142.

for both "reductive purism and sexual provocation" and attempts to scrutinize the "highly formalised art object" alongside the "object of fantasy." Her response to Brancusi's *Bird* blends these imperatives, first by highlighting the extent to which the sculpture constitutes a distilled, denuded object. Loy fills the poem with phrases that describes the sculpture in these terms, and I want to quote the poem in its entirety to ensure that we maintain a sense of exactly how saturated it is with such imagery:

> The toy
> become the aesthetic archetype
>
> As if
> some patient peasant God
> had rubbed and rubbed
> the Alpha and Omega
> of Form
> into a lump of metal
>
> A naked orientation
> unwinged   unplumed
>   —the ultimate rhythm
> has lopped the extremities
> of crest and claw
> from
> the nucleus of flight
>
> The absolute act
> of art
> conformed
> to continent sculpture
> —bare as the brow of Osiris—
> this breast of revelation
>
> an incandescent curve
> licked by chromatic flames
> in labyrinths of reflections
>
> This gong
> of polished hyperaesthesia
> shrills with brass
> as the aggressive light

strikes
its significance

The immaculate
conception
of the inaudible bird
occurs
in gorgeous reticence . . . [99]

Not only is the *Golden Bird* "a naked orientation," "bare as the brow of Osiris," but the sculpture is also denuded in its status as a singular, elemental form: it is "the aesthetic archetype," "the nucleus of flight," "The absolute act / of art," and "This gong / of polished hyperaesthesia" (79). Brancusi's sculpture concretizes both the essence of flight and the essence of art, and in this ekphrasis, these essences seem divorced from any processes of movement or creation, which Loy evokes only as past events.

The poem begins, in fact, with a noun followed by an unconventional past participial phrase—"The toy / become the aesthetic archetype"—which indicates that the process of the sculpture's formation has already ended. The sculpture seems almost denuded of its own history, and Loy can do little more than imagine what might have happened (79). This is precisely how the poem proceeds, with its movement at the beginning of the second strophe to a meditation on "as if" (79). In this strophe, Loy depicts the creation of the sculpture as a reduction to its material essence: the "patient peasant God" who creates the sculpture rubs "the Alpha and Omega / of Form / into a lump of metal," which Loy then proceeds to describe in the next four strophes, each of which functions in apposition to the phrase "a lump of metal" (79). The opening lines of each strophe provide these appositives: "A naked orientation," "The absolute act / of art," "an incandescent curve," and "This gong / of

polished hyperaesthesia."[100] And these strophes provide additional images of the sculpture's creation by reduction, as in the third strophe, which imagines that an "ultimate rhythm / has lopped the extremities / of crest and claw / from / the nucleus of flight" (79). All of these phrases in apposition—as well as Loy's frequent use of past participles here—emphasize the sculpture's status as a created object in its finished state, an abstract epitome that remains after a process of distillation.

Furthermore, the poem's final strophe adds one final superlative to describe the creation of this perfectly unadorned object:

> The immaculate
> conception
> of the inaudible bird
> occurs
> in gorgeous reticence . . . (80)

With the intrusion of the present tense here, it might seem possible that Loy offers the reader or viewer a new avenue to access the sculpture's prior history, but this moment of creation nevertheless remains inaccessible. The entire making of the *Golden Bird*—including the rubbing of the "peasant God," the "lopp[ing]" off of all excess, and the polishing of the bronze to a final sheen—has been an "immaculate / conception." In other words, Brancusi's sculpture has been conceived in such a pure state that it as much an idea as it is an object (although, as I shall explain shortly, the sculpture is not only an idea, nor more an idea than it is an object). Loy links this abstraction to the sculpture's inability to speak: it remains

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[99] Mina Loy, "Brancusi's Golden Bird," in *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, 79-80. Subsequent citations of this poem appear in parentheses.

[100] Of course, since "an incandescent curve" isn't capitalized, it is also possible to read this phrase in relation to the line that precedes it—"this breast of revelation"—as an appositive, or as the predicate of a sentence missing the verb, "is," that would link the two strophes together.

"inaudible" in its "reticence."[101] (If we choose to follow Carolyn Burke in reading the poem as an ars poetica, Loy's emulation of a silent object might prove problematic, since the sculpture's "aesthetic inevitably leads one to the abandonment of writing": in this view, as the poem trails off into a final ellipsis, we might read its conclusion as a surrender to one of the maxims long associated with the relationship between the visual and verbal arts, that poetry is a speaking painting, and that painting is silent or mute poetry.[102] But as I will demonstrate, Loy's ellipsis makes more sense, within the context of Loy's other work on Brancusi, as a vector—an indication of movement—rather than as a retreat into poetic silence.) Even though the sculpture's creation occurs in the present tense, then, the process remains at a sonic and visual distance from the reader.

Loy's exploration of the sculpture's denuded, essentialized qualities thus provides both the organizing principle of the poem and its central strain of imagery, and in placing such stress upon these characteristics, Loy recognizes the features of Brancusi's work that were most appealing to her modernist contemporaries. As Potts writes, the sculptor was "celebrated for his supposed pursuit of an utterly simplified sculptural ideal": "in his lifetime, Brancusi was usually seen as doing what any nicely behaved modernist purist ought to do, which was to pare down the irregularities of observed form in the interests of creating a new purity and stability of shape."[103] This paring down is the central impulse that William Carlos Williams identified in Brancusi's work: "there was … with Brancusi the constant pull towards the centre, to simplify, to eliminate the inessential, to purify, a scientific impulse to

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[101] The reticence of the *Bird* remains typical of Brancusi's overall aesthetic, which is, as Chave writes, characterized less by "bombast" than by a "pregnant silence." See Chave, *Constantin Brancusi*, 43.
[102] See Carolyn Burke, "'Accidental Aloofness': Barnes, Loy, and Modernism," in *Silence and Power: A Reevaluation of Djuna Barnes*, ed. Mary Lynn Broe (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), 76.
[103] Potts, *Sculptural Imagination*, 132, 141.

get at the very gist of the matter."[104] Similarly, Clive Bell wrote that "he creates a pure form," made especially evident "by the fact that of some of his most beautiful works there are as many as three versions, the second pushed farther in the direction of simplification than the first, and the third farther than the second. […] in working towards his goal, Brancusi becomes aware of a further goal, of a simplification more complete, and more expressive, therefore, than his original conception."[105] (Brancusi himself said nearly the same thing in a 1917 letter to John Quinn, who had asked why he "had been producing additional versions of sculptures done earlier": "I did not repeat them merely to do them differently," Brancusi wrote, "but to go further."[106])

And in his own essay on the sculptor in *The Little Review*, Ezra Pound—who was "the sculptor's first serious advocate in the press" and "the person initially most responsible for the canonical reading of Brancusi's art"—likewise exalts the pursuit of purity in Brancusi's work.[107] Brancusi, Pound writes, has "continued the process of purgation" in modern sculpture: "Above all he is a man in love with perfection. […] Brancusi has set out on the maddeningly […] difficult exploration toward getting all the forms into one form."[108] Pound describes the formal perfection that he discerns in Brancusi's work in slightly paradoxical terms: it is both the result of a "process of purgation"—the refined remainder left behind when all excess has been eliminated—and yet somehow, as one form that encapsulates all

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[104] William Carlos Williams, "Brancusi," in *A Recognizable Image: William Carlos Williams on Art and Artists*, ed. B. Dijkstra (New York: New Directions, 1978), 250, quoted in Potts, *Sculptural Imagination*, 143.
[105] Clive Bell, "The Art of Brancusi," in *Vogue* 1 June 1926: 83. American reviewers of Brancusi's work struck much the same note: *The New York Sun* declared that he had "carried abstraction further than any one," *The Art News* lauded his "genius for simplification," and the *Brooklyn Eagle* expressed admiration for his creation of "the essential forms of life." *New York Sun* 27 Feb. 1926, *The Art News* 27 Feb. 1926, and *Brooklyn Eagle* 28 Feb. 1926, all quoted in Chave, *Constantin Brancusi*, 10.
[106] Quoted in Chave, *Constantin Brancusi*, 207.
[107] Ibid., 1.
[108] Ezra Pound, "Brancusi," in *The Little Review* 8.1 (Autumn 1921): 4-5.

other forms, possibly also the result of a process of accretion. But despite this implication, Pound's analysis makes perfect sense alongside Loy's aesthetics of denuding: here Pound approaches a description of Brancusi's form as an epitome. It is both the essential form that remains when everything superfluous has been stripped away and the concentrated nucleus of other forms.

Pound approximates this kind of language in his discussion of Brancusi's ovoid sculptures, like *Danaïde* (1913) or *The Beginning of the World* (1920), which attracted his particular attention: "as an interim label, one might consider them as master-keys to the world of form—not 'his' world of form, but as much as he has found of 'the' world of form. […] I take it Brancusi is meditating upon pure form free from all terrestrial gravitation; form as free in its own life as the form of the analytic geometers."[109] Pound views Brancusi as a "latter-day Platonist" and his ovoids as sublime exercises in unadulterated aesthetics (or perhaps metaphysics),[110] and although Pound usefully articulates one way in which we might consider Brancusi's elemental shapes as abstract epitomes—"master-keys to the world of form"—it sometimes proves difficult to glimpse any art *objects* in Pound's engagement with Brancusi's work. For this reason, despite the extent to which Loy's ekphrasis echoes the contemporary emphasis on Brancusi's pursuit of an abstract artistic ideal and "process of purgation," I want to pause here to draw out an additional strain of thought in the poem that does not quite align with Pound's reading, although it certainly derives from obvious features of Brancusi's actual work. That is, at the same time that Loy goes to such rhetorical lengths

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[109] Ibid., 5-6. As he did with his *Bird* sculptures, Brancusi executed multiple versions of each of these shapes: see Hulten, Dumitresco, and Istrati, *Brancusi*, 284 and 287 (cat. nos. 63 and 75), for the versions of *Danaïde* (as well as the related versions of the ovoids *Mademoiselle Pogany*, *Sleeping Muse*, and *The Newborn*), and 295 and 301 (cat. nos. 115 and 143) for the versions of *The Beginning of the World*.
[110] Chave, *Constantin Brancusi*, 41.

to underscore the sculpture's status as an abstracted aesthetic form—an "archetype," an "orientation,"an "absolute act," a "significance," a symbol, in short—she also highlights its incontrovertible materiality, especially with the unrefined phrase that concludes the second strophe, "a lump of metal" (79-80). This particular phrase has nothing "hyperaesthetic" about it, and it seems more grounded than the rest of the poem, or more subject to "terrestrial gravitation," if we borrow Pound's term.

In this moment, Loy seems to call up the extent to which Brancusi's sculpture attracts simplified interpretations or masquerades as an object without artistic aspirations. Although perhaps less clearly than the *Torso*, the *Bird* sculptures might appear wholly industrial, or mechanical, as indeed one did for U. S. Customs officials in 1926, when Brancusi shipped a 1926 *Bird in Space* and twenty-five other sculptures from France to New York for an exhibition: upon their arrival in the United States, officials "examined the objects for duty-free entry as works of art, took one look at the *Bird in Space* and saw the similarities it bore to a propeller blade or some other industrial object. They insisted on imposing a commercial import tax on the work, refusing to believe that it was sculpture."[111] As I have already mentioned, I do not want to imply that Brancusi's sculpture, however archetypal it may be, is absolutely simplified or reduced. But if we refrain from fully identifying objecthood with a kind of impoverished simplicity, then the Customs officials' reading of Brancusi's work can remind us—helpfully, I think—of its materiality, so that we do not risk reading the *Bird* sculptures (or Loy's ekphrasis) as exercises in ethereal abstraction. Rather, the poem insists that the sculpture constitutes both a primary artistic

[111] Krauss, *Passages*, 99-100, and for a full account of the Customs controversy and lawsuit, see Chave, *Constantin Brancusi*, 198-202.

form and a naked, elemental object, and both emphases remain in keeping with Loy's aesthetics of denuding.

Indeed, we find the same aesthetics in a later poem, in which Loy more or less rewrites the second strophe of "Brancusi's Golden Bird." This poem, simply titled "Gertrude Stein," appeared originally as the untitled epigraph to Loy's two-part essay on Stein in the *Transatlantic Review* in 1924.[112] In the essay, Loy offers her reading of Stein's work, and she uses some terms that echo those in "Brancusi's Golden Bird," by arguing that Stein, like other modern artists, asks "what would we know about anything, if we didn't know anything about it?" and seeks "to track intellection back to the embryo."[113] These artists remove all layers of culturally determined consciousness and attempt to crystallize "the irreducible surplus of the abstract" in their works.[114] Loy's essay on Stein, in short, locates the priorities of her own aesthetics of denuding in another writer's work, and the poem that heads her essay likewise concentrates on the production by reduction that gives us the abstract art object. I quote the poem in full:

> Curie
> of the laboratory
> of vocabulary
>   she crushed
> the tonnage
> of consciousness
> congealed to phrases
>   to extract
> a radium of the word[115]

Loy's lines here are characteristically short, but much simpler, grammatically, than we find elsewhere in her poetry, so that Loy manages to impart a sense of the step-by-step

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[112] Conover, editorial notes to *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, 203.
[113] Loy, "Gertrude Stein," in *The Last Lunar Baedeker*, 297.

procedure that informs the work of Marie Curie, the composition of Gertrude Stein, and the construction of her own poem. And here, as in "Brancusi's Golden Bird," process is a means of paring away excess in order to move from an entire lexicon ("vocabulary") to the units of a sentence ("phrases") and finally to the singular "word." Loy recounts the process of paring down by employing a grammar that works in the opposite direction; she layers prepositional and verbal phrases here, and piles up appositives and strophes in the Brancusi poem. Such a grammar is clearly meant to ensure that seven of the lines in "Gertrude Stein" conclude with a noun, and the three longest nouns—"laboratory," "vocabulary," and "consciousness"—have a vital function in the poem's creation of meaning through sound.[116] These nouns arrive at the end of prepositional phrases beginning with "of": their lines move quickly towards these nouns as conclusions and land hard at the end on their several syllables. They represent the "tonnage" one may achieve with a single word that arrives after the proper preparation, and Loy delights in the nearly voluptuous way they roll off the tongue and land.

In a similar way, especially suggestive phrases like "the radium of the word" in this poem, or "the nucleus of flight" in the Brancusi poem, conclude the strophe, so that we are left with a distilled essence. But because such radiant language arrives as the final object of a relatively long series of phrases, it feels somehow heavy—or perhaps dense. That is, in the case of "Gertrude Stein," the final "word" contains all of the energy produced by the poem's patterns of sound, its verbal phrases, and its lineation: freighted in this way, "word" acquires

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[114] Ibid.

[115] Mina Loy, "Gertrude Stein," in *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, ed. Conover, 94.

[116] Alex Goody, by contrast, argues that poem places special emphasis on its verbal phrases—in the indented lines in particular—in order to underscore of movement of these creative processes. See Alex Goody, *Modernist Articulations: A Cultural Study of Djuna Barnes, Mina Loy, and Gertrude Stein* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 138.

a nearly Biblical resonance.[117] Moreover, "word" becomes a synedochic substitute for the poem itself, which delivers a great deal of potential reverberation in a very small package, by managing at its end to announce its own arrival as a singular, elemental aesthetic object. In this way, Loy's "word" becomes very similar to the *Golden Bird*. It is Brancusi's "gong of polished hyperaesthesia": it resonates, becomes almost material. Loy's brief poem on Stein also manages to highlight a related characteristic that Loy's and Brancusi's work share—what Chave describes as a "gnomic and aphoristic" quality.[118] Like the resonant "word" that Stein produces—or like the reverberating poem that Loy writes—Brancusi's sculptures sometimes seem to be "displaced relics" meant to strike viewers dumb with their "sacred and revelatory" quality.[119] Loy's poem about Stein thus underscores the extent to which the distilled forms at the heart of her aesthetics of denuding are always both artistic abstracts and elemental objects.

Elemental Erotics and Dynamic Form in Flight

Even though Loy repeatedly evokes the materiality of these distilled forms, and uses her preferred scientific language of deflation in the poem on Stein, she does not aim, in her art poetry, to abandon all eroticism. As I have claimed, she brings denuded forms together with "sexual provocation" and "object[s] of fantasy," and in her ekphrasis, she summons the

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[117] Burke argues convincingly that Loy is always "also expressing her own ideas about modernism" when she writes about Stein, but she misreads this poem as a statement that "voiced her sense that the aim of modernism was to release this untapped energy." But as I have shown, I believe instead that the word "word" at the end of the poem encapsulates the poem's energy into a resonant object. See Carolyn Burke, *Becoming Modern*, 318, 329.
[118] Chave, *Constantin Brancusi*, 2.
[119] For Chave, this capacity to strike a view dumb arises from the way in which the machine "is united with the sensual" in Brancusi's suggestive "totems," and she notes that Pound himself identified this quality in the sculptor's work. Ibid., 3, 145, 162.

extent to which the abstracted, refined shapes of Brancusi's works are responsible for significant portion of their erotic charge. For Brancusi, a realist rendering of a nude body could never be erotic: although Brancusi was not affiliated with the Futurists (or with any avant-garde movement, for that matter), he experienced a discontent with the sexualization of the nude body in "the high classical, Renaissance, and academic figurative traditions" very closely related to that of the Futurists, and he moved away from lifelike forms after 1907, when he "began insisting (and would continue to insist) that 'sculpted male bodies are not as handsome as toads' and that 'a man's figure isn't very plastic.'"[120] Referring to sculpted nudes as "beefsteaks," he strove to create "a less physicalized image of the body, a more contained expression of emotion, and so a sense of spirituality."[121] As Potts puts it, "the uncompromisingly simple formal purism of his work" proves "crucial to the evocative effect of the impurities that appealed to the other, Surrealist or Dadaist, aspect of the early modernist imaginary. The purism […] brings the impurity into focus."[122]

Brancusi's *Bird*, in particular, epitomizes this dialogue between purism and impurity. The sculpture presents a clearly phallic shape, as I have already noted, and the sculptor himself recognized the provocative possibilities of this shape, saying "'I could wish that one day my *Birds* and *Cocks* would pervade the whole universe and express total liberation.'"[123] The appeal of such a shape—and such a sentiment—to Loy seems unsurprising, since she proclaimed herself to be a poet interested in avoiding "anglo saxon covered up-ness," and her contemporaries also noted the brash nudity of Brancusi's sculpture. Notably, William Carlos Williams—who knew Loy well, having joined her in performing a play by Kreymborg

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[120] Ibid., 17, 52.
[121] Ibid., 30.

with the Provincetown Players in 1916—wrote that the sculptor had completed his work with a "daring that disdained to hide […] anything from the view of the world. […] So the artist, as in the case of Goya in his *Maja Desnuda*, had nothing to conceal and did not."[124] Williams highlights the fact that sculptures like the *Golden Bird* constitute not only denuded, essentialized objects but also images purposefully calculated to evoke the nudity of the human male; as Chave rightly points out, "a bird's body in flight is normally oriented horizontally, with its wings extended," but Brancusi instead "tilt[s] the birds' heads straight upward," which reinforces "the sexual valence of his bird."[125]

Yet at the same time that Brancusi capitalizes upon the markedly erotic shape of the *Bird* sculptures, he also requires this shape to carry additional meanings. For if Brancusi "explicitly associated birds with love and lovers," then, like the symbolists, he was also keen to use sexual love "as a symbol of spiritual aspiration," and in fact, "he once defined love as 'the flight of the Fire-bird into the eternal and the absolute.'"[126] Brancusi's birds, then, are both phalluses and phoenixes, evocative of a "yearning for joy, love, ecstasy, and transcendence" that might find satisfaction in what is simultaneously "an embodied and a disembodied state of bliss."[127] This register of the *Bird*s' erotics suggests that the sculptures are capable of representing both desire and fulfillment, and more important, that they manage to convert their powerful materiality into a sign of the immaterial. This conversion aligns with the kind of interaction that I have identified as central to Loy's *Songs to Joannes*,

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[122] Potts, *Sculptural Imagination*, 144.
[123] Radu Varia, *Brancusi* (New York: Rizzoli, 1986), 304, chap. 14n1, quoted in Chave, *Constantin Brancusi*, 119.
[124] William Carlos Williams, "Brancusi," in *A Recognizable Image: William Carlos Williams on Art and Artists*, ed. B. Dijkstra (New York: New Directions, 1978), 253, quoted in Potts, *Sculptural Imagination*, 143. For an account of the Provincetown Players' production of Kreymborg's *Lima Beans*, see Carolyn Burke, *Becoming Modern*, 220-23.
[125] Chave, *Constantin Brancusi*, 119.
[126] Ibid., 61, 142.

where we find lovers' bodies "clash[ing] together […] / In seismic orgasm" and yet also extending beyond visually verifiable boundaries. Thus for Loy, Brancusi's *Bird* becomes more than just a phallic "significance" or a "naked orientation." It is also "the nucleus of flight," an object that works like a vector to suggest and initiate movement, in keeping with the sculptor's aim: "'It is not the bird that I wish to express but its gift, its flight, its élan.'"[128] In this regard, Loy's admiration—and perhaps reverence—for Brancusi's *Golden Bird* aligns perfectly with her own aesthetics of nudity and denuding.

Yet despite this congruence, it nevertheless seems odd for the poet who seemed to mock male anatomy in *Songs to Joannes* ("the skin-sack / In which a wanton duality" is "packed") to acclaim such a phallic sculpture and seem nearly to regard it as the aesthetic, even perhaps the erotic, ideal to which all art should aspire. Ellen Keck Stauder suggests one way of managing this dissonance with her reading of the third and fourth strophes of the poem, in which Loy describes the sculpture as both "bare as the brow of Osiris" and as the "breast of revelation": "Loy plays with the dual gendering of the bird in her poem. [. . .] The mention here of Osiris and thus of his rememberment by Isis, coincides with the shift in emphasis from the de-limbed nucleus to the now female and radiant 'breast of revelation.'"[129] Stauder directs the reader's attention to the fact that Loy deploys multiple

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[127] Ibid.

[128] Claire Gilles Guilbert, "Propos de Brancusi," in *Prisme des Arts* 12 (1927): 7, trans. by Chave, quoted in Chave, *Constantin Brancusi*, 119. Chave argues that Brancusi almost manages "to render not merely birds but flight and space" in part by streamlining his sculptures of animals in ways "that evinced their soaring or gliding motions and, by extension, the seemingly weightless environments that permit such movement," so that the sculptor nearly succeeds at "fixing the fluid and materializing the immaterial." See Chave, *Constantin Brancusi*, 141.

[129] Stauder's complex reading of the gendering of the Brancusi *Bird* (via Loy's poem) echoes other reactions to the sculptor's work, particularly that of William Carlos Williams, who, in an essay spurred by a major Brancusi retrospective in 1955, noted the femininity of *Princess X* and its metamorphosis into a phallic shape. The *Bird* sculptures, in Stauder's view, can undergo a similar metamorphosis, but in the opposite direction. See Ellen Keck Stauder, "Beyond the Synopsis of Vision: The Conception of Art in Ezra Pound and Mina Loy,"

references to human nudity throughout the poem by characterizing the sculpture not just as a "naked" phallus, but also as a "bare" brow and as an exposed "breast of revelation"; in so doing, the poet draws on the extent to which Brancusi's sculpture is an indeterminately gendered object. Indeed, Chave argues that Brancusi's "birds are not only phallic but also constitute a gently curving crescent or almond shape, a sign for women's sex organs."[130]

In this way, the sculpture's condensation to such a streamlined shape actually manages to complicate—or perhaps to amplify—its erotics, so that we must again underscore that even though the *Bird* remains a singular and concentrated art object, we cannot read it as a simplified form. Brancusi's shapes are far from elementary, and they prove difficult to apprehend, as several art historians have noted. Krauss writes, for instance, that it is actually "the unified quality of the single shapes, whether ovoid or finlike or voluted," which ensures that "there is no way to read them formally, no way to decode the set of their internal relationships, for to put it simply, no relationships exist."[131] What Brancusi's works offer instead of legible internal relationships, according to Krauss, is "something one might call the deflection of an ideal geometry. That is, when confronting many of his works, one seems to be seeing simple spheres or cylinders or ellipsoids that have

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Paideuma 24 (1995): 210-21, and Potts, *Sculptural Imagination*, 142-44, for a full account of Williams's engagement with Brancusi's work.

[130] Furthermore, in the case of the development of the bird motif in the later *Bird in Space* series, Chave contends that each work's title "suggests another kind of dual sexual coding," since "Brancusi explicitly claims the space around the work as part of the work. This is not merely a (phallic) bird, but a bird *in* space, a visible element in an invisible one, and space, the not-seen, may be associated with the distinctive voids of the female sexual and reproductive organs." In all of these ways, the curved form of the *Bird* manages to elide sexual difference in what Chave calls "an image of dual sexuality, full and replete, of love and liberation through union or reunion." And while Loy would never fully embrace "a non- or a dual sexual identity," the sculptor's interest in "doubling, confouding, and fusing the markers of sexual identity" is echoed by Loy's exploration of the ways in which lovers' egos and bodies are doubled, confounded, and fused in *Songs to Joannes*. See Chave, *Constantin Brancusi*, 121, 123 (emphasis original).

[131] This lack of internal formal relationships begins to explain the absence identified by Potts, of those features that could "mediate between these split perceptions" encouraged by a Brancusi sculpture, "between seeing it as

been deformed in some way."[132] The *Bird* sculpture that inspired Loy's poem presents one such deformed cylinder, and Potts explains this deflection of the ideal in greater detail in relation to the later, slightly more deformed *Bird in Space* series:

> The *Bird in Space*, which from the side seems to be launching itself in a direction defined by the outward curve of the body, does not set up a stable directional axis. The subtle variations in the slender rounded shape as one moves round it make it difficult to isolate any one view as the definitive profile shape. Seen head-on the work becomes very narrow, a little like the later Giacometti figures, but it lacks a definite profile to anchor this elusive frontality. If one continues circulating round the work to try to get a firmer grip on its pose and shape, this only creates more ambiguity, as the barely perceptible variations of aspect alternately suggest that it is launching itself outwards or pulling back."[133]

For Pound, this ambiguity meant that a Brancusi sculpture could give the viewer "satisfaction no matter what angle of vision," and it was a measure of Brancusi's skill that he could achieve the difficult height of giving this satisfaction "by a single mass."[134] (I do want to note, though, that both Potts and Pound restrict themselves to discussing only the bronze, or marble, portions of Brancusi's sculptures in these quotations: they neglect Brancusi's bases, which have always, as Chave points out, served to counter the aesthetic and symbolic qualities of the upper bronze or marble pieces. Since Loy's poem also ignores Brancusi's base, I have not paused to analyze it, but I would be remiss if I did not mention that Brancusi's bases constitute one of the most significant ways in which he challenged sculptural convention.[135]) In short, any thorough viewing in the round of Brancusi's sculptures makes quite clear that none of his *Bird*s can be reduced to a "simple, stably poised

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a highly formalised art object and as an object of fantasy." See Krauss, *Passages*, 85-86, and Potts, *Sculptural Imagination*, 142.

132 Krauss, *Passages*, 86.

133 Potts, *Sculptural Imagination*, 139-41.

134 Pound, "Brancusi," 5.

135 For more on his bases, see Chave, *Constantin Brancusi*, 14, 16, 186-93, 222-49,

form": their asymmetries "become more obvious," and each sculpture refuses "to assimilate itself to the perfect symmetry of a slender column or cylinder to which it seemed to aspire."[136] A Brancusi sculpture viewed in the round is, Chave writes, always "slightly out of kilter": "the seeming stability of the work is often only that (and many of the sculptures had to be anchored to their bases with hidden rods to keep them erect)."[137] Thus despite the *Golden Bird*'s apparently rudimentary materiality and its refined shape, the sculpture remains unwilling to settle down. In keeping with Loy's understanding of the piece as "the nucleus of flight," it acquires a quality of movement when we inspect its shape more closely—so much so that Pound could say that Brancusi's "research for the aerial has produced his bird which stands unsupported upon its diminished base."[138]

The bronze finish of the sculpture even further intensifies this impression of movement. Thus far, I have discussed the shape of the sculpture as unified—remaining singular even if it is not simplified or stable when viewed in the round—but as Krauss and others contend, the boundaries of this shape can appear to be in flux when light strikes the reflective metallic surface: "The flamelike bronze shape of *Bird in Space* seems to alter continually because of the way light falls on the elongated convexity of the sculpture's surface. As light strikes the tubular form, it tends to dissolve the vertical contours into an inexact, unstable gleam, fracturing one's sense of its absolute shape."[139] In fact, Brancusi was

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[136] Potts, *Sculptural Imagination*, 141-42.
[137] Chave, *Constantin Brancusi*, 41.
[138] Pound, "Brancusi," 6.
[139] Krauss, *Passages*, 96-99. This instability unnerved Pound, and his objections to this gleaming, reflective finish raise the possibility that the sculpture offers an arena for narcissistic self-contemplation, or even for a kind of autoeroticism, and these are additional dimensions to the sculpture's erotic appeal that Loy embraces with her emphasis on the sculpture's reflective properties and its construction through rubbing. See Pound, "Brancusi," 6, and Chave, *Constantin Brancusi*, 20, 66, 78-79, and 211; and for readings of the ways in which the sound effects of Loy's poem recreate the reflective surface of Brancusi's bronze sculpture, see Stauder, "The Irreducible Surplus of Abstraction," 366-67, and Kouidis, *Mina Loy*, 99-100, 122-23.

particularly careful to draw on the shape-altering power of the polished bronze surface, both in the way that he staged his works, and in the way that he photographed them: take, for example, the light effect at work in the photograph of the sculpture that appeared in *The Dial*,[140] which Brancusi took himself for Foster's article, and which emphasizes the reflective surface of the bronze and courts "the dissipation of the edge of the work," so that "the sculpture's form is almost completely dissolved by the surface dazzle and play of shadow."[141] (Like Loy's poem, Brancusi's photograph places much greater emphasis on the bronze portion of the sculpture than on its base.) Despite the sculpture's elementality—the quality that Loy identifies when she calls it "a lump of metal"—this kind of dissolution manages to mount what Pound called "a revolt against one sort of solidity."[142] Brancusi himself even seemed to acknowledge this goal, saying "'I think a true form ought to suggest infinity. The surfaces ought to look as thought they went on forever, as though they proceeded out from the mass into some perfect and complete existence.'"[143] Thus Brancusi's *Bird* encapsulates two of the principal fascinations "surrounding the modernist art object": on the one hand, it provides "a peculiarly concrete instance of the autonomy of the art work, of plastic form really made into objective self-sufficient thing," and on the other hand, it also attests to "the idea of dematerialising solidity and mass in pure form and space and volume."[144] For this

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[140] Constantin Brancusi, *The Golden Bird*, photograph, c. 1922, *The Dial* (Nov. 1922): 509.

[141] Krauss, *Passages*, 99, and Potts, *Sculptural Imagination*, 134. For more on his deployment of photography, see Chave, *Constantin Brancusi*, 3, 212-15, 279.

[142] Pound, "Brancusi," 6.

[143] Athena T. Spear, *Brancusi's Birds* (New York: New York University Press, 1969), 21, quoted in Chave, *Constantin Brancusi*, 136.

[144] Potts discusses these twinned, nearly contradictory preoccupations in general, without reference to Brancusi, but later, he implies that Brancusi's work can specifically be seen to instantiate either vision of modernist sculpture by noting that Brancusi's work has been "celebrated for its reconfiguring of the sculptural object by writers of widely different aesthetic persuasions": on the one hand, "in William Tucker's *The Language of Sculpture* Brancusi is presented as the exemplary creator of a perfectly self-contained modernist object," and on the other hand, "in Rosalind Krauss's *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, by contrast, he is seen to prefigure the post-

reason, even though Brancusi was not a Futurist sculptor, and even though his work does not fully pursue the "simultaneousness of the ambient," "the dislocation and dismemberment of objects," and "the scattering and fusion of details" that the Futurists championed as the next artistic frontier, I want to claim that Brancusi's sculpture, as it appears in Loy's ekphrasis, constitutes a related kind of dynamic form. Like the supposedly "inviolate egos" or quadrille-dancing fireflies of *Songs to Joannes*, the *Bird* challenges conventional boundaries and extends beyond visually confirmable margins.

"Primary Embodiment" and Protean Form

Loy even further underscores her view of Brancusi's sculptures as dynamic forms in a short piece called "Brancusi and the Ocean" that is both essay and prose poem:

> The interpretation of Brancusi—
> the analysis of the elemental.
>
> An art engendered beyond the formidable naked subjectivity—
> Here is no abstraction coerced to the domain of form—
> Perhaps form arrested at its very inception—
> a certain *élan* of primary embodiment—
> has revealed to us the intriguing comparison of elemental form—
> evolved by the forces of nature—
> and an elemental form whose evolution is submitted to the process of the intellect—
>
> Of a man comparatively young in years—whose concentration—such
> sublime and imprecise
> the friction of his aesthetic has brought to a white heat of featureless beauty—
> the memory and anticipation of aesthetic fulfilment—
> and he has got irrefutably that something that every one of them lacks—

Minimalist shift from such an obsession with the inner formal logic of the object to a concern with its surface qualities and its staging." Tucker highlights the autonomy of Brancusi's work, and Krauss highlight its dissolution of solidity. Potts, *Sculptural Imagination*, 124, 132.

> the primary investigators of beauty.
>
> At any race he has set a terrible precedent—that will be impossible to eliminate with either fundamental or accessory—
> The form on which form is based.
> And so elemental - - - -
> that it actually connives with the atmosphere in any attainment of a prolongation of its direction
> A song to the eye—
> "who" used to take after *belle matìere*—
>
> Brancusi is one of the few moderns—whose art has survived its own impetus—its cosmic reticence—he has got none of that everything else that all his other contemporary sculptors have—[145]

The initial phrasing, rhythm, and line breaks of this piece seem extraordinarily similar to what we find in "Brancusi's Golden Bird"—almost as if the poem had been paraphrased as an essay but its lineation and breath retained—so that even though Loy does not mention any sculpture by name, nor refer to any specifically bird-like features of the work in question, we cannot help but read this essay with Brancusi's *Bird* sculptures in mind. Significantly, Loy seems to echo Brancusi's description of his own surfaces, which should "look as thought they went on forever, as though they proceeded out from the mass into some perfect and complete existence," when she writes that his work is "so elemental - - - - / that it actually connives with the atmosphere in any attainment of a prolongation of its direction."

In Futurist terms, then, Brancusi's *Bird* gives the viewer at once the elemental object and "the simultaneousness of the ambient" so that we witness "the apparation of a whole:

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[145] "Brancusi and the Ocean," in *Stories and Essays of Mina Loy*, ed. Sara Crangle (Champaign, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 2011), 221-22. Sara Crangle notes that "the rough, handwritten document of 'Brancusi and the Ocean' includes a draft of a poem entitled 'La descent des Ganges,'" and because "a more complete version of this poem is published in *The Last Lunar Baedeker* as 'Descent of the Ganges," and dated by the editor of *The Last Lunar Baedeker*, Roger Conover, "as most likely written in the late 1930s or early 1940s," we can assume that this aphoristic essay on Brancusi also dates from some time before the late 1930s. See Crangle, notes to *Stories and Essays of Mina Loy*, 370.

environment object."[146] (It is this quality, perhaps, that the sculptor sought to highlight by titling the sculptures his later series "*Bird in Space*.") And if the *Bird* extends beyond the edges of "the lump of metal" that supposedly define and restrict its shape, then this phenomenon may account for Loy's struggle to describe the sculpture's form beyond its "elemental" quality. In "Brancusi and the Ocean," Brancusi's *Bird* seems to possess a more charged form than is typical of sculpture, a shape that prompts Loy to consider the object as having a relationship to the very idea of form: "Here is no abstraction coerced to the domain of form— / Perhaps form arrested at its very inception— / a certain *élan* of primary embodiment—." In her view, Brancusi hasn't chosen to seize the notion of abstraction and encapsulate it in a physical object, nor has he attempted to create a Platonic figure for abstraction. What the sculptor has managed, instead, is to capture form itself as it begins to exist, in the "elemental," "primary" state of "its very inception," its initial "embodiment."[147] A Brancusi sculpture, in other words, renders form as it becomes material and it enters the physical world, so that a piece like the *Golden Bird* offers the viewer nothing less than a protean form: "the form on which form is based."

Brancusi's *Bird* may even seem to picture dynamism as Boccioni imagined it—as "the lyrical conception of forms"—and if we lean a bit harder on Boccioni's and Loy's shared diction here, we might go so far as to argue that the kind of formal conception Loy describes in "Brancusi and the Ocean" is not all that different from the human conception

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[146] Balla et al., "The Exhibitors to the Public," 106, and Boccioni, "Dynamism," 190.

[147] My paraphrase and interpretation of Loy might here begin to suggest that the sculpture behind "Brancusi and the Ocean" is actually one of his ovoids, like *The Beginning of the World*, which present an egglike shape to the viewer and might therefore seem a more logical inspiration for Loy's description of "form arrested at its very inception." And this may be true, since Loy certainly saw Brancusi's ovoids on a visit to his studio, and since there may well be more than one sculpture that prompts her lines in this essay. But I want nevertheless to

she discusses in *Songs to Joannes*, where her speaker often contemplates the possibility that she and her lover might conceive a child.[148] In a portion of section XIII that I have already quoted, the speaker voices her fear about the danger that she might experience a loss of self, and the lines that describe this fear are also simultaneously about the chance that her self will merge with that of lover in their offspring: they "might tumble together / Depersonalized / Identical / Into the terrific Nirvana / Me you — you — me" (58). The speaker expresses her concern about the combination of personalities that results in the annihilation of both, and these lines underscore that vacuum with the word "Nirvana," which means "non-existence."[149] We might also read "Nirvana" here as a kind of placeholder for their desired child, since as the rest of the poem makes quite clear, no child is ever created. (Whether this absence occurs because of miscarriage, abortion, or simply failed conception is virtually impossible to tell.[150]) Loy returns to this image of the two lovers combining in the production of, or falling into, nothing, later in the poem, in section XXVII:

> The contents
> Of our ephemeral conjunction
> In aloofness from Much
> Flowed to approachment of — — — —
> NOTHING (64)

Here Loy deploys her characteristic dashes both as a kind of vector, to signal the lovers' approach to conception, and as an indicator of emptiness, of the absence of substantive

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claim that Brancusi's *Bird* sculpture remain Loy's primary inspiration because of the strong similarities between this piece and "Brancusi's Golden Bird."

148 Boccioni's original Italian is "Dinamismo è la concezione lirica delle forme," and as is true in English, "concezione" is used in Italian both for the notion of conception as it relates to thought (as in "the lyrical conception of forms") and as it relates to reproduction (as in the "immaculate /Conception").

149 Oxford English Dictionary Online, s.v. "nirvana," 1.a., 1.b., accessed March 14, 2013, http://dictionary.oed.com/.

150 Critics have found evidence to support all of these possibilities; for a variety of readings, see DuPlessis, "'Seismic Orgasm,'" 61-64; Shreiber, "'Love Is a Lyric,'" 91; Peppis, "Rewriting Sex," 570, 573, 575; Goody, *Modernist Articulations*, 98-99; and Pozorski, "Eugenicist Mistress," 62.

words or offspring. The lovers are left instead only with "Nucleus Nothing / Inconceivable concept" (63), the victims of "prenatal plagiarism" and "foetal buffoons" (66). They have missed, in sum, their chance to capture the "proto-form" (66).

In this way, Loy manages to appropriate the Futurist notion of dynamic form, remake it, and deploy it for a purpose that is dramatically opposed to Futurist aims. What she offers, both in her work on Brancusi and in *Songs to Joannes*, is a theorization of conception that simultaneously makes use of a Futurist-inflected understanding of dynamic, elemental forms and strongly counters the ideal of immaculate male conception that arose in various avant-garde movements in the early twentieth century, when artists like Marinetti (in his novel *Mafarka*) and Guillaume Apollinaire (in his play *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*) put forward a procreative ideal in which men give birth to their own offspring.[151] But throughout her oeuvre—in her autobiographical poetry, her art poetry, and the "Feminist Manifesto"—Loy offers a feminist rejoinder to this ideal that nevertheless draws on a Futurist understanding of how life at its most elemental behaves, whether this life is the protean form, the individual ego, the particular atom, or the soul naked in the cosmos. (Of course, Loy's feminist theorization of the "proto-form" depends upon an understanding of the embodied female self, the sexual female body, as always potentially fertile—in a way that may seem uncomfortable for twenty-first-century feminist readers. Let us not forget, though, that Loy

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[151] As Chave notes, this idea "can be seen as a masculinist dream of omnipotence," and Brancusi's *Bird* sculptures may also uphold it, with their forms suggestive of both phalluses and female genitalia. This kind of sexual dimorphism may participate in "the circumvention of the female body in a dream of omnipotent self-regeneration—the dream of the immortal phoenix as suggested by Brancusi's *Bird in Space*." Though Chave's reading of Brancusi's sculpture remains compelling, it doesn't fully align with the reading of his work put forth by Loy in "Brancusi's Golden Bird" and "Brancusi and the Ocean," as I hope my argument has shown. For Loy, the erotics of Brancusi's work will always bring it closer to her own, feminist-inflected deployment of dynamic form than that of misogynists like Marinetti. For more on the significance of Brancusi's sexually dimorphic figures and on the immortality of the mythical bigendered bird, see Chave, *Constantin Brancusi*, 19, 99, 104, 112, 115-17, 142, 163.

is the same writer who, in her "Feminist Manifesto," advocated "the unconditional surgical destruction of virginity through-out the female population at puberty" in order to dispense with "the fictitious value of a woman as identified with her physical purity," and also proclaimed that "every woman has a right to maternity" and that "every woman of superior intelligence should realize her race-responsibility, in producing children in adequate proportion to the unfit or degenerate members of her sex.[152] There is no shortage of ways in which Loy's feminism can make us feel ill at ease.) But what Loy's exploration of lyrical conceptions does—whether she pictures sexual bodies interacting beyond their apparent visual boundaries, or as in "Brancusi's Golden Bird" and "Gertrude Stein," presents an origin story for an "absolute act / of art"—is to offer us a new way of understanding the conversion of matter into form.

Marinetti's and Apollinaire's autogenous protagonists, Picasso's experimentation upon the faces of his *Demoiselles d'Avignon*, Duchamp's cheekily titled *Nude Descending a Staircase*, and the Futurists' vehement desire to suppress the nude—all of these bold gestures participate in a "modernist trajectory" that can be defined, as Carol Duncan argued, in terms of "an attempt to transcend the earthly domain of woman/nature/representation in order to discover the higher masculine plane of pure abstraction."[153] Loy's poetry, by contrast, expands the genre of the nude into a rhetoric of denuding that brings together nature and form, matter and abstraction, erotics and aesthetics—no matter whether we consider her longer autobiographical poems, like *Songs to Joannes*, or her shorter art poems, like "Brancusi's Golden Bird." Loy's denuded bodies, objects, sculptures, and selves manifest a kind of

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[152] Mina Loy, "Feminist Manifesto," in *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, 154-155 (underlining original).
[153] Nead, *The Female Nude*, 45.

modernist abstraction that is far from sterile, leaving us with the sense that in her work, too, we may locate "the form on which form is based."

CHAPTER 3
Still Life and Other Elegiac Touches: Mortal Form in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*

Late in the evening on March 28, 1918, a government car rolled to a stop at the bottom of a lane near the town of Lewes, in east Sussex, and deposited a single passenger and a quantity of luggage. The passenger, John Maynard Keynes, had just returned from Paris, where he had helped the National Gallery to acquire thirteen works by major European artists at the sale of the estate of Edgar Degas, which proceeded despite the wartime bombardment of the city. In fact, the sounds of the exploding shells from Big Bertha had depressed prices at the auction to such an extent that Keynes was able to purchase a few items for himself, and he returned to England with all of this artwork in tow. Unable to carry it all up the lane to Charleston farmhouse, though, he paused to hide a parcel in the hedge near the gate.[1] Then, with his more manageable burden, he began to walk toward the house, where, upon his arrival, he declared to the great surprise of its inhabitants, "If you'd like to go down to the road, you'll find there's a Cézanne just behind the gate."[2]

As Vanessa Bell told Roger Fry in a letter she wrote the following week, this eccentric greeting caused a bit of upheaval: "We had great excitements about the pictures. Maynard came back suddenly and unexpectedly late at night, [. . .] and said he had left a Cézanne by the roadside! Duncan rushed off to get it and you can imagine how exciting it all

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[1] Quentin Bell, "A Cézanne in the Hedge," in *A Cézanne in the Hedge and Other Memories of Charleston and Bloomsbury*, ed. Hugh Lee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 136-38.
[2] Duncan Grant, "Charleston Trust Interview with Quentin Bell," rec. 1969, *The Spoken Word: The Bloomsbury Group* (British Library, 2009). For a historical account of this episode, see Caws and Wright, *Bloomsbury and France*, 16, 99, 317 (see introduction, n. 2).

was."[3] The excitement over the painting in the hedge still reverberated years later, and the event lent its title to a collection of reminiscences about Bloomsbury, *A Cézanne in the Hedge*, in which Quentin Bell suggested that "surely there ought to be some little monument, a small obelisk, a pillar or at least a post. After all, there cannot be many other English hedgerows which have actually housed a Cézanne."[4] But in 1918, the excitement over the manner of the painting's arrival soon gave way to the thrill of examining a Cézanne up close and in color. It had been six years since the last Post-Impressionist Exhibition at the Grafton Gallery, and at that time, no private collection in England included a Cézanne painting.[5] Furthermore, none was to be seen, as Quentin Bell explains, "except in black and white photographs, usually very bad, in *avant-garde* magazines."[6] Little wonder, then, that Vanessa Bell wrote to Roger Fry with such enthusiasm about the small still life, entitled *Pommes*: "The Cézanne is really amazing and it's most exciting to have it in the house. It's so extraordinarily solid and alive."[7]

When Virginia Woolf saw the painting a few days later, once it had been brought into London, she noted the same liveliness, writing about it at length in her diary:

> There are 6 apples in the Cézanne picture. What can 6 apples not be? I began to wonder. Theres [*sic*] their relationship to each other, & their colour, & their solidity. To Roger & Nessa, moreover, it was a far more intricate question than this. It was a question of pure paint or mixed; if pure which colour: emerald or veridian; & then the laying on of the paint; & the time he'd spent, & how he'd altered it, & why, & when he'd painted it— We

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[3] Vanessa Bell, *Selected Letters of Vanessa Bell*, ed. Regina Marler (London: Bloomsbury, 1993), 212-13.
[4] Quentin Bell, "A Cézanne in the Hedge," 136.
[5] Caws and Wright, *Bloomsbury and France*, 99.
[6] Quentin Bell, "A Cézanne in the Hedge," 138.
[7] Vanessa Bell, *Selected Letters*, 213. As Bell's letter hints, *Pommes* is quite small—only 27 centimeters across and 19 centimeters high, or approximately ten and three-quarters by seven and a half inches. The painting is now housed at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, England. Paul Cézanne, *Pommes (Still-Life with Apples)*, oil on canvas, 1877–78 (Keynes Collection, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, UK), http://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/gallery/FrenchImpressionists/gallery/cezanne.files/Cezanne_Still_life_SE.html.

> carried it into the next room, & Lord! how it showed up the pictures there, as if you put a real stone among sham ones; the canvas of the others seemed scraped with a thin layer of rather cheap paint. The apples positively got redder & rounder & greener.[8]

Here, with her profusion of ampersands, Woolf emphasizes the painters' overwhelming attention to the details of Cézanne's craft, and at the same time that she gently mocks her sister and her friend, she also poses somewhat disingenuously as a naïf. This day in April 1918 was far from the first time that Woolf had viewed Post-Impressionist painting. She had attended both of Fry's exhibitions and had even dressed as a Gauguin picture with Vanessa for the Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition Ball.[9] In fact, Woolf was quite familiar with Post-Impressionist and modernist painting, and a great deal of critical attention has been paid to the links between her work and that of painters like Picasso and Cézanne.[10] Indeed,

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[8] Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell, vol. 1 (New York: Harcourt, 1977), 140-41. It is also worth noting that, although Woolf extols the possibilities of Cézanne's "6 apples," the painting actually pictures seven apples, arranged in two slightly curved horizontal rows. The reason for her mistake is unknown. Woolf saw the painting, according to Caws and Wright, a few days after Keynes returned from France, when, because of Fry's desire to make a copy, the painting was moved to 46 Gordon Square in London. See Caws and Wright, *Bloomsbury and France*, 99-100.

Fry's desire to make a copy (and Bloomsbury's enthusiasm for the painting) stem from his interest in Cézanne's particular mode of paint application, among other things. In *Pommes*, the viewer's sense of three-dimensionality is actually produced in significant part by Cézanne's "laying on of the paint," as Woolf puts it. Cézanne has built up and scraped away pigment—particularly the grayish-blue outline around each apple—so that the apples seem to protrude slightly, to rise up from the ground. The materiality of the paint thus contributes to the illusion of the apples' materiality. For a variety of relevant readings of Cézanne's characteristic and constructive brushstrokes, see Roger Fry, *Cézanne: A Study of His Development* (London: Hogarth Press, 1927), 43, 45-46, 50-51, and *A Roger Fry Reader*, ed. Christopher Reed (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 112; Virginia Woolf, *Roger Fry: A Biography* (New York: Harcourt, 1968), 153-6; John McCoubrey, "Cézanne's Difference," in *Impressionist Still Life*, ed. Eliza E. Rathbone and George T. M. Shackelford (New York: Phillips Collection in association with Harry N. Abrams, 2001), 37; Meyer Schapiro, *Modern Art 19th & 20th Centuries. Selected Papers* (New York: Georges Braziller, 1978), 25, and *Paul Cézanne*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1962), 18-19; and Richard Shiff, "Constructing Physicality" in *Art Journal* 50.1 (Spring 1991): 43-45, and "Apples and Abstraction," in Rathbone and Shackelford, *Impressionist Still Life*, 44-45.)

[9] Christine Froula, *Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury Avant-Garde: War, Civilization, Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 15.

[10] Much of this attention to Woolf's attitude toward painting has arisen in light of her relationship and artistic competition with her sister, the painter Vanessa Bell. Diane Gillespie has discussed their artistic relationship at length. See *The Sisters' Arts: The Writing and Painting of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1988), and "Virginia Woolf, Vanessa Bell and Painting," in *The Edinburgh Companion to Virginia Woolf and the Arts*, ed. Maggie Humm (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 121-139. See also Maggie

those scholars who have noticed Woolf's diary entry on Cézanne's *Pommes* have used it to demonstrate Woolf's awareness of her friends' interest in Post-Impressionist color, composition, and paint application and, by extension, to link Woolf's presentation of painting in her novels, particularly *To the Lighthouse*, to Post-Impressionism. But almost none have noted the genre of the painting and considered the role that still life might play in Woolf's relationship to the visual arts.[11]

In fact, there exist only two extended discussions of still life and Woolf's work, the first from Robert Kiely, who uses the term in order to describe the oddly impersonal portraits and highly arranged compositions of *Jacob's Room* and *Roger Fry: A Biography*. In Kiely's usage, still life stands in for the stiffness of fictional and biographical life-writing.[12] A related argument arises in Diane Gillespie's discussion of still life in the work of Woolf and Vanessa Bell: what matters to both sisters is "the impersonality of objects," their ability to provide "an escape from the confusions of the human realm" and "a source of relief from human activity."[13] For both Kiely and Gillespie, then, the most important part about still life is its stasis, but as Woolf's diary entry about *Pommes* hints, small paintings of objects may prove surprisingly lively. Surrounded by vigorous human discussion and other paintings,

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Humm, *Modernist Women and Visual Cultures: Virginia Woolf, Vanessa Bell, Photography, and Cinema* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 75-87; Humm, *Snapshots of Bloomsbury* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 5-8, 10-12; and Torgovnick, *Visual Arts*, 118-121 (see ch. 1, n. 7).

[11] For one example of a scholarly connection between Woolf's diary entry on *Pommes*, Post-Impressionism, and Lily Briscoe, see Victoria Rosner, *Modernism and the Architecture of Private Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 166. And for the only work in which a critic pauses over the genre of the painting, see the opening of Rosemary Lloyd's *Shimmering in a Transformed Light*. Here Lloyd quotes the diary entry just in passing, in much the same way that she quickly mentions the flowers arranged in Miss Pym's shop in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Her reading of these flowers depends as much on the aesthetics of the list as it does on the aesthetics of still life painting, and the broad scope of her book allows for no sustained investigation of the place of still life in Woolf's oeuvre. See Rosemary Lloyd, *Shimmering in a Transformed Light: Writing the Still Life* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 1-2, 15-16.

[12] Robert Kiely, "*Jacob's Room* and *Roger Fry*: Two Studies in Still Life," in *Modernism Reconsidered*, ed. Robert Kiely (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 147-66.

Cézanne's apples get "redder & rounder & greener," and the life that Woolf imagines for them—"What can 6 apples not be?"—suggests that the genre may play a vital role in the life of her own work.

In this chapter, I take up the task of defining this role, particularly in relation to Woolf's most painting-obsessed novel, *To the Lighthouse*. And rather than center my argument, as so many critics have done, on the canvas completed by Lily Briscoe in the third part of the novel, I choose initially to turn away from this painting (although I shall return to it in the latter half of the chapter) because it blocks the view we might have of other works of art. I want to draw our attention first to unframed works of art, like Rose's still-life centerpiece of fruit and a seashell on the Ramsays' dining table. It is this kind of quiet art-work, I argue, which reveals the extent to which the visual and verbal arts are imbricated in *To the Lighthouse*. Their inter-mediation goes far beyond the thematization of Lily's painting by the novel: the very forms of still life are woven into the fabric of *To the Lighthouse*, which embraces the genre's familiar objects of depiction, and the aesthetic and iconographical preoccupations to which they conventionally give shape. In my exploration of the particular form that written still life adopts in the novel, I build upon a brief discussion of paintings by Cézanne and suggest a revised understanding of still life that emphasizes not the genre's stasis but rather its malleability and its compatibility with narrative. Similarly, I contend that the common critical understanding of visual-verbal intersections in literature as ekphrastic

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[13] Gillespie, *The Sisters' Arts*, 227, 236, and for a more thorough treatment of these points, see 12-13, 224-66.

description, or "the still movement of poetry," neglects the narrative potential of the visual, particularly its implications for the novel.[14]

As I shall argue, the visual can actually animate both anecdotes like the one with which I began and also stories like *To the Lighthouse*, where still life crops up not in the hedge, but rather in the Ramsays' house. There, it ceases to be an amusing incongruity and becomes instead a visual force and a constituent part of the progress of the narrative, from the dinner table to the children's nursery to the abandoned drawing room. At the same time, still life also intermingles with the novel's range of affects, including sympathy, melancholy, and even more extreme states, like terror at the inevitability of death. These affects link the novel's presentation of still life with its elegiac project, and in the second half of this chapter, I turn to the bodily attitudes and physical forms that Woolf uses to describe grief—which I want to call inter-mediated representational forms for elegy—before I examine Lily Briscoe's completion of her painting. I conclude by arguing that Lily's painting possesses a greater kinship with the still-life objects of the novel than with Mrs. Ramsay's domestic art, so that at the end of the novel, as the visual and affective concerns of the novel converge, *To the Lighthouse* seems finally to present a kind of movement in and through stillness.

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[14] Steiner offers a brief rehearsal of this argument and notes that the atemporal, eternal stillness to which ekphrastic passages supposedly aspire is an impossible goal: ekphrastic description remains weakly narrative. See Krieger, *Ekphrasis*, 263, 266-68 (see introduction, n. 12); Steiner, "Pictorial Narrativity," 150 (see introduction, n. 58), and *Pictures of Romance*, 4, 126 (see introduction, n. 58); and Bal, "Over-Writing as Un-Writing," 97, 124-5 (see introduction, n. 44).

Still Life I: Fruit and Skull

I want to continue, then, by revisiting the theorization of still-life painting in art historical circles as a non-narrative genre. Perhaps the clearest formulation of this idea arises in Norman Bryson's work, in which he describes still life in marked contrast to history painting: "While history painting is constructed around narrative, still life is the world minus its narratives or, better, the world minus its capacity for generating narrative interest. [. . .] It exactly breaks with narrative's scale of human importance. [. . .] still life pitches itself at a level of material existence where nothing exceptional occurs: there is wholescale eviction of the Event."[15] Bryson continues, arguing that insofar as still life refuses events, it also offers an attack on the principal subject of modernist literature—human subjectivity: still life "attends to the world ignored by the human impulse to create greatness. Its assault on the prestige of the human subject is therefore conducted at a very deep level. The human figure, with all of its fascination, is expelled. Narrative—the drama of greatness—is banished."[16] Bryson's discussion does underscore an important generic contrast: there are no noble, heroic humans to be found on Post-Impressionist canvases covered with fruits and crockery or in seventeenth-century Dutch paintings of flowers. Indeed, in her landmark study of seventeenth-century Dutch art—one of the heights of western still-life painting—Svetlana Alpers contends that Dutch painting offers "an art of describing," in which "attention to the

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[15] Norman Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 60-16.
[16] Ibid., 61. Margit Rowell has more recently offered a related argument with her assertion that still life possesses a "closed narrative structure." Both Bryson and Rowell allude to the still life's lowly position in the hierarchy of genres taught in European art schools: to an even greater extent than genre painting, which is sometimes considered to be narrative, still-life paintings do not show events and thus seem neither to contain narratives nor to be worthy of prompting them. See Margit Rowell, *Objects of Desire: The Modern Still Life* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1997), 16, and Steiner, "Pictorial Narrativity," 146-48.

surface of the world described is achieved at the expense of the representation of narrative action."[17] But for Alpers and Bryson, still life's non-narrative status is not simply the product of an insistence that narrative is the proper prerogative of history painting and a corresponding observation that still life renounces "the categories of achievement, grandeur, or the unique."[18] Rather, still life and narrative prove incompatible because still life attends to material details and eschews the human: still life operates on a scale that doesn't allow for the growth of story or the "impulse" toward narrative. For these scholars, its narrative potential is quashed by the narrowness of its scope and the superficiality of its attention.[19]

This rejection of the possibility that still life might prove narrative emerges earlier in the twentieth century, too, in the work of Roger Fry, among other places. In fact, in Fry's monograph on Cézanne—published by the Hogarth Press in 1927, the same year that *To the Lighthouse* appeared—he notes that "in any other subject humanity intervenes," while "in still-life the ideas and emotions associated with the objects represented are, for the most part, so utterly commonplace and insignificant that neither artist nor spectator need consider them."[20] Like Alpers and Bryson, then, Fry holds that still life is non-narrative because of its lowliness, and he goes even further, to argue that the genre is purely aesthetic, containing no ideas or emotions of import. This theorization also remains in keeping with later discussions of still-life painting: as Meyer Schapiro has noted, "the painting of still-life has in fact been

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[17] Sveltana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), xx-xxi.
[18] Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked*, 61.
[19] It seems worth clarifying that neither Alpers nor Bryson considers the non-narrative quality of still life to be a significant shortcoming: both scholars' work is groundbreaking for insisting upon the value of the often derided or overlooked still-life painting.
[20] Fry, *Cézanne*, 41.

regarded as altogether a negation of the interest in subject matter."[21] The objects that still life paintings depict "are nothing more, it is supposed, than 'pretexts' of form" for the experiments of modern painters like Cézanne.[22] All the tables of modernist still life "are really laboratory tables on which aesthetic problems can be isolated,"[23] and these aesthetic problems should, in Fry's view, prompt aesthetic responses from viewers who grasp each painting's "purely plastic significance."[24] In keeping with the notion of "significant form,"[25] Fry upholds the still life as a vehicle for arousing specifically aesthetic emotions, not for containing or prompting narratives: "it would be absurd," he says, "to speak of the drama of [Cézanne's] fruit dishes."[26]

But there are ways in which fruit dishes may be dramatic and still-life paintings can begin to tell stories. As Peter Schwenger argues, still life "can generate narrative, be bound up with narrative,"[27] and even Fry seems to hint, almost against his will, that still life might prove weakly narrative, when he characterizes the genre as "drama deprived of all dramatic incident":

> These scenes in his hands leave upon us the impression of grave events. If the words tragic, menacing, noble or lyrical seem out of place before Cézanne's still-lifes, one feels none the less [*sic*] that the emotions they arouse are curiously analogous to these states of mind. It is not from lack of emotion that these pictures are not dramatic, lyric, etc., but rather by reason of a process of elimination and concentration. They are, so to speak, drama deprived of all dramatic incident. One may wonder whether painting has ever

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[21] Schapiro, *Modern Art*, 15.
[22] Schapiro, *Modern Art*, 16.
[23] Margaret Preston, aphorism 45, in Sidney Ure Smith, *Margaret Preston: Recent Paintings* (Sydney: Sidney Ure Smith, 1929), quoted in Lloyd, *Shimmering*, 6.
[24] Fry, *Cézanne*, 41.
[25] For a useful discussion of the term "significant form," see Jane Goldman, *The Feminist Aesthetics of Virginia Woolf: Modernism, Post-Impressionism and the Politics of the Visual* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 134-42.
[26] Fry, *Cézanne*, 42.
[27] Peter Schwenger, *The Tears of Things: Melancholy and Physical Objects* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 115.

> aroused graver, more powerful, more massive emotions than those to which we are compelled by some of Cézanne's masterpieces in this genre.[28]

Fry acknowledges that still-life painting can contain some ideas and emotions worth our consideration—like those we find in Bell's letter to him and in Woolf's diary entry—provided, of course, that the genre remains in Cézanne's hands.[29] And his insistence on the superior character of Cézanne's still lifes emerges quite plainly in the center section of his book, which he devotes to these paintings. (At 16 pages, it is by far the longest of the sections.) As he states, "it is hard to exaggerate their importance in the expression of Cézanne's genius or the necessity of studying them for its comprehension, because it is in them that he appears to have established his principles of design and his theory of form."[30] For this reason, Fry also chose to model the cover for *Cézanne: A Study of His Development* on

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[28] Fry, *Cézanne*, 42.

[29] The drama that Fry describes in this passage is, of course, purely formal, to his mind: he points to aesthetic choices like Cézanne's use of red and green to model the apple in the bottom left corner of *Pommes*. Here, the painter gives the illusion of a spherical surface not with different shades of red—created by adding more black or white to red paint—but rather with contrasting colors, so that the shadows on the right side of the apple are actually green. This deployment of color was for Fry one of Cézanne's "greatest contributions to art," since color functions in this still life and in much of Cézanne's oeuvre "not as an adjunct to form, as something imposed upon form, but as itself the direct exponent of form." That is, color proves partly—and unexpectedly—responsible for the viewer's sense of three-dimensionality in *Pommes*, so that, if we follow Fry's line of thought, we can identify a quiet drama, or even a low-level lyricism, in this compact painting. Similarly, we might find something "analogous" to nobility or tragedy in the aesthetic choices of Cézanne's larger, more complex still-life paintings, like those with draped tablecloths and heaped piles of fruit, in which more textures and colors operate in concert on a larger scale.

What I mean to indicate is that it is possible to read Fry slightly against the grain—to locate drama in areas that he would consider insignificant, and even to identify some narrative potential in these areas. For example, a narrative germ lies in the bottom right corner of *Pommes*, where an apple's shadow—composed of red and green and possessed, at its top edge, of a thicker layer of paint than the ground—seems to take on its own mass and volume. As the fourth shape in the bottom row, the shadow substitutes for an apple, and although one cannot pinpoint whether the apple is simply absent, or was recently removed, the peculiar representation of this shadow can, to borrow Schwenger's phrase, "generate narrative, be bound up with narrative." For Fry, the only drama worth noting here would be the fact that the shadow is not black or gray but made up of other pigments. See Fry, *Cézanne*, 13.

[30] Ibid., 52.

a still life by the artist, *Still Life with Skull*.[31] Both Cézanne's painting and Fry's cover display a human skull prominently, alongside a selection of fruit, including pears, apples, and a lemon. These skulls hint that the strong emotions of still life may not be entirely aesthetic and disinterested, and we can read Fry's emphasis on the "grave events" and "graver, more powerful, more massive emotions" of Cézanne's still lifes not only as a description of solemn artistic experimentation, or of the unexpected seriousness of paintings of fruit, but also in terms of their connection to human mortality.

In other words, Cézanne's painting here offers up a *vanitas* theme. Derived from the opening words of Ecclesiastes, the term refers to paintings that suggest the ephemerality of human existence, pleasure, and understanding in the face of "the inevitability of death"; the theme has been common in still life painting since antiquity and especially since the seventeenth century, when its motifs "became more defined: Mortality, in the form of a skull or other such emblem; Learning, symbolised by books and globes; the Passage of Time, indicated by horological instruments or objects of transitory nature, like flowers; and the hope of Resurrection, represented by ears of corn, for example."[32] As Rathbone and Shackelford have noted, this theme was common to Cézanne's paintings from this period: from 1898 to 1906—the last eight years of his life—Cézanne painted six oil paintings and four watercolors with skulls, far more than he did in earlier years.[33] As Charles Sterling has

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[31] Paul Cézanne, *Still Life with Skull*, oil on canvas, 1896–98 (Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia, PA), http://www.barnesfoundation.org/collections/art-collection/object/4712/still-life-with-skull-nature-morte-au-crane.

[32] Richard Foster and Pamela Tudor-Craig, *The Secret Life of Paintings* (New York: St. Martin's, 1986), 92. Bryson has argued that still life's capacity for allegory, particularly in *vanitas* pieces, is dependent upon a "change of gear from performative to constative and from image to word" in order for an object like a melon to signal an idea or value like temperance. In this way, we might consider allegorical, iconographical still-life paintings to already be operating in an intermedial way, by mixing the visual and the verbal. See Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked*, 121.

[33] Rathbone and Shackelford, *Impressionist Still Life*,192.

written, because Cézanne "also painted a picture of a young man brooding over a skull, there is no mistaking his intention: already he was haunted by thoughts of death and these are allegories contrasting life, as symbolized by fruit or sumptuous carpets, with the ineluctable doom towards which all life flows—these are *Vanitas* pictures."[34] Sterling's iconographical reading has a logical foundation in biography, then, but it nevertheless interjects far too much "non-plastic emotion" into Cézanne's canvases for Fry's taste.[35] Indeed, Fry goes so far as to discount the participation of the skull in the *vanitas* theme by writing, near the end of his section on Cézanne's still lifes, that "it is needless to say that for Cézanne at this period a skull was merely a complicated variation upon the sphere. By this time he had definitely abjured all suggestion of poetical or dramatic allusion," so that the painter's work offered only "form considered in its pure essence and without reference to associated ideas."[36] Despite Fry's anti-symbolist protestations, however, he cannot altogether prevent the skull from associating with ideas.

Schwenger argues in his compelling response to Bryson's work that, "even if an object is viewed as motionless, there is a paradoxical connection to event in that very viewing," since an object may "provoke (mental) events in temporal sequence."[37] By virtue of that provocation, still life can become embroiled in narrative, or give rise to it, and Sterling's analysis of the *vanitas* motif in Cézanne's late still-life paintings hints at this potential: his phrasing, with its emphasis on an unavoidable end, suggests that still life can point in the direction of an event. In fact, Fry's book-cover version of *Still Life with Skull*

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[34] Charles Sterling, *Still Life Painting: From Antiquity to the Present Time*, trans. James Emmons (New York: Universe Books, 1959), 102.
[35] Fry, *Cézanne*, 41.
[36] Ibid., 53.
[37] Schwenger, *Tears of Things*, 100.

seems to point even more aggressively, by giving the skull an even more prominent place. Because Fry has cropped the composition to such a great extent, and because the bright white that attracts the eye to the tablecloth in the original painting is nowhere to be found on the two-tone cover, the skull is now the largest and most noticeable object in the image. (Of course, this is not to say that skulls and apples do not also attract Cézanne's—and Fry's—interest as spherical shapes: in the original *Still Life with Skull*, we can see similar modeling and coloring in Cézanne's treatment of the skull and the fruit, particularly the frontmost pear.[38]) Fry also allows the position of the skull to rhyme with the placement of Cézanne's name: each heads a series that descends from left to right, with the diagonal created by the increasing indentation of the lettering echoed in the line created by the decreasing height of the leaf motif and the pieces of fruit. If, in the original painting, we find the emblem of death nestled among the rich reminders of short-lived earthly pleasure, then in Fry's reworking of it, the skull conspicuously announces the book as a study of the deceased painter most important to the new guard. In this way, Fry's skull suggests that, counter to his own arguments, "poetical" and "dramatic allusion" may creep into still life.

Journeys in Stillness

Still-life painting, in other words, cannot be altogether insulated from narrative, and despite both modernist and contemporary theories of the genre, still life often seems to leave itself open to narrative intervention or to contain incipient narratives. The genre seems to

[38] Rathbone and Shackelford provide anecdotal support for the argument that the skull interested Cézanne as a means of studying volume at the same time that they acknowledge the resurgence of the painter's interest in the subject at the end of his life. See Rathbone and Shackelford, *Impressionist Still Life*, 192.

take special advantage of what Stephen Cheeke describes as painting's ability to "employ a iconographical code, a language of signs and symbols to suggest things that will happen in the future."[39] In *Still Life with Skull* and the corresponding image on Fry's book cover, the *vanitas* motif causes the still life to gesture towards a significance beyond concerns that are purely formal (in Fry's strict sense of that word): the skull and the fruit allow an intimation of events to come. And just as this still-life painting accommodates—and even encourages—more narrative readings, so too, in an instance of inter-media reciprocity, does still life invigorate the narrative of Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. In fact, in a moment that challenges Bryson's insistence that the material and the lowly have no stories to tell,[40] Woolf presents the most important still life in the novel at a turning point in the plot, when Mrs. Ramsay notices her daughter's arrangement of fruit and a seashell at the dinner party which serves as the climactic scene in "The Window." What seems initially like mere description becomes charged with narrative power:

> Now eight candles were stood down the table, and after the first stoop the flames stood upright and drew with them into visibility the long table entire, and in the middle a yellow and purple dish of fruit. What had she done with it, Mrs. Ramsay wondered, for Rose's arrangement of the grapes and pears, of the horny pink-lined shell, of the bananas, made her think of a trophy fetched from the bottom of the sea, of Neptune's banquet, of the bunch that hangs with vine leaves over the shoulder of Bacchus (in some picture), among the leopard skins and the torches lolloping red and gold. . . . Thus brought up suddenly into the light it seemed possessed of great size and depth, was like a world in which one could take one's staff and climb hills, she thought, and go down into valleys, and to her pleasure (for it brought them into sympathy momentarily) she saw that Augustus too feasted his eyes on the same plate of fruit, plunged in, broke off a bloom there, a tassel here, and returned, after feasting, to his hive. That was his way of looking, different from hers. But looking together united them.

[39] Cheeke, *Writing for Art*, 62 (see introduction, n. 6).
[40] See Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked*, 61.

> Now all the candles were lit up, and the faces on both sides of the table were brought nearer by the candlelight, and composed, as they had not been in the twilight, into a party round a table, 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.
>
> Some change at once went through them all, as if this had really happened, and they were all conscious of making a party together in a hollow, on an island… [41]

Rose's arrangement reminds Mrs. Ramsay of the incidental still lifes that appear in paintings of feasts and classical bacchanals, and Mrs. Ramsay even looks at it in painterly terms, "putting a yellow against a purple, a curved shape against a round shape" (110).[42] Just as in her description of Cézanne's *Pommes*, Woolf here emphasizes the presence of complementary colors and defined geometric shapes at the same time that she highlights the importance of relationships and context: Mrs. Ramsay observes the features of Rose's arrangement in terms of their connections to each other, so that no color, texture, or shape is mentioned in isolation. And as she contemplates the still life of fruit and shell in this manner, she notices that her friend Augustus is also looking. She reflects that "looking together unite[s] them," and all of a sudden, everyone else is united, too. In other words, Mrs. Ramsay's looking at an

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[41] Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, ed. Mark Hussey (New York: Harcourt, 2005), 99. All subsequent citations to this text will appear in parentheses. Woolf's description of Augustus Carmichael's bee-like visual feasting has an important echo in her later work: in her biography of Roger Fry, Woolf records his pleasure at the first Post-Impressionist Exhibition, where he faced the pictures, "plunging his eyes into them as if he were a humming-bird hawk-moth hanging over a flower, quivering yet still." See Woolf, *Roger Fry*, 152.

[42] Rose's budding artistic talent is given further development in the draft of the novel, in which she muses upon the possibility of a life "in Paris with painters." Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse: The Original Holograph Draft*, transcribed and ed. Susan Dick (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 8. And her arrangement here has been called a still life by other critics, but without any investigation of the impact such a term might have on our understanding of the novel as a whole. See Gillespie, *The Sisters' Arts*, 240; Torgovnick, *Visual Arts*, 22; Roberta White, *A Studio of One's Own: Fictional Women Painters and the Art of Fiction* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2005), 92; Emily Blair, *Virginia Woolf and the Nineteenth-Century Domestic Novel* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 203; and Kathryn Stelmach, "From Text To Tableau: Ekphrastic Enchantment In 'Mrs. Dalloway' And 'To The Lighthouse,'" *Studies In The Novel* 38.3 (Fall 2006): 317.

aesthetic object created from disparate components parallels very strongly the way in which the distinct individuals around the table are "composed" into a party.

Moreover, the dish that cradles the fruit seems to echo the roundness of this scene in the hollow, where the group is sheltered from the sea by protective panes of glass. We find here what Bryson has called still life's "principal spatial value: nearness."[43] Like many still life paintings, Woolf's dinner party scene demonstrates a "disinclination to portray the world beyond the far edge of the table"; it circumscribes the sphere of vision, and "instead of plunging vistas, arcades, horizons and the sovereign prospect of the eye, it proposes a much closer space."[44] Thus brought close together and arranged, the Ramsays and their guests rhyme structurally with the still life to such an extent that it hardly seems adequate to say that the still life simply appears at a key moment in the narrative. Instead, Rose's composition seems to precipitate that very turning point: the dish of fruit and shell prompts the party to come together.

In fact, the still life also seems to cause the end of the dinner party, when, after the Boeuf en Daube has been eaten and declared a "triumph" (102), Mrs. Ramsay finds herself thinking about the virtues of "boobies" like Paul Rayley, who, though stupid, possesses enough consideration to ask "whether she would like a pear": "No, she said, she did not want a pear. Indeed she had been keeping guard over the dish of fruit (without realising it) jealously, hoping that nobody would touch it" (110). Mrs. Ramsay's appreciation for Paul Rayley leads her back to the still life, and his considerate inquiries contrast markedly with the

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[43] Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked*, 71.
[44] Ibid., 71.

possessive gaze Mrs. Ramsay directs towards the dish of fruit.[45] Her glances at the still life have calmed her gradually over the course of the dinner, and she feels suddenly disappointed when a disembodied hand removes a pear from the dish, ruining the composition entirely: "she felt more and more serene, until, oh, what a pity that they should do it—a hand reached out, took a pear, and spoilt the whole thing" (110). This disintegration of the still life prompts Mrs. Ramsay to look "in sympathy" at Rose, the arranger, and then at all her children, and just when she expresses her hope that her eldest daughter Prue shall be even happier than the newly engaged Minta Doyle, the dinner ends abruptly: "her own daughter must be happier than other people's daughters. But dinner was over. It was time to go" (110-11). In this way, it seems that the conclusion of the dinner party arises not from the actions of any person seated at the table, but rather from the removal of the pear from the dish, which "spoil[s] the whole thing." The still life thus triggers the dinner and the coming together of the diners, and its disintegration prompts the dissolution of the party within a page.

It seems difficult, then, to insist, as so many critics have done, that still life should be identified with non-narrative description. This association emerges powerfully from an influential strain in art historical scholarship which I have already mentioned. In this line of thought, of which Alpers is the key advocate, still life is an art of description above all else: the genre presents "a delight to the eyes" and places its meaning on the surface, rather than burying it beneath a layer of symbolism, to be unearthed with the tools of iconography and

[45] The draft of the novel makes Mrs. Ramsay's possessive investment in the still life even clearer: "She did not want anybody to take any fruit" (Woolf, *Original Holograph Draft*, 179).

made subject to narrative reading.[46] From this perspective, as a primarily descriptive genre, still life has no truck with narrative. Furthermore, the genre's interest in surfaces—its attention to the (lowly) details of the everyday world—aligns its aims with those of realist literary description: Rosemary Lloyd, in fact, has argued that "the verbal equivalents of still lifes" are those "passages that have at their core the appreciation of the objects that lie at the heart of domestic, everyday life."[47] And descriptions, especially of the everyday and the domestic, have always held an uncertain position in narrative theory. As Peter Brooks has noted, the description of things like fruit, furniture, and decorative objects—the stuff of still-life painting—is "sometimes maddeningly" typical of the novel, where it serves as a reality effect that often proves as annoying as it is useful.[48] In this view (which both Brooks and Mieke Bal rehearse in order to dispute) descriptions constitute boring, lengthy, irrelevant digressions from the supposedly primary thrust of the *fabula*, "the real stuff of narrative literature."[49] Indeed, most foundational works of narratology, as I outlined in my introduction, have held that description and plot are forces working in opposite textual directions—that is, that descriptions of all kinds constitute narrative stoppages.

To the Lighthouse challenges this theoretical commonplace, for within its pages, description does not interrupt narrative. As Leonard Barkan writes, "words about pictures" can "play the role of pivot," and in fact, Maggie Humm suggests that "much of the narrative weight of [Woolf's] novel is sustained by images which act as visual analogues to plot

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[46] Lloyd makes the link between still life and non-narrative description even more explicit, by asserting that the influence of "still life can be detected in written texts and above all, in novels, at points where the plot stops and the narrative viewpoint focuses on the elements we associated with the painted still life." See Svetlana Alpers, *Art of Describing*, xxii-xxiv, and Lloyd, *Shimmering*, 7.

[47] Lloyd, *Shimmering*, 3.

[48] Brooks, *Realist Vision*, 16-17.

[49] Bal, Over-Writing as Un-Writing," 102.

developments."[50] We might take Humm's unelaborated idea one step further: description and image may not merely parallel the plot of *To the Lighthouse*, but instead propel it. Here, in the dinner party scene, what seems at first glance to be a compositional echo between the group of objects in the dish and the group of people around the table becomes, when we look at it from a different angle, a pair of events. That is, a textual effect that looks merely like a formal rhyme, or perhaps like foreshadowing, may be something stronger: a kind of causality. For this reason, I want to contend that in *To the Lighthouse*, verbalized visual and plastic forms exert great narrative force—what we might even think of as a kind of narrative determinism. And this force is only visible—and only palpable, as well, since the forms I shall discuss are not all entirely visual—if we borrow an art historical mode of reading attentive to the traditions of still life painting. With this kind of reading, we can see that, as literature mingles with the visual arts, it does not attempt immobility, becoming primarily spatial instead of temporal.[51] Like Woolf's dish of fruit and shell, the plastic forms of the novel are not static at all, but dynamic, and capable of driving events. In *To the Lighthouse*, still life simply won't stay still.

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[50] Barkan, *Mute Poetry, Speaking Pictures*, 22 (see introduction, n. 6), and Humm, *Modernist Women and Visual Cultures*, 7.

[51] For an example of this argument, see Steiner, *Pictures of Romance*, 4, and Krieger, *Ekphrasis*, 263-287, and for a more recent deployment of these ideas, see Glavey, "Dazzling Estrangement," 754 (see introduction, n. 34), and Stelmach, "From Text to Tableau," 317-319. Stelmach's discussion of spatial form proves particularly relevant, since she links the still-life centerpiece in *To the Lighthouse* with the tradition of ekphrasis, arguing that the diners' "common focus on a central totemic object unites them against the outer fluidity of time and change" so that "the dinner party scene transforms into an enchanted tableau." In her estimation, "this timeless moment revolutionizes earlier literary forms of ekphrasis because it no longer seeks to envoice an art object through the spoken word, but rather relinquishes all speech in favor of silent aesthetic contemplation, where visual imagery predominates so strongly that the scene could easily be reproduced as a painting." And while I obviously share Stelmach's interest in the intermingling of verbal and visual representation in this scene, I believe that Woolf's challenge to earlier kinds of ekphrasis lies elsewhere. Furthermore, as I hope my argument

Still Life II: Shell and Skull

As I have hinted, the most important still-life event in "The Window" is the removal of the pear from the dish, but the thoughts that Mrs. Ramsay has in the moment just after this gesture also prove vital to understanding the narrative power of the still life and its capacity to end the dinner party:

> [A] hand reached out, took a pear, and spoilt the whole thing. In sympathy she looked at Rose. She looked at Rose sitting between Jasper and Prue. How odd that one's child should do that!
>
> How odd to see them sitting there, in a row, her children, Jasper, Rose, Prue, Andrew, almost silent, but with some joke of their own going on, she guessed, from the twitching at their lips. [. . .] What was it, she wondered, sadly rather, for it seemed to her that they would laugh when she was not there. There was all that hoarded behind those rather set, still, mask-like faces [. . .] Mrs. Ramsay looked from one to the other and said, speaking to Prue in her own mind, You will be as happy as she [Minta Doyle] is one of these days. You will be much happier, she added, because you are my daughter, she meant; her own daughter must be happier than other people's daughters. But dinner was over. It was time to go. (111)

Between the removal of the pear from the dish of fruit and the staccato realization that dinner is over, then, Mrs. Ramsay thinks about her children's laughter and Prue's future happiness. More importantly, though, Mrs. Ramsay engages in a thought experiment about what her children's lives might be like when she is, euphemistically, "not there." She removes herself from the imagined scenes of their lives, and this removal strongly parallels the removal of the maternally shaped pear from the dish of fruit.[52] In this way, then, it seems that the conclusion of the dinner party proceeds also from Mrs. Ramsay's meditation on the future her children will have after her death.

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thus far has demonstrated, we cannot read the dinner-party scene as a moment of suspension—as a *tableau vivant*—unless we ignore its narrative kernel.

Thus the dish of fruit, with its pear claimed by a disembodied hand, provides a topos for Mrs. Ramsay's thoughts about her own mortality. As I have hinted in my reading of Cézanne's work, still-life paintings have often allowed their viewers to contemplate mortality, since still life is, as Bonnie Costello has noted in her work on twentieth-century poetry, "a threshold genre, between nature and culture, morbidity and vitality."[53] The reason for this sometimes uncomfortable liminality is, Guy Davenport contends, that "a still life [is] a symbol of what we shall have taken from us[,] though at the moment[,] it is a sign of God's goodness and the bounty of nature."[54] What Costello and Davenport imply here, in other words, is that still life possesses the remarkable, paradoxical capacity to render *absence* as *presence*—indeed, as overwhelmingly abundant presence. This power of the genre suggests that even before the anonymous hand reaches out to take the pear from the dish, the fruit alone is capable of providing an arena for Mrs. Ramsay's thoughts about her own mortality.

But of course, the centerpiece that Rose has arranged contains more than just fruit. The dish holds grapes, pears, bananas, and a "horny-pink lined shell"—a seashell, which serves in this case not only to remind us of the ever-present power of the sea in this novel, but also as a *memento mori*. Material reminders of death, shells are often used as "elements of the vanitas motif [because] their beautiful forms are empty of the life they briefly housed."[55] As kinds of skeletons themselves, in short, shells become easy analogues for the human

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[52] Bonnie Kime Scott has specifically linked the pear in the dish to other modernist uses of the fruit in connection with female sexuality. See Bonnie Kime Scott, *In the Hollow of the Wave: Virginia Woolf and Modernist Uses of Nature* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 30.
[53] Bonnie Costello, *Planets on Tables: Poetry, Still Life, and the Turning World* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 10.
[54] Guy Davenport, *Objects on a Table: Harmonious Disarray in Art and Literature* (Washington, DC: Counterpoint, 1998), 7.
[55] Lloyd, *Shimmering*, 48.

skulls that appear in so many still-life paintings and descriptions, like the Cézanne still life on which Roger Fry chose to model his book cover.

And of course, in *To the Lighthouse*, we find a skull just a few pages after we have seen the shell. After dinner, Mrs. Ramsay goes to the bedroom of her two youngest children, James and Cam, to see if they are asleep, but she finds them awake and agitated because of the boar's skull nailed to the wall of their bedroom: "there was Cam wide awake, and James wide awake quarrelling when they ought to have been asleep hours ago. What had possessed Edward to send them this horrid skull?" (116). An amusing gift by day, the skull has become a spectre by night, with its horns enlarged into huge "branching" shadows: "She could see the horns, Cam said, all over the room. It was true. Wherever they put the light (and James could not sleep without a light) there was always a shadow somewhere" (116). Here, the boar's skull follows the shell in the still-life centerpiece as a *memento mori*.[56] As a more obvious emblem of death, the skull frightens Cam, and it even seems to echo the shape and texture of the shell: the shell has a horny ridge, and the skull has horns.

Since this devilish shadow prevents the children from sleeping, Mrs. Ramsay searches for a solution that will restore peace to the nursery:

> "Well then," said Mrs. Ramsay, "we will cover it up," and [. . .] she quickly took her own shawl off and wound it round the skull, round and round and round, and then she came back to Cam and laid her head almost flat on the pillow beside Cam's and said how lovely it looked now; how the fairies would love it; it was like a bird's nest; it was like a beautiful mountain such as she

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[56] The skull has been called a *memento mori* in passing by Jane Fisher. But quite differently—and quite curiously—Ann Banfield has read the skull in connection with Roger Fry's refusal to see Cézanne's skulls as anything other that spherical forms. In both of these cases, she argues, the skull "is the presentation of a meaningless solid object, even its association with death emptied of meaning." See Jane Fisher, "'Silent as the Grave': Painting, Narrative, and the Reader in Night and Day and To the Lighthouse," in *The Multiple Muses of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Diane Gillespie (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1993), 104, and Ann Banfield, *The Phantom Table: Woolf, Fry, Russell, and the Epistemology of Modernism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 304.

> had seen abroad, with valleys and flowers and bells ringing and birds singing and little goats and antelopes and . . . She could see the words echoing as she spoke them rhythmically in Cam's mind, and [. . .] Mrs. Ramsay went on speaking still more monotonously, [. . .] raising her head very slowly and speaking more and more mechanically, until she sat upright and saw that Cam was asleep. (116-17)

At this moment, even after Mrs. Ramsay has covered it, the skull continues to echo the dinner-party still life, which invited Mrs. Ramsay to explore its contours as she would a miniature landscape, "a world in which one could take one's staff and climb hills, she thought, and go down into valleys" (99).[57] Similarly, wrapped in Mrs. Ramsay's shawl, the skull becomes another miniature world in which the sleepy Cam can traverse "a beautiful mountain such as she had seen abroad, with valleys and flowers and bells ringing and birds singing and little goats and antelopes." In both of these moments, Woolf presents a pastoral landscape, which, with its attendant poetic tradition, evokes a lifestyle of peaceful wandering and safe shepherding over terrain that proves quite different from the "broiling sea" (37) or the "icy solitudes of the Polar region" (38) upon which Mr. Ramsay imagines his heroic perseverance as he struggles to reach the letter "R." Distinct from this kind of epic tragedy, the miniature pastoral here remains directionless and safe—the playground of the innocent.[58]

Indeed, the affect attached to the miniature pastoral in *To the Lighthouse* extends beyond safety to include a kind of family feeling. As I have argued, Mrs. Ramsay's wandering

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[57] For a discussion of the landscape features of the dinner table still life, see Gillespie, *The Sisters' Arts*, 240, and for more on the importance of landscape to the novel, see Bonnie Kime Scott, *In the Hollow*, 112-13, 128-30.

[58] Mrs. Ramsay's attempt conjure such a world seems to partake, like the shepherds that Wordsworth imagines to be in "harmony with the sublime landscape," of the nostalgia for childhood that forms an integral part of Romantic and Victorian pastoral poetry. And although Paul Alpers has shown that "idealized nature" and "idyllic landscape" are not themselves "the defining features of the pastoral," I would submit that both the landscape of the wrapped skull and the landscape of the dish of fruit, with their emphasis on how the viewer-traveler might move through or across the terrain, nevertheless display the attention to the lives of herdsmen that Alpers identifies as central to the pastoral mode. See John Barrell and John Bull, eds., *A Book of English Pastoral Verse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 427-28, and Paul Alpers, *What Is Pastoral?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 22, 28).

through the landscape of fruit unites the hostess, her family, and her guests in the warmth of the dinner party. Moreover, as Douglas Mao has recognized, "the finding of the large scene in the small thing [. . .] serve[s] to link people in tenderness (Mrs. Ramsay unites with Augustus Carmichael and later soothes her daughter to sleep by imagining landscapes in domestic objects)."[59] The security in which the miniature wanderer—whether it is Mrs. Ramsay or Cam—may traverse the landscape, in other words, arises from her connections to other people, who seem to hover unseen, just outside the sphere of the pastoral, as benevolent, full-scale forces of protection.

But the Ramsays' relations to miniature landscapes are not always charged with positive feeling in *To the Lighthouse*, and in fact, these landscapes prove saturated with loss to such an extent that they can help us to better understand the narrative drive of Woolf's still lifes. For example, when Nancy Ramsay crouches over a tidal pool during her walk with Paul Rayley and Minta Doyle, she does not place herself in the landscape by imagining a Lilliputian version of herself at sea; remaining her full size, she instead makes of herself a god: "she changed the pool into the sea, […] and cast vast clouds over this tiny world by holding her hand against the sun, and so brought darkness and desolation, like God himself, to millions of ignorant and innocent creatures" (78). And Nancy's thought experiments with landscape and scale lead her, like her mother, to contemplate her own limits. She suffers a version of the crisis that attends Mrs. Ramsay's still-life meditation on the life her children will have after her death: "the two senses of that vastness and this tininess (the pool had diminished again) flowering within it made her feel that she was bound hand and foot and

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[59] Douglas Mao, *Solid Objects: Modernism and the Test of Production* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 73.

unable to move by the intensity of feelings which reduced her own body, her own life, and the lives of all the people in the world, for ever, to nothingness" (78). Playing at omnipotence, Nancy finds herself reduced to something less significant than she was when she began. Her thoughts cannot quite be called a meditation on mortality *per se*, focused as they are on her "tininess" and the reduction of humanity to "nothingness," but they do share with her mother's thoughts a certain kind of existential anxiety.

I want to suggest, then, that Nancy's evening drama in the tidal pool reveals something vital about the other miniature landscapes in the novel—a subterranean rumbling that threatens the safety of the worlds in the dish of fruit and shell and the shawl-wrapped skull. That is, the pastoral (or the marine) in *To the Lighthouse* always bears traces of the elegiac, so that the novel seems to participate in the longstanding poetic tradition of pastoral elegy: Woolf's miniature topographies situate loss in a manner not altogether different from those landscapes in which we seek "a consolation for our mortality," or those places of pastoral elegy "in which human loss is integrated into the rhythms of nature."[60] Indeed, Woolf's landscapes seem to *prefigure* loss—the shell and the skull offer vanitas motifs, and Nancy's tidal pool causes her to imagine her own "nothingness"—without actually suffering from the removal of any object. (It is only after Mrs. Ramsay has climbed up hills and

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[60] Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 15, and Bonnie Costello, "Fresh Woods: Elegy and Ecology Among the Ruins," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy*, ed. Karen Weisman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 324.

Jane Goldman argues that the novel as a whole follows the pattern of pastoral elegy, with its movement through three stages: "After the idyll ('The Window'), comes the untimely fall ('Time Passes'), then the 'fresh woods and pastures new' ('The Lighthouse'). Finally, *To the Lighthouse* celebrates the survival and flourishing of its own 'uncouth swain', Lily Briscoe," and "in keeping with elegiac convention," the novel "ends in lyric consolation and transformative vision." Although Goldman is careful to note that this vision "maintains a notion of art as contestive, not transcendent," her reading fails to take into account Woolf's use of pastoral convention *in* the novel, which, as we shall see, reveals its comforts to be temporary at best. See Randall Stevenson and Jane Goldman, "'But what? Elegy?' Modernist Reading and the Death of Mrs. Ramsay," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 26 (1996): 178, 181, 184.

descended valleys in the dish of fruit that the anonymous hand removes the pear.) Just as the still life does, then, the miniature landscapes figure absence as presence,[61] and thereby converge with a central paradox of pastoral poetry—the extent to which its peace always remains a "myth," and its solace is characterized by "change and pain."[62]

Much like idealizing pastoral elegies, the pastoral world in *To the Lighthouse* is anything but natural.[63] Both the still-life centerpiece and the shawl-covered boar's skull have been arranged, subjected to aesthetic modification. The comforting pastoral of the children's nursery arises only from the bedtime stories of Mrs. Ramsay, and her words, like her shawl, serve to mask the "horrid," branching reality of the skull. The pastoral, in short, works in *To the Lighthouse* not to naturalize death or to comfort the grieving, but instead to screen the *memento mori*. And even as Mrs. Ramsay tries to protect James and Cam from the harsh iconography of the *vanitas* motif by wrapping the skull with her shawl, we know that such safety cannot last forever.[64] In time, the skull will surely escape her shawl as it has seemed to outwit the children's attempts to dominate it with the lamp: "Wherever they put the light [. . .] there was always a shadow somewhere."

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[61] We might connect this figuration with the fact that the "traditional pastoral contextualisation of elegy has less to do with the anthropomorphism of nature than with the naturalization of man." That is, the pastoral context for elegy represents the process by which the human body returns to nature, vanishing as a distinct object in the landscape. See Costello, "Fresh Woods," 330.

[62] Barrell and Bull, *English Pastoral Verse*, 4-5, and Iain Twiddy, *Pastoral Elegy in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry* (New York: Continuum, 2012), 4.

[63] For more on this kind of elegy, see Barrell and Bull, *English Pastoral Verse*, 224.

[64] Goldman reads this moment quite differently, as a "Post-Impressionist colourist solution" that, by covering the sharply defined "light and dark" of the skull, which are evocative of "patriarchal chiaroscuro," manages to sow "the seeds of social and artistic progressiveness." See Jane Goldman, *Feminist Aesthetics*, 173-4.

Still Life III: Shrouded Jug and Sheeted Chair

In fact, the redeployment of this image reveals the harshness it has always possessed. If we examine the wrapped still life object in another context, its meaning shifts slightly so that, whereas it appeared to offer Cam a sense of security in "The Window," it actually participates in the ghostly look that the Ramsays' house takes on in "Time Passes." Here, in the middle of the novel's three sections, the house is uninhabited, and all of the furniture is covered:

> So loveliness reigned and stillness, and together made the shape of loveliness itself, a form from which life had parted; solitary like a pool at evening, far distant, seen from a train window, vanishing so quickly that the pool, pale in the evening, is scarcely robbed of its solitude, though once seen. Loveliness and stillness clasped hands in the bedroom, and among the shrouded jugs and the sheeted chairs even the prying of the wind, and the soft nose of the clammy sea airs, rubbing, snuffling, iterating, and reiterating their questions—"Will you fade? Will you perish?"—scarcely disturbed the peace, the indifference, the air of pure integrity, as if the question they asked scarcely needed that they should answer: we remain.
>
> Nothing it seemed could break that image, corrupt that innocence, or disturb the swaying mantle of silence which, week after week, in the empty room, wove into itself the falling cries of birds, ships hooting, the drone and hum of the fields, a dog's bark, a man's shout, and folded them round the house in silence. Once only a board sprang on the landing; once in the middle of the night with a roar, with a rupture, as after centuries of quiescence, a rock rends itself from the mountain and hurtles crashing into the valley, one fold of the shawl loosened and swung to and fro. (133-34)

The draped furniture at the beginning of the passage presents us with another metamorphosis of the *vanitas* motif: just as we found the horny texture of the seashell echoed in the branching horns of the bare boar's skull, here we find the shawl-covered skull echoed in "the shrouded jugs and the sheeted chairs." In the world of "Time Passes," as

Ann Banfield argues, "nothing persists but unconscious things, shrouded furniture."[65] And this ghostly furniture seems, like the objects which I have already discussed, to borrow from the tradition of still-life painting.

In some ways, the beginning of this passage seems even to be a meditation on the condition of still life: it is a loveliness that the viewer seems to catch unawares and to leave "scarcely robbed of its solitude," although it has been "once seen." Thus, if there is a subjectivity that perceives the objects of "Time Passes," it is a glancing, inchoate one, and for this reason, the section became a "most difficult abstract piece of writing" for Woolf, who wrote in her diary that she struggled "to give an empty house, no people's characters, the passage of time, all eyeless & featureless with nothing to cling to."[66] Woolf's description here seems directly to contradict Bryson's theorization of still life: if "Time Passes," like still-life painting, "breaks with narrative's scale of human importance" and "pitches itself at a level of material existence," then it does not do so in order to stage a "wholescale eviction of the Event." Rather, the material existence of the empty house—its "eyeless," "featureless," characterless, inhuman world—actually seems to Woolf to provide the perfect gauge by which to register "the passage of time."

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[65] Banfield, *Phantom Table*, 223.

[66] Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell, vol. 3 (New York: Harcourt, 1980), 76. Though "Time Passes" is devoid of a centralized, organizing perception that has its basis in Woolf's characters, the extent to which the section is also devoid of a narrator's consciousness remains a matter of some debate. Douglas Mao calls it an "object world from which consciousness is apparently excluded" and a "vision of utter serenity in the world without humans," while J. Hillis Miller argues for an alternative reading, in which the only thing to persist "as witness of the gradual decay of the house is the mind of the narrator or the language of the narrator." See Mao, *Solid Objects*, 59-60, and J. Hillis Miller, "Mr. Carmichael and Lily Briscoe: The Rhythm of Creativity in To the Lighthouse," in *Modernism Reconsidered*, ed. Robert Kiely (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 179-82.

Indeed, the absence of consciousness in a space which was previously peopled by so many perceiving subjects results in a ghostly atmosphere, a house inhabited by shades.[67] In "Time Passes," even the loveliness and stillness that Woolf personifies offer cold comfort to the reader: "the shape of loveliness itself" is, after all, "a form from which life had parted." With this description, in fact, Woolf foreshadows Lily Briscoe's description of the trouble with Mrs. Ramsay's beauty in "The Lighthouse." As Lily recalls in this final section of the novel, "she was astonishingly beautiful, as William said. But beauty was not everything. Beauty had this penalty—it came too readily, came too completely. It *stilled life*—froze it" (180-1; my italics). In this way, just as loveliness is a lifeless form, beauty is a force that seems to freeze life. Here, Woolf nearly allows the term "still life" to enter her novel, just as she does when Lily paints in the early morning and recalls Mrs. Ramsay's ability "to make of the moment something permanent": "*Life stand still* here, Mrs. Ramsay said. 'Mrs. Ramsay! Mrs. Ramsay!' she repeated. She owed it all to her" (165; my italics). As Lily describes her debt to Mrs. Ramsay's mode of everyday art-making, she evokes the mechanics of the dinner scene, in which life halts momentarily. But as I have argued, this apparent transcendence does not coincide with a narrative suspension or standstill, and Mrs. Ramsay's beauty or domestic art cannot stop the passage of time.

The apparent permanence of Mrs. Ramsay's moments goes hand-in-hand with her own impermanence, and Lily's realization that Mrs. Ramsay could preserve the moment

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[67] The ghostly quality of the interior in "Time Passes" may be, as Julia Prewitt Brown suggests, connected to the nostalgia that always surfaces in "the bourgeois interior," or as Victoria Rosner contends, it may also be evocative of the freedom that comes with the passing of Victorian values, since the "deteriorating house stands in for" the decay of the "many limiting social conventions" associated with the Ramsays' Victorian attitudes. See Julia Prewitt Brown, *The Bourgeois Interior* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 11, and Victoria Rosner, "Virginia Woolf and Monk's House," in Humm, *The Edinburgh Companion to Virginia Woolf and the Arts*, 192.

arrives accompanied by the very language that will characterize Lily's body-wracking grief—the repetition of Mrs. Ramsay's name, as if to summon her: "if they shouted loud enough Mrs. Ramsay would return. 'Mrs. Ramsay!' she said aloud, 'Mrs. Ramsay!' The tears ran down her face. […] 'Mrs. Ramsay!' Lily cried, 'Mrs. Ramsay!' But nothing happened. The pain increased" (183-84). In other words, although Mrs. Ramsay seems to make life stand still, Lily's recognition of this fact depends upon—and is trumped by, perhaps—Mrs. Ramsay's absence from the scene of her realization. Thus, even as Woolf even seems to permit the emergence of the term "still life," she hints at the dangers to everyday existence that paintings of this genre often present clearly. As Bryson reminds us, even though still life evokes the space and gestures of the human body, the removal of this body is "the founding move" of the genre, and "still life also expels the values which human presence imposes on the world."[68] The loveliness of "Time Passes," just like the beauty of "stilled life," in other words, is predicated on human mortality, and the entire section turns, to borrow Douglas Mao's formulation, "upon the difficulty of separating the inanimacy of the innocent object world from human death."[69]

This difficulty is underlined by the questions that the "sea airs" pose in "Time Passes." Snuffling about the Ramsays' house, they ask, "Will you fade? Will you perish?". In response, the natural forces—loveliness and stillness—and the objects in the house seem to say that they remain, capable of disregarding the human inevitability of mortality. But the still life in "The Window," with its composition spoiled by the removal of a pear, suggests

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[68] Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked*, 60.
[69] Mao, *Solid Objects*, 61. In a related manner, Elizabeth Helsinger has argued that all paintings—not just still lifes—may remind us of death because of their stillness and lack of movement, so that pictorial elegies do not "set out to horrify" the viewer, but they may well unnerve the viewer nevertheless. See Elizabeth Helsinger, "Grieving Images: Elegy and the Visual Arts," in Weisman, *The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy*, 667-68.

that loveliness and stillness are not actually permanent qualities—for the still life or for the Ramsays' home. On the one hand, almost as soon as Woolf suggests that "nothing [. . .] could break that image, corrupt that innocence, or disturb the swaying mantle of silence," Mrs. McNab arrives to clean the house, and the object world of "Time Passes" is jolted into a kind of animacy. And on the other hand, the genre of still life, whether it presents a pear and a seashell or a "shrouded jug," always asks the questions repeated by the sea airs—"Will you fade? Will you perish?"—and with its *memento mori*, it always answers these questions with a "yes." Loveliness will fade, and stillness will perish; the fruit in the dish will rot, and the humans who once viewed these objects will die.

In other words, the still-life objects of "Time Passes" demand the completion of a particular kind of narrative, one in keeping with "the iconographical 'pointing' […], the forefiguring of events that are in the future" that we have seen elsewhere in *To the Lighthouse*.[70] Bound up with the human inevitability of mortality, these examples of *memento mori* drive the central section of the novel towards its only possible iconographical fate. Thus, after the sea airs introduce the possibility of perishing, the wrappings begin to come off the shrouded objects of the Ramsays' house, as "the swaying mantle of silence" is undone "with a roar, with a rupture." One fold of the shawl which Mrs. Ramsay has wrapped around the boar's skull loosens, and its effects are calamitous: the shawl has begun to swing in the section after we learn that Mrs. Ramsay has died, and her death means that she cannot protect her children any longer.[71] The loosening of the shawl from the horrid skull thus

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[70] Cheeke, *Writing for Art*, 64.

[71] Mrs. Ramsay's shawl provides one example of the extent to which Woolf uses garments as "poignant markers of physical absence" and "archival traces of loss," as Jane Garrity argues. See Jane Garrity, "Virginia Woolf and Fashion," in Humm, *The Edinburgh Companion to Virginia Woolf and the Arts*, 209. For a related

opens the floodgates of death in this section, so that two of her children, Prue and Andrew Ramsay, die within three pages. Yet, as horrible as this sequence of events is, I want to suggest that the terror of "Time Passes" is simply the fulfillment of the promise made by the still life—the realization of the fate its *vanitas* motif has ensured all along.

This fulfillment becomes clearer if we view still life as Bonnie Costello asks us to in *Planets on Tables*, that is, through a window. She argues that "still life is a threshold genre which focuses on what is on the table," but which "is often, throughout its tradition, combined with landscape, through a window that looks out, or a shape that suggests a wider topography."[72] Thus, still life manages "to bring the distant near and to relate to the world and public events within the private life."[73] Seeing still life combined with landscape, in other words, allows us to see what is on the table and what is outside the window at the same time—to see foreground and background at once, or to see the smaller scale alongside the larger. This kind of double vision emerges from the full story of Cézanne's *Pommes*, with which I began: we can see the arrival of John Maynard Keynes from a Paris bombarded by Big Bertha at the same time that we see his small still life, which remains "extraordinarily solid and alive," with all of its tiny brushstrokes. And in "Time Passes," Woolf offers a related kind of innovation in scale. She enlarges the life of objects like "the shrouded jugs" to fill the space of the section and miniaturizes the drama of the Ramsay family to fit into the space between brackets. In this way, the Ramsays become something like the minnows in the tidal pool in relation to the span of the horizon. And just as Nancy feels simultaneously

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reading, see also R. S. Koppen, *Virginia Woolf, Fashion, and Literary Modernity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 2, 35, 153-56.

[72] Costello, *Planets on Tables*, 6.

[73] Ibid. This point is one which in which Costello argues against the commonplace that still life is "the opposite of history" (ibid., viii).

"the two senses of that vastness and this tininess" (78), so too do we comprehend the broader public upheaval of World War I alongside the private tragedies within the Ramsay family.

Or, to put it another way, if "The Window" allows us to see only the candlelit dinner because of its "disinclination to portray the world beyond the far edge of the table,"[74] then "Time Passes" reveals both the human drama at the dinner table and what we might see outside the Ramsays' dining room. While "The Window" refuses "any accurate view of the outside world," "Time Passes" ensures that "the night" is no longer "shut off by panes of glass" (99). With this change in scale and the "downpouring of immense darkness" (129), then, we can see the full extent to which Woolf's still life proves its narrative capacity, in the events which consummate its *memento mori*.[75] Mrs. Ramsay dies for an unknown reason, and Prue dies in connection with childbirth. Andrew Ramsay is killed in World War I, rats carry "off this and that to gnaw behind the wainscots," and the house is "deserted" (141). Nature overtakes the Ramsays' house, and "Time Passes" suggests that we should have grasped the meaning of the *vanitas* motifs scattered throughout "The Window": death has been a constituent part of the narrative since the beginning of the novel, not a surprise.

Iconography, Physiognomy, Elegy

Thus far, my reading of still life in *To the Lighthouse* has been insistently iconographical.: I have attended to the symbolism of Woolf's *vanitas* theme, and I have

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[74] Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked*, 71.

[75] For Froula, this darkness of nightfall and sleep offers a clear foreshadowing of death, and she also argues that the deaths of Mrs. Ramsay, Prue, and Andrew do not constitute the first "shock of loss" for the reader,

tracked images like the skull and the wrapped still life object through the pages of her novel. But this is not the only kind of reading—or viewing—that still life can prompt. As I have already noted, still life has also proven powerful throughout the history of art because it offers a unique site for aesthetic experiment, and for those who regard still life as purely formal, the kind of reading that the genre demands is something like Fry and Vanessa Bell's investigation of *Pommes*, with its emphasis on Cézanne's techniques, like "the laying on of the paint; & the time he'd spent, & how he'd altered it."[76] The Bloomsbury painters find themselves intrigued by the painted surface of the canvas itself, where Cézanne's layers of pigment call attention to the texture of the work, while Woolf, by contrast, celebrates the possibilities of the objects in the still life in a far less clinical manner: "What can 6 apples *not* be?" Woolf admires what the painting depicts, and her sister and friend emphasize its qualities as a crafted object.

These two modes of viewing echo the critical distinction between transparency and opacity—between seeing what is *in* a particular picture as though the surface were a window, and seeing the picture *as* a picture, with a material surface—which echoes in turn, as Richard Shiff has argued, another distinction between sensory modes: "transparency facilitates vision; whereas opacity impedes its course, seeming instead to invite the touch."[77] I have employed both of these figures in my discussion of still life in *To the Lighthouse*, shifting tacitly from one to another until this point, but I want now to focus more tightly on the connection between still life and touch, or gesture, in Woolf's novel, not least because the still life is "simultaneously optical and tactile, objectively neutral and yet subjectively charged, purely

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which actually comes earlier, with the "narrator's new detachment" in "Time Passes." See Froula, *Bloomsbury Avant-Garde*, 152-4.

formalist and yet almost evidentiary in its ability to "produce" the inhabitant of its domestic setting."[78] As Jeannene Przyblyski contends, the genre's capacity to convey "the nature of the individual through the painting of everyday things" constitutes a "physiognomic" kind of "eloquence" that proceeds from "physical impressions and traces—a cumulative effect of the deep, domestic familiarity born of the habits of daily use worn into the surfaces of commonplace objects and imprinted from their surfaces to the surface of the painting."[79]

For this reason, I want to add to the iconographical and formalist understandings of Woolf's still life which I have outlined by turning now to the insights that emerge when we begin to read in the terms that Shiff and Przyblyski suggest—that is, in terms of the physical, the "physiognomic," and the touch. In some ways, locating this kind of meaning in Woolf's still lifes seems obvious, since, as I have already noted, one of the features of the dish of fruit and shell on the dinner table is "nearness," which Bryson calls "the principal spatial value" of still life. In Bryson's analysis, still life evokes "the space around the body that is known by touch and is created by familiar movements of the hands and arms"; logically, then, "what builds this proximal space is gesture: the gestures of eating, of laying the table," and of creating the vessels which hold food and drink from "formless clay and metal."[80] These are

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[76] Woolf, *Diary* 1:140-41.
[77] Richard Shiff, "Constructing Physicality," 42.
[78] Jeannene M. Przyblyski, "The Makings of Modern Still Life in the 1860s," in Rathbone and Shackelford, *Impressionist Still Life*, 29.
[79] Ibid. For an extended treatment of the idea of the ordinary within modernist literature, see Olson, *Modernism and the Ordinary* (see introduction, n. 43), and for an investigation of the connections between Woolf's work and the concept of dailiness, especially in the representation of reading in texts like *To the Lighthouse*, see Bryony Randall, *Modernism, Daily Time and Everyday Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007). For an examination of the repetitive or recurrent aspect of the everyday—the "difference-in-sameness" that particularly characterizes the work of modern American poets like Wallace Stevens or Elizabeth Bishop—see Siobhan Phillips, *The Poetics of the Everyday: Creative Repetition in Modern American Verse* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).
[80] Bryson, *Looking at the Overlookedi,* 70-71. This point, taken in conjunction with Bryson's contention that the removal of the human body from the depicted scene is the foundational movement of still life, accounts for the

the gestures that Przyblyski finds "worn into" objects and "imprinted from their surfaces to the surface of the painting." And to these gestures is added, in the case of particular painters of still life, the movement of the paintbrush itself, a kind of touch that Shiff describes as the first of three vital aspects of a tactile understanding of painting:

> "Touch," as the term is commonly used, refers to at least three aspects of a painting and its process. First, touch is the gesture that deposits the painter's mark as an imprint or impression. We regard the mark as an indexical sign of the gesture. Second, touch is the applied paint mark itself, in its capacity as a visible form; discernible features of a touch (or group of touches) relate it iconically to things of similar form seen both outside and inside paintings—say, both clouds and pictures of clouds. We call the applied paint material a touch because it is the effect of an act of touching; this is a straightforward case of metonymy, with the name of the action or cause—touching a surface to leave a mark—being given to its effect, the mark or "touch." Third, touch is the tactile sensation the painter actually experiences or the viewer imagines to be associated with making such a mark. Each of these aspects of the experience of painting (both painter's and viewer's) is "touch."[81]

In sum, then, touch includes gesture, mark, and sensation, and all three of these parts of experiencing a painting have particular resonance in the genre of still life, which already rests, as Przyblyski and Bryson argue, on a multiplicity of touches.[82]

An understanding of painting in terms of all three kinds of touch proves vital to reading Lily Briscoe's painting in the final section of the novel, "The Lighthouse," in which she recreates and then completes the painting that she began ten years earlier. To begin with,

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uncanny quality that he ascribes to the genre. For more on still life's evocation of the body, see Schapiro, *Modern Art*, 23, and *Paul Cézanne*, 18-19.

[81] Shiff, "Constructing Physicality," 43.

[82] In the case of still life, the touch does not necessarily proceed directly from the painter. As Przyblyski's discussion of the kind of touch impressed upon still life—deep familiarity with careworn objects in the domestic sphere—implies, there exist gendered and classed connotations for the genre. That is, still lifes often seem to be constructed from the labor of the working-class, "care-taking woman"—someone like Mrs. McNab—whose touches are characterized as "inarticulate," even though her work, once translated into the painter's medium, may yield the "eloquent" paintings Przyblyski analyzes. See Alison Light, *Mrs. Woolf and the Servants: An Intimate History of Domestic Life in Bloomsbury* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2008), 200-201, and Edward P. Comentale, *Modernism, Cultural Production, and the British Avant-Garde* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 61-62.

Lily recalls her decisions about the painting's composition not by remembering an abstract puzzle of arranging masses, but instead by reliving the physical situation in which she made those decisions. As Randi Koppen has argued in her exploration of the grounding of Woolf's aesthetic vision in the body, "memory and its reconstitution cannot be isolated from the body and its contingencies, its physical conditions."[83] Thus, only because Lily sits at the breakfast table can she recall her solution to her compositional problem:

> Suddenly she remembered. When she had sat there last ten years ago there had been a little sprig or leaf pattern on the table-cloth, which she had looked at in a moment of revelation. There had been a problem about a foreground of a picture. Move the tree to the middle, she had said. (151)

Here Lily relives the realization that she had while sitting in the same place at the table a decade ago. This orientation allows her to see the tablecloth as it was, with a botanical pattern that echoed the landscape elements of her painting. She meant to relocate the tree, as the relevant passage from "The Window" confirms:

> In a flash she saw her picture, and thought, Yes, I shall put the tree further in the middle; then I shall avoid that awkward space. That's what I shall do. That's what has been puzzling me. She took up the salt cellar and put it down again on a flower in a pattern on the table-cloth, so as to remind her to move the tree. (87)

During the Ramsays' dinner party, then, Lily had constructed a mnemonic device out of the tabletop object nearest to her, and her touch of the salt cellar and the tablecloth registers as a particularly concrete initial gesture towards her painting. Moreover, her "familiarity" with this "commonplace object" links this first mark of her painting process to the impressions on the objects in still life paintings that Przyblyski discusses; Lily's handling of the salt cellar also demonstrates the large extent to which domestic life mediates the fine arts in this novel.

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[83] Randi Koppen, "Embodied Form: Art and Life in Virginia Woolf's 'To the Lighthouse,'" *New Literary History*

And although the salt cellar does not rise to the surface of Lily's memory in "The Lighthouse," the gesture for which it was a marker does, and Lily resolves to paint the picture which she never finished.

She sets to painting with a series of deliberate gestures, "fetch[ing] herself a chair" and "pitch[ing] her easel with her precise old-maidish movements on the edge of the lawn" at a particular location, "not too close to Mr. Carmichael, but close enough for his protection" from the volatility of Mr. Ramsay (151). When Lily takes out her pigments and begins to work on her canvas, Woolf continues to emphasize the physicality of her engagement with her artwork, but Lily's movements become less methodical and more impulsive:

> With a curious physical sensation, as if she were urged forward and at the same time must hold herself back, she made her first quick decisive stroke. The brush descended. It flickered brown over the white canvas; it left a running mark. A second time she did it—a third time. And so pausing and so flickering, she attained a dancing rhythmical movement, as if the pauses were one part of the rhythm and the strokes another, and all were related; and so, lightly and swiftly pausing, striking, she scored her canvas with brown running nervous lines which had no sooner settled there than they enclosed (she felt it looming out at her) a space. (161-62)

As Lily begins, the movements of her paintbrush present a paradoxical picture of her agency in her own art. On the one hand, Lily's brush seems to act of its own accord, "descend[ing]," "flicker[ing]," leaving "a running mark," and quickly enclosing "a space" whose existence seems to surprise Lily. Yet on the other hand, she appears to control her painting process: her first brushstroke is "decisive," and then, with her own "flickering" movement, she "score[s] her canvas," seeming to mark it deeply. In either case, however, it remains crucial to note that Woolf does not describe the launch of the painting in terms of what Lily thinks

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32.2 (Spring 2001): 384.

about its composition, or how she feels about the scene she is going to represent, or even what the canvas itself looks like in any specificity.

Instead, Woolf begins Lily's painting with a "curious physical sensation," and alternately endowing Lily or her brush with agency, she sketches "a dancing rhythmical movement," which is "grounded in the body."[84] Lily's painting process, in sum, is highly gestural. It is, as Koppen argues so persuasively, "quite simply, about the close connection that exists between the artistic act, the rhythms of bodily movement, and the physical world [. . .] what is communicated with striking clarity through Lily's performative experience, is the sense of bodily movement that constitutes the act of painting—the pauses, the strokes, and how that bodily movement creates the rhythm, constitutes the act."[85] And if, as Koppen claims, the movements of the body constitute the act of painting, then the painting itself becomes the record of this movement. With such a "direct translation of the body onto the canvas"—with so many touches, in Shiff's terms—Lily's completed work will then surely demonstrate some of the qualities that Przyblyski finds in still life paintings, where eloquence is "'physiognomic,' a product of physical impressions and traces."[86]

I want to underscore the importance of touch to the way in which Lily paints for two primary reasons. First and foremost, the concrete physicality of her painting process strikes an important contrast with the abstract work that she produces. Traditionally read as Post-Impressionist in influence, Lily's painting is not strictly mimetic: for example, her central "question" as she paints in "The Window" is "how to connect this mass on the right hand with that on the left" (56), while simultaneously avoiding "the danger [. . .] that by doing that

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[84] Koppen, "Embodied Form," 381. For more on rhythm, see J. Hillis Miller, "Mr. Carmichael and Lily Briscoe," 170-71.

the unity of the whole might be broken" (57). This kind of conceptualization has often led critics to argue for the painting's avant-garde status or its position on the verge of modernist abstraction. Torgovnick, for instance, concludes that "Lily's concerns as an artist are explicitly those of a painter working in the abstract mode": "Lily conceives of Mrs. Ramsay sitting with James (human components in her picture) not as a representational artist or a portrait-painter might, but simply as one of the 'masses' with which she must work. Her concerns are abstract—the achievement of a general principle of balance and harmony—rather than the preservation of specific, 'historical' figures or moments."[87]

In addition to this kind of abstraction, we might also call Lily's painting abstract in a more conventional sense: that is, despite some critics' desire to treat it as a modernist masterwork, the painting is barely present within the pages of Woolf's novel—more an idea of a painting than a fully realized one. And if we limit our consideration only to the canvas that Lily completes in "The Lighthouse," our list of details about the painting proves quite short indeed. We know that she begins by creating a group of brown lines enclosing a space, "model[s] it with greens and blues," and then begins "to lay on a red, a grey, [. . .] to model her way into the hollow there" (163, 174). Despite this brief use of red and gray, Lily's preferred pigments are blue and green—though we have no information about the particular shades she uses—and we might assume that she chooses these colors because she wants to

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[85] Koppen, "Embodied Form," 382.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Torgovnick, *Visual Arts*, 139. See also Banfield, *Phantom Table*, 288-9; Froula, *Bloomsbury Avant-Garde*, 132; Gillespie, *The Sisters' Arts*, 221-2; Daniel R. Schwarz, *Reconfiguring Modernism: Explorations in the Relationships between Modern Art and Modern Literature* (New York: St. Martin's, 1997), 39-42; Christopher Reed, "Through Formalism: Feminism and Virginia Woolf's Relation to Bloomsbury Aesthetics," in Gillespie, *The Multiple Muses of Virginia Woolf*, 25; and Jack Stewart, "A 'Need of Distance and Blue': Space, Color, and Creativity in To the Lighthouse," *Twentieth-Century Literature* 46.1 (Spring 2000): 78-99.

represent the Hebridean landscape.[88] Exactly which features of the landscape she will include, however, remains unclear: Lily looks repeatedly at the sea and the hedge while she paints, and she notes the appearance of "an odd-shaped triangular shadow over the step" outside the Ramsays' drawing room, near the window that figures so prominently in the first section of the novel (204). But Lily gives prominent place to none of these subjects, and we know that, no matter what the contents of her painting, none of them anchors the composition, which seems to consist primarily of the unbalanced masses on the left and right sides of the painting. These masses trouble Lily until she finally seems to reach an equilibrium at the end of the novel by completing the canvas with a line in the center. In the end, despite Lily's momentous statement, "I have had my vision," all of these characteristics of her painting—whether they pertain to its composition, subject matter, or coloring—fail to coalesce into a whole.

And somewhat remarkably, very few critics have noticed how little we can see of Lily's painting.[89] Most seem to suffer from the same metonymic confusion that afflicted critics of Cézanne's painting. In Cézanne's work, as Shiff explains, there is "a metonymic exchange operating between material surface and immaterial image: the 'solidity' previous critics saw actually belonged to neither the objects depicted nor even the illusion of their 'real' presence; instead, it belonged to the construction, by means of juxtaposed 'touches,'"

[88] There remains some critical debate over the genre in which Lily's painting should appropriately be placed. Mao, among others, believes that it is obviously a landscape, while another group of scholars hold that, even after Mrs. Ramsay's death, the painting remains a portrait. For references to the painting as a landscape, see Mao, *Solid Objects*, 62, and Jane Goldman, *Feminist Aesthetics*, 170-71. For references to it as a portrait, see Banfield, *Phantom Table*, 289; Comentale, *British Avant-Garde*, 60; Dalgarno, *Visible World*, 88, 95; Fisher, 92; Froula, *Bloomsbury Avant-Garde*, 129, 167; and Humm, *Modernist Women and Visual Cultures*, 84-85.
[89] One of the few is Cheryl Mares. See her "Reading Proust: Woolf and the Painter's Perspective," in Gillespie, *The Multiple Muses of Virginia Woolf*, 76-77. See also Gillespie, *The Sisters' Arts*, 220-21.

of the painting itself.[90] That is, a painting by Cézanne—like one by Lily Briscoe—is built upon multiple touches, and these brushmarks draw attention to their material support. They emphasize the canvas, its layers of pigment—indeed, all the various features of the painting's physicality. Critics have mistakenly attributed this "solidity" to the image depicted in a Cézanne, and the same metonymic transfer has occurred in discussions of Lily's work: scholars have taken Woolf's description of Lily's touches—gestures, marks, and sensations—as evidence of the substantial presence of her image.[91] Yet as I believe I have demonstrated, with my description of Lily's painting, these touches are almost all we have of her work. In the end, her painting is minimally drawn—a barely visible sketch in comparison to the more fully colored descriptions of her movements as she paints.

The second reason that I want to underscore the touches of Lily's painting has less to do with her finished work and more to do with the motivations behind her painting. That is, as many readers of *To the Lighthouse* have noted, Lily's painting is a means of grieving the death of Mrs. Ramsay,[92] and her elegy springs from an acutely physical sense of loss. Indeed, in the passage in which Lily begins to paint, which I have already discussed, the first shape that emerges from the lines on her canvas is a mark of loss: "she scored her canvas with brown running nervous lines which had no sooner settled there than they enclosed (she felt it looming out at her) a space." What Lily paints, in other words, is not so much a shape or a figure as it is an absence; it might even be most accurate to say that Lily does not paint space

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[90] Shiff, "Constructing Physicality," 43. For references to the solidity of Cézanne's images, see Bell, *Selected Letters*, 213; Fry, *Cézanne*, 51; Schapiro, *Paul Cézanne*, 10; and Sterling, *Still Life Painting*, 104.
[91] See, for example, Roberta White, *A Studio of One's Own: Fictional Women Painters and the Art of Fiction* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2005), 106.
[92] See, for example, Fisher, "'Silent as the Grave,'" 105; Froula, *Bloomsbury Avant-Garde*, 161; Mao, *Solid Objectsi,* 62; Stevenson and Goldman, "Modernist Reading," 174, 178; Jane Goldman, *Feminist Aesthetics*, 168-170; and Humm, *Modernist Women and Visual Cultures*, 17, 77, 84.

nearly as much as she allows negative space to appear. Throughout "The Lighthouse," her painting process is dominated by her attempt to grapple with this emptiness: "the problem of space remained, she thought, taking up her brush again. It glared at her. The whole mass of the picture was poised upon that weight" (174). The space "loom[s]" and "glare[s]," almost daring Lily to paint over it, and despite its vacancy, the space acquires a paradoxical "weight" that attests to the psychological impact of Mrs. Ramsay's death. (We see this connection even more clearly when Lily describes the absence of Mrs. Ramsay from the house and grounds in the same terms that she has used to describe her painting: "the empty drawing-room steps, the frill of the chair inside, the puppy tumbling on the terrace, the whole wave and whisper of the garden became *like curves and arabesques flourishing round a center of complete emptiness*" [182; my italics].) In this way, Lily's canvas, marked by the movements of her paintbrush, registers her grief before her body does.

When Lily's body does realize her sense of loss, the effects are devastating. She wants somehow to communicate her grief to Mr. Carmichael, but the clumsiness of language holds her back:

> Little words that broke up the thought and dismembered it said nothing. "About life, about death, about Mrs. Ramsay"—no, she thought, one could say nothing to nobody. The urgency of the moment always missed its mark. Words fluttered sideways and struck the object inches too low. Then one gave it up; then the idea sunk back again; then one became like most middle-aged people, cautious, furtive, with wrinkles between the eyes and a look of perpetual apprehension. For how could one express in words these emotions of the body? express that emptiness there? (She was looking at the drawing-room steps; they looked extraordinarily empty.) It was one's body's feeling, not one's mind. The physical sensations that went with the bare look of the steps had become suddenly extremely unpleasant. To want and not to have, sent all up her body a hardness, a hollowness, a strain. And then to want and not to have—to want and want—how that wrung the heart, and wrung it again and again! Oh, Mrs. Ramsay! (181-82)

Here Lily laments the inaccuracy of language to express the whole shape of her grief: trying to tell Mr. Carmichael how she feels would "dismember" the thought and strike "the object inches too low." Moreover, in the time that it might take her to contemplate her store of available expressions and discard them all as inadequate, she will lose "the urgency of the moment." But the problem with language that Lily feels most viscerally does not have to do with precision or temporality; instead, her primary frustration with communicating her grief to Mr. Carmichael arises from its physicality. Grief is, for Lily, one of the "emotions of the body," and in order to tell Mr. Carmichael how she feels, she would have to translate this emotion into another medium. The poverty of language halts her attempt at this inter-mediation, and Lily is left isolated, with something like the "eloquence" of "physical impressions" that Przyblyski locates in still life painting.

Here Lily contends not exactly with physical impressions but rather with their opposite: the vacuum left by Mrs. Ramsay after her death. As Koppen notes, Lily's "loss is experienced physically"[93]: Mrs. Ramsay's death manifests itself as an "emptiness" that is not merely visual, but also palpable. The emptiness of the house and "the bare look of the steps" generate "unpleasant" "physical sensations" for Lily; her body becomes rigid under the force of "a hardness, a hollowness, a strain." Such tension suggests that when Lily's grief wrings her heart again and again, we should note the corporeal pain that underwrites the intensity of the expression. This moment is, as Emily Dalgarno notes, perhaps "the most painful in all of Woolf's work,"[94] and this pain is bodily: "to want and not to have" is, for Lily, not a state of "one's mind" but a physical condition—a yearning in which Lily's grief takes on the

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[93] Koppen, "Embodied Form," 387. See also Dalgarno, *Visible World*, 94.
[94] Dalgarno, *Visible World*, 94.

paradoxical capacity of still life to render an absence as presence. Mrs. Ramsay's absence makes Lily's body present in Woolf's text, and this "body's feeling" can only become fully legible—fully tactile—through the physiognomic, touch-based reading of painting that I have outlined.

Indeed, I want to suggest that the bodily feeling associated with Mrs. Ramsay's death here constitutes a form that proves just as vital to the progress of Woolf's narrative as the other forms I have examined. "To want and want" and "not to have" is to orient one's body outward and ache from the absence of a reply. Such a feeling is not unique to Lily's grief; it begins in the novel's bracketed acknowledgment of Mrs. Ramsay's death in "Time Passes," in which we find Mr. Ramsay reaching for her: "[Mr. Ramsay, stumbling along a passage one dark morning, stretched his arms out, but Mrs. Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before, his arms, though stretched out, remained empty.]" (132). Here, in what has been called "one of the most disturbing moments in twentieth-century fiction," Mr. Ramsay's outstretched, ultimately empty arms establish the form for grief in *To the Lighthouse*.[95] To reach out for another person in this novel ensures that one shall never grasp her; indeed, the only completed contact is disembodied or figurative, and always associated with mortality. An anonymous hand extends itself to take the pear from the dish on the dinner table in "The Window," and when Lily experiences her "physical sensations" of loss in the long passage above, she also describes it as a touch from Mrs. Ramsay's absent hand: "Ghost, air,

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[95] Randall Stevenson also argues that the "almost a-syntactic" sentence causes the reader to stumble as well. Jane Goldman offers a different reading of the moment, which, for her, reasserts the "rather critical, and comical, view" of Mr. Ramsay as "self-obsessed, rogue-elephant of a man" who "is always clumsily intruding on others." While Goldman's reading is compelling, it does not take into account the connection between Mr. Ramsay's gesture here and the others like it in *To the Lighthouse*. Furthermore, as Emily Dalgarno notes, this "trope of the empty arms that embrace both the invisible world of the dream and the waking world" extends

nothingness, a thing you could play with easily and safely any time of day or night, she had been that, and then suddenly she put her hand out and wrung the heart thus" (182). If these extended hands are markers of mortality, then Lily's "body's feeling" and Mr. Ramsay's outstretched arms demonstrate the posture of the bereaved—what we might call the sculptural attitude of elegy.

This attitude, like Lily's "body's feeling" and the memento mori which I have already examined, is a form in which physical presence depends on absence, and as Gabrielle McIntire has suggested, the interaction between presence and absence is the most prominent characteristic of this novel's deployment of the elegiac mode: "*To the Lighthouse* explores what it means to wish for the presence—a *re-presentation* that involves both *re-presenting* and *representing* presence—of the irretrievable by rigorously and attentively mapping the longing friends and family feel for the dead, thereby opening an archive of both melancholia and healing. In this way the novel functions as an 'elegy' for Mrs. Ramsay and her real-life correlative, Woolf's mother, Julia Stephen—both mourning and honoring the psychic evolution that ensues in the wake of an absent maternal."[96] McIntire implies that the novel's engagement with the question of representation broadens its scope so that it serves not only as an elegy for Mrs. Ramsay but also as an elegy for Woolf's mother. In fact, in Woolf's earliest conception of the novel—which she began in the early summer of 1925, just as *Mrs. Dalloway* was being read by her friends—her memory of her father lay at the heart of the

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beyond this novel into other works by Woolf. See Stevenson and Goldman, "Modernist Reading," 174, 181, and Dalgarno, *Visible World,* 7.

[96] Gabrielle McIntire, *Modernism, Memory, and Desire: T. S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 173 (emphasis original). For other discussions of the biographical basis of the novel, see Gillespie, *The Sisters' Arts*, 195-203, 220-1; Humm, *Modernist Women and Visual Cultures*, 17, 77; Suzanne Nalbantian, *Aesthetic Autobiography: From Life to Art in Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Anäis Nin* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994), 145-151.

book: "This is going to be fairly short: to have father's character done complete in it; & mothers; & St Ives; & childhood; & all the usual things I try to put in—life, death &c. But the centre is father's character, sitting in a boat, reciting We perished, each alone, while he crushes a dying mackerel."[97] By late June, it had become clear that Woolf's engagement with the subject of death—whether it affected her characters, her parents, or a fish—had grown to dominate the book to such an extent that she believed she was writing in a different genre altogether: "I am making up 'To the Lighthouse'—the sea is to be heard all through it. I have an idea that I will invent a new name for my books to supplant 'novel'. A new —— by Virginia Woolf. But what? Elegy?"[98]

Woolf's diary entry, despite its frequent invocation by scholars, mentions elegy with hesitation, and her uncertainty about the new genre surfaces not only in her use of question marks, but also, more provocatively, in the long dash. The dash, though it is a touch from her pen, a decidedly present mark, holds the place of an absent name, attesting quietly to the complexity of representing—or re-presenting—the dead that McIntire mentions. McIntire's interest in the question of re-presentation remains primarily a temporal, psychoanalytic one, as the quotation above hints,[99] but I want to suggest that Woolf's elegy not only re-presents the dead but, more important, offers various re-presentations of grief. That is, Woolf mingles visual and verbal media, as well as two- and three-dimensional forms, in her exploration of emotions like the "longing" which McIntire identifies. All of these kinds of literal feeling—Lily's touches to her canvas, the impressions on the objects of still life, Mr.

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[97] Woolf, *Diary*, 3:18.
[98] Ibid., 3:34.
[99] See McIntire, *Modernism, Memory, and Desire*, 165, 168-71, 174, 178-79.

Ramsay's hand reaching for his wife in the dark, the bodily sensation of wanting and not having—offer inter-mediated representational forms for elegy.

Woolf offers us one more key three-dimensional form for grief in *To the Lighthouse*, which becomes visible just after Lily's "body's feeling" causes her to break into tears. Here, in the shortest chapter of the novel, Woolf sketches grief in surprisingly violent, even cruel, terms: "[Macalister's boy took one of the fish and cut a square out of its side to bait his hook with. The mutilated body (it was alive still) was thrown back into the sea.]" (183). With this brief, bracketed sentence, Woolf offers a literalized figure for grief—a metaphor made material, in which the body of the fish serves an analogue for Lily's body, and the removal of its square of flesh corresponds to Mrs. Ramsay's death.[100] This metaphor depends for its force on the pathetic fallacy—the attribution of human feelings to nonhuman entities—but Woolf refuses to employ the figure at all; she never presents the slightest allusion to the possibility that the fish possesses feelings. We have only a description of the body in external terms: missing a square of flesh, "mutilated," and yet somehow "alive still." In this way, the metaphor constitutes an intriguing abandonment of the terms of "Time Passes," in which Woolf extends and subverts the pathetic fallacy.[101] (In fact, with its invocation of a figure of speech that isn't actually used, the metaphor also presents another instance of the confusion

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[100] Roberta White offers a similar reading, but many other potential meanings have been put forward by critics. Jane Goldman suggests several possibilities, including the idea that the boy's action represents a gesture of artistic creation and the related notion that Mrs. Ramsay constitutes a fish that Lily wants to "retrieve and (less brutally) transform." Quite differently, Elizabeth Abel and Jane Marcus connect the fish to Cam: Abel holds that the fish corresponds to Cam's sense of psychological mutilation at her father's hands, and Marcus pulls from the holograph draft to argue that Cam's desire to catch a fish is related to her budding talents as a writer. Alternatively, Christina Alt suggests that Macalister's boy's "wastefulness and indifference to suffering mirror Mr. Ramsay's selfish absorption and waste of the energy of others." See White, *Studio of One's Own*, 104; Jane Goldman, *Feminist Aesthetics*, 180; Elizabeth Abel, *Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 59; Jane Marcus, *Virginia Woolf and the Languages of Patriarchy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 153-4; and Christina Alt, *Virginia Woolf and the Study of Nature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 206.

of presence and absence in *To the Lighthouse*: here we have a metaphor in which the vehicle is present, but the link between tenor and vehicle remains stubbornly absent.) Thus we might think of the link between the mutilated fish and Lily's physical agony as relying upon a metonymic substitution of two of Shiff's aspects of touch: here, the mark upon the fish is taken for the sensation of Lily's body. Thus, with this intensification of Lily's "body's feeling," Woolf moves beyond her earlier suggestion that loss stirs "unpleasant" "physical sensations" in order to contend that death leaves the living survivors maimed. This is grief in extremis, and the still-living fish with a square cut out of its side presents a more shocking picture of grief than Mr. Ramsay's sculptural attitude of outstretched arms.

This gruesome form often surprises readers, but like the boar's skull, it actually echoes an earlier, more subtle image. In fact, the mutilated fish proceeds from the very first significant form introduced in *To the Lighthouse*, which has gone largely unremarked by critics.[102] As the novel opens and Mrs. Ramsay tells James that he may go to the lighthouse "if it's fine tomorrow," he sits on the floor at her feet "cutting out pictures from the illustrated catalogue of the Army and Navy Stores" (7). James's clipped advertisements do not quite constitute the still life that his sister Rose's arrangement of the fruit and shell will later that evening, but he shares with his sister an aesthetic sense of selection. Similarly, he shares with his mother the capacity to attach an emotional state to an aesthetic object: just as Mrs. Ramsay finds sympathy with Augustus Carmichael in the dinner-table still life, James "endow[s] the picture of a refrigerator," as soon as his mother tells him he may go to the lighthouse, "with heavenly bliss" so that the picture is "fringed with joy" (7). The emotional

[101] Mao, *Solid Objects*, 59-60. See also Miller, "Mr. Carmichael and Lily Briscoe," 181.

vibration of James's pictures does not remain positive, however, and once his father has overturned his mother's decision, his ability to "guide his scissors neatly round the refrigerator" morphs into a patricidal impulse to seize "an axe handy, or a poker, any weapon that would have gashed a hole in his father's breast and killed him, there and then" (8). In this way, James's careful handling of his scissors gives way to a desire for a sharper instrument. Although he cannot really "gash a hole in his father's breast," he establishes the form for boyhood cruelty later revisited by Macalister's boy when he "cut[s] a square out" of the side of the fish.[103] Moreover, James even comes close to getting his hands on a knife with which he could do the same kind of damage as Macalister's boy: his mother tries to pacify him by finding an object in the catalog "like a rake, or a mowing-machine, which, with its prongs and handles, would need the greatest skill and care in cutting out" (19), and eventually she comes upon the image that fulfills her requirements and James's unspoken desires—"a pocket knife with six blades" (20). Both the implement and the emotional template for the actions of Macalister's boy thus surface in the very first pages of the novel. And even though Woolf explores James's affinity for sharp objects and his urge to wound his father in connection with two-dimensional images, she reuses this form—now literalized, in three-dimensional form—with Macalister's boy, as I have outlined. One boy's patricidal impulse becomes another's routine fishing activity, which Woolf uses to figure the cruelty of grief.[104]

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[102] Jane Goldman has noted this moment in connection with Mrs. Ramsay's vision of James as a judge, as evidence of prewar ties to "imperialism and colonialism," and Roberta White has found in it vague evidence of James's "artistic sensibility." See Jane Goldman, *Feminist Aesthetics*, 171, and White, *Studio of One's Own*, 88-9.

[103] We might also think of Macalister's boy's cruelty as connected to the power over the sea that Nancy wields when she plays at divinity in the tidal pool.

[104] These two moments also attest to the extent to which there is no real opposition between the ordinary and the traumatic, or between the ordinary and the moment of shock or epiphany, as Olson suggests there is.

Indeed, when we trace the fish with a square cut out of its side back to its original form, located in James's anger at his father while he cuts out catalog pictures, we can see that the violence inherent in the image of the mutilated fish possesses traces of a kind of childish rage. This particular emotion can help us to elucidate the affective range of elegy in *To the Lighthouse*, particularly in Lily's thought. I have argued that her "body's feeling" of "to want and not to have" and Mr. Ramsay's outstretched arms constitute a sculptural attitude for elegy, but this kind of ache is not the only feeling common to the genre. As Jahan Ramazani has argued, elegy in the twentieth century displays a variety of emotional states: it is "unresolved, violent, and ambivalent"—better characterized by melancholia than successful mourning.[105] The elegiac tone of *To the Lighthouse* is not melancholic in precisely Freudian terms,[106] but it does carry touches of the boys' violence and certainly demonstrates the "anger and despondency" that Ramazani finds particularly characteristic of modern elegy.[107] Lily's grief, in particular, shows signs of some of the most prominent modern "characteristics of the elegy, such as masochism, irresolution, irredemption, aggression, and self-criticism."[108] For example, Lily offers an aggressive critique of some of Mrs. Ramsay's

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Reading *To the Lighthouse* as I have, in terms of the forms that begin with the still life on the dinner table, reveals that these two states coexist. See Olson, *Modernism and the Ordinary*, 7-9.

[105] Jahan Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 4.

[106] For one thing, Lily's self-doubt and self-reproach about her skills as a painter predate Mrs. Ramsay's death, so it would be difficult to argue, as Freud does in "Mourning and Melancholia," that her "ego-loss" is the result of the loss of a loved person about whom she has ambivalent feelings. See Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (New York: Norton, 1989), 586.

[107] Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning*, 5.

[108] Ibid., 10. Ramazani is careful to note that these qualities can be found in elegies throughout literary history but only become the dominant characteristics of elegy in the modern period.

most cherished beliefs by emphasizing the futility of Mrs. Ramsay's efforts to design the future according to a late Victorian model of marriage.[109]

But Lily's aggression is not limited to her thoughts about Mrs. Ramsay: at the height of her despair, she envisions a rebellion against death itself in which she is joined by Augustus Carmichael: "she felt that if they both got up, here, now on the lawn, and demanded an explanation, why was it so short, why was it so inexplicable, said it with violence, [. . .] if they shouted loud enough Mrs. Ramsay would return" (183). Lily's "bitter anger" surfaces obviously in this moment, but her thought experiment is—and must always have been—fruitless (184). She knows full well that Mrs. Ramsay cannot return, and therefore the moment in which she imagines an alternative reality causes her great pain.[110] This unnecessary, self-inflicted suffering then quickly gives way to self-criticism once she has regained her calm: "She remained a skimpy old maid, holding a paint-brush" (184). Lily's unflattering image of herself, like her anger at death and her condemnation of Mrs. Ramsay's Victorian attitudes toward marriage, thus reveals the complexity of Woolf's elegy and its inability to offer easy consolation to the living.

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[109] Lily thinks of Mrs. Ramsay's attitude towards marriage as one of her "limited, old-fashioned ideas," and she wants to tell Mrs. Ramsay how the proud pairing of Paul Rayley and Minta Doyle has turned out quite differently from how the matchmaker might have imagined: "It has all gone against your wishes. [. . .] For a moment Lily, standing there, with the sun hot on her back, summing up the Rayleys, triumphed over Mrs. Ramsay, who would never know how Paul went to coffeehouses and had a mistress; how he sat on the ground and Minta handed him his tools; how she stood here painting, had never married, not even William Bankes" (178). Lily counts these circumstances as evidence of her "triumph" over Mrs. Ramsay, and her association with this word, which was used to sound the success of the Boeuf en Daube at the dinner party, amplifies our sense of the extent to which Mrs. Ramsay's values have been overturned. And there may also be an additional valence to Lily's aggression here: because Lily imagines this triumph as she "squeez[es] her tube of green paint," which was one of the signature colors of the suffrage movement, Goldman suggests that the paint becomes "invested with the fantasy of overcoming Mrs. Ramsay," who remains an "arch propadangist for marriage." See Jane Goldman, *Feminist Aesthetics*, 179, and also Stevenson and Goldman, "Modernist Reading," 183.

[110] We might even consider this feeling as a invocation of the one of the qualities of still life that Margit Rowell outlines, in which "the modernist or avant-garde still life is still a system of objects [. . .] based on a yearning for

In addition, Lily's self-criticism invokes one of the most common tropes of elegy. Her picture of herself as a "skimpy old maid" implies that the artwork produced by her paintbrush will be equally anemic, and she echoes her earlier lament for her inability to "express in words these emotions of the body" (181). In both of these moments, Lily shares other elegists' frequent emphasis on their shortcomings in using art to express grief or mourn the dead. As Karen Weisman remarks in her introduction to *The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy*, "more than any other literary kind, elegy [. . .] throws into relief the inefficacy of language precisely when we need it most. It follows naturally that the limits of poetic utterance have surfaced as recurrent motifs in elegy."[111] This stress on the inefficacy of the writer's (or the painter's) medium often adds another elegiac layer to such compositions: even already at the opening of the twentieth century, Ramazani claims, "every elegy is an elegy for elegy—a poem that mourns the diminished efficacy and legitimacy of poetic mourning."[112] Such a metapoetics implies that T. S. Eliot's acknowledgment of the pervasiveness of elegy near the end of *Four Quartets*—"Every poem an epitaph"—must become doubly true.[113] In Woolf's terms, then, if "a picture must be a tribute" not only to the dead but also to picture-making, then Lily Briscoe's painting remains a daunting task, with the touches on her canvas under a double imperative to offer up some kind of eloquence (56).

possession of the real that, supplanted by a fiction, is perpetually deferred or denied." See Rowell, *Objects of Desire*, 16.

[111] Karen Weisman, introduction to *The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy*, 1.

[112] Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning*, 8.

Rhopography: Painting for the Attic

As I have already hinted, Lily's attempt to elegize Mrs. Ramsay with her painting—to make of this picture a "tribute"—is plagued by self-doubt. This doubt surfaces not only in the customary poetic elegist's despair over the limitations of language, but also, more pertinently, in Lily's uncertainty about her abilities as a painter. Just after she makes her first brushmarks on the canvas in "The Lighthouse," she feels "exposed without protection to all the blasts of doubt" and hears the echo of Charles Tansley's repudiation of her painting:

> Why then did she do it? She looked at the canvas, lightly scored with running lines. It would be hung in the servants' bedrooms. It would be rolled up and stuffed under a sofa. What was the good of doing it then, and she heard some voice saying she couldn't paint, saying she couldn't create, as if she were caught up in one of those habitual currents in which after a certain time experience forms in the mind, so that one repeats words without being aware any longer who originally spoke them.
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> Can't paint, can't write, she murmured monotonously, anxiously considering what her plan of attack should be. [. . .] Charles Tansley used to say that, she remembered, women can't paint, can't write. Coming up behind her, he had stood close beside her, a thing she hated, as she painted here on this very spot. (162-63)

Lily's skepticism surfaces as she begins to paint, and it takes the form of Tansley's refrain, which still possesses some strength after ten years, despite Lily's original dismissal of it in "The Window" as something that "was not true to him but for some reason helpful to him, and that was why he said it" (88). Lily recognizes the self-serving quality of Tansley's remark, and she never concedes his central point: her concern about her own painting is not whether she can paint at all, but why she paints, and to what end her picture will be put. In Lily's doubtful moments, the fate of her painting seems clear. It remains destined for

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[113] T. S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot* (London: Faber, 1969), 197, quoted in Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning*, 1.

obsolescence, "hung in the servants' bedrooms," "rolled up and stuffed under a sofa," or, as she thinks later, "hung in the attics" (182).

Many critics of *To the Lighthouse* have attempted to read against, or through, Lily's protestations here, not least because giving any credence to Charles Tansley's opinions seems commensurate with admitting one's own misogyny.[114] For example, in her study of fictional women painters, Roberta White insists that Lily is a "serious artist" and her painting is not at all amateurish, but "serious art" instead.[115] Similarly, Victoria Rosner suggests, in her recent reading of the novel's domestic life and interior design, that Lily's painting will eventually be vindicated: "the house falls apart; Mrs. Ramsay dies; but Lily's painting—or the idea of Lily's painting—may endure. If one generation stores it under the sofa, the next may hang it in a museum."[116] In Rosner's view, the passage of time can only help Lily, and her work may well be recognized as valuable. Furthermore, in a closely related argument, Benjamin Harvey contends that it is not only the disappearance of Victorian domesticity that will bring Lily's painting to light, but also the education of the public about modernist art: if "Lily still fears that her work is a failure, that it might be hung in attic, rather than, say, a museum or gallery," then we must remember that "the aesthetic climate has also changed" since the novel's first section (which was "set just before the first Post-Impressionist exhibition occurs") and educated members of the public, like William Bankes, might "now

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[114] One of the very few critics to take Lily seriously is Emily Dalgarno, for whom Lily's rejection of "the possibility that her work will be displayed" also constitutes her rejection of a system of aesthetic values in which women's beauty is commodified. See Dalgarno, *Visible World*, 88.

[115] White, 85-6, 89. Christine Froula even goes so far as to imply that Lily's work might be a "masterpiece." See Froula, *Bloomsbury Avant-Garde*, 173.

[116] Rosner, *Modernism and the Architecture of Private Life*, 170. Goldman suggests that Lily's painting triumphs over the Ramsays' Victorian values in a more specific way by replacing their "chiaroscuro," evocative of patriarchal oppositions, with her own "feminist prismatics" and colorism. Similarly, Christopher Reed claims that Lily's painting will be valued as bringing "women's art" into visibility. See Jane Goldman, *Feminist Aesthetics*, 168, 185, and Reed, "Through Formalism," 25.

be at least somewhat familiar with the premises of Lily's approach."[117] Thus Harvey, like Rosner, holds that the change from the staid Edwardian world of "The Window" to the more aesthetically risk-tasking modernism of "The Lighthouse" will allow Lily's painting to be recognized—not only as valuable but also, perhaps, as avant-garde. Lily has painted ahead of the curve all along, and Britain has needed to catch up with her.

This view remains especially common among critics who argue that Lily participates in the groundbreaking aesthetic movements of modern painting, but it is perhaps most remarkably voiced by Vanessa Bell. Writing in response to her sister's conviction that she would "laugh at the painting bits in the Lighthouse,"[118] Bell speculated about the extent of Lily's talent: "By the way, surely Lily Briscoe must have been rather a good painter—before her time perhaps, but with great gifts really? No, we didn't laugh at the bits about painting—though I'm a little doubtful about covering paints with damp cloths, but it *might* be done."[119] Although she expresses skepticism about one small feature of her sister's representation of the painting process, Bell's tone proves largely affirmative. She not only finds Woolf's "bits about painting" compelling but also believes Lily to be a gifted avant-garde artist—someone who might have found common aesthetic cause with Bell herself.[120]

But in general, these attempts to redeem Lily's artistic credentials and recuperate her painting go too far. She may advance the cause of painting in the Hebrides by eschewing the

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[117] Benjamin Harvey, "Virginia Woolf, Art Galleries and Museums," in Humm, *The Edinburgh Companion to Virginia Woolf and the Arts*, 155. Emily Dalgarno makes a similar point but claims that the changing aesthetic climate enables Lily's art because of the abandonment of the "outmoded visual conventions" of linear perspective and Victorian beauty. See Dalgarno, *Visible World*, 88-90.
[118] Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 3, ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (New York: Harcourt, 1977), 372.
[119] Bell, *Selected Letters*, 318 (emphasis original).
[120] It should be no surprise that Bell finds a kindred spirit in Lily Briscoe, since Lily's character was based, in part, on her own. See Torgovnick, *Visual Arts*, 118, and Gillespie, *The Sisters' Arts*, 108-9, 196-203.

simpering style of Mr. Paunceforte, "with lemon-coloured sailing boats, and pink women on the beach," but as I believe my discussion of her canvas in "The Lighthouse" has shown, her painting is so minimally described that it proves very difficult to conclude that it is avant-garde art of any kind (17). Moreover, Lily is neither a great nor a serious painter. She barely seems to think of painting as a career or even as a consuming hobby: we can hardly consider someone an undyingly devoted artist when she forgets a painting for ten years, no matter how momentous her eventual completion of the work is. I do not want to overemphasize my point, but I believe it remains possible—even vital—to acknowledge the importance of Lily's painting and simultaneously refuse to aggrandize it. Diane Gillespie is one of the very few critics who does precisely this, noting that, among Woolf's "women artist characters—like Lily Briscoe, the painter in *To the Lighthouse*—most are amateurs, however committed."[121] To class Lily with misunderstood artists who toil in obscurity in order to advance the field is to make of her another Mr. Ramsay, when she possesses none of his ambition for heroic sacrifice in imagined expeditions "across the icy solitudes of the Polar region" (38).[122]

Lily's painting is an ordinary occurence, even resolutely minor, much like the dinner-table still life in "The Window" and the shrouded furniture in "Time Passes." For this reason, it makes little sense to attribute the epic scope of history painting or the grand innovations of Post-Impressionists like Cézanne to her canvas. The best description for her art is instead one borrowed from still life: rhopography. As Bryson has argued, if the domain of history painting is megalography, or "the depiction of those things in the world which are great," then the proper sphere of still life is rhopography—a word from the Greek *rhopos*,

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[121] Diane F. Gillespie, "Virginia Woolf, Vanessa Bell and Painting," 128.

meaning "trivial objects, small wares, trifles"—which refers to "the depiction of those things which lack importance, the unassuming material base of life that 'importance' constantly overlooks."[123] Still life has a natural relationship with rhopography, since its "whole subject is nothing else but the life of people among material things," particularly those things which, like food, kitchen utensils and vessels, and boots, make daily life possible.[124] Vanessa Bell's own experience, in fact, underscores this relationship, since one of her greatest domestic problems "was to find a cleaning woman who would not tidy away unfinished still life compositions."[125] Still life is so attuned to "the ordinary business of daily living, the life of houses and tables,"[126] in other words, that Mrs. McNab might well have cleaned up the objects that typify the genre. (Indeed, as Erich Auerbach notes in his seminal essay on the novel, "The Brown Stocking," *To the Lighthouse* itself "holds to minor, unimpressive, random events: measuring the stocking, a fragment of a conversation with the maid, a telephone call.[127]) And although Lily's painting isn't necessarily a still life, I want to link her interest in the life of the house, the garden, and the woman who animated them to the resolutely domestic, rhopographic qualities of still life. Thus, while Lily Briscoe certainly possesses the capacity for heroism, passion, and ambition, and even demonstrates some of these qualities, these are not the subjects of her painting: the everyday can certainly prompt great art, but

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[122] In this way, my reading diverges sharply from that of Christine Froula, who charts the similarities between Mr. Ramsay's journey and Lily's painting as voyages, and contends that the novel remakes the quest romance and uses the voyage as its guiding metaphor. See Froula, *Bloomsbury Avant-Garde*, 130, 133-36, 149, 161.
[123] Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked*, 61. See also Sterling, *Still Life Painting*, 11.
[124] Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked*, 131.
[125] Margaret Drabble, "Vanessa Bell," in *A Cézanne in the Hedge and Other Memories of Charleston and Bloomsbury*, ed. Hugh Lee, 20.
[126] Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked*, 135.
[127] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968), 546.

Lily's painting does not respond to this prompt in its aesthetic quality, its ambition, or its subject matter.

To read against Lily's insistence that her painting will be hung in the attic, in sum, is to deny one of its integral characteristics and even to ignore the very condition of its completion. At the end of the novel, when Lily finishes her painting, she does so in full knowledge of its minor status:

> "He has landed," she said aloud. "It is finished." Then, surging up, puffing slightly, old Mr. Carmichael stood beside her, looking like an old pagan god, shaggy, with weeds in his hair and the trident (it was only a French novel) in his hand. He stood by her on the edge of the lawn, swaying a little in his bulk and said, shading his eyes with his hand: "They will have landed," and she felt that she had been right. They had not needed to speak. They had been thinking the same things and he had answered her without her asking him anything. He stood there as if he were spreading his hands over all the weakness and suffering of mankind; she thought he was surveying, tolerantly and compassionately, their final destiny. Now he has crowned the occasion, she thought, when his hand slowly fell, as if she had seen him let fall from his great height a wreath of violets and asphodels which, fluttering slowly, lay at length upon the earth.
>
> Quickly, as if she were recalled by something over there, she turned to her canvas. There it was—her picture. Yes, with all its greens and blues, its lines running up and across, its attempt at something. It would be hung in attics, she thought; it would be destroyed. But what did that matter? she asked herself, taking up her brush again. She looked at the steps; they were empty; she looked at her canvas; it was blurred. With a sudden intensity, as if she saw clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision. (211)

Lily can only complete her canvas once she has acknowledged both the possibility that it may be destroyed and the fact that this eventual ruin ought not prevent her act of creation. Lily's acceptance of the chance that her painting may be hung in the attic is the mark of its status as both a *vanitas* piece—which reminds us of the superfluity of all earthly, material goods—and a work of rhopography, an engagement with the easily overlooked materials of

everyday life that will itself remain minor. Moreover, as an object that may be ignored or even discarded, Lily's painting has a kind of kinship with the still-life objects of the novel, and as Banfield suggests, Lily's first, unfinished picture from "The Window" might well have been among the abandoned objects of "Time Passes."[128]

In a very important way, then, the painting's completion is dependent upon its own eventual absence. This condition arises in particular from the physicality of Lily's painting process in the third section of the novel, which finds its conclusion here with Lily's final brushmark—the "line there, in the centre"—and the final gesture, in which she "lay[s] down her brush in extreme fatigue." Lily's touches here necessarily draw attention, as Shiff reminds us, to the "material, constructed physicality of an artwork," and this materiality signals that the painting can become subject to all of the forces of decay, just like the fruit in the dish and the furniture in the Ramsays' house.[129] Thus Lily's final statement, "I have had my vison," is not a totalizing statement in which she fully overcomes Mrs. Ramsay's death, replacing the dead woman's outmoded vision with her own. As Cheryl Mares notes, these words cause an implicit gap to open up "between Lily's vision and her final design," and with them, Woolf "avoids the kind of closure that suggests mastery, fixity, authority."[130] Instead, Lily's final statement is an exhausted glance, a final touch insistently bound up with the physiognomy and rhopography that are central to still life painting.

Moreover, Lily completes her painting here in the company of Mr. Carmichael, the aging author of "a volume of poems" (138). Shaggy, bulky, and puffing, Augustus Carmichael hardly seems capable of playing the role of Neptune, and indeed, Woolf is

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[128] Banfield, *Phantom Table*, 135.
[129] Shiff, "Constructing Physicality," 43.

careful to deflate the divine simile by reminding us that he holds a novel and not a trident.[131] The wartime elegist, who "lost all interest in life" after Andrew Ramsay's death, then offers a funeral benediction, laying his wreath of flowers associated with mourning upon the earth (197).[132] This final gesture of the aging poet provides the template for Lily's "laying down her brush in extreme fatigue," and this physiognomic form makes it impossible to read the end of the novel as a moment in which art transcends the condition of human mortality. Despite the desire of so many critics to see Lily's painting as a triumph[133]—an aesthetic achievement that corresponds to Mrs. Ramsay's domestic art, and a masterpiece on par with the Boeuf en Daube—the formal determinism of the novel forestalls such a reading. The painting's kinship is not with the triumphant dish but instead with the still life, the composition of fruit and shell that is spoiled. These works are grounded in their own likely obsolescence, and it would be a mistake to insist that Lily's work will last for all eternity. As Lily herself recognizes, it is not "that actual picture" which will remain, but only "what it attempted" (183).[134] Like the still life, Lily's painting remains vulnerable: a hand may reach out to take a pear, or to roll her canvas up and stuff it under a sofa.[135] This susceptibility to the destructive forces of modern life renders Lily's elegy all the more poignant.

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130 Mares, "Reading Proust," 77.

131 Miller suggests, somewhat improbably, that the narrator's perspective comes closest to that of Augustus Carmichael. See J. Hillis Miller, "Mr. Carmichael and Lily Briscoe," 177-79.

132 Banfield suggests that this may not be a gesture in memory of Mrs. Ramsay, but rather a "valedictory" offering for her husband, whose voyage to the lighthouse can be read as a journey to death. See Banfield, *Phantom Table*, 234.

133 For one example, see Mark Hussey, *The Singing of the Real World: The Philosophy of Virginia Woolf's Fiction* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1986), 80, and also see Torgovnick, *Visual Arts,* 118-21, for a reading of the ways in which Lily's painting succeeds where Woolf thought her sister's had failed.

134 For related points, see Dalgarno, *Visible World*, 96, and Gillespie, *The Sisters' Arts*, 311.

135 This vulnerability means that Lily does not, as Diane Gillespie contends, use her painting to make "life stand still"; or produce a painted representation that can "resist death," as Maggie Humm suggests, or make "stay against time and death," as Froula argues. See Gillespie, *The Sisters' Arts*, 74-75; Humm, *Modernist Women and Visual Cultures*, 87; and Froula, *Bloomsbury Avant-Garde*, 164.

I began this chapter by telling the story of the purchase of *Pommes* from the estate of a dead Impressionist, and I hinted at some of its lessons for a new group of modernists in Britain. But my point here has not really been about the movement from one outmoded kind of art to a fresh one that promises to make it new. Rather, I have hoped to emphasize the movement of still life over the canvases of Cézanne and through the pages of Woolf's novel, where it joins forces with the inter-mediated representational forms that animate Woolf's elegiac project. In *To the Lighthouse*, still life enacts a radical redefinition of Clive Bell's notion of "significant form." Refusing to call up specifically aesthetic emotions, still life instead guides us through a range of fully human emotions, including sympathy, premature grief, nostalgia, and shock—emotions for which Woolf also presents physical, embodied forms like the outstretched hand. Both plastic forms and bodily attitudes prove mobile and malleable, and as they change, they move us towards a revisionary reading of Woolf's narrative and a reinvigorated understanding of the genre of still life. In *To the Lighthouse*, the objects of still life remain vital, and all of them—apple and pear; shell, skull, and shrouded jug—shift affective shapes before our eyes. When they seem most to affirm human sympathy, they quietly yield to mortality, and when they appear nearly calcified into impersonal objecthood, their stillness perishes, permitting the human world to reenter the picture. These forms continually expand the scope of the novel's vision and demonstrate the power of still life and other mortal forms, which flourish and re-form themselves, moving the narrative—and moving us—along the way.

CHAPTER 4
Looking at People Looking at Pictures: Portraiture, Painting, and Photography in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*

One Saturday evening in September 1907, Alice B. Toklas visited the home of Gertrude and Leo Stein at 27 rue de Fleurus for the first time. Invited for dinner, Toklas had the privilege of sitting next to Pablo Picasso and sipping coffee with a group of artists discussing the upcoming *vernissage* of the Salon d'Automne. After dinner, returning to the atelier, Toklas observed the atmosphere and peculiar rules of this salon: "there were already quite a number of people in the room, scattered groups, single and couples all looking and looking. Gertrude Stein sat by the stove talking and listening and getting up to open the door and go up to various people talking and listening."[1] Although Toklas does not mention exactly what all of these people are "looking and looking" at, we know that they are looking at the walls of the Steins' home, which were hung with paintings by Cézanne, Matisse, Picasso, and other key painters of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In fact, the Steins' Saturday evenings were informal exhibitions of modern art, with Gertrude Stein serving both as the atelier's gatekeeper and as a focal point for the swirling currents of people "talking and listening." Indeed, even at this early date, before Toklas has become a resident of 27 rue de Fleurus and before the pictures have gained the "value" that will justify their use of "the only yale key in the quarter" to lock the atelier's door, Stein sits, in her spot by the stove, at the heart of modernist Paris (13).

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[1] Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, 17 (see introduction, n. 65). All subsequent references to this text will appear in parentheses.

Of all the writers I have discussed so far, she remains the one with perhaps the most intimate relationship to the key modernist movements in the visual arts, especially Fauvism and Cubism. Stein recounts this relationship in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, in which she uses Toklas as her narrator—a strategy that proves particularly effective because Toklas may play the part of the representative newcomer to this society. Indeed, Toklas arrived in Paris at a particularly auspicious moment, for in 1907, the avant-garde stood on the verge of its major works. The previous year had seen the definitive end of one artistic movement with the death of Cézanne, and it had marked the apex of another with the exhibition of Matisse's Fauve masterpiece *Le bonheur de vivre* at the Salon des Indépendants.[2] 1907, by contrast, showed all the signs of new developments. It was a year in which key relationships began—Marie Laurencin met Guillaume Apollinaire in February, and Pablo Picasso met Georges Braque later that spring—and one of the most important commercial sites for artists in Paris came into being, when Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler opened his gallery on the rue Vignon in July.[3] Indeed, that year, visits even more important that Alice Toklas's trip to 27 rue de Fleurus occurred: in the spring, Picasso went to the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro to see African art, and in the summer and early fall, Braque began traveling to La Ciotat and L'Estaque, on the Mediterranean, in order to paint landscapes.[4] By the time Toklas arrives at Stein's door, then, several major paintings—not just for this year, but for the decade—have been completed: Matisse's *Blue Nude*, Braque's *Landscape at La Ciotat* and *Landscape at L'Estaque*, and Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*.

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[2] Hal Foster et al., *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2004), 70-76.

[3] John Richardson, *A Life of Picasso, Volume II: 1907-1917* (New York: Random House, 1996), 34, 59, 63, 68. See also Christopher Green, *Art in France 1900-1940* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 53-54.

We might thus be tempted to read 1907 as a year of accomplishment, of marked public triumph, but none of these works caused quite the burst of recognition that we imagine. For example, the primitivism of Matisse's painting caused a scandal when it was shown in the spring, with the critic Louis Vauxcelles proclaiming his disdain for the "mannish nymph" with "the deformed body."[5] Furthermore, the Braque paintings named after Mediterranean towns in which we recognize incipient Cubism would not be made until the following summer, in 1908.[6] And perhaps most importantly, Picasso's *Demoiselles*, which is often said to herald the arrival of Cubism, was only seen privately, in Picasso's studio in Montmartre, by a few friends in 1907; the painting was not photographed and reproduced in a publication until 1910, and it did not leave the studio for an exhibition until 1916.[7] In 1907, none of these paintings had garnered the public approval with which we retrospectively endow them. It remains vital, therefore, to view 1907 as a transitional year, with the avant-garde positioned on the cusp of the key movements in modern painting.

I want to begin this chapter, then, with a sense of Toklas and the rest of modernist Paris on the threshold. As we see them there, poised to move forward, I also want to propose that we pause briefly to consider the rooms which they enter—that is, the scenes of viewing in Stein's Paris. In 1907, as I have suggested, the nascent Cubist movement was not the subject of widespread, monumental recognition. Instead, Cubist work was most often exhibited in relatively private, informal settings like artists' studios—specifically the cheaply rented studios in the so-called Bateau Lavoir, a tenement building on the Butte of

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[4] Richardson, *A Life of Picasso*, 24-25, 67-68, and Christopher Butler, *Early Modernism: Literature, Music and Painting in Europe 1900-1916* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 57.
[5] Green, *Art in France*, 91, and Richardson, *A Life of Picasso*, 38.
[6] Butler, *Early Modernism*, 57.
[7] Foster et al., *Art Since 1900*, 78.

Montmartre where Picasso and Juan Gris were neighbors and Max Jacob, André Salmon, and Guillaume Apollinaire were frequent visitors.[8] Outside of this small Bohemia, their work was also shown in the commercial spaces of the galleries and dealers' shops owned by Kahnweiler and Ambroise Vollard. These small galleries were arguably the most important scenes of viewing for the artists themselves, since the dealers could—and did with increasing frequency in the 1910s—give the artists solo shows and contracts that guaranteed them some income.[9] Indeed, the dealers' galleries were also vital viewing spaces for collectors, since Kahnweiler and Vollard's shared business strategy meant that they each possessed "an unrivalled stock" of a particular kind of art: Vollard held works by the Impressionists, Cézanne, and Gauguin, and Kahnweiler held the work of the Fauves and the Cubists, including Picasso, Braque, Derain, and Gris.[10]

For the artists in Stein's Paris, then, the only scenes of viewing that we might properly call formal exhibitions were the Salons, most importantly the spring Salon des Indépendants and the Salon d'Automne. These exhibitions offered painters and sculptors the best opportunities to show their work publicly, although, as we shall see, they were hardly the stiff, academic showings that were typical of the state-supported Salons. Instead, the independent Salons took place "in spaces provided rent-free by the Ville de Paris,"[11] and here, in "a kind of fairground free-for-all on the Champs de Mars," the Salon des

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[8] Green, *Art in France*, 63, and Richardson, *A Life of Picasso*, 3-7. See also John Malcolm Brinnin, *The Third Rose: Gertrude Stein and Her World* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1960), 84-86, and for an explanation of the relationship between the studios on the Butte and the café society on the lower part of Montmartre that is more conventionally associated with Parisian Bohemia at the beginning of the twentieth century, see Jerrold E. Seigel, *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830-1930* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 336-39.

[9] Vollard gave Picasso and Matisse their first solo shows at his gallery in 1901 and 1904, respectively. See Green, *Art in France*, 39, 53.

[10] Ibid., 53-54, 71.

Indépendants allowed any artist, for a small entrance fee, to show at least two works.[12] The operative mood, in other words, was commercial and temporary, which, for Toklas, was part of the charm of the scene: having been "to the building just put up for this salon," she jokes that "Gertrude Stein's elder brother always says that the secret of chronic employment or lack of unemployment in France is due to the number of men actively engaged in putting up and taking down temporary buildings" (21). In fact, she asserts that "when after the war or just before, I forget, the independent was given permanent quarters in the big exposition building, the Grand Palais, it became much less interesting. After all it is the adventure that counts" (21).[13]

It *is* the adventure that counts, and Alice Toklas's first Saturday evening in the atelier—inflected as it is by all of these other scenes of viewing—does result in her unquestionable exhilaration, since at this moment, she is introduced to "the heart of an art movement of which the outside world at that time knew nothing" (33). The early pages of *The Autobiography* recount the beginning of Toklas's entrance from the outside world into the inner sanctum of art, and with Toklas, we discover that "the heart of an art movement" consists of "looking and looking" at people and pictures. The art-obsessed *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* invites our looking at pictures in a variety of ways: Stein interleaves her text with photographs that document her life with Toklas, and she peppers their joint autobiography with references to the artworks they have viewed, bought, and helped to create. Stein's book often seems, in short, to constitute a gallery of galleries as it moves

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[11] Ibid., 40-41, and see 12-15, 40-43, for an explanation of the differences between the spring Salon des Indépendants and the Salon d'Automne.
[12] Bernard Smith, *Modernism's History: A Study in Twentieth-Century Art and Ideas* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 1998), 151-52.

through scenes of the exhibition, display, and sale of artwork and activates different modes of looking.

Stein herself even proclaims that the only thing she "never get[s] tired of doing is looking at pictures," but despite her insistence, I want to suggest that the real adventure in reading *The Autobiography* lies in shifting the emphasis slightly.[14] The "heart of an art movement," I contend, actually becomes visible when we look at *people* looking at pictures. This practice allows us to peer over shoulders, to see as others see, or more interestingly, to see the uses to which they put certain pictures. Looking at people looking at pictures also allows us to change our focus at will, to separate person and picture into foreground and background, or to blur them together. This effect of looking at people looking at pictures is, I will argue, the central formal innovation of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, which, for the most part, does not describe or verbally represent paintings. Instead, the strangeness of the artworks that appear in *The Autobiography* redirects our attention away from pictures and toward the people who make them and view them. Stein's presentation of all of these individuals ensures that *The Autobiography* is "crowded with [. . .] precise miniatures," so that we might say that its narrative picture-making is less about ekphrasis than it is about a particularly compact kind of literary portraiture, as it works, from scene to scene, by presenting people looking at pictures.[15]

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[13] As Christopher Green explains, the Salon d'automne entered the Grand Palais in 1904, and the Salon des Indépendants did the same with its first postwar exhibition, in 1920. See Green, *Art in France*, 40-42.

[14] Gertrude Stein, "Pictures," in *Gertrude Stein: Writings 1932-1946*, ed. Catharine R. Stimpson and Harriet Chessman (New York: Library of America, 1998), 224.

[15] Richard Bridgman, *Gertrude Stein in Pieces* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 219. The term "portrait" has circulated in description of *The Autobiography* and its anecdotes for decades, but this classification been pressed for further meaning only by Wendy Steiner and Jaime Hovey, both of whom focus on the large-scale dynamics of intersubjectivity inherent in the portrait-making situation, rather than any particular formal features of it. For their analyses, see Wendy Steiner, *Exact Resemblance to Exact Resemblance: The Literary Portraiture*

In the first part of this chapter, then, I shall examine three vital formal features of *The Autobiography* and the ways in which they encourage us to look at people looking at pictures. These formal units of *The Autobiography*—the proper name, the witticism, and the anecdote—are often remarked upon by Stein scholars (even if they have never been considered seriously, all at once, as consciously deployed formal devices), and we might consider them as parts of Stein's textual imprimatur, a style specific to her writing that circulates, constituting the author as a "formal artifact," and creating her as a celebrity.[16] In the second part, I will, like Toklas in the first pages of *The Autobiography*, finally "return to the pictures"—that is, to the photographs that form an integral part of the book and seem, in some ways, to call into question the narrative picturing enacted by the text itself (13). Looking at all of these pictures, I hope to follow recent readers of *The Autobiography* in demonstrating the untenability of the false binary by which Stein's text is understood either as all gossip, all surface chatter in the pursuit of fame, or all serious experiment in narrative voice and queer identity. It is my contention that Stein's superficiality *is* the experiment, and

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of Gertrude Stein (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1978), 163, 187, and Jaime Hovey, *A Thousand Words: Portraiture, Style, and Queer Modernism* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006), 5, 99.

And for casual or superficial uses of the term, see Kenneth Burke, "The Impartial Essence," rpt. in *Critical Essays on Gertrude Stein*, ed. Michael Hoffman (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1986), 73-74, originally published in *The New Republic* 83 (7 March 1935): 227; Lynn Z. Bloom, "Gertrude Is Alice Is Everybody: Innovation and Point of View in Gertrude Stein's Autobiographies," *Twentieth Century Literature* 24.1 (Spring 1978): 90; S. C. Neuman, *Gertrude Stein: Autobiography and the Problem of Narration* (Victoria, BC: English Literary Studies, 1979), 16-17; Franziska Gygax, *Gender and Genre in Gertrude Stein* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 65; Robert Lubar, "Unmasking Pablo's Gertrude: Queer Desire and the Subject of Portraiture," *The Art Bulletin* 79 (1997): 56-58; Leigh Gilmore, "A Signature of Lesbian Autobiography: 'Gertrice/Altrude,' in *Autobiography and Questions of Gender*, ed. Shirley Neuman (London: Frank Cass, 1991), 71; Phoebe Stein Davis,"Subjectivity and the Aesthetics of National Identity in Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*," *Twentieth Century Literature* 45. 1 (Spring 1999): 17; Charles Caramello, "Portrait Narration: Generals James and Stein," in *Intertextuality and Contemporary American Fiction*, ed. Patrick O'Connell and Robert Con Davis (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 104, 110, and *Henry James, Gertrude Stein, and the Biographical Act* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 122, 125, 169-70; Anne Herrmann, *Queering the Moderns: Poses/Portraits/Performances* (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 95; and Neil Schmitz, "Portrait, Patriarchy, Mythos: The Revenge of Gertrude Stein," in *Gertrude Stein Advanced: An Anthology of Criticism*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1990), 160-79.

even when *The Autobiography* is at its most chatty and wandering, when it seems caught up in the texture and effects of language at its most opaque, we can find Stein experimenting with inter-mediation and engaging with both painting and photography.

Narrative Pictures and Portraiture Techniques I: Proper Names

I want to begin with perhaps the most obvious and most commented-upon formal feature of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*: its reliance upon—and its delight in—the proper name. The name takes center stage very early in *The Autobiography*, when Toklas concludes the brief first chapter with perhaps the most frequently quoted lines of the book: "The three geniuses of whom I wish to speak are Gertrude Stein, Pablo Picasso, and Alfred Whitehead. I have met many important people but I have only known three first class geniuses and in each case on sight within me something rang" (9). By evoking her own perceptive "sight" of these three figures, Toklas indicates the degree to which the reader will be asked to look at people in this text, but here, as will prove to be the case throughout *The Autobiography*, we are presented not with physical descriptions or psychological sketches of these people, but instead with their names.

Indeed, as Toklas moves into the narration of the second chapter, names come to dominate the text. Take, for example, Toklas's summary of the Steins' collection on her first Saturday evening:

> In those days there were pictures of all kinds there, the time had not yet come when they were only Cézannes, Renoirs, Matisses and Picassos, nor as it was even later only Cézannes and Picassos. At that time there was a great deal of Matisse, Picasso, Renoir, Cézanne but there were also a great many

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[16] Aaron Jaffe, *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 20.

> other things. There were two Gaugins [*sic*], there were Manguins, there was a big nude by Valloton that felt like only it was not like the Odalisque of Manet, there was a Toulouse Lautrec. [. . .] There was a portrait of Gertrude Stein by Valloton that might have been a David but was not, there was a Maurice Denis, a little Daumier, many Cézanne water colours, there was in short everything, there was even a little Delacroix and a moderate sized Greco. (14)

Toklas offers a brief catalogue of the different painters whose work Gertrude and Leo Stein have purchased by 1907, and the list proves exciting for the reader in its variety; it seems amazing that one private room contains the work of so many important late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century painters. (The Steins' collection still proves so extraordinary, in fact, that the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art recently mounted an exhibition designed to reunite many of their paintings and contextualize them anew.[17]) Yet this list actually gives us almost no information about the characteristics of these paintings, with the exceptions of the "big nude by Valloton," the "portrait of Gertrude Stein by Valloton," and the "Cézanne water colours." In this way, *The Autobiography* makes clear from the beginning that it will not adopt a traditionally ekphrastic relation to the artworks within its pages: Stein does not describe visual art, or recreate it in language. She doesn't really offer verbal representations of visual representations,[18] or even point directly outside the text to clearly defined pre-existing artworks. What Stein gives us instead is reference at its most general: in this list of paintings, qualities like genre, size, and subject matter prove far less significant than authorship, and the specificities of the paintings in the Steins' collection are subsumed into the generalities of these painters' styles.

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[17] See Janet Bishop, Cécile Debray, and Rebecca Rabinow, eds., *The Steins Collect: Matisse, Picasso, and the Parisian Avant-Garde* (New Haven, CT: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in conjunction with Yale University Press, 2011).
[18] Heffernan, *Museum of Words*, 3-4 (see introduction, n. 5).

And while referring to a painting by Cézanne as "a Cézanne" has long been a common conversational and even critical shorthand, the effect of this shorthand, repeated as it is throughout the list, is one of metonymic substitution of the artist for the artwork. This metonymic play can seem to make the paintings in the atelier into characters in *The Autobiography* itself: the Matisses that line the walls seem no different than the several different Matisses we meet over time throughout the narrative.[19] Or, to put it differently, we might say that this metonymic substitution of the painter's name for his work—there is "a little Daumier" on the wall—effectively directs our attention away from the canvases and towards their creators so that the "enormous Picassos of the Harlequin period" slide easily into "the Picassos [who] have not come" to dinner on time (15-16). The reader is asked to conflate people and pictures, to blur them together and see them at once.

Such metonymy also ensures that the paintings participate in Stein's practice of littering her text with famous names, so that Stein and Toklas appear to come into contact with every single significant modernist writer, painter, sculptor, or dancer working in France or Britain in the first part of the twentieth century—either in person or in the guise of a painting. That is, the list of the artists in Stein's collection offers the reader exactly the same impression as this list of "wives of geniuses" that Toklas provides: "I began with Fernande and then there were Madame Matisse and Marcelle Braque and Josette Gris and Eve Picasso

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[19] Such metonymy is one of the reasons that some critics, following a critique of Stein leveled by Braque, have argued that Stein's presentation of the history of modern art in terms of personality constitutes a major shortcoming of *The Autobiography*, but as Loren Glass has demonstrated, this presentation of the lives of artists rather than their work corresponds with the public's interests. See Loren Glass, *Authors Inc.: Literary Celebrity in the Modern United States, 1880-1980* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 116, and for those argument about *The Autobiography*'s shortcomings, see Michael Hoffman, *Gertrude Stein* (Boston: Twayne, 1976), 115; Helga Lénárt-Cheng, "Autobiography as Advertisement: Why Do Gertrude Stein's Sentences Get under Our Skin?" *New Literary History* 34.1 (Winter 2003): 126; and Bryce Conrad, "Gertrude Stein in the American Marketplace," *Journal of Modern Literature* 19.2 (1995): 223-33.

and Bridget Gibb and Marjory Gibb and Hadley and Pauline Hemingway and Mrs Sherwood Anderson and Mrs Bravig Imbs and the Mrs Ford Maddox Ford and endless others" (95). (It is worth noting, however briefly, that not all of the names in *The Autobiography* are as complete as these; many names are partial. Braque, for instance, never gets a first name, and Hélène—Stein and Toklas's cook—never gets a last name. It could be worse: in a clear insult, Gertrude Stein never names her brother Leo at all; he is simply referred to as her brother and then dismissed when Toklas takes up permanent residence at 27 rue de Fleurus.)

Toklas's list of wives provides a condensed version of an effect that Stein employs often throughout *The Autobiography*, in which it seems that a whirlwind suddenly deposits a new group of artists on Stein and Toklas's doorstep: "Kate Buss brought lots of people to the house. She brought Djuna Barnes and Mina Loy and they had wanted to bring James Joyce but they didn't. We were glad to see Mina whom we had known in Florence as Mina Haweis. Mina brought Glenway Westcott on his first trip to Europe" (216). In both of these examples, Stein manages to enclose a large number of people within the figurative bounds of 27 rue de Fleurus even when, like James Joyce, they never actually visit Stein and Toklas. Both lists exploit the way in which the list form can create a "suggestion of plenitude," or "of rapid motion," and can "spark endless connections and inclusions."[20] Indeed, Stein's lists of names throughout *The Autobiography* can serve to create these effects because they are largely unencumbered by characterization or description: Stein never gives her readers any personal traits, physical attributes, or funny anecdotes to attach to most of the names—famous or not—that she scatters throughout her text. These people appear suddenly, as if

[20] Robert E. Belknap, *The List: The Uses and Pleasures of Cataloging* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 3.

from nowhere, and Stein provides her reader with no narrative that explains their origins or their reasons for being in Paris.

This technique—as brazen as it can be tiresome, since Stein names four hundred different people over the course of the book[21]—has long attracted critical attention, and it has become the locus of many dismissals and even denunciations of *The Autobiography*. Richard Bridgman, for instance, contends that "The *Autobiography* is a virtual address book of names" that becomes less interesting in its later parts: "after the brilliant strategies of the early part of the *Autobiography* Gertrude Stein's inventiveness flagged. The lines of characterization, formerly sharp and clear, now blurred. The wit dampened. The narrative became burdened by too many diary-like entries consisting merely of names and places."[22] I shall return to the questions of wit and narrative later in this chapter, but what I want to suggest now is that Bridgman's identification of listed proper names with the entire project of *The Autobiography* is characteristic of the way in which this formal feature has been exhibited as the crucial piece of evidence in the critical cases both for and against *The Autobiography*.

On the one hand, the name has figured prominently in the arguments of those critics who have sought to mount a case for the literary value of *The Autobiography* by linking it to the rest of Stein's pioneering oeuvre and by defining its experimentalism in terms of its unconventional narrative voice. Feminist critics, in particular, have written extensively about Toklas's narration, as Phoebe Stein Davis has noted: "for these feminist critics, Stein's displacement of the autobiographical 'I' onto the lesbian couple demonstrates that *The*

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[21] Goble, *Beautiful Circuits*, 90 (see introduction, n. 24).
[22] Bridgman, *Gertrude Stein in Pieces*, 223, 227.

Autobiography presents a distinctly feminist notion of identity that, with its resistance to the idea of a unified, coherent self, anticipates postmodern notions of subjectivity."[23] And queer theorists have adopted a similar argument, claiming that Stein's resistance to the notion of a coherent self may be allied with her refusal to tell her queer life story "straight."[24] These feminist and queer readings of *The Autobiography* focus in particular on the repetition of the name "Gertrude Stein" throughout the text, and Sidonie Smith, in one notable example of this kind of argument, has argued that the repetition of the name might tell us something not only about the person it represents but also about the person who speaks it. These usages, she claims, "signal the pleasure of Stein as the author of the text; the pleasure of Stein as the lover of 'Alice,' the pleasure of 'Alice' in her lover, and our pleasure in the *jouissance* implicit in repetition and the release of the signifier from its signified into its word-ness and sound."[25]

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[23] Phoebe Stein Davis,"Aesthetics of National Identity," 19.

[24] Most of these feminist and queer readings build on the work of Marianne DeKoven, even though she excludes *The Autobiography* from her list of Stein's experimental works that challenge "the privileged language of patriarchy." See Marianne DeKoven, *A Different Language: Gertrude Stein's Experimental Writing* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), xiii-xiv, and for similar readings, see Caramello, "Portrait Narration," 111; Leigh Gilmore, "Lesbian Autobiography," 61-62; Gygax, *Gender and Genre*, 68; Herrmann, *Queering the Moderns*, 98-99; Catharine R. Stimpson, "Gertrude Stein and the Lesbian Lie," in *American Women's Autobiography: Fea(s)ts of Memory*, ed. Margo Culley (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 157-58; Sidonie Smith, *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body: Women's Autobiographical Practices in the Twentieth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 67, 71; Karin Cope, *Passionate Collaborations: Learning to Live With Gertrude Stein* (Victoria, BC: ELS Editions, 2005), 166-69; Anna Linzie, *The True Story of Alice B. Toklas: A Study of Three Autobiographies* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2006), 12, 64; and Georgia Johnston, *The Formation of 20th-Century Queer Autobiography: Reading Vita Sackville-West, Virginia Woolf, Hilda Doolittle, and Gertrude Stein* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 10, 149-50.

Critics focusing on genre have also mounted a case for the experimental quality of *The Autobiography*, using an examination of Toklas's narration to differentiate *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* from other autobiographies by calling it, for example, a "mock memoir" or "an elaborate tall tale" and by drawing attention to its place within a tradition of humorous first-person writing in American literature. For this kind of reading, see Timothy Dow Adams, *Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 30, 37, and Neil Schmitz, *Of Huck and Alice: Humorous Writing in American Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 203.

[25] Sidonie Smith, *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body: Women's Autobiographical Practices in the Twentieth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 81. This emphasis on the linkage between Stein's use of Toklas's voice and the pleasure signaled by the text is related to a explanation for the compostion of *The*

But, on the other hand, the name has also figured prominently in less laudatory comments, since the technique can seem geared to make Stein seem popular and important, as Lynn Bloom has noted: "Stein refers to the famous, the talented, and the notorious by name, and generally without identifying explanations. [. . .] Since all are seen in relation to Gertrude Stein, [. . .] and since Stein's name is, naturally, mentioned more frequently than the others, this technique has the repeated effect of making Gertrude Stein seem to be the focus of a coterie of luminaries."[26] This effect has been especially noted by those critics who have rejected the possibility of any experimentation in *The Autobiography* and emphasized its superficial characteristics instead. In this view *The Autobiography* is, at best, a collection of amusing vignettes with no real literary value. B. L. Reid, for instance, dismisses the book as "chitchat" in one example of the way in which, as Bridgman writes, the "innocently discursive" style of the book has ensured "that it is regarded as gossip, pleasant to read but undeserving of serious critical attention."[27] Even so great a defender of Stein as Catharine

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Autobiography that is worth mentioning and was first put forth by Ulla Dydo, who studied notes in the manuscripts that Stein wrote in the summer of 1932 and concluded that Stein wrote the book in order to placate Toklas, who was enraged after discovering Stein's early novel *Q.E.D.*, which chronicles the affair that Stein had with May Bookstaver from 1901 to 1903. Toklas had not known of the relationship or the novel (which had not been published) before then, and her jealousy was such that she made Stein destroy Bookstaver's letters and delete all occurences of the word "may" from the manuscript of the long, abstract *Stanzas in Meditation*. In her desire to calm her lover, then, Stein wrote *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* as a kind of gift. See Ulla E. Dydo, "*Stanzas in Meditation*: The Other Autobiography." *Chicago Review* 32.2 (1985): 12-13, 16, and Cope, *Passionate Collaborations*, 165-66. For other readings that suggest stories as a mode of emotional exchange between the two women, see Georgia Johnston, "Narratologies of Pleasure: Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*," *Modern Fiction* Studies. 42.3 (1996): 600, and Catharine R. Stimpson, "Gertrice/Altrude: Stein, Toklas, and the Paradox of the Happy Marriage," in *Mothering the Mind: Twelve Studies of Writers and Their Silent Partners*, ed. Ruth Perry and Martine Watson Brownley (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1984), 133.

[26] Bloom, "Gertrude Is Alice," 84.

[27] B. L. Reid, *Art by Subtraction: A Dissenting Opinion of Gertrude Stein* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), 186; quoted in Bridgman, *Gertrude Stein in Pieces*, 218; and Bridgman, *Gertrude Stein in Pieces*, 218.
For more positive spins on the same points, see also the original review written for the *New York Times* by Edward Kingsbury, who calls *The Autobiography* "a little random anthology" meant to provide "a record of a rich, vivid and various experience," or the review written for *The Nation* by William Troy, who calls the book one of the "richest, wittiest" books of "literary reminiscences" ever written. Edward M. Kingsbury, "Gertrude

Stimpson tells us that *The Autobiography* "pull[s] back from Stein's upsetting challenge to representational codes and generic conventions. Telling her comic stories, Stein writes *of* modern art. Despite some shrewd narrative tricks, she does not write modern art itself."[28]

All of these critics imply that *The Autobiography* can easily be construed as simple storytelling meant to please—rather than challenge—Stein's readers. Even Stein herself appeared to hold this view, since she called *The Autobiography* an example of "'audience writing': books written to satisfy demands of an imagined or real audience."[29] Some of Stein's audience, as I have implied, has been far from satisfied: the most unhappy readers of *The Autobiography* have lambasted it as a lengthy exercise in self-promoting gossip meant to create Stein's celebrity in America and shore up her bank account.[30] (Indeed, Stein did seek to increase demand for the book in advance of its publication in August 1933 by teasing her American readers with excerpts in *The Atlantic*, and she seemed to capitalize upon their taste for "scandalous information about Bohemian life" by repeating "discredited stories as long as they add[ed] to the myth she [was] trying to create."[31] This "effective bit of press-agentry" and "extended essay in self-appreciation" resulted in quick sales of *The Autobiography*, which

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Stein Articulates At Last," *New York Times* 3 September 1933: BR2; and William Troy, "A Note on Gertrude Stein," *The Nation* 137 (6 September 1933): 274-5, rpt. in Hoffman, *Critical Essays on Gertrude Stein*, 62-64.

[28] Catharine R. Stimpson, "Gertrude Stein and the Lesbian Lie," in *American Women's Autobiography: Fea(s)ts of Memory*, ed. Margo Culley (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 161. Emphasis in the original.

[29] Dydo, "*Stanzas in Meditation*," 4. Indeed, even Marianne DeKoven excludes the book from her list of Stein's experimental works and dismisses it as a "Hollywood Life of Gertrude Stein" filled with little else beside "Great Moments of Modern Culture" that seem "aglow with the sheen of idealised memory," although she does contend—briefly, and without further explanation—that Stein "undo[es] patriarchal portraiture in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*." See DeKoven, *A Different Language*, xiii, 11, and DeKoven, "Gertrude Stein and the Modernist Canon," in *Gertrude Stein and the Making of Literature*, ed. Shirley Neuman and Ira B. Nadel (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988), 8-9. See also Goody, *Modernist Articulations*, 50 (see ch. 2, n. 116).

[30] For an example of a reading that emphasizes the economic impulse behind Stein's decision to write *The Autobiography*, see Stimpson, "Gertrude Stein and the Lesbian Lie," 156, and also Conrad, "American Marketplace," 224; Lénárt-Cheng, "Autobiography as Advertisement," 118-22; and Janet Malcolm, *Two Lives: Gertrude and Alice* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 8-9.

[31] See Hoffman, *Gertrude Stein*, 115-116.

"sold its entire first printing, more than 5,000 copies, nine days in advance of its official publication date."[32] And as the popularity of *The Autobiography* rose, so too was Stein's fame in America amplified—so much so that she would embark upon a lecture tour throughout the country in 1934–35.[33])

Recent critical attention to *The Autobiography* has taken up this historical context under the aegis of, or in parallel with, the new study of celebrity.[34] Scholars like Jonathan Goldman and Mark Goble have attempted to bridge the gap between the two accounts of *The Autobiography* that I have outlined by locating the text's experimentalism, literary value, and modernity precisely in its "self-appreciation," superficiality, and engagement with celebrity. (In this way, their work has been typical of the current inclination in Stein studies toward reading "the same formal features that were once deemed off-putting […] as the

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[32] Richard Kostelanetz, introduction to *The Gertrude Stein Reader* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2002), xxi, and Timothy W. Galow, *Writing Celebrity: Stein, Fitzgerald, and the Modern(ist) Art of Self-Fashioning* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 1.

[33] As Alyson Tischler and Karen Leick have persuasively demonstrated, Stein's American fame was not *created* by the publication of *The Autobiography* but simply heightened: mass cultural forms like advertisements and newspaper column parodies acknowledged Stein as early as 1914. As Leick states, "it was because Stein was a household name that *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* became a bestseller." See Karen Leick, *Gertrude Stein and the Making of an American Celebrity* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 8, and Alyson Tischler, "A Rose Is a Pose: Steinian Modernism and Mass Culture." *Journal of Modern Literature* 26.3/4 (Spring 2003): 12-27.
For critical explorations of the literary, psychological, and material after-effects of Stein's increased fame after the publication of *The Autobiography*—an area of Stein studies that has received an enormous amount of attention in recent years—see Leick, *Gertrude Stein and the Making of an American Celebrity*, 131-190; Galow, *Writing Celebrity*, 43-109; Glass, *Authors Inc.*:, 1-2, 25-26, 115-37; Marsha Orgeron, *Hollywood Ambitions: Celebrity in the Movie Age* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), 139-53; Deborah M. Mix, "Gertrude Stein's Currency," in *Modernist Star Maps: Celebrity, Modernity, Culture*, ed. Aaron Jaffe and Jonathan Goldman (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 93-95. And for older studies in the same vein, see Brinnin, *The Third Rose*, 307-12; Conrad, "Gertrude Stein in the American Marketplace," 215-33; Kirk Curnutt, "Inside and Outside: Gertrude Stein on Identity, Celebrity, and Authenticity," *Journal of Modern Literature* 23.2 (1999): 291-308.

[34] This trend arguably began with Loren Glass's excellent work on Stein's thoughts about her celebrity and her ruminations on money after *The Autobiography*'s publication so transformed her status; like much of the work in this vein, Glass focuses more on the impact of *The Autobiography* than on its actual workings. See Glass, *Authors Inc.*, 25-26, 115-37, and for an overview of what celebrity studies brings to modernist studies more generally, see Aaron Jaffe and Jonathan Goldman, introduction to *Modernist Star Maps: Celebrity, Modernity, Culture* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 1-16.

source of delight and even accessibility."[35]) The abundance of proper names in *The Autobiography* has been crucial to these two reevaluations of the text. Goldman focuses on modernist style and formal characteristics like Stein's name-dropping in his aptly titled *Modernism Is the Literature of Celebrity*, and he contends that Stein links celebrities together into "a network of individuals," in which "even a celebrated name accrues value only by assuming a place within a system of signifiers composed of other names."[36] Stein exploits the fact that "the celebrity name gestures beyond the diegesis of a text […] and toward the real person in the real world" and makes use of the name's "cultural resonance," or aura," but she also "resists the celebrity name's power to refer to the person who bears it" by recontextualizing the name, "making it signify an ordinary person within her text as much as it does an extraordinary person in the extratextual world."[37] In Goldman's view, Stein's "relational system" constructed of celebrity names confined to the domestic sphere ultimately upholds her own "self-creation and self-valuation" as an "exceptional personality."[38]

And in his especially nuanced discussion of Stein's celebrity, Goble traces the way in which *The Autobiography* gives the reader a "life of cameo appearances, where we experience everything in passing, in abbreviated gestures of familiarity and recognition that put precious little on display in showing us just what we want to see."[39] Stein's lists of names are

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[35] Laura Frost, *The Problem with Pleasure: Modernism and Its Discontents* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 65.
[36] Jonathan Goldman, *Modernism Is the Literature of Celebrity* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2011), 14. In this way, Goldman's argument directly counters Deborah Mix's assertion that, for Stein, masterpieces, literary values, and fame exist "outside systems of exchange" or systems of "relation." See Mix, "Gertrude Stein's Currency," 97.
[37] Jonathan Goldman, *Literature of Celebrity*, 86-88, 92.
[38] Ibid., 14, 109, 14.
[39] Goble, *Beautiful Circuits*, 97.

composed of such cameo appearances and characterized by "rapid, superficial referencing," so that "a disorienting democracy of attention is all but forced upon us, a vortex of characters in constant motion, some of whom are perhaps crucial, many of whom are clearly trivial, yet all of whom occupy the stage for the identical fleeting moment."[40] For Goble, "what comes to matter about all these names," on the one hand, "is not their singularity as references to people but their accretion within space and time": in this way, Stein's names make use of a certain obtrusive, aggressive "'theatricality' of information" in which modernist difficulty and opacity are operative "not because the text resists definitive interpretation but because it encourages endless annotation."[41] But on the other hand, as he so rightly notes, "to the degree that cameo apperances in Stein refer only to names that no reader, I think, is supposed to know in full […] the text must also acknowledge that these names need not communicate at all."[42]

In sum, we might say that Goldman and Goble have sought to renovate our understanding of *The Autobiography* by drawing out the implications of how the text refers, and their arguments lie between the two poles identified by previous readers of Stein. At one extreme, we might say that "the very essence of Stein's literary enterprise [. . .] was precisely to demonstrate that language is not transparent, that it does not point innocently to a world of objects or ideas somewhere outside itself."[43] In this view, even at its most apparently referential, in its listing of the names of real people, *The Autobiography* always refers back to language first and foremost. (And in this insistence upon the opacity of language, *The*

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[40] Ibid., 100, 103.
[41] Ibid., 102, 105, 104.
[42] Ibid., 105.

Autobiography is clearly linked to Stein's more experimental work.) And at the other extreme, the proliferation of names can encourage a reader who does not recognize a name to research it—to use "the autobiography as a source text" and begin to read intertextually.[44] What Goldman and Goble demonstrate so well is that *The Autobiography* is neither entirely opaque—referring first (or only) back to language—nor entirely open, always referring clearly to the real world, or to other texts outside its own covers. *The Autobiography* possesses both of these tendencies and exploits both of them. And while I follow Goldman and Goble in their location of *The Autobiography*'s experimentalism in its superficiality—its lack of interiority, especially as that absence is manifested in Stein's lists of names—what I want to emphasize is the way in which these qualities are thoroughly inter-mediated, particularly—as I shall discuss later—by photography. (In this regard, my argument departs sharply from Goldman's insistence that *The Autobiography* demonstrates a "rejection of the visual" and that "Stein shuns the pictorial" and "dismisses visuality."[45]) While Stein's use of names—especially her metonymic deployment of painters' names to stand in for their artworks—is neither ekphrastic nor descriptive, that does not necessarily mean that she entirely rejects visuality. A list is recognizable "as a visual object," and "to list nouns," like the names in *The Autobiography*, "is to do more than record; it is to display, to lay out, to arrange—to create

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[43] Perloff, "(Im)Personating Gertrude Stein," in Neuman and Nadel, *Gertrude Stein and the Making of Literature*, 63. See also Shari Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank: Paris, 1900-1940* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1986), 186.
[44] Johnston, "Narratologies of Pleasure," 596-97.
[45] Jonathan Goldman, *Literature of Celebrity*, 106-8.

reality."[46] And it is precisely the visually overwhelming quality of the lists of names that forces upon us what Goble calls such "a disorienting democracy of attention."[47]

Furthermore, I want to contend that Stein's external presentation of people and events in *The Autobiography* is highly inter-mediated, caught up in Stein's theories about how other art forms operate. If, as Marjorie Perloff notes, Stein "implies that her characters can never be fully knowable,"[48] then Toklas tells us that Stein holds exactly this idea in relation to painting: "She always was, she always is, tormented by the problem of the external and the internal. One of the things that always worries her about painting is the difficulty that the artist feels and which sends him to painting still-lifes, that after all the human being essentially is not paintable" (130). Stein believes, then, that "the human being" is fundamentally an "internal" creature: she locates the essence of humanity in consciousness, and since this consciousness cannot really be seen, she argues that people are "not paintable." Painters must focus their attention on essentially external subjects, like the fruits, bottles, and newspapers in still lifes, and presumably, writers like Stein must follow suit.

In *The Autobiography*, however, Stein claims that it does prove possible to mix the external and the internal: referring to the poems of *Tender Buttons*, Toklas says that "they were the beginning, as Gertrude Stein would say, of mixing the outside with the inside. Hitherto she had been concerned with seriousness and the inside of things, in these studies she began to describe the inside as seen from the outside" (170). In *Tender Buttons*, then, Stein describes the emotional and physical experience of domestic life. She presents poems with titles like "A chair" and "Rooms," and she offers a phenomenological apprehension of these

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[46] Dennis Hall, "Listomania: The List as Popular Culture Icon," *Studies in Popular Culture* 28.1 (October 2005): 52, and Belknap, *The List*, 19.

objects and spaces rather than standard descriptions of them; she evokes, in other words, "the inside as seen from outside." And in an intriguing instance of textual correspondence, Stein uses the same language in her lecture "Portraits and Repetition" to describe her project in *The Autobiography*: "the important thing was that for the first time in writing, I felt something outside me while I was writing, hitherto I had always had nothing but what was inside me while I was writing. [. . .] now I suddenly began to feel the outside inside and the inside outside and [. . .] so I wrote the Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas."[49] Thus, if in *Tender Buttons* Stein sought to "describe the inside as seen from the outside," or to embody the human consciousness of an object like a seltzer bottle in the bottle itself, then in *The Autobiography* she focuses on her feeling that there exists "something outside" her own consciousness.

This problem of "the outside" has long proven central to the task of the autobiographer: as Shirley Neuman claims, "The autobiographer must create a text of what he knows from the *inside* in terms of what we recognize from the *outside*."[50] Thus Stein has little choice but to mix outside and inside, external and internal, in *The Autobiography*, and we can locate the most prominent example of this kind of mixing in the lists of names that I

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47 Goble, *Beautiful Circuits*, 103.
48 Perloff, "(Im)Personating Gertrude Stein," 69.
49 Gertrude Stein, "Portraits and Repetition," in *Gertrude Stein: Writings 1932-1946*, 312. In an interview, Stein expresses a similar idea in different terms; she says that in the writing of *The Autobiography*, she discovered that "other people's words are quite different from one's own" and that "narrative in itself is not what is in your mind but what is in somebody else's," and she concludes this discussion of externalities with triumph: "and so I did a tour de force with the *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*." See Gertrude Stein, "A Transatlantic Interview," in *A Primer for the Gradual Understanding of Gertrude Stein*, ed. Robert Bartlett Haas (Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1971), 19, and for further analysis of her views of *The Autobiography* during the American lecture tour in relation to her celebrity, see Galow, *Writing Celebrity*, 69-76.
50 Shirley Neuman, "The Observer Observed," *Prose Studies* 4 (1981): 328; quoted in Adams, *Telling Lies*, 11 (emphasis original). See also Neuman, *Problem of Narration*, 15; Caramello, *Biographical Act*, 144; Schmitz, "Portrait, Patriarchy, Mythos," 170; and James E. Breslin, "Gertrude Stein and the Problems of Autobiography," in *Critical Essays on Gertrude Stein*, ed. Michael Hoffman (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1986), 153.

have been discussing. In these lists, Stein transforms people—who often seem to live essentially interior lives and to be fundamentally unrepresentable—into the their names, the external signs of their existence. As I have noted, the name simultaneously refers and questions the possibility of linguistic reference, and by performing this double insistence, Stein's *Autobiography* does call into question the traditional purpose of autobiography as a genre. As Neil Schmitz reminds us, "like conventional portraiture, autobiography typically strives for the likeness, the lifelike, strives to identify," and Stein frustrates this aim not only with her decision to write Toklas's autobiography for her but also with her emphasis on the proper name, which eschews the lifelike even as it may refer to the living.[51]

In this way, perhaps the work that Stein's *Autobiography* most resembles—and as with all Steinian likenesses, this remains a fragile one—is Picasso's famous 1906 portrait of her, which "faithfully represents [. . .] the tension, the slippage, between [. . .] conventional representation and likeness."[52] The portrait looks and does not look like Stein, and it refers both to the woman who sat for it and to the conventions of painting that Picasso disavows. And just as "portraiture figure[s] at key points in the most experimental work of leading modernist" painters, so too does it figure in Stein's experimental work in *The Autobiography*, even when that experiment is not easily recognized.[53] Or to put it a different way, if we follow Perloff in understanding the "shift from internal to external" as "one of the central

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[51] Schmitz, "Portrait, Patriarchy, Mythos," 166-67.
[52] Michael North, *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language, and Twentieth-Century Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 71.
[53] Green, *Art in France*, 92.

paradigm shifts of the early twentieth-century avant-garde," then we might well consider Stein's deployment of proper names as the most avant-garde strategy of *The Autobiography*.[54]

Narrative Pictures and Portraiture Techniques II: Witticisms

If the stressed and repeated proper name is the most salient formal feature of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, then the witticism is most famous to the casual reader. So often used as pithy openings for essays, witticisms are the most recognizable parts of *The Autobiography*, and they all underscore Stein's intelligence and sense of superiority. The most widely quoted witticism is, fittingly, Stein's remark about remarks: "Once when Hemingway wrote in one of his stories that Gertrude Stein always knew what was good in a Cézanne, she looked at him and said, Hemingway, remarks are not literature" (85). Here Stein performs a sleight-of-hand trick: she chides Hemingway for precisely the sort of writing that she executes flawlessly throughout *The Autobiography*. She may have meant one thing in the context of her original utterance, but the remark performs precisely the opposite meaning when Toklas narrates it. With this kind of clever doublespeak, she even manages to provide metacommentary on the project of *The Autobiography* and challenge the capacity of any single genre—remarks or literature, life-writing or artistic criticism—to contain it.

Similarly pithy one-liners follow quick on the heels of this one. Recounting Stein's years at Radcliffe and Johns Hopkins, Toklas describes the bold manner in which, after a long night out at the opera, Stein chose to opt out of an exam in William James's class: sitting down for the examination, she wrote spontaneously, "Dear Professor James, [. . .] I

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[54] Marjorie Perloff, "Of Objects and Readymades: Gertrude Stein and Marchel Duchamp," *Forum for Modern*

am so sorry but really I do not feel a bit like an examination paper in philosophy today" (88). James responded positively, of course, by writing in reply, "I understand perfectly how you feel I often feel like that myself," and giving Stein the highest grade in the course (88). Then, when Stein decided to leave medical school in Baltimore without her degree, her friend chastised her on feminist grounds: "Marion Walker pleaded with her, she said, but Gertrude Gertrude remember the cause of women, and Gertrude Stein said, you don't know what it is to be bored" (91).

The witticisms of *The Autobiography* are not limited to the chapter that describe Stein's exceptional intelligence as an unconventional student before she came to Paris. In the chapters that take place after World War I, Stein uses witty remarks to make it clear that she stands apart from the crowd of artists and writers in Paris. For instance, Toklas recounts their meeting with Ezra Pound: "Gertrude Stein liked him but did not find him amusing. She said he was a village explainer, excellent if you were a village, but if you were not, not" (217). And continuing her mocking of the younger generation of male Modernists, Stein states that Hemingway's success occurs because "he looks like a modern and he smells of the museums" (234). Stein also makes sure to place witty remarks in the mouths of speakers other than herself. She allows Toklas a few in the first chapter: on the very first page of *The Autobiography*, for example, she states, "I like a view but I like to sit with my back turned to it" (7). And even some painters are so lucky as to have their amusing remarks recorded in *The Autobiography*: early in the second chapter, reflecting upon the youth and poverty that lie in his past, Braque sighs, "how life has changed we all now have cooks who can make a soufflé" (10-11).

Language Studies 32.2 (1996): 137.

It is quite tempting to continue to pull these quotations from *The Autobiography*, since all of the clever remarks of Stein's set are, of course, quite funny. They remain the most memorable and frequently excerpted parts of *The Autobiography*—Margot Norris refers to them as the book's "nuggets of opinion about genius"—and it often seems that they can, like Stein's conveniently small yale key, be stuffed into a purse and taken anywhere.[55] That is, their very portability hints at their possibly unfixed relationship to the larger text. These comments can easily—to change the metaphor—be untethered from their posts in *The Autobiography* and ridden off in the service of any argument about Stein. Their easy movement might seem, then, to suggest that they prove inessential to the narrative as a whole: if they can be so easily deployed in other contexts, then they must have very little to do with the actual workings of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*.

Yet I want to claim precisely the opposite status for these remarks. Borrowing from Robert Scholes's discussion of the wit of Oscar Wilde, I want to insist that *The Autobiography* is actually "kept alive by a wit that operates on a number of levels," and this wit—which is, importantly, "not purely verbal"—can help to make us "aware not only of the amount of life captured in this supremely artificial text but also of the amount of artifice and performance that goes into our experience of life itself," our "trivial world," with all its "fragile social constructions."[56] In other words, I want to contend that the performativity, superficiality, and self-containment of these one- and two-line comments mark not their separation from but rather their integration into the project of *The Autobiography*. Stein's book as a whole enjoys drawing attention to the performance required to maintain modern social

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[55] Margot Norris, "The 'Wife' and the 'Genius': Domesticating Modern Art in Stein's *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*," in *Modernism, Gender, and Culture: A Cultural Studies Approach*, ed. Lisa Rado (New York: Garland, 1997),

constructions, sometimes by making (mockingly) earnest commentary on the affairs of the world with lines like one of the witticisms I have already mentioned, in which Marion Walker says, "but Gertrude Gertrude remember the cause of women, and Gertrude Stein said, you don't know what it is to be bored." In this single sentence, Stein expresses simultaneously the undesirability of a world with no female doctors, and the undesirability of a world in which an adherence to abstract principles would prevent a woman writer from pursuing her own agenda on the page.

And even though Stein succeeds in communicating these "nuggets of opinion" that do have some significant political and social resonance, it is precisely this brand of wit that angered some of her early readers and still holds some critics at a distance. Six of the people who appear in *The Autobiography*, in fact, were so offended by Stein's flippant portrayals of them and by her less than scrupulous treatment of the details of certain events that they sought retribution: Eugene and Maria Jolas, André Salmon, Georges Braque, Tristan Tzara, and Henri Matisse published a rebuttal in a supplement to the journal *transition* soon after Stein's publication of *The Autobiography*. The anger of Eugene Jolas is characteristic of the group's outrage, when he contends that the book, with its "hollow, tinsel bohemianism and egocentric deformations, may very well become one day the symbol of the decadence that hovers over contemporary literature."[57] The anger of these modernists arises from the inaccurate or unflattering picture of Parisian bohemia that they perceive Stein to have

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[56] Robert Scholes, *Paradoxy of Modernism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 160-61.

[57] See Andre Vuillet, "Americans on the Continent," *The Washington Post* 10 March 1935: S7, and Henri Matisse, Georges Braque, André Salmon, Tristan Tzara, Eugene Jolas, and Maria Jolas, "Testimony against Gertrude Stein," supplement to *transition* 23 (1935): 1-16. For a more extended discussion of the specific charges leveled against Stein, see Darcy L. Brandel, "The Case of Gertrude Stein and the Genius of Collaboration," *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 37.4 (June 2008): 371-392, and also Neuman, *Problem of Narration*, 10, 22-23.

presented in *The Autobiography*: looking at themselves as Stein sees them, they don't like what they find. Or to put it another way, their response to *The Autobiography* helps us to see how Stein's witty remarks about other modernists—including those about Pound and Hemingway which I have already quoted—function as portraits of a kind, even when they offer no physical description or psychological sketching. Her witticisms consistently redirect our attention away from the writing or painting or sculpture completed by these artists and toward the artists themselves as ordinary, flawed, mockable people.

In this way, Stein's witticisms possess an important quality that Goble has discussed as belonging to the cameo appearance: these textual moments reproduce "stardom in miniature," depending upon a "reduction in scale" that manages to "effectively trivialize or 'tame'" the author or the painter in question.[58] Stein's witticisms, like other miniature objects, present "a diminuitive, and thereby manipulable, version of experience, a version which is domesticated and protected from contamination," even as it also generates "a tension or dialectic between the inside and outside, […] between the space of the subject and the space of the social."[59] This capacity to miniaturize, trivialize, and tame is typical of all of the formal features of *The Autobiography* that I shall examine: we have already seen it in operation in the way in which Stein's lists of names enclose modernists within the walls of 27 rue de Fleurus, and we shall also see it at work in her anecdotes. But I want to highlight it now, in relation to the witticism, because there is something about the witticism's one- or two-line length that brings *The Autobiography*'s tendencies toward the domestic and the diminuitive into tight focus, along with the ways in which these qualities are bound up with the book's provocative

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[58] Goble, *Beautiful Circuits*, 91-92.

goading of the avant-garde. Working quickly, like the aphorism (its clear cousin), the witticism dispenses information "in small, appealing, and easy-to-remember capsules."[60] And its small, self-contained satisfactions are especially generative of tension "between the inside and the outside," between the subject and the social world—tension we find registered by the rebuttal in *transition* and by those critical denigrations of *The Autobiography*'s gossipy qualities, which judge its witticisms to be pat, or precious, or just too cute.

In fact, if we press a bit harder on the connection between the witticism's diminuitive length and its gossipy content, we might say that these linked characteristics index the high degree to which the witticism makes use of the aesthetic of cuteness, which has recently been elaborated by Sianne Ngai, in relation to, among other texts, Stein's own *Tender Buttons*. Ngai argues that the cute is, among other things, often "soft, round, and deeply associated with the infantile and the feminine," particularly with "a 'twittering' use or style of language, [which is] marked as feminine."[61] Furthermore, cuteness is "a 'soft' aesthetic emerging from the sphere of mass culture as opposed to high art," "a taste concept [. . .] firmly rooted in visual commodity culture," and "a response to familiar, homey objects imagined as unusually responsive to the subject's desire for an ever more intimate […] relation to them."[62] And most important, cuteness is "a minor aesthetic concept that is fundamentally about minorness."[63] All of these markers of cuteness surface, in ways that I think are clear, in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and the discourse around it. Stein's text

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[59] Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 69, 68.
[60] Sianne Ngai, "The Cuteness of the Avant-Garde," *Critical Inquiry* 31.4 (Summer 2005): 842.
[61] Ngai, "Cuteness," 814.
[62] Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 58; "Cuteness," 813; and *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 54.
[63] Ngai, "Cuteness," 816.

is considered to be gossipy, popularizing, meant to domesticate modernism and bring it—and Stein herself—into closer relation with the mass market. Its narrative is unformed or formally simple, shapeless, soft; the book does not merit the label "literature," since it is a minor work in comparison to Stein's more serious poetry.[64]

My aim here is not to claim that Ngai's cuteness is necessarily the best or the only aesthetic descriptor for *The Autobiography*, but rather to trace how some of the operations and characteristics of cuteness can help us to understand Stein's challenge to representational conventions, and her turn away from pictures to people, especially in her witty remarks. As I have noted, all of the typical markers of cuteness that we might find in *The Autobiography* are identical to those qualities that have attracted the most negative critical attention. As Ngai notes, calling a comment or an object or a person cute is "strikingly equivocal," since such a statement leaves it "ambiguous as to whether one regards [the cute object] positively or negatively": "to call something or someone cute is not necessarily a compliment."[65] And part of the equivocation inherent in judging an object cute arises because the aesthetic of cuteness holds the "contradictory feelings" of "aggression and tenderness" in "indefinite tension."[66] Or to put it slightly differently, "it is possible for cute objects to be helpless and aggressive at the same time."[67]

Cuteness fights back, and Stein's witticisms manage exactly this, by way of a particular linguistic feature they share. Many of the remarks I have discussed so far are

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[64] For more on shapelessness as a characteristic of cute objects, see Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 30.
[65] Ibid., 19, 24.
[66] Ibid., 19. One of the key values of Ngai's theorization of cuteness is the extent to which it accounts for both our affectionate and our assault-like response to cute objects or works, and Laura Frost has similarly sought to account for the "wide discrepancies in readers' responses to her writing" by discussing Stein's work in terms of "tickling," a paradigm that rests upon a "sliding scale of pleasure to irritation" and "fuses irritation, intimacy, and estrangement." See Frost, *The Problem with Pleasure*, 30, 67, 66.

couched in negative terms or are about non-action: Stein says that remarks are *not* literature, that she does *not* feel like a philosophy exam, that Marion Walker does *not* know what it is be bored. We might also think of the double "not" in her description of Pound as a village explainer. (It's excellent if you're a village, but if you're not, not.) These remarks refuse to define themselves explicitly, to say what remarks are, what Stein does feel like, what being bored actually is. In this way, we might characterize Stein's witty remarks are ontologically helpless—they cannot really describe states of being—but we can take this idea one step further: they refuse to. This refusal is aggressive, and it is precisely where Stein's challenge to modernist institutions lies. She won't define herself in terms of the literary, the standards of university education, or the expectations for a forward-thinking woman in a man's profession in the early twentieth century. In other words, some of Stein's witticisms present feminist challenges to patriarchal institutions, even as others offer domestications of some notable male modernists. And especially insofar as these witticisms remain frequently excerpted and reproduced in all kinds of scholarly and popular discourse, they partake of the cute object's engagement with mass culture, so that Stein's witticisms manage finally, outside the pages of *The Autobiography*, to circulate as a kind of commodity feminism.

Narrative Pictures and Portraiture Techniques III: Anecdotes

If witticisms stage Stein's small rebellions against patriarchal expectations and literary conventions, then the anecdotes of *The Autobiography* allow her to display her victories at

[67] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 85.

greater length, in an expanded theatre of wit. Such is precisely the case on Toklas's first Saturday evening, when Stein introduces Toklas to Henri Matisse:

> Miss Stein called me and said she wanted to have me meet Matisse. She was talking to a medium sized man with a reddish beard and glasses. He had a very alert although slightly heavy presence and Miss Stein and he seemed to be full of hidden meanings. As I came up I heard her say, Oh yes but it would be more difficult now. We were talking, she said, of a lunch party we had in here last year. We had just hung all the pictures and we asked all the painters. You know how painters are, I wanted to make them happy so I placed each one opposite his own picture, and they were happy so happy that we had to send out twice for more bread, when you know France you will know that that means that they were happy, because they cannot eat and drink without bread and we had to send out twice for bread so they were happy. Nobody noticed my little arrangement except Matisse and he did not until just as he left, and now he says it is proof that I am very wicked. Matisse laughed and said, yes I know Mademoiselle Gertrude, the world is a theatre for you, but there are theatres and theatres, and when you listen so carefully to me and so attentively and do not hear a word I say then I do say that you are very wicked. Then they both began talking about the vernissage of the independent as every one else was doing and of course I did not know what it was all about. But gradually I knew . . . (19-20)[68]

At the same time that this anecdote recounts Toklas's meeting with Matisse, it also introduces the reader to Gertrude Stein, for although her name does appear on the second page of *The Autobiography*, Stein hardly speaks or acts before this scene. She merely opens the door to admit Toklas into the atelier before dinner, and we have little chance to learn about her character before this story. Listening to Stein chat with Matisse about the lunch, we are impressed by her wit and her hubris, and especially by her warm, joking friendship with the painter. In this way, the scene is constructed so that our position mimics that of Toklas: at this moment, before she has become Stein's partner, she is also an outsider peeking into a

[68] Although Stein's phrasing suggests that the group was discussing the opening of the Salon des Indépendants, Toklas's arrival in September makes it highly unlikely that the artists were discussing the spring Salon des Indépendants, even though both the spring Salon and the Salon d'automne were referred to as "independent salons." As Picasso's biographer, John Richardson, has noted, Toklas's first Saturday evening at the Steins'

tightly-knit community and enjoying a performance in this "theatre" of clever conversation. We might also read our relationship to this anecdote as a kind of looking over the shoulder: reading, we peer over Toklas's shoulder as she looks on her first Saturday evening at the indomitable Gertrude Stein, who recounts her own looking at Matisse as he recognizes her trick after the luncheon.

Or to put it yet another way, we might say that at this moment we discover with Toklas that Parisian modernism sustains itself by watching its own encounters with art—that is, this anecdote demonstrates that *The Autobiography* actually works, from scene to scene, by looking at people looking at pictures. As I have already suggested, the Steins' Saturday evenings provide the opportunity for precisely this activity, and when Stein and her friends engage in their "talking and listening" (17), they are reminiscing about past occasions for looking (the luncheon) and anticipating future exhibitions (the Salon des Indépendants). And here, we may not know which painters besides Matisse attended the luncheon, nor do we know which paintings from the collection Stein chose for her gag, but we (and Stein and Toklas) cannot help but smile over the ways in which the painters are made happy by navel-gazing at their own pictures. Our attention is deflected from the paintings on the walls to the high spirits of the "happy" luncheon and then to the gay atmosphere of the Saturday evening. In this regard, the anecdote of the luncheon can provide the model for all of the other anecdotal discussions of pictures in *The Autobiography*. Pictures are to be looked at, certainly, but they mostly provide opportunities to gather with friends and tell stories. Stein uses pictures as prompts to talk about their creators, their buyers, and the material

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home was September 28, and the Salon d'Automne opened on October 1 in 1907. See Richardson, *A Life of Picasso*, 50, and Green, *Art in France*, 43.

circumstances of their making, so that *The Autobiography* might be said to thematize what Lisa Siraganian identifies as Stein's animating theoretical interest "in the work of art not in relation to its referent," to what it depicts, "but in relation to the beholder."[69] We rarely look directly at a picture, but we often look at someone looking at a picture in a way that strikes Stein as important, or amusing, or poignant.

With this anecdote about the luncheon, Stein's amusement arises from the way in which visual reflection—the painters sit opposite their own work, mirroring it—generates gustatory pleasure: "they were happy so happy that we had to send out twice for more bread," and that "we had to send out twice for bread so they were happy."[70] Happiness calls for more bread, and bread creates happiness: the chiasmus conveys a sense of circular logic and allows Stein's syntax to mirror itself.[71] What the anecdote communicates, in short, is both the painters' and Stein's pleasurable self-reflection, which is, Jaime Hovey has argued, a feature that proves typical of queer modernist portraiture: this type of "writing is primarily

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[69] And while Siraganian explores this interest largely in relation to Stein's *Lectures in America*, wherein Stein discusses her aesthetics of punctuation, she also notes that Stein had developed this aesthetic before the success of *The Autobiography*, so that we cannot consider her interest in the text's relation to the beholder as something that arises out of the success of that book. Siraganian, *Modernism's Other Work*, 27, 34 (see introduction, n. 22).

[70] Noting Stein's ostentatiously limited, repetitive diction here, we might also describe this anecdote as displaying a kind of self-reflexivity on the level of language itself, or deploying "a language that continually points up its own artifice," which James Breslin has identified as one of "the leading features of Stein's writing." In these moments, we can see clearly the connection between the language of *The Autobiography* and the language of Stein's more difficult works. Despite frequent critical insistence on a sharp distinction between these areas of Stein's oeuvre, parts of *The Autobiography*, it turns out, *do* draw attention to their words as words. See Breslin, "Problems of Autobiography," 152; and for more on Stein's limited-vocabulary technique, see Lawrence Raab, "Remarks as Literature: The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas by Gertrude Stein," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 17.4 (1978): 487. For some examples of critical distinctions between the language of *The Autobiography* and the (more overtly difficult) the language in the rest of Stein's work, see Dydo, "*Stanzas in Meditation*," 4; Norris, "The 'Wife' and the 'Genius,'" 87; and Marianne DeKoven, "Gertrude Stein and Modern Painting: Beyond Literary Criticism," *Contemporary Literature* 22.1 (1981): 81-83.

[71] Shirley Neuman reads this repetition not as a reflective chiasmus but instead as a "literal representation of 'twiceness'" in which Stein's style parodies "the ideas of its content" and, by "recreating instead of remembering what it tells," manages to create a sense of the "continuous present" even within the confines of a genre that would seem antithetical to it. See Neuman, *Problem of Narration*, 26-27.

enamored of its own self-consciousness, of the pleasures of looking at itself seeing itself."[72] The anecdote of the luncheon presents an erotics of narcissism not only with the painters' fond gazing at their work, but also with the layered looking that the telling of the anecdote requires: Stein the author looks at Toklas the narrator, who looks at Stein the storyteller, who looks at Matisse the painter, who discovers her trick by looking at the paintings on the wall (all in the house that Stein built).

Just as the painters are made happy by looking at their own work, Stein is tickled by her own cleverness, and Matisse must remind her that such tricks are not always good: "Mademoiselle Gertrude, the world is a theatre for you, but there are theatres and theatres, and when you listen so carefully to me and so attentively and do not hear a word I say then I do say that you are very wicked." Here, Matisse accuses Stein not only of a certain "wicked" pleasure in beholding her own wit, but also of duping her friends into becoming unwitting actors and transforming her atelier into a theatre for her private amusement. As good-natured as Matisse's tone is here, his rebuke stands, not only as a reaction to Stein's lunchtime joke, but also as concealed commentary on the project of *The Autobiography* itself. Stein often sets her contemporaries up so that she (and we) may laugh at them, and the pleasure that we take in their performances is, of course, a bit wicked. (We cannot help sniggering a bit over the absurdity of Picasso and Fernande's fight over the Katzenjammer Kids comic strip and her certainty that taking the comics "is a brutality [she] will never forgive him" [31]. Yet Stein does also present her own ridiculous behavior for our amusement, and just as we laugh at Picasso and Fernande, we laugh at the gullibility that permits Stein's cook Maddalena to cure her hiccoughs by pretending to break a beautiful

[72] Hovey, *A Thousand Words*, 5.

black plate purchased in Rome.) Thus, Stein here uses Matisse to critique her own project while slyly winking at her readers to let us know that she has no intention to "hear a word" that he says.

Precisely the same thing happens again a few pages later, when, in another anecdote, Toklas recounts her visit to the opening of the Salon with a friend, courtesy of a card of invitation for two that they were given on their Saturday evening at the Steins' home. Toklas and her friend tour the galleries, and then they pause to rest on a bench in front of one painting by Georges Braque and another by André Derain:

> We had been resting and looking at every body and it was indeed the vie de Bohème just as one had seen it in the opera and they were very wonderful to look at. Just then somebody behind us put a hand on our shoulders and burst out laughing. It was Gertrude Stein. You have seated yourselves admirably, she said. But why, we asked. Because right here in front of you is the whole story. We looked but we saw nothing except two big pictures that looked quite alike but not altogether alike. One is a Braque and one is a Derain, explained Gertrude Stein. They were strange pictures of strangely formed rather wooden blocked figures, one if I remember rightly a sort of man and woman, the other three women. Well, she said still laughing. We were puzzled, we had seen so much strangeness we did not know why these two were any stranger. (23)

"Right here in front of you is the whole story": thus Stein collapses the complex relationship between early Cubism and Fauvism and the history of modernist painting into the dialogue between these two paintings. But despite her attendance at the Steins' Saturday evening, and despite this (supposedly) helpful synecdoche, Toklas remains bewildered. Little wonder, of course, since she and her friend have seated themselves admirably not in order to have the best view of the paintings but rather to have the best view of the crowd. They are supposed to have been looking at pictures, but instead, they have been looking at people.

Yet at the same time that Stein chastises Toklas for not having seen the paintings and giggles at her incomprehension of "the whole story," Stein refuses to show her readers the paintings in any detail. She executes, in short, much the same move as when she tells Hemingway that "remarks are not literature": she gets away with exactly the same activity for which she criticizes someone else, and at the same time, she provides hidden commentary on her own project in *The Autobiography*. Here, like Toklas, we cannot really see the paintings, and the "two big pictures" become far less amusing than the dialogue between the characters—the wise Stein and the naïve Toklas—whose relationship will become the whole story of *The Autobiography*.

In fact, this kind of shift in attention—from picture to person—occurs not just in those anecdotes that, like the two I have discussed thus far, give us little to no description of paintings. Even when Stein offers further description, she still deflects our attention to her characters, most notably herself. Nearly every time Toklas presents an important painting in the first part of *The Autobiography*, we find ourselves looking primarily at Stein. At the Salon, for example, when Toklas and her friend see a painting by Matisse of "a big figure of a woman lying in among some cactuses"—presumably his *Blue Nude*—she recalls the most memorable reaction to this painting after it was relocated to 27 rue de Fleurus:

> There one day this five year old little boy of the janitor who often used to visit Gertrude Stein who was fond of him, jumped into her arms as she was standing at the open door of the atelier and looking over her shoulder and seeing the picture cried out in rapture, oh là là what a beautiful body of a woman. Miss Stein used always to tell this story when the casual stranger in the aggressive way of the casual stranger said, looking at this picture, and what is that supposed to represent. (22)

Here we have not only the boy's way of looking at the picture—which marvels at the nude body of the woman—but also the stranger's way of looking, with its unpleasant insistence

on symbolism. Caramello argues that the juxtaposition of these two ways of looking is meant to help us see first "that a child with a fresh eye can 'read' modern art while an adult with a habituated eye cannot" and second that the boy is "already acculturated to seeing women as bodies and to seeing those bodies as well as their representations [. . .] as things to own."[73] Stein's seemingly offhand repetition of the boy's innocent remark therefore gives way to an acknowledgment of the cultural influence on all modes of viewing art. To borrow Siraganian's terms, Stein here elevates the artwork's relation with the beholder over its relation with the referent:[74] she refuses to say what the picture represents. And with this refusal, she also responds to some of the interrogations of her work, which she allows to reverberate in the stranger's belligerent questioning. Thus at the same time that Stein comments slyly on the representation of women by and for men, she also provides self-conscious commentary on her own work.

What Stein's anecdotes do, in sum, is to mount brash displays of amusement and revel in their own wit. They are "posturing, performative"—small exhibitions that aim to have a grand effect.[75] These parts of *The Autobiography* seem consistent with the way in which queer portraiture, in Hovey's analysis, strives to suspend "plot and character in its expert rhetorical display and stream-of-consciousness emotional and aesthetic digressions, delighting in its own deferrals" and excesses: *The Autobiography* seems to say, 'You want to watch? I'll give you something to watch.'"[76] But even though the text does draw our attention to its dazzling performance, the anecdotes do not quite work in the way that

[73] Caramello, *Biographical Act*, 156.
[74] Siraganian, *Modernism's Other Work*, 27
[75] Hovey, *A Thousand Words*, 11.

Hovey describes. As I think I have made clear, all of the anecdotes serve to build Stein's character, establishing her as a warm, witty, well connected member of Parisian artistic circles. And although *The Autobiography* certainly "plays down psychology and sticks to the surface," refusing to offer any significant access to its characters' interiority in its pursuit of "a phenomenon of social poetics," it doesn't entirely reject the notion of character, either.[77] As Goble puts its, in Stein's "world of cameo appearances […] a traditional poetics of character has given way to one based on speed and scale."[78] We learn a little bit about a lot of people in Stein's Paris—not just Stein and Toklas, but also Matisse, the small son of the janitor, and the casual stranger. In this way, Stein's anecdotes remain in keeping with what Wendy Steiner has identified as a signal feature of the mode: synecdoche. As Steiner writes, "the anecdote is a decidedly individuating device" that works by synecdoche: the "little glimpse" that we have in the anecdote stands for all that matters.[79]

More important, though, is the way in which Stein's anecdotes refuse to suspend plot in their pursuit of self-conscious display. Working by means of synecdoche, the events that occur in the anecdotes that I have discussed do tell us quite a lot about the events that will comprise the rest of the plot of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*: they suggest that the

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[76] Ibid. Georgia Johnston also identifies a textual excess in Stein's work, specifically "an excess of represented self" that she associates with the autobiographical works of other lesbian modernists. See Johnston, *20th-Century Queer Autobiography*, 18.
[77] Breslin, "Problems of Autobiography," 153, and Goble, *Beautiful Circuits*, 102.
[78] Goble, *Beautiful Circuits*, 119.
[79] We might link Steiner's definition of the anecdote with Haselstein's insistence that the point of portraiture is the "identification of psychological traits held to be essential for the represented subject in question." Essential traits are obvious synecdoches for characters, and Stein excels at communicating this kind of information: Frenchmen like bread, painters like to look at their own work, Stein likes to hear stories of her own cleverness. (Haselstein limits her analysis to Stein's freestanding portraits, which she defines as "short and condensed prose texts which do not employ narration and ignore chronological time." Stein obviously departs from this program in *The Autobiography*, where she adds back in both narration and chronological time in order to pursue a new kind of portraiture.) See Steiner, *Exact Resemblance*, 21, and Ulla Haselstein, "Gertrude Stein's Portraits of Matisse and Picasso," *New Literary History* 34 (2004): 730.

rest of the plot will also consist of looking at people looking at pictures or, at one further level of remove, watching Stein's theatre of wit. But if we pause to consider these anecdotes not only in terms of synecdoche, and investigate their integration into the larger narrative, we can discover that they possess a much more complicated narrative status than critics have previously suggested. As I have already noted, Hovey links the self-reflexive language of modernism to "digressions" and "deferrals." And Sidonie Smith specifically suggests that the anecdotes of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* work in this way: calling these moments in the text "the digressive asides, the gossipy anecdotes," Smith contends that digression and gossip offer their own kind of textual pleasure.[80] In her view, we might read the anecdote of the luncheon, for instance, as a digression from the supposedly central story of Toklas's introduction into Stein's world, and as a deferral of any significant description of the paintings in the Steins' atelier. For this reason, Smith claims that "the anecdotal style is repetitious because it always calls for a return to the narrative thread, disruption and return, creating a kind of compelling rhythm that Stein herself understood as erotic."[81] In other words, for both Hovey and Smith, the digressions and deferrals performed by the anecdotes of the self-conscious text can be linked to queer sexuality, and because of their insistence on return, these anecdotes drive the plot towards some final (orgasmic) moment of return to the main narrative thread.

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[80] Sidonie Smith, *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body*, 80, and for other critics's references to *The Autobiography*'s avoidance of chronological progression, see Caramello, *Biographical Act*, 123-24; Johnston, "Narratologies of Pleasure," 594; and Linzie, *The True Story of Alice B. Toklas*, 93.

[81] Sidonie Smith, *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body*, 80. For Smith, this kind of digression and rhythm constitute a feminist resistance to "the stability of one origin and its line of descent," and she echoes the claim by DeKoven that "experimental writing is erotic in its excess," even though DeKoven specifically excludes *The Autobiography* from her consideration of Stein's experimental work. See Sidonie Smith, *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body*, 70, and DeKoven, *A Different Language*, 16.

Indeed, Stein's anecdotes are often concluded with a statement of return. Take, for example, the chapter which contains all three of the anecdotes that I have quoted thus far, which centers on Toklas's first visit to 27 rue de Fleurus and the *vernissage* of the Salon on the following day. Toklas begins by recalling that she was invited for dinner on that Saturday evening in September, 1907, and she remembers that the dinner was cooked by Hélène, which compels her to offer a brief story of Hélène's life (another anecdotal portrait miniature). But then Toklas seems to realize that she has forgotten to tell the story of her own introduction to Stein, and she concludes her discussion of Hélène quickly: "But to come back to 1907" (12). She uses a similar turn of phrase four times in the next two pages, when she offers her first description of the atelier and the dinner that evening. Talking about the furniture in the room, Toklas interrupts herself with "But to return to the pictures" (13). Distracted by an anecdote about the way Stein sits in her chair, she does not actually discuss the paintings and says the same thing again—"But to return to the pictures"—only to find herself on another tangent, this time about gas fixtures, which she concludes by saying, "But this time I am really going to tell about the pictures" (13-14). This move, repeated so often in these pages and frequently throughout the rest of *The Autobiography*, asks that we take notice of it.

But I want to refrain from reading this repeated move as evidence to support Hovey's and Smith's contentions. Their reading presupposes the existence of a singular plot and privileges it, suggesting that such a thread deserves to be considered the main event.[82]

[82] For other readings that suggest that *The Autobiography*'s anecdotes are tangential to some main narrative thread, see Neil Schmitz, "Portrait, Patriarchy, Mythos," 161; Lénárt-Cheng, "Autobiography as Advertisement," 122; and Malcolm, *Two Lives*, 16-17. And for a slightly different reading, which claims that *The Autobiography* both possesses and resists a typically chronological singular narrative thread, see Breslin, "Problems of Autobiography," 149-58, and Neuman, *Problem of Narration*, 23-27.

And in their view, these statements of return would suggest that Toklas's attention to the pictures should be constitute this key part of the narrative, especially since Toklas does eventually tell us that "on all the walls right up to the ceiling were pictures" (13-14). But even when Toklas finally turns to these pictures, she does not actually describe any of them in any detail; instead, she provides us with a list of the names of the painters represented in the Steins' collection, which I have already discussed. For this reason, I want to claim that *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* is so digressive, and its narrative thread is so difficult to identify—or so beside the point—that we cannot regard the anecdotes as mere sideshows. As I have argued, they give us opportunities to marvel at Stein's wit, and this run of performances creates its own kind of narrative: as Matisse says, "there are theatres and theatres," and the real theatre in *The Autobiography* is performed in the anecdotes. Moreover, the anecdotes of *The Autobiography* open up the question of looking at pictures to looking at the people that surround them—at the *vernissage* or in the atelier, at the picture dealer's shop or in the home of the painter. Looking at pictures in this mediated way, Stein makes pictures products of and invitations to narrative, rather than static art objects.

"But to return to the pictures": The Photographs of *The Autobiography*

Perhaps the most obviously mediated approach to a set of pictures in *The Autobiography* comes, as I have hinted, near the beginning, when Toklas attempts to halt her description of the furniture in the atelier and turn to the paintings on its walls but cannot quite make the leap:

> [I]n one corner of the room was a large table on which were horseshoe nails and pebbles and little pipe cigarette holders which one looked at curiously

> but did not touch, but which turned out later to be accumulations from the pockets of Picasso and Gertrude Stein. But to return to the pictures. The pictures were so strange that one quite instinctively looked at anything rather than at them just at first. I have refreshed my memory by looking at some snap shots taken inside the atelier at that time. The chairs in the room were also all italian renaissance . . . (13)

Toklas seems to offer a quiet explanation here for the anecdotal mode of *The Autobiography*: although it is a story of "an art movement of which the outside world at that time knew nothing" (33), the pictures made by this art movement are so strange that one would rather look elsewhere first, at something easier on the eyes. For this reason, *The Autobiography*'s discussion of pictures always manages to turn to people instead, as we have seen in our exploration of the anecdotes of the lunch, the *vernissage*, and the nude. We might say, then, that Toklas states the narrative principle of *The Autobiography* here: pictures direct the story away from themselves and toward related subjects, like the lives of their creators. In this way, the strangeness of these works creates the opportunity for portraiture, for the kinds of narrative picturing that Stein achieves with the three formal devices I have mentioned—the proper name, the witticism, and the anecdote.

But if we push a bit harder on Toklas's explanation, we find that this particular redirection leads us not to people but rather to another set of pictures: "The pictures were so strange that one quite instinctively looked at anything rather than at them just at first. I have refreshed my memory by looking at some snap shots." Toklas cannot quite remember the pictures as they were on the day in 1907 when she first visited the atelier, and so she has consulted some photographs in order to remind herself. That is, Toklas redirects our attention from the pictures she is supposedly about to describe to the photographs interleaved with the text of *The Autobiography*, which allows us to "return to the pictures"

immediately, without waiting for Toklas's narration to catch up.[83] Or, given that the table of contents in the first edition of *The Autobiography* (as well as in all other editions that include the photographs) is followed by a list of illustrations, we may have already returned to the pictures by the time we read Toklas's comment, making our memory fresher than her own.[84] In these ways, then, Toklas's invocation of the photographs significantly complicates the movement of the narrative, opening up several possible looping trajectories of departure from and return to the text that have no fixed length and allow for the reader to peruse the photographs whenever and for as long as she may wish. In short, the reader's experience of *The Autobiography* may be inter-mediated by photography not just in this moment, but at a variety of moments over its course.

These photographs also gesture toward the time that has elapsed between the moment they represent and the moment in which Toklas refers to them—that is, between the early years of the twentieth century, which are the subject of almost two-thirds of *The Autobiography*, and the moment of the book's writing, in 1932. In this elapsed time, not only has World War I occurred, but the lives of modernist writers and artists have changed in other marked ways as well. Picasso, for example, had joined Georges Braque in the development of Cubism and moved through a key period of working in collage. He had also signed an exclusive contract with Kahnweiler in 1912, which allowed him to move into

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[83] I suggest here that a reader might move from Stein's text to the photographs and back again, meandering between them with no particular haste and in no particular order. In this way, I mean to evoke a less rigid practice of reading and looking than has been suggested by Paul Alkon, the only critic to have written about the photographs as a group. Alkon builds his entire argument upon the premise that the table of illustrations at the beginning of the book necessarily sends the reader off to look at the pictures before he begins to read. That this method may not be the one the reader chooses is, I think, obvious. See Paul K. Alkon, "Visual Rhetoric in 'The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas,'" *Critical Inquiry* 1.4 (1975): 849.

[84] The Library of America edition of Stein's *Writings 1903-1932* reproduces the text of the 1933 Harcourt Brace first edition. For its list of illustrations, see Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas,* in *Gertrude Stein:*

increasingly more comfortable apartments, and ultimately, after his marriage in 1918 to Olga Koklova (a dancer from the Ballet Russes), into a stylish bourgeois residence at 23 rue la Boétie.[85] In 1932, two experiences confirmed Picasso's admission to the realms of fame and material wealth: a full-scale, 236-work retrospective exhibition of his work opened in June at "that venerable symbol of artistic celebrity, the galerie Georges Petit," and a photo-essay about him was published by the Hungarian photographer Brassaï, who could not help but note his luxurious life, complete with dogs, nicely tailored suits, and a chauffeured car.[86] As Picasso's life and work suggest, the photographs that accompany *The Autobiography* create a stitch between two radically different moments in the lives of Stein and her fellow travelers. If, as I have argued, the avant-garde stands in 1907 on the threshhold of its major works, then by 1932 it has entered the room, bought the house, and completely redefined the standards for interior decoration. Toklas's look back at photographs from the early years of the century therefore constitutes a supremely self-conscious gesture of history writing.

And if the turn towards photography is neither simple nor insignificant for the reader's experience and *The Autobiography*'s claim to historicize, then the same proves true for the text's relation to painting. After all, painting—not photography—has been the ostensible subject of *The Autobiography* since its third page, when Toklas recounts her meeting with Michael Stein's wife, who brought from France to California "three little Matisse paintings, the first modern things to cross the Atlantic" (9). Roland Barthes has claimed that photography "has been, and still is, tormented by the ghost of Painting," and while many art historians have disputed his location of the origin of photography in painting, his

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Writings 1903-1932, ed. Catharine R. Stimpson and Harriet Chessman (New York: Library of America, 1998), 657.

identification of this anxiety of the medium points usefully to the tension between photography and painting in Toklas's remark.[87] Her words attribute a special status to photography; they imply that photography possesses a more privileged relationship to memory than painting does, such that a group of snapshots can attest to the existence of a collection of paintings. In this way, Toklas's recourse to the photographs draws upon a characteristic of the medium that Barthes identifies as its essence: its dependence on a referent, "the *necessarily* real thing which has been placed before the lens, without which there would be no photograph" and because of which "in Photography [one] can never deny that *the thing has been there*."[88] While I do not want to follow Barthes's insistence that photography always presents a record of the necessarily real and that this quality lies at the heart of the medium—photographers have often experimented with presenting that which has not "been there"—I do want to draw our attention to the way in which Toklas's comment seeks to activate this characteristic of photography, to make it obtain for the photographs in *The Autobiography*.

What Toklas appeals to, in brief, is the indexical quality of these photographs; to some extent, she relies upon them to certify the reality of the text. For instance, we see a photograph of Stein and Toklas in their car with the Red Cross on it,[89] when we read in the chapter about the First World War that they visited the town of Rivesaltes, the birthplace of

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[85] Green, *Art in France*, 73-75.
[86] Ibid., 49, 68-9.
[87] See Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 30-31, and Michael North, *Camera Works: Photography and the Twentieth-Century Word* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 4-8.
[88] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 76 (emphasis original). See also North, *Camera Works*, 25.
[89] "Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas in front of Joffre's birthplace," *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas,* in Stein, *Gertrude Stein: Writings 1903-1932*, 835.

General Joseph Joffre, who was responsible for the Allied victory at the Battle of the Marne in 1914:

> It had a little hospital and we got it extra supplies in honour of Papa Joffre. We had also the little ford car showing the red cross and the A. F. F. W. sign and ourselves photographed in front of the house in the little street where Joffre was born and had this photograph printed and sent to Mrs. Lathrop [the head of the American Fund for the French Wounded]. The postal cards were sent to America and sold for the benefit of the fund. (194)

The interleaved photograph serves to confirm that Stein and Toklas did indeed visit Joffre's birthplace and take a photograph that was used to raise money for the A. F. F. W., and by extension, it authenticates their good will more generally. Much the same kind of reference and authentication is enacted with photographs that depict Gertrude Stein at Johns Hopkins, studying medicine while a skull looks on, or Stein and Toklas surrounded by pigeons in Saint Mark's Square in Venice.

And a similar kind of authentication seems to occur even earlier in *The Autobiography*, when Toklas's story about Stein's purchase of Matisse's painting *La Femme au Chapeau* and her description of Picasso's long process of painting Stein's portrait are followed quickly by a photograph that shows them hanging together on the wall of the atelier. The picture points us to their coexistence with its caption, "Room with Gas (Femme au chapeau and Picasso Portrait)," and provides specific information about their positions in relation to other paintings at the time that the photograph was taken.[90] We see the portrait of Stein in the upper left corner of the photograph, with the Matisse directly below it, and at least seven other paintings appear on the same wall.[91] In Barthes's view, this photograph tells us that the

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[90] "Room with Gas (Femme au chapeau and Picasso Portrait)," *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas,* in Stein, *Gertrude Stein: Writings 1903-1932*, 707.

[91] Alkon argues that the positioning of the Matisse in the lower left corner and its representation in black-and-white necessarily "domesticates it," rendering it and the work of Stein with which it is compared completely

paintings have been there, and this kind of visual certification proves important in *The Autobiography* not just because the photographs tell us that certain pictures were in certain places in 1907 but also because they seem to fill in the information that Stein's proper names, witticisms, and anecdotes do not allow room for. *The Autobiography* contains sixteen photographs, and seven—nearly half—are photographs of paintings in one way or another: these photographs can corroborate Stein's stories and therefore shore up its claims to "faithful mimesis" against those who—like Jolas, Matisse, and others—might question it.[92] Or to put it a bit differently, the photographs can reinforce the truth-claims of *The Autobiography* as autobiography, a genre that conventionally depends on reference and faithful accounts.[93]

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unthreatening. And in a related vein, Caramello argues that the photograph also executes a comparison between the two portraits "as similar masculine appropriations of the female model," and if we bear in mind the constant association of Toklas with hats, then it also encodes a "representations of Toklas, herself, and their lesbianism." See Alkon, "Visual Rhetoric," 859-60, and Caramello, *Biographical Act*, 163-64.

[92] Paul Alkon reads the first three photographs of paintings in precisely this way, as "a corrective" to Stein's otherwise silly narrative of "visitors and parties," and while I strongly disagree with his implication here that the superficiality of *The Autobiography*'s text is an unimportant red herring, his identification of the strangeness of "the absence of people" in these three photographs is certainly worth noting. See Alkon, "Visual Rhetoric," 857.

And while Michael North has helpfully discussed the long assocation of photography with mimesis and indexicality, he also argues quite persuasively that the capacity of the photograph to represent details typically invisible to the human eye made the photograph "as much as a cabinet of wonders as a representation of the real," and this "hyperreality" allowed modern writers to see photography as "the first significant break in the façade thrown up by the senses" and as "an ally in their attempt to see the world anew and to represent it in different terms." Caramello makes much the same point in reference to the snapshots to which Toklas refers (although he does not connect these to the photographs in *The Autobiography*), which are "recorded observations of constructed representations of previously mediated observations." See North, *Camera Works*, 3, 25-26, and Caramello, *Biographical Act*, 144-45.

[93] Many critics have argued that *The Autobiography* manages this deftly with its very first photograph. This frontispiece photograph by Man Ray places Alice Toklas in the doorway, looking on as Stein sits at her desk, writing. In this way, the photograph rightly positions Stein in the place of the writer, revealing her authorship in visual terms long before the narration does and simultaneously insisting that the subject of this autobiography is the joint life of the two women. For readings of this type, see Breslin, "Problems of Autobiography," 151-2; Caramello, *Biographical Act*, 165; Gilmore, "Lesbian Autobiography," 67; Gygax, *Gender and Genre*, 67; Herrmann, *Queering the Moderns*, 99; Linzie, *True Story*, 58; Neuman, *Problem of Narration*, 15-16; Schmitz, *Of Huck and Alice*, 205-6; Sidonie Smith, *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body*, 66; Juliana Spahr, *Everybody's Autonomy: Connective Reading and Collective Identity* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2001), 35.

And while I want to maintain our sense that Toklas's narration seeks to activate this characteristic of photography, I also want to draw out another implication of her initial reference to them, which significantly complicates our understanding of the kind of indexicality they might possess. If we choose to think of the photographic illustrations that accompany the narrative as identical to the snapshots that Toklas mentions, then we might say that our perusal of these pictures puts us in Toklas's position and pushes us outside of the text towards intertextuality or intermediality. And if we read or look as Toklas does in this way, we might also find ourselves mimicking her intimate, non-hierarchical relationship to the text, which Georgia Johnston argues is desirable.[94] Curiously, however, Toklas's intimate relationship to the text is not one marked by knowledge: Toklas admits that she, like most visitors to 27 rue de Fleurus, avoided looking directly at the pictures—"one quite instinctively looked at anything rather than at them just at first"—and critics have often classified Toklas's method of looking as naive, or somehow "suspect."[95] Leaving aside critics' frequent condescension towards Toklas, we can see how her reference to the photographs dramatizes a particular epistemological problem of *The Autobiography* that is also part of how its proper names, witticisms, and anecdotes function. Toklas has once (sort of) known these paintings, forgotten them, and recalled them: she knows them, but she doesn't know them well. And this fluctuation also characterizes Stein's rapid-fire lists of names, witticisms, and anecdotes, with their "abbreviated gestures of familiarity and recognition."[96]

For this reason, it proves difficult to read the photographs in *The Autobiography* as the ultimate reference, framed as they are by a narrator with an incomplete memory and a

[94] See Johnston, "Narratologies of Pleasure," 597-600.
[95] Johnston, "Narratologies of Pleasure," 594. See also Bridgman, *Gertrude Stein in Pieces*, 221.

passing, superficial knowledge of painting. (I want to emphasize that this is how Stein deploys Toklas as a narrator, not how Toklas as a historical person engaged with either painting or photography.) What photography comes to stand for in *The Autobiography*, then, is something quite apart from its "mimetic function": it operates instead as what Judith Brown has called "a modern and almost magical blending of word and image that introduces the potential for new expressive form."[97] And the new expressive form that *The Autobiography*'s photographs—particularly those that, like "Room with Gas," or "Room with Bonheur de Vivre and Cézanne,"[98] picture the walls of Stein's home—most evoke is collage. In fact, Stein's photographs of paintings hung "on all the walls right up to the ceiling" (13) resemble similar photographs that Picasso made of "his paintings and sketches, sometimes in grand compositions stretched out across a full wall."[99] Stein saw these photographs and mentions them in "Picasso" (1938), and these combinations hint, Michael North argues, "that photography had some basic affinity with assemblage, and that it helped Picasso develop the essentially critical visual sense that shifted and juxtaposed elements, sometimes from very different representational media, in the same space," exactly as Picasso did in his *papiers collés*.[100]

If, as North contends, a composition of paintings and drawings (and wine glasses and small sculptures and oil lamps and Italian Renaissance chairs, all of which we find in the

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[96] Goble, *Beautiful Circuits*, 97.
[97] Judith Brown, *Glamour in Six Dimensions: Modernism and the Radiance of Form* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 11.
[98] "Room with Bonheur de Vivre and Cézanne," *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas,* in Stein, *Gertrude Stein: Writings 1903-1932*, 701.
[99] North, *Camera Works*, 18. For the photographs, see Pablo Picasso, *Wall Arrangement of Papiers Collés in the boulevard Raspail Studio* (Nos. 1, 3), gelatin silver prints, 1912 (private collection), in Anne Baldassari, Picasso and Photography: The Dark Mirror, translated by Deke Dusinberre (Houston, TX: Museum of Fine Arts, 1997).
[100] Siraganian, *Modernism's Other Work,* 40-41, and North, *Camera Works*, 18.

photographs in *The Autobiography*) suggests that photography possesses some important relation to assemblage and collage for Picasso, then we might well conclude the same for Stein, who juxtaposes several different kinds of narrative pictures throughout *The Autobiography*, as I have demonstrated. In this way, then, the first three photographs of paintings ultimately point us back to *The Autobiography* itself and to its collage-like collection of names, witticisms, and anecdotes. (This comparison becomes even more compelling if we follow North's argument one step further. He notes, following Christine Poggi, that the use of prefabricated materials in the *papiers collés* "drastically destabilizes accepted notions of individual creativity,"[101] a destabilization that Stein also prompts with her use of a colloquial voice and the seemingly superficial forms of the anecdote, the witticism, and the name in *The Autobiography*. Both kinds of work seem to emphasize selection over creation.)

It is important to note, however, that the final three photographic illustrations in *The Autobiography* function a bit differently. These photographs present reproductions of Juan Gris's painting *A Transatlantic* and two untitled paintings by Francis Rose, one of Bilignin and one of Alice Toklas, and they reproduce these paintings so that they fill the frame of the illustration and are ungrounded by a particular context or setting. The reproduction of Juan Gris's *A Transatlantic* does seem to possess a frame, or at least black borders to the left and right sides, but neither its title nor its subject matter are mentioned in the text.[102] Paul Alkon boldly claims that the ship's lack of direction and its empty decks are meant to evoke the war, but this need not be the case.[103] He also suggests that the title may refer to Gertrude Stein herself, as the ultimate transatlantic traveler of *The Autobiography*, and he links this

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[101] North, *Camera Works*, 18.

apparent use of a symbol to represent Stein to the portrait of Toklas by Francis Rose: both photographs suggest "a final transformation, within the *Autobiography*, of both Gertrude and Alice into works of art."[104] Yet I want, in keeping with the larger argument of this chapter, to suggest that these photographs of paintings actually encourage us to do what *The Autobiography* has done all along: to look at people looking at pictures in ways that blur the distinctions between them without insisting on the primary status of one or the other.

Yet regardless of the particular readings we have of the individual photographs, I want to suggest that the key feature of these final three is their lack of context: separated from the walls of the atelier or the space of the studio, these works can meet us wherever we are. In this way, they demonstrate one feature of photographic reproduction to which Walter Benjamin devoted significant attention: "technical reproduction can put the copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself. Above all, it enables the original to meet the beholder halfway, be it in the form of a photograph or a phonograph record."[105] Benjamin's continuation of this line of thought is, by now, quite familiar: the artwork possesses an aura, which we might define "as the unique phenomenon of a distance," and in the contemporary world, in which "the masses" want "to bring things 'closer' spatially and humanly" by means of mechanical reproduction and dissemination, this aura is destroyed.[106] To translate this distinction into the terms of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, we might say that the pictures which Alice Toklas encounters on the walls of the atelier, which are "so strange" that they generate feelings of "uneasiness" and confusion (13-

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[102] "A Transatlantic, painting by Juan Gris," *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas,* in Stein, *Gertrude Stein: Writings 1903-1932*, 867.
[103] Alkon, "Visual Rhetoric," 874.
[104] Ibid., 876, 880.
[105] Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 220-21.

15), are pictures in full possession of their auras, whereas the photographic reproductions of the paintings by Juan Gris and Francis Rose are not.[107] We might conclude, moreover, that Stein's brief, broad-brushstroke descriptions of the most important paintings in her collection, which we cannot even see in any detail in the photographs—her portrait by Picasso, Matisse's *La Femme au Chapeau* and *Bonheur de vivre*, and some key Cézanne works—preserve their auras as properties of the original works, while the illustrations of the other paintings rob them of their auras. These aura-less paintings are then sent out into the world of the market to do the business of reinforcing Stein's celebrity, which *The Autobiography* also mechanically produces as an inauthentic image, or as a mere name.[108]

As tempting as it is to pursue this Benjaminian distinction further, I want to pause here for a moment to suggest that there can be no meaningful assignment of the label of "the original" to any part of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. Stein's work, in both its written and its photographic parts, destabilizes the very notion that any authentic, "original" version of something or someone might exist. The photographs in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* refer us simultaneously to paintings, to painting *per se*, to other photographs, and to the text of *The Autobiography* itself, and none of these references can finally trump the rest. The point is not that looking at these photographs puts us in Toklas's place, which provides us with some originary or particularly intimate relation to the text. And neither is it that these

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[106] Ibid., 222-23.
[107] Siraganian offers an altogether different reading of Stein and Benjamin's distinct understandings of aura, and she argues that, "in Benjamin's terms," for Stein, art without art cannot be art, modern or ancient. For Benjamin, in contrast, art's currently lack of aura is simply the inescapable condition of modernity. See Siraganian, *Modernism's Other Work*, 45-49.
[108] Juliana Spahr argues that this is precisely the case as Stein "becomes a 'name' in the sense of product with the publication of *The Autobiography*," and Herrmann echoes this point, claiming that "the unreality of America is about the production of images, the reproduction of oneself, and the market value of that image." See Spahr, *Everybody's Autonomy*, 40, and Herrmann, *Queering the Moderns*, 110.

pictures, with their Barthesian necessarily real referents, authenticate the truth-claims of *The Autobiography* and ratify its realist project, its attempt to write the lives of two women.

Instead, Stein's photographs—of people, of paintings with and without their frames, and even of a page of her own book—suggest a heightened self-consciousness about the question of originality itself. When at the end of *The Autobiography* Toklas declares that Stein has written her autobiography and "this is it," she points to all the distinct copies of the book we may hold in our hands, a singular work created in multiple, marketable form from the beginning (272). And when we see a photograph of the first page of her manuscript alongside this statement,[109] Stein plays even more explicitly with this supposedly "deictic gesture": she acknowledges that there can be no original text.[110] And since the photograph of the first page "directs us back to the beginning of the book," the illustration also manages, as Goble points out, to turn "Joseph Frank's famous aesthetic of 'spatial form'—in which modernist literature aspires to 'rival the spatial apprehension of the plastic arts in a moment of time'—into a kind of joke."[111] Moreover, because this photograph that exists in the company of other photographs, half of which show us paintings, we cannot help but hear "this is it" as a declaration not only mediated by the voice of Alice Toklas but also *inter-mediated* by the relationships between literature, painting, and photography. Paradoxically, Stein proclaims her self-reflexivity in mixed-media terms. Her final announcement pushes us beyond ekphrasis, beyond the mere re-creation of a visual artwork in language, and *The Autobiography*'s inter-mediation shows us just how interdependent, how imbricated literature and visual media can be. By the end, its listed names and witty remarks, its anecdotes and

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[109] "First page of manuscript of this book," *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas,* in Stein, *Gertrude Stein: Writings 1903-1932*, 911.

photographs—and above all, its multiplicity of media—give us a whole story of modernism, right in front us, exactly as Stein has promised.

[110] Goble, *Beautiful Circuits*, 107.
[111] Ibid., 106.

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