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The Metro of Modernity:
Queer Women's Poetics

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

by

Kayleigh C. Quarterman

June 2022

Dissertation Committee:
	Prof. Steven Gould Axelrod, Chairperson
	Prof. Jennifer Doyle
	Prof. David Lloyd

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2022

The Dissertation of Kayleigh C. Quarterman is approved:

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Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

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For all the brilliant, creative women who have ever had their work dismissed, appropriated, or buried. History is starting to take notice.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Metro of Modernity:
Queer Women's Poetics

by

Kayleigh C. Quarterman

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in English
University of California, Riverside, June 2022
Prof. Steven Gould Axelrod, Chairperson

Modernism has traditionally been viewed as the zenith of White male genius, even though the forms that have marked the period's innovation were largely created by women, and especially queer women and queer women of color. Examining poetry in particular provides a unique opportunity to understand the fluidity of the modernist period not only in regards to its kaleidoscopic forms and innovations but also in relation to its burgeoning alternate sexualities and gender expressions in art and literature. This dissertation is a restorative project that refocuses a handful of queer modernist women poets toward the center of a canon that has historically left them on the margins due to their gender, sexuality, race, and/or because their work has been considered too vulgar or eccentric. H.D., Angelina Weld Grimké, Djuna Barnes, and Hope Mirrlees are part of what I call the "metro of modernity," which is a mode of alternative modernist production that emphasizes women's artistic and creative labor rather than their biological function. I

argue that “metro,” a compounded word denoting the city, the subway, poetic verse, and etymologically the womb or mother, is the mode through which these queer poets navigate and create modernity.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

(?)	Unsure of the preceding word (i.e., cannot read the handwriting).
BC	Briggs, Julia. “Commentary on *Paris*.” *Hope Mirrlees: Collected Poems*, edited by Sandeep Parmar. Fyfield Books, 2011, pp. 113-127.
BH	Briggs, Julia. “Hope Mirrlees and Continental Modernism,” *Gender in Modernism : New Geographies, Complex Intersections*, edited by Bonnie Kime Scott, University of Illinois Press, 2007, pp. 261-270.
BM	Briggs, Julia. “‘Modernism’s Lost Hope’: Virginia Woolf, Hope Mirrlees and the printing of *Paris* -- The search for form.” *Reading Virginia Woolf*. Edinburgh University Press, 2006, pp. 80-95.
CP	Mirrlees, Hope. *Hope Mirrlees: Collected Poems*, ed. Sandeep Parmar, Fyfield Books, 2011.
DBP/C	Djuna Barnes Papers, Correspondence, University of Maryland’s Special Collections.
DBP/F	Djuna Barnes Papers, Family and Personal Papers, University of Maryland’s Special Collections.
DBP/P	Djuna Barnes Papers, Photographs, University of Maryland’s Special Collections.
DBP/W	Djuna Barnes Papers, Writings, University of Maryland’s Special Collections.
HAD	Honey, Maureen. *Aphrodite’s Daughters: Three Modernist Poets of the Harlem Renaissance*. Rutgers UP, 2016, *ProQuest:* www.ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ucr/detail.action?pq-origsite=primo&docID=4620082.
HMP	Hope Mirrlees Papers. Newnham College Archives, Cambridge.

HSM	Honey, Maureen. "'All the Loving Words I never Dared to Speak': Angelina Weld Grimké's Sapphic Modernism." *A Companion to the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. Cherene Sherrard-Johnson, Wiley, 2015, pp. 81-101, doi: 10.1002/9781118494110.
L2	Woolf, Virginia. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*: vol. 2, 1912-1922. Edited by Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann, Houghton Mifflin, 1978.
L3	Woolf, Virginia. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*: vol. 3, 1923-1928. Edited by Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann, Houghton Mifflin, 1978.
RW	*The Book of Repulsive Women*, Djuna Barnes, Bruno Chap Books, 1915.
RWOP	*Djuna Barnes: The Book of Repulsive Women and Other Poems*, edited by Rebecca Loncraine, Routledge, 2003.

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Introduction

“Cosmic Reproductivity”: Modernist (m)Otherhood

“Yes!—Yes!—I!—I!—An instrument of reproduction!”

—Angelina Weld Grimké’s “The Closing Door” (1919)

“I harbor [Artist life]–I carry it around–Djuna–like [an] embryo in [the] womb–and as such it grows! It grow[s] by law of natural necessity–through air I am in–if I am not operated! It will swallow me–it will–at end! When!? Djuna–is this–my cancer? Djuna–have I spiritual cancer of [the] womb because I am [an] artist [who has] only had mindchildren–as my mother perished from physical disease–is–suicide–hence–my natural conclusion–or–insanity–?”

—Letter from Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven to Djuna Barnes (1924)

For decades, literary scholars have agreed upon which authors and texts fit under the rubric of modernism for their innovation and difficulty, such as T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* or James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. More recently, significant work has been done to illuminate women’s contributions to modernism, though Virginia Woolf and Gertrude Stein are still often considered the predominant torch carriers of feminist modernism while many other female artists remain on the periphery, as Erica Gene Delsandro agrees in the recent *Women Making Modernism*. The inclusion of Woolf and Stein in the canon is not necessarily a cause for celebration, however, as it merely reinforces the limitations of canon formation as a history of exclusion and hierarchy. Having such a limited scope to the canon not only leaves scholars with an incomplete picture of the literary movement, but it is also a missed opportunity to more accurately represent a heterogeneous period that has largely been portrayed homogeneously, as the zenith of (mostly straight) White male genius.

Thus, this project aims to widen the scope of modernist poetics by examining H.D., Angelina Weld Grimké, Djuna Barnes, and Hope Mirrlees: a handful of marginal queer women who are part of what I call the "metro of modernity," which is a mode of modernist production that disrupts gendered modalities to recast female subjectivity, desire, and creation. Ultimately, I suggest that "metro," a compounded word denoting the city, the subway, poetic verse, and etymologically the womb or mother (borrowing from Ancient Greek), is the mode through which these queer poets navigate and create modernity. This dissertation is not an exhaustive list of the metro of modernity, but I have chosen to focus on these four poets in particular due to the disregard of their pioneering early work—as is the case with H.D. and Djuna Barnes—or due to the near absence of them entirely from the modernist canon, as we see in Angelina Weld Grimké and Hope Mirrlees. Additionally, I have chosen to focus on these poets' work from the nineteen-teens or even earlier[1] to combat the popular view that modernism reached its zenith in 1922,[2] the year *Ulysses*, *Jacob's Room*,[3] and *The Waste Land* were published. By highlighting the innovations and key markers of modernism in work that predates Joyce, Woolf, and Eliot, I suggest that we must view modernism through a less myopic lens. Moreover, my hope is that, in identifying the metro of modernity as a space for reproductive and creative alterity, other scholars might recognize additional modernists who should be refocused toward the center.

---

[1] As I discuss in more depth in Chapter Two, the only chronological caveat here is that Grimké's work is difficult to date, though we do have evidence that her work was explicitly modernist in early poems such as "El Beso," which was published in 1909.

[2] Multiple articles and books on modernism have been devoted to this idea, such as Michael North's *Reading 1922: A Return to the Scene of the Modern* (2001), Kevin Jackson's *Constellation of Genius: 1922: Modernism Year One* (2013) or Michael Levinson's "1922: The *Annus Mirabilis* of Literary Modernism" (2018).

[3] In fact, Mirrlees's *Paris*, which was published by Woolf's Hogarth Press, may have helped inspire Woolf's use of white space in *Jacob's Room*, which I discuss in further detail in Chapter Four.

This dissertation project will examine the tension and fissure between how the modernist canon was constituted and the prejudiced responses that resulted from critiques of marginalized poets' personal identity and their straying away from certain formal modernist dictums. In my primary research, I found that queer female poets in particular were often subject to criticisms unshared by their straight male contemporaries; such criticisms were usually aimed at their personal lives rather than their work, and their formal innovations were typically minimized as infantile nonsense, indecency, or madness. Queer women in particular were considered an affront to the social order and gendered expectations of the time, and being in a position of intellectual authority was not only uncommon but also potentially threatening to the domestic sphere. In *The Gender of Modernity*, Rita Felski suggests that modernist aesthetics were explicitly masculinist, as evidenced by key figures such as the dandy or the flâneur, gendered male. By contrast, women, relegated to domestic life, were viewed to be atemporal, as existing outside history and the fragmentation of modern urban life (16). As my dissertation project will suggest, examining queer women poets provides a unique opportunity to understand the fluidity of the modernist period in regards to poetic form and sexuality and gender expression.

Poetry is an ideal medium for navigating the interstices between consciousness and the unconscious and the manners in which modernists espoused their articulatory experiments because poetry is not bound by narrative structure. The "stream" in stream-of-consciousness, a key modernist literary technique, is significant for its stress on movement and fluidity, and it is no coincidence that various modernist poems are situated around a literal stream, as, for example, in the case of Hope Mirrlees's *Paris* (Chapter Four), which sees the flâneuse traversing the river Seine as both a marker of her movement throughout the city and as a metaphor for her emerging consciousness and identity. Furthermore, stream-of-consciousness, coined by philosopher-psychologist William James in 1892, parallels with new understandings of sexuality, especially considering that "homosexuality" also entered into the lexicon that same year.

The modernist period's conflation of gender and sexuality signaled the binate modalities in relationships, roles, and/or clichés; however, modernist textual forms—much like representations of gender—are more fluid and performative than prescriptive. Since gender and sexual fluidity is so prominent in modernist poetry, it should be considered a specific poetic marker of the cultural struggle between poets and the social sciences and the tensions between and among individuality and conformity in early twentieth-century culture. This tension is also not specific to female poets, for Wilfred Owen, as one example, expressed his criticisms of the patriarchal myth of the honor in a man dying for his country in “Dulce Et Decorum Est.” Thus, the individual soldier is subsumed (and arguably erased) under a collective cause, mirroring Eliot’s Prufrock, who highlights the divide between the collective and the individuals who refuse to conform. Even in *The Waste Land*, Eliot reinscribes the gender and sexuality of classical mythic figures so as to deconstruct the notion of virile masculinity (e.g., by including the impotent Fisher King, the intersex Tiresias, etc. throughout the poem, who are all emasculative in some way). In a similar vein, H.D. re-narrativizes classical myths via the use of the “I” throughout her poetry, an “I” that asserts her selfhood and houses the agency to tell her own story (expanded upon in Chapter One).

Many queer/female modernist poets such as Marianne Moore, Amy Lowell, Edith Sitwell, Mina Loy, and Gertrude Stein also disrupt masculinist language. For example, in *Tender Buttons*, Gertrude Stein’s emphasis on the noun rather than the verb signals her movement away from avant-garde aesthetics (e.g., Futurism, Vorticism, or Dada) that emphasize mechanical progress, opting instead for a repetitive poetics that demands a slower pace to allow for contemplation. Stein’s emphasis on the noun rather than the verb —which is pronounced in alternative avant-garde forms as a poetic vehicle that combats the fin de siècle’s investment in subjectivity—thus aligns with her aesthetics of repetition. Interestingly, too, while other female modernist poets such as H.D., Marianne Moore, and Mina Loy attempt a poetics that liberates the female speaker from the confines of the domestic sphere, *Tender Buttons* is entirely set and dependent upon domestic spaces and motifs so as to subvert Freudian and Futurist sexual difference and masculinist aesthetics.

That is, Stein is able to rewrite object-love via her linguistic strategy (i.e., her eroticizing of objects throughout *Tender Buttons*), which Elizabeth A. Frost coins "lesbian fetishism" (4), "fetishism" being defined as a kind of "double consciousness" of both object and symbol that opposes Freudian (male) fetishism. Stein attempts to destabilize the notion that women are "pure" (i.e., non-sexual beings) and that sexual desire is strictly a masculine/male characteristic.

What is more, the Futurist/Vorticist investment in machines was a way to combat the need for female reproduction, which Stein eschews in poems like "Marry Nettie" by emphasizing the importance of love and relationships rather than glorifying militarism and toxic masculinity. Stein's innovation, too, is laudable when considering the fact that, during a period that Pound would later declare "Make it New!" the dictum, she truly did create her own unique form by playing with and challenging language and modes of signification, and by rejecting the more popular avant-gardist standards for her own poetic idiom that relishes words for their materiality, for both their meaning and feeling. Stein's innovative form (and, in particular, her parodic revision of avant-garde masculinist form) empowers women and their artistry, disrupts gender difference, and asserts female/lesbian pleasure and desire—therefore rejecting the normalized notion of being an object of male desire.

This project and the title of this introduction were first inspired by Mina Loy's 1914 poem "Parturition," which signals literal and figurative maternal poetic production, suggesting that modernity is actually a feminine space of creation. "Parturition" acts as a kind of segue between a literal maternal production and a figurative one. Loy's ties to Decadence in her early modernist work is a more direct reaction and resistance to Victorian bourgeois life, particularly regarding women's rights and sexual expression. In her "Feminist Manifesto" (a reaction to the Futurist and Vorticist manifestos), she divorces a woman's identity from the expectation of her chastity, while also embracing maternity and destigmatizing a woman's sexual pleasure and desire, as she similarly does in "Parturition":

> A leap with nature
> Into the essence
> Of unpredicted Maternity
> Against my thigh
> Tough of infinitesimal motion
> Scarcely perceptible
> Undulation
> Warmth   moisture
> Stir of incipient life
> Precipitating into me
>
> The contents of the universe
> Mother I am
> Identical
> With infinite Maternity
>   Indivisible
>   Acutely
>   I am absorbed
>   Into
> The was—is—ever—shall—be
> Of cosmic reproductivity [....] (6-7)

For Loy, femininity is intertwined with modernity, which aligns with the subjective experience of desire and creation. Loy's detached speaker in "Parturition" allows for her to move freely, beyond prescribed spaces. Furthermore, its abstract and defamiliarizing form also performs refracted notions of womanhood that defy the rhythms of social mores and expectations as a direct response to the masculinist aesthetics of the Italian Futurists that dictated female immobility and restriction. Not only is the sexual gratification that precedes pregnancy destigmatized by describing it as "incipient life" that "precipitates" into "the contents of the universe," but as such Loy represents motherhood as an empowering, kind of cosmic experience. Motherhood holds all the "contents of the universe," as it is more powerful than machination, connecting to Felski's assertion that "the modern is predicated on the absence of the Other and the erasure of feminine agency and desire" (17). In this way, various authors, such as Loy and Stein, subvert masculinist language just by portraying female desire and showing that sexual gratification is not inherently a male pursuit.

Similarly, overlooked artists such as Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven's sexually explicit poems and phallic readymades of the nineteen-teens and -twenties mark the city as a site of consumption, as a space for female pleasure and their pursuit of sexual gratification outside of a masculinist aesthetic. Readymades such as *Cathedral* (1918) and *Limbswish* (1917-1918) serve as examples of gendered disruption or what Irene Gammel and Suzanne Zelazo call "degender[ing] the phallus" (42):

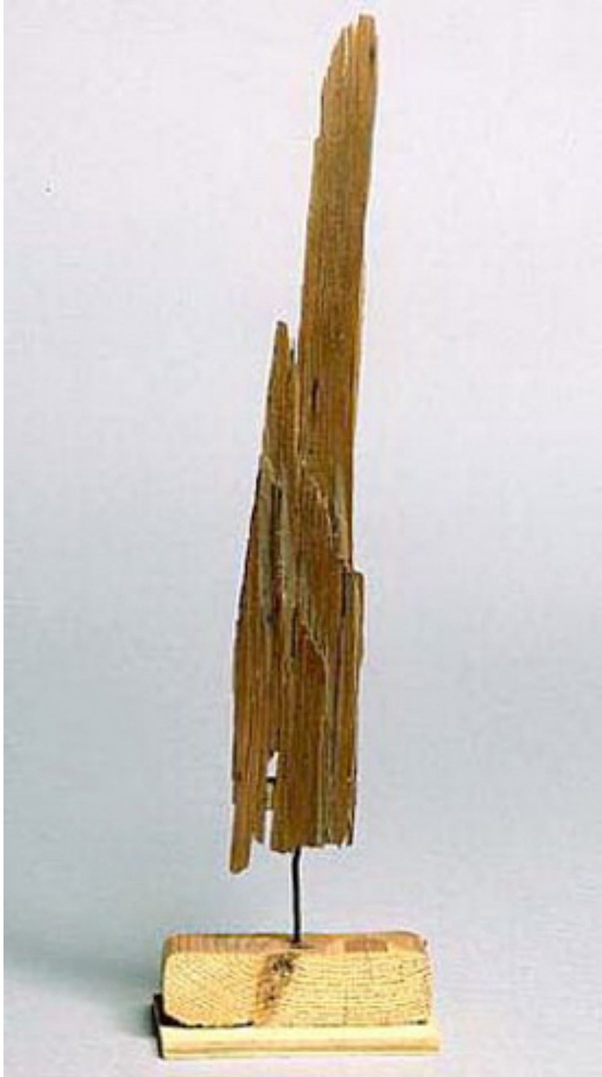

Figure 1.1: *Cathedral*, wood fragment, Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, 1918.

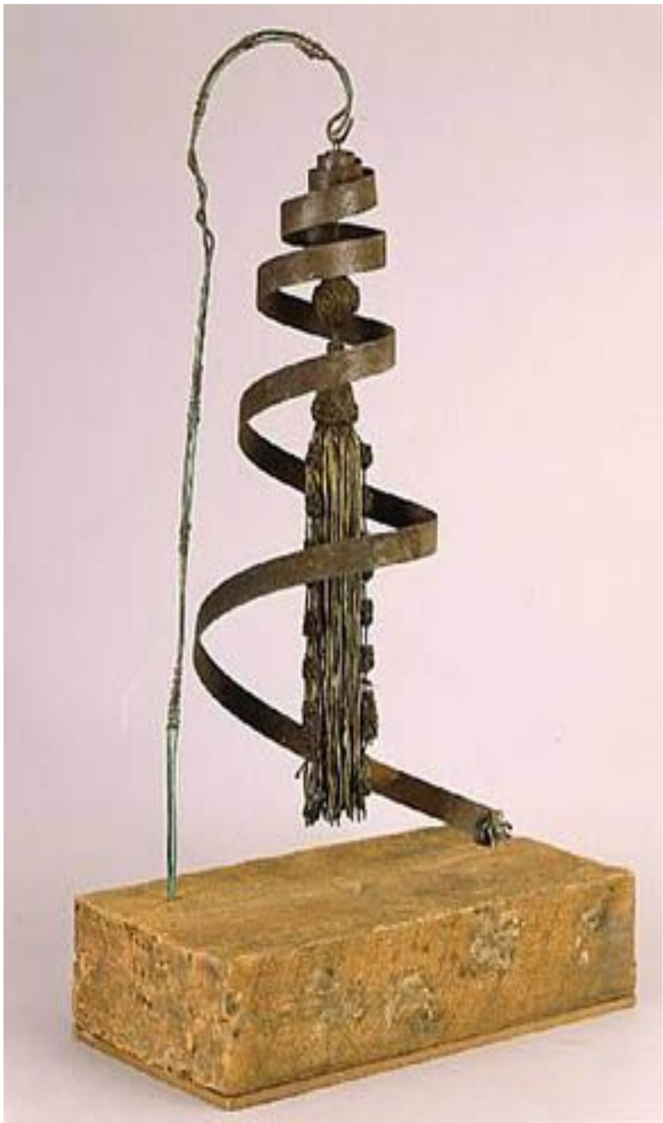

Figure 1.2: *Limbswish*, metal spring, curtain tassel, and wire mounted on wood block, Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, 1917-1918.

In such representations, the phallus is severed from its associations with virility and instead becomes an object of female pleasure, thus disrupting the notion that women are objects of male desire, or that sexual gratification is gender specific. Furthermore, poems such as "Subjoyride" and "Appalling Heart" represent the speaker's movement through the city punctuated by advertisements, sights, sounds, and other metropolitan ephemera—

similar to Mirrlees's flâneuse in Chapter Four. As Amelia Jones suggests in *Irrational Modernism*, von Freytag-Loringhoven's flânerie in urban space disrupts not only mainstream modern culture but also a masculinist avant-garde.

Although largely minimized or rendered invisible, queer women's contributions to modernism were so significant that some of the literary movements underneath the modernist umbrella might not have even existed without their artistic vision—one of the most noteworthy examples being the onset of Imagism. While Ezra Pound is often lionized as being the founder and innovator behind Imagism, it was only after being struck by H.D.'s poetry in 1912 that he built his whole philosophy and manifesto of the movement. When considering women poets' exclusion from the modernist canon, Michael Kaufmann suggests that the reason may be due to "The modernist aesthetics of impersonality and objectivity" because of how they "correspond neatly to conventional conceptions of masculinity"; what is more, H.D.'s poetry, in particular, complicates a "masculinist aesthetic," for it "not only embodied the early principles of modernist poetry…but actually enabled their formulation in the first place" (59).

As another less known example, I have found that what little Mirrlees scholarship is available tends to be fixated on *Paris* in relation to *The Waste Land* or in trying to uncover her male influences. This same comparison to *The Waste Land* was later applied to Nancy Cunard's little-known book length poem *Parallax* from 1925, in which Cunard satirizes the male poet-hero figure in a post-war world, critiques his short-sighted worldview, and questions the legitimacy of his positioning as a prophet. As such, she demotes the poet-hero/-prophet to poet-fool, thus repositioning our focus toward the possibility of a poetess-hero. While scholars have acknowledged that Mirrlees's and Cunard's modernist contributions are important, their work still largely remains on the periphery of the modernist canon while *The Waste Land* continues to be centralized as *the* premiere example of the modernist long-form poem. As a modernist scholar, I hope to move beyond Eliotian and Poundian dicta as the paramount criteria in modernism's rubric to include the kaleidoscopic contributions in poetic form and fluid sexuality and gender expressions that best represent the heterogeneity of the period.

Performance and representation of sexuality was much more prevalent in poetry written by women during this period due to such ongoing anxieties of masculinity. Poets like Marianne Moore, Amy Lowell, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Lola Ridge, and H.D. championed a poetics that enmeshed aesthetics and gender performance with social change, while female Harlem Renaissance poets such as Gwendolyn Bennett, Helene Johnson, and Angelina Weld Grimké tackled the interstices of race, gender, and sexuality as a way to combat hundreds of years of sexual violence against Black women and assert women's voices within the polyphony of Black pride. Felski asserts that "representations of the modern have repeatedly positioned women in a zone of ahistorical otherness and have thereby sought to minimize their agency, contemporaneity, and humanity" (210). H.D., for example, challenges women's "ahistorical otherness" by recasting female representation and highlighting women's agency and empowerment. By referring to mythic and historical figures, H.D. anchors women's temporal and historical significance.

H.D.'s invoking of ancient Greek landscapes—as both environmental and psychic spaces—not only serves to destabilize the strictures of domesticity impressed upon women but also renders them capable of imagination and complexity. In the same way that H.D.'s environments mimic a liberation from the confines of domesticity, Moore's poetry also elicits a certain "wildness" in the form of her interest in natural history and evolutionary biology. Moore is critical of the notion that mankind can conquer and control nature, seeing it instead as an extension of the spatial restrictions placed upon women regarding their placement within the domestic sphere. Felski suggests that, in being tied to the home and nature, women are considered separate from the fragmentation of modern urban life; the figure of the flâneuse, then, in Hope Mirrlees's *Paris* and Djuna Barnes's *The Book of Repulsive Women*, subverts that separation by garnering female movement in the city and also making sense of the various forms of urban fragmentation as correlated to their own self identification and subjective understanding.

My dissertation will open with a chapter that repositions H.D.'s first poetry collection, which is often overlooked, as a significant modernist text. In *Sea Garden*, H.D. transcends a temporal narrative by resuscitating myths in order to reconstruct and deconstruct female subjectivity, employing female mythic symbols and figures to recast and refocus the conversation toward a more complex and multifaceted female subject. To do this, she engages in and embraces liminal spaces not only to acknowledge female marginality but to also recast the possibility of a restorative female subjective space. By assessing the borderlines between a rural mythos and an urban modernity, she illuminates both an imagined past and an imagined future. In this way, she presents the possibility to write a corrective female narrative for the future, since past mythoi have not been objective records but, rather, imagined narratives. And, in paving a space for a corrective narrative in the future, H.D. is thus able to illustrate transatlantic modernity.

I will examine *Sea Garden*'s various mythological and theological female figures who serve as guides from a mythic to a modern space, so that the movement toward the metropolis by the collection's conclusion acts as a potential space for recasting female subjectivity. "Cities," the last poem of *Sea Garden*, breaks away from the natural landscapes of the preceding poems, where urban women "await great events," "are spread through this earth," and "protect [their] strong race" and "young future strength" (47). The female subject has an ocean of possibilities as she navigates her way past the rural, mythic spaces of the past and towards the modern world, where she can have free movement and can write her own narrative.

My second chapter will focus on Grimké, who was a quiet yet significant figure of the Harlem Renaissance. Between the late 1890s and 1930, Grimké wrote poetry and short fiction and nonfiction that was published in journals, newspapers and magazines, and some anthologies, including Countee Cullen's iconic *Caroling Dusk* (1927). Today, she is probably most known for her famous lynching play *Rachel*, first produced in 1916 and published in 1920. *Rachel* was Grimké's only published book prior to the posthumous publication of her *Selected Works*, an indication of how chronically unavailable her works have been, even during her lifetime; and this 1991 *Selected Works* is currently out of print today, making access to her work that much more difficult. Gauging the composition dates of her unpublished poems is strenuous, so it makes it somewhat challenging to piece together her life and career. Her *Selected Works* contain about one third of her poems, previously published and unpublished, but the bulk of them are housed at Howard University's Moorland-Spingarn Research Center in the Angelina Weld Grimké Collection.

Herron suggests that Grimké's work has long been ignored because of the directness of her romantic or violent content (21). Grimké's vow of celibacy after a failed relationship in 1903 hardened her love poetry, making it less hopeful and whimsical and more conflated with death, such as we see in "Grass Fingers":

> Touch me, touch me,
> Little cool grass fingers,
> ……………………
> Soon I shall be too far beneath you
> For you to reach me [….] (40)

A handful of Grimké's poems also portray racialized violence upon African Americans, which is evident in "Trees," as one example:

> God made them very beautiful, the trees,
> ………………………………………….
> Yet here amid the wistful sound of leaves,
> A black-hued gruesome something swings and swings,
> Laughter it knew and joy in little things
> Till man's hate ended all [....] (109)

Here we see classic modernist defamiliarization in first presenting a tranquil scene of God's creation and leaves rustling in the wind before abruptly shifting to the violent image of a lynched body. While poems like this are undoubtably significant contributions to African American poetry (and American poetry in general), my second chapter will focus on a selection of Grimké's poetry that represents the intersections of racial and queer desire and longing, as well as her worsening depression stemming from her lifelong romantic isolation. Grimké was aware of her sexuality from a young age but stayed closeted, possibly because of her disapproving father, whom she greatly admired. As early as fourteen, she was writing love letters to various female classmates, with one letter even describing Grimké's desire for one of her female classmates to become her "wife" (qtd. in Herron 7).

Although Grimké lived in cities such as Boston, Washington, D.C., and New York throughout her life, her unrequited love poems tend to exist within imaginary rural settings that are set against dusk or dawn, perhaps suggesting that her queer desire must exist within a peripheral or liminal space and time. Such poems reflect what Anna Clark coins "twilight moments," which represent the ambiguity and fluidity of sexual desire that was not yet understood or accepted, with a notable example being "El Beso":

> Twilight—and you,
> Quiet—the stars;
> Snare of the shine of your teeth,
> Your provocative laughter;
> The gloom of your hair;
> Lure of you, eye and lip;
>
> Yearning, yearning,
> Languor, surrender;

Your mouth,
And madness, madness,
Tremulous, breathless, flaming,
The space of a sigh;
Then awakening—remembrance,
Pain, regret—your sobbing;
And again quiet—the stars,
Twilight—and you. (82)

The "twilight moments" present in this poem represent the liminal spaces between kisses or intimate moments, which are punctuated by the staccato delivery via dashes and asyndeton, signaling both a hesitancy to cross heteronormative boundaries but also the subtle pause inherent between two new lovers still unfamiliar with each other. The object of desire's "Pain, regret [and] sobbing" indicate that she is not yet ready to cross that threshold, but there is hope in that, with the coming of dawn, there can be a space for queer love and desire.

Utilizing original archival research from the Djuna Barnes Papers at the University of Maryland's Special Collections, my third chapter will focus on the eight "rhythms" and five illustrations in *The Book of Repulsive Women*, a collection of Barnes's which unfortunately tends to be eclipsed by her later, more famous works like *Nightwood* (1936). Barnes's New York landscape sets the stage for what is considered "repulsive" of women: homosexuality, nudity, disability, prostitution, being a cabaret dancer, and/or being unmarried. Even though critics and even Barnes herself have referred to the collection as "disgusting," I still think it is a significant example of queer women's disruptive poetics that deserves more attention. For instance, the first poem in the collection, “From Fifth Avenue Up,” is often read as representative of childbirth, but I actually read it as also portraying cunnilingus:

> See you sagging down with bulging
> Hair to sip,
> The dappled damp from some vague
> Under lip.
> Your soft saliva, loosed
> With orgy, drip. (13)

By compressing childbirth and sapphic pleasure, Barnes is able to subvert heteronormativity by representing reproduction as repulsive and by offering a coded scene of alternate sexuality that exists outside a masculinist aesthetic. Portraying the women in this collection as repulsive and grotesque undermines the male gaze that limits women to objects of male desire or as mere vessels for their progenitors. Ultimately, Barnes makes space for queer, disabled, or otherwise labeled “disgusting” women through her poetics of repulsion, for such a space exists outside the confines of a masculinist aesthetic.

In my fourth chapter, which also incorporates original archival research from the Hope Mirrlees Papers at Cambridge University’s Newnham College Archives, I will examine Mirrlees’s eponymous flâneuse who saunters through the city of Paris in a psychogeographic poem that transcends time, space, and consciousness. Mirrlees’s flâneuse’s movement is not just figurative but also literal, which is an important distinction that denotes her queerness and movement between spaces in the metropolis, a movement that was typically reserved only for men at the time. The simultaneity of ads and the flâneuse's movement on the Nord-Sud metro line signals her fluidity between and among creative spaces, while the ads that whizz past her on the train perform that movement. As she passes under the Seine, she gains consciousness so that the metro serves as a birth canal that brings her into being.

It is through the flâneuse's lens that we can observe what Megan Beech calls "Sapphic space," which is the intervening in a space that is otherwise heteronormative and masculine (73). Mirrlees's disruptive poetics also align with her desire for a poetics that is marked by simultaneity and multi-modality, which transcend the limitations of the written word to attempt to reveal or portray the entirety of urban experience and the complexities of the self. *Paris* rejects the female body as solely a biological vessel and offers it as a vessel for creative and artistic production. Thus, Mirrlees's project with *Paris* is that it recasts the female subject to transcend the cycle of death and rebirth and become immortal through one's art rather than just through one's biological function.

Overall, this dissertation will examine H.D., Angelina Weld Grimké, Djuna Barnes, and Hope Mirrlees, four queer women poets who have unfortunately remained marginal modernist figures. I will argue that these poets disrupt heteronormativity and gendered modalities in their poetry so as to recast the possibility of a restorative female subjective space, i.e., "the metro of modernity." Starting with H.D. and Grimké, I provide a revisionist imagining of Imagism by examining H.D.'s first poetry collection *Sea Garden* (1916) alongside Grimké's poetry selections from her posthumous *Selected Works*, edited by Carolivia Herron (1991). These works exist on the margins of a sapphic space that is mythical for H.D. and imagined for Grimké but that elicits a natural topography in anticipation of queer urban space. Next, the second part of my dissertation moves from an imagined to a literal cityscape in Barnes's depictions of women traversing New York in her critically ignored *The Book of Repulsive Women* (1915). Then, expanding upon Barnes's representations of the modern woman in the metropolis, I will examine the flâneuse in Mirrlees's virtually unknown long-form poem *Paris* (1920). Ultimately, as my dissertation will suggest, these women's disruptive poetics make space for queer female desire and creation that can exist outside the confines of domestic heteronormativity and beyond the margins of modernist history.

Chapter 1

“Await[ing] the New Beauty of Cities” in H.D.’s *Sea Garden*

The breadth and depth of H.D.’s significance as a modernist poet has only just started to be acknowledged and examined within the last few decades. Up until recently, she was considered only a minor poet in relation to Ezra Pound’s Imagist movement, which was short-lived. Imagism was made famous by Pound, but—as scholars have only just begun to discuss since the 1980s and ‘90s—it may not have existed at all if it were not for H.D.’s poetry. Although this is now starting to change, for too long H.D.’s work was merely a footnote or was considered a minor example of a perceived modernist genius’ theorizing. What is more, past scholarship categorized her as a niche “women’s” writer, as if to say that her canonical placement should be limited to the margins with other female poets of the time period and not within the larger context of poetic modernism. Thankfully, however, there has been a restorative momentum working toward establishing a more complete picture of how Imagism came to be, a picture that recognizes just how essential H.D. was to the movement and, by extension, to modernism as a whole.

In the fall of 1912, Hilda Doolittle’s appellation and Imagism were at once created in a Bloomsbury tea shop when Pound read a handful of her poems for the first time, as she later recalled in *End to Torment: A Memoir of Ezra Pound*:

> “But Dryad [Pound’s nickname for H.D.]”… “this is poetry.” He slashed with a pencil. “Cut this out, shorten this line. ‘Hermes of the Ways’ is a good title. I’ll

> send this to Harriet Monroe of *Poetry*. Have you a copy? Yes? Then we can send this, or I'll type it when I get back. Will this do?" And he scrawled "H. D. Imagiste" at the bottom of the page. (qtd. in Sword 427)

Richard Aldington, one of the other "founders" of Imagism (and H.D.'s soon-to-be husband), corroborated that the birth of the movement was linked specifically to H.D.'s work: "Ezra was so much worked up by these poems of H.D.'s that he removed his pince-nez and informed us that we were Imagists" (qtd. in Carr 490). Pound himself even admitted that Imagism "was invented to launch H.D. and Aldington before either had enough stuff for a volume" (qtd. in Korg 36). As several critics have noted, H.D. may have "felt stamped by Pound's title" of "Imagiste" (Kaufmann 66), but she may not have necessarily taken issue with "H.D.," for she continued to use the appellation for the rest of her life. Several scholars, such as Parker and French, have suggested that "H.D." was her poetic persona, while Hilda Doolittle was who she was in her personal life; further, they indicate that H.D. may have felt it necessary to form a sense of separation between the two because of the ways in which women artists were more harshly criticized than their male counterparts, with more emphasis on their appearance and personal lives rather than their actual work (119).

However, in being a female poet within a male dominated literary climate, H.D. faced a biased predicament throughout her life: her laconic stylization which had inspired Imagism was dismissed for departing from more traditional poetics, yet her later work was then criticized for moving away from that same rejected phanopoeia. But perhaps H.D. was never an Imagiste to begin with, for she never did theorize about her work—she wrote it without explanation, unlike many of the male modernists who composed entire essays and manifestos, which were essentially bravados of their "innovative" work (despite the fact that their work was often heavily—if not entirely—dependent on other cultural/historical traditions). The reasons for her silence regarding being categorized under an Imagist aesthetic have largely been debated among scholars—most suggest that either her indifference or disinterest in the Imagist doctrine was the motivating factor. For Cassandra Laity, H.D.'s silence was due to her being "implicitly barred from the anti-Romantic, gender-biased discourse that characterized the prevailing program for modernism" (30-31). Indeed, I would suggest that H.D.'s exposure to such a "gender-biased discourse" is precisely what sets her poetic project apart from a masculinist modernity.

While interest in H.D.'s oeuvre continues to grow, recent scholarship often gives *Sea Garden*, her first poetry collection, a cursory glance rather than a careful examination. Explicating *Sea Garden* is important not only in establishing H.D.'s place within the modernist canon but also in understanding her poetic intent in particular as it relates to modernity.[1] T.S. Eliot's modernist project, for example, is outlined in his 1923 essay "*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth"; in it, he posits that modernist writers must use what he calls the "mythical method" rather than the traditional "narrative method," arguing that the “mythical method” is “simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history” (123). In this way, Eliot wants modernists to make use of a comparative mythology to transcend the temporal narrative that looks to the past for what has been lost or destroyed in the present. This looking to the past is not nostalgic, however; rather, it is an acceptance of the confusing present that destabilizes poetic authority in exchange for the reader’s participation.

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[1] Some scholars, such as Polina Mackay, agree: "H.D.'s modernist aesthetic, as it is shaped in *Sea Garden* in particular, expands the imagist principles of directness and lack of excess into wide-ranging engagement with literary traditions—from Greek mythology to Sappho's poems and beyond—without ever losing sight of its own modernity, of its own place in time" (58). However, even recent scholarship, such as Will Montgomery's "Ezra Pound, H.D. and Imagism" (2020), suggests that H.D. is not so much an innovator of the short-form line but rather that she develops it better in practice than Pound does in thought (37).

In the same way, H.D.’s utilization of mythos was not a hope to return to the Classical era but was instead a way for her to disguise personal metaphors as artistic expression. However, even though H.D. is employing the “mythical method,” I argue that her *purpose* for doing so houses greater significance than Eliot’s. Eliot aims to transcend a temporal narrative by instigating the “mythical method” for the sake of reimagining literary form as a way to help us understand (or, at least, accept) modernity’s reality of confusion. Laity suggests that Eliot’s masculinist modernity is dependent on being separated from tradition but that H.D. is reconstructing tradition in order to make space for women within modernity (32). Expanding upon this idea, I contend that H.D. is actually *transcending* the temporal narrative by resuscitating myths in order to reconstruct and deconstruct female subjectivity.

In particular, H.D. employs female mythic symbols/figures to recast and refocus the conversation toward a more complex and multifaceted female subject. To do this, she engages in and embraces liminal spaces not only to acknowledge female marginality but also to recast the possibility of a restorative female subjective space. By assessing the borderlines between a rural mythos and an urban modernity, she illuminates both an imagined past and an imagined future. In this way, she presents the possibility to write a corrective female narrative for the future, since past mythoi have not been objective records but, rather, imagined narratives. And, in paving a space for a corrective narrative in the future, H.D. is thus able to illustrate transatlantic modernity, as Celena Kusch argues: "H.D.'s first poetry collection maps a space for modern American authorship in a global context. And it does this by focusing on the ocean that defines the geography of transatlantic modernity" (48). Kusch challenges academe to consider H.D.'s borderline poetics to move beyond gender so as to reach the larger global context of modernity, but I would expand this reading to include H.D.'s recasting of female subjectivity *within* a transatlantic reading. Representing American poetic authority within a global context is essential, yes, but the borderlines must be broadened to include women (and other marginalized individuals, too), for we cannot reach a global understanding of modernity if it is limited to a masculinist aesthetic.

In *Sea Garden*, the sea and its corresponding flowers serve as symbols for various mythological/theological female figures, and these feminine figures are significant due to their role as guides from a mythic to a modern, urban space. *Sea Garden* then concludes with the movement toward the city, which I argue serves as a space for recasting female subjectivity. In this way, *Sea Garden* functions as the bridge between a kind of mythic pastoralism to what I call the "metro of modernity," which is a queer feminine site of productive alterity. This move to the metropolis is necessary in order for queer women to be able to integrate within modernity and not be limited by their rural isolation. While such isolation in the wilderness may have been beneficial and even necessary, especially in divorcing womanhood from the binds of domesticity, maintaining such isolation eventually becomes a prison of sorts.[2] By *Sea Garden*'s conclusion, H.D. recognizes these limitations by looking toward the city as a potential site of artistic resuscitation for modern queer women.

While scholars have often acknowledged the repetitive "sea" poem titles throughout *Sea Garden*, there has been little exploration regarding their sequence and significance. Keeping in mind the context of the Imagist aesthetic and H.D.'s contemporaries like Eliot and Pound who practiced a kind of citational poetics, I read the "sea" poems as having greater underlying significance than perhaps previously considered. To begin, the repetition of the noun "sea" throughout the collection cannot help but be conflated with the verb "see," which establishes not only a directive to the reader to engage in viewing the poetic image H.D. presents but also emphasizes the fact that there is more to be seen than just surface—the ocean, like the female subject, has much greater depths.[3] But the sea also represents the feminine presence of the theological figure of the Virgin Mary, since the name "Mary" could have been derived from *mare*, the

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[2] Compare with Grimké's poetics of rural isolation in the following chapter.

[3] In a similar vein, Mackay maintains that, "In using the sea as the key background, H.D. suggests that the poetic gaze…not only illuminates the subjective nature of seeing but also extends this subjectivity to the entire shot" (58).

Latin word for “sea.” Additionally, the sea also symbolizes Aphrodite/Venus, who is mythologically associated with it, since it is her birthplace. Both Mary and Venus are icons of female fecundity, but the maternal figure in general is often conflated with the ocean for its being symbolic of the earth’s “womb.”

The sea as a maternal figure is just as prevalent as the symbolic currency of the many florae that H.D. employs throughout *Sea Garden*. H.D. utilizes flowers as a trope for femininity, since that is a recognizable symbol carried over from the Victorian era, yet she “displaces the conventional flower of the cultural imagination with an alternative bloom,” as Miranda Hickman notes (“Early” 193). Not only do flowers represent women’s beauty, but they also signal the power of reproduction, so that the florae in *Sea Garden* then become a metaphor for poetic innovation. The rose from “Sea Rose” (2) and the lily from “Sea Lily” (13) are both identified with Venus and the Virgin Mary.

Next in the “se[a]quence” is “Sea Poppies” (21), the only pluralized title in the “sea” flower poems, which may represent the poppy’s signifying fecundity due to its many seeds. Poppies are directly tied to the myth of Morpheus, the god of sleep, and Demeter, the goddess of the harvest, who was so saddened by the loss of her daughter Persephone that she could not sleep; and, because she was so exhausted from her insomnia, she was not able to make the crops grow. Morpheus then created the poppy flower for her, which is said to induce sleepiness, so that she could get some rest and continue her work with the harvest.

Last is “Sea Violet” (26), which continues on narratively from “Sea Poppies” in that violets are associated with Persephone, Demeter’s daughter who was kidnapped by her uncle Hades and doomed to become his wife in the Underworld. According to the myth, violets were said to have sprung from the place where the earth opened up and swallowed Persephone; thus, violets are representative of death and the spirit world. Violets are also self-pollinating, which is reminiscent of the Virgin Mary, who did not need to be “pollinated” to reproduce. Thus, this four poem “sea” flower sequence moves from the yonic rose, to the phallic lily, to the fertile poppies, and then concludes with the self-pollinating violet, which may emphasize the cycle of reproduction or what Lesley Wheeler refers to as a kind of “maternal urgency” that the “poems encode as spiritual and creative frustration” (497). Also present in this sequence is the paradoxical projection of both chastity (Mary and Persephone) and fertility, represented by the repetition of the maternal figures in “Sea Rose” and “Sea Lily” (Venus/Mary) and in “Sea Poppies” and “Sea Violet” (Demeter).

As many scholars have previously explicated, H.D.’s portrayal of the flowers throughout *Sea Garden* are jarring and defamiliarizing; they serve as a break from the Victorian fantasy that women are one-dimensional, delicate, beautiful objects designed solely for the male gaze and admiration. In these four “sea” flower poems, the flower-subjects are “harsh,” “marred,” “stunted,” “slashed,” “torn,” “shattered,” “dashed,” “flung,” and “frail”; but all of these words denote that the subjects *are* subjects. And they are active subjects, too; they are not diminished in passivity. H.D’s sea rose is beautiful not because she is perfect or innocent but *because* she is “harsh,” “marred,” “meagre,” and so on. The rose is beautiful because of who she is, not what she is projected to be, which can perhaps be read as a political statement when considering what the cultural climate was like for women at the time. For example, in “‘Uncanonically Seated’: H.D. and Literary Canons,” Hickman suggests that the defamiliarization of flowers as symbols of tenacity rather than delicate beauty can possibly be connected to the suffragist movement that was occurring at the time H.D. was working on *Sea Garden*, especially since suffragettes were often the victims of retaliatory violence (14-15).

Such defamiliarization is especially prevalent in “Sea Lily,” a poem not as widely discussed as the frequently anthologized “Sea Rose”:

> Reed,
> slashed and torn
> but doubly rich—
> such great heads as yours
> drift upon temple-steps,
> but you are shattered
> in the wind.
>
> Myrtle-bark
> is flecked from you,
> scales are dashed
> from your stem,
> sand cuts your petal,
> furrows it with hard edge,
> like flint
> on a bright stone.
>
> Yet though the whole wind
> slash at your bark,
> you are lifted up,

aye—though it hiss
to cover you with froth. (13)

Though the subject whom the speaker addresses (i.e., the "you") may be "slashed and torn," it only makes her twice as strong ("doubly rich"). The speaker acknowledges not only her physical but also her intellectual strength ("such great heads as yours / drift upon temple-steps"), denoting that she is more than just her body, the body that has been "shattered," "flecked," "dashed," and "slash[ed]," for her mind is powerful enough to be worshiped "upon temple-steps" (i.e., she is a goddess). Despite all these attempts to diminish her—both in body and spirit—we have the resounding "*Yet*." In spite of all the torment, *still* she is "lifted up," the following "aye" a resonant "I," an insistence of her self.

Next, "Sea Poppies" continues the theme of resilience while introducing the notion of reproductive alterity:

Amber husk
fluted with gold,
fruit on the sand
marked with a rich grain,

treasure
spilled near the shrub-pines
to bleach on the boulders:

your stalk has caught root
among wet pebbles
and drift flung by the sea
and grated shells
and split conch-shells.

> Beautiful, wide-spread,
> fire upon leaf,
> what meadow yields
> so fragrant a leaf
> as your bright leaf? (21)

The opening of the poem degenders the phallus by associating it with yonic symbols. The "husk / fluted with gold" in the opening lines could allude to an erection, followed by the ejaculate, the "fruit" that is "marked with a rich grain." The third stanza then conveys insemination: the poppy's "stalk has caught root / among wet pebbles" and "split conch-shells." However, the speaker is really describing the poppies, heavy with their own seed, that are "wide-spread" and cover the sand. "Sea Poppies" ends with a question, the same as "Sea Rose": "Can the spice-rose / drip such acrid fragrance / hardened in a leaf?" (2). The speaker transitions from questioning whether the flower's fragrance can thrive in such a torturous environment to then declaring a rhetorical question. It is a challenge for the reader to find a meadow (perhaps more typically associated with fecundity—and definitely more peaceful) that has a flower as fragrant as the poppies that are thriving in the unlikely environment that borders the sea, rising up from the rock boulders, "among wet pebbles," "drift[wood]," and "grated shells."

In "Huntress," the singular "aye"/"I"/"eye" of the "sea" flower poems is invited to join the "we," the "We [who] lead the pace" (24), which are, according to Collecott, "'the collective voice of Artemis' *thiasos*, or band, who challenge a novice to join the chase…." (159). The *thiasos*' request,

> *Can you come*
> *can you come,*
> *can you follow the hound trail,*
> *can you trample the hot froth?* (24),

becomes a directive in “Sea Gods”:

> For you *will* come,
> you *will* come,
> you *will* answer our taut hearts,
>
> you *will* break the lie of men’s thoughts,
> and cherish and shelter us. (33, added emphasis)

The present “can” request in “The Huntress” shifts to the future “will” directive in “Sea Gods” because the female addressee *can* join in the chase for equality in the present, but she *must* do so in the imagined future; she “*must* rise to refute” (31, added emphasis) even when “they say there is no hope” (31). Significantly, the second part of “Sea Gods” contextualizes the need for this imagined future:

> But we bring violets,
> great masses—single, sweet,
> wood-violets, stream-violets,
> violets from a wet marsh.
>
> Violets in clumps from hills,
> tufts with earth at the roots,
> violets tugged from rocks,
> blue violets, moss, cliff, river-violets.
>
> Yellow violets’ gold,
> burnt with a rare tint—
> violets like red ash
> among tufts of grass. (31-32)

Since violets are self-pollinating, it signals that this coming band of women do not need a masculinist aesthetic in order to thrive. All of the violets/women are coming from various bucolic places, out of their isolation, to form this feminine futurity. Though they may be "uprooted," the sacrifice is worth "break[ing] the lie of men's thoughts," as it states by the poem's conclusion (33). This uprooting, then, is likened to a tempest in "Storm":

> You crash over the trees,
> you crack the live branch—
> the branch is white,
> the green crushed,
> each leaf is rent like split wood.
>
> You burden the trees
> with black drops,
> you swirl and crash—
> you have broken off a weighted leaf
> in the wind,
> it is hurled out,
> whirls up and sinks,
> a green stone. (40)

The apostrophized storm here (i.e., "you") is assumed, based on the verbs, to be the feminized sea; contrastingly, I read the white branch as a phallic representation of a masculinist modernity. In this way, H.D.'s landscape is a "'borderline' bod[y], caught between two elements (here the sea and land) and recreated through collision" (McCabe 146); this "collision" is necessary, the land (i.e., masculinist modernity) must be "crack[ed]," "crushed," and "broken" so that a new beginning can commence, and a new narrative can be written.

This “break[ing] the lie of men’s thoughts” (33) may be viewed as a “burden”—but only at first—for soon after this storm, a rainbow will grace the sky, which is implicitly suggested in “Sea Iris”:

> Do your roots drag up colour
> from the sand?
> Have they slipped gold under you—
> rivets of gold?
>
> Band of iris-flowers
> above the waves,
> you are painted like a fresh prow
> stained among the salt weeds. (41)

The first stanza here implies the quizzical illusion of a rainbow that seems palpable (“Do your roots drag up colour”) and yet has no corporeality or point of exit/entry (“from the sand?”). “Have they slipped gold under you” references the Irish myth of being able to find gold at the end of the rainbow that, of course, can never be achieved because the rainbow is only a spectrum of light with no real beginning or end. In this way, perhaps H.D. is skeptical of the movement from one “realm” of modernity to the other—maybe it is just an illusion, after all. However, there does seem to be hope in the final stanza, for the addressee (i.e., “you”) is not alone because the “Band,” the *thiasos* from “The Huntress,” has reappeared. Alternatively, the “Band” could be a metonym for the rainbow itself or a reference to its arch; either way, we are presented with a beautiful image of the collective “Band of iris-flowers” who are “painted” “above the waves.”

I read “Sea Iris” as a great example of a liminal poem in *Sea Garden*, for its symbolism is complex and multifaceted. Upon first glance, one might assume that the iris in this poem is solely in reference to the genus of flower; but an iris is also the portion of the eye that determines eye color, perhaps encouraging the reader to "look" closer for deeper signification. Iris is the Greek goddess of the rainbow and a messenger god, who is often considered the female counterpart to Hermes. Specifically, Iris is known to guide *female* souls into the next world and can thus easily travel between the realms of the living and the dead. As such, I read the Iris figure in this poem as a mediator between the past (and present) realm of masculinist modernity and the imagined future realm of an inclusive modernity—but what does this imagined futurity look like?

"Sheltered Garden" may initially suggest, in its title, that perhaps this band of women must remove themselves from such a harsh environment so that they can be protected by the wilderness. However, we soon learn that this garden will not suffice:

> I have had enough.
> I gasp for breath.
>
> Every way ends, every road,
> every foot-path leads at last
> to the hill-crest—
> then you retrace your steps,
> or find the same slope on the other side,
> precipitate.
>
> I have had enough—
> border-pinks, clove-pinks, wax-lilies,
> herbs, sweet-cress. (19)

The line "I have had enough" is repeated twice, and it is jarring, as it is one of the only instances in the entire collection that asserts the first person "I," for the speaker throughout *Sea Garden* usually utilizes the plural "we" or is absent entirely, focusing only on the objective “you” throughout each poem. These opening stanzas indicate that the speaker has come to the realization that she cannot keep following the same repetitive path she has been on, the path being a bucolic space, for its isolation has become maddening. A couple of stanzas later, the speaker questions why, in this “Sheltered Garden,” pears must be “wadded in cloth, / [to protect them] from the frost” even though doing so shields them from the light they need to grow:

> Why not let the pears cling
> to the empty branch?
> All your coaxing will only make
> a bitter fruit—
> let them cling, ripen of themselves,
> test their own worth,
> nipped, shrivelled by the frost,
> to fall at last but fair
> with a russet coat. (19-20)

This poem, and especially this stanza and the one that follows it, may have been influenced by the fact that H.D. had a stillborn daughter right before she began working on *Sea Garden*. This may also explain why H.D.’s “I” (if we are to read the “I” as herself) interjects as the speaker of this poem. Wheeler suggests that this poem is “a uterine space that promises to protect life but ultimately destroys it” (506), which we can perhaps liken to the psychological torment H.D. must have gone through after experiencing something so traumatic. She may very well have hoped that her body would be a sheltered garden that would protect her daughter, only for her body to then betray her in the end. However, maybe this traumatic event helped cultivate one of the major themes of *Sea Garden*, which this poem so elegantly depicts: the idea that struggle is necessary in order for women to move beyond a masculinist modernity. Even if they become frost-bitten or fall off their branch, these are the steps needed in order for them to “ripen” and “test their own worth.” Though the pear that has been “wadded in cloth” may be blemish-free, its beauty is meaningless:

> For this beauty,
> beauty without strength,
> chokes out life.
> I want wind to break,
> scatter these pink-stalks,
> snap off their spiced heads,
> fling them about with dead leaves—
> spread the paths with twigs,
> limbs broken off,
> trail great pine branches,
> hurled from some far wood
> right across the melon-patch,
> break pear and quince—
> leave half-trees, torn, twisted
> but showing the fight was valiant.
>
> O to blot out this garden
> to forget, to find a new beauty
> in some terrible
> wind-tortured place. (20)

Wheeler reads the wind here as a metaphor for poetic inspiration (505), somewhere that can lead to “a new wild world to resuscitate lost daughters” (512), though I disagree that this new world must be “wild.” This garden was beautiful, but now it is time “to find a new beauty” elsewhere, for only urbanity can be “new” compared to the ancient wilderness. Additionally, there is no wind in the garden—the fact that the speaker “want[s]” there to be indicates that it does not exist there. If we are to follow Wheeler’s reading of the wind denoting poetic inspiration, then it is necessary to "blot out this garden" in order to move toward a new site of poetic inspiration.

Such a place is therefore depicted in "Cities," the last poem of *Sea Garden*. The speaker positions the city as a "disgust[ing]," "Crowded," and homogeneous space, where "street after street, / each [are] patterned alike" (45), in comparison to the varied landscapes that have painted the last twenty-six poems of the collection. But perhaps H.D. is gesturing towards "a wider modern world which [...] is both hard and craftable, both durable and transitory" (Mackay 57). In this "wider modern world," the "Band" of women "are spread through this earth," and they "protect [their] strong race" and their "young future strength" (47). The poem concludes:

> Though they sleep or wake to torment
> and wish to displace our old cells—
> thin rare gold—
> that their larv[ae] grow fat—
> is our task the less sweet?
>
> Though we wander about,
> find no honey of flowers in this waste,
> is our task the less sweet—
> who recall the old splendour,
> await the new beauty of cities? (47)

The city's "wish to displace [their] old cells" contrasts the cells of plant regeneration with a kind of mechanical simulation, perhaps serving as a criticism of Vorticism, the artistic movement Pound transitioned to after he viewed Imagism as being taken over by female modernist poets. Vorticism aimed to transcend biological reproduction through machination engineered by masculinist aestheticism, but women artists' production here is emphasized as “rare gold” while theirs is “waste.” Eventually this band of women, with their eye on the “task,” will “await the new beauty of cities,” a beauty that only *they* can cultivate. The female subject has an ocean of possibilities as she navigates her way past the rural, mythic spaces of the past and towards the modern world, for as H.D. wrote in “The Wise Sappho”:

> [She] is the sea itself, breaking and tortured and torturing, but never broken. She is the island of artistic perfection where the lover of ancient beauty (shipwrecked in the modern world) may yet find foothold and take breath and gain courage for new adventures and dream of yet unexplored continents and realms of future artistic achievement.

The modern woman cannot remain isolated forever on “the island of artistic perfection,” for she cannot progress in her own creativity and innovation alone. Thus, H.D. anticipates an urban space, though it may not be perfect, where at least women can “dream” of “future artistic achievement.” Despite what tradition may have already written of this female subject, H.D. invites her to write her own narrative. Even if it is just a dream, soon enough it will come to fruition, as we will see in the following chapters.

Chapter 2

"Dusk Dreams": Angelina Weld Grimké's Liminal Poetics of Surrogacy

The only collection of Angelina Weld Grimké's poetry that exists is the out-of-print 1991 Oxford University Press edition of the *Selected Works of Angelina Weld Grimké* that contains approximately one third of the poetry she composed during her lifetime. Maureen Honey was the first scholar to draw our attention to Grimké and other important queer/female Harlem Renaissance poets through her groundbreaking anthology *Shadowed Dreams: Women's Poetry of the Harlem Renaissance* (1989), followed by her revisionist anthology *Double-Take* (2001), co-edited with Venetria K. Patton. Honey is unfortunately still one of the very few academics who studies Grimké; she makes the pressing point that, even though Grimké was "at the center of the Harlem Renaissance in 1927,"[1] it only took a few years before her "poetry would disappear for decades, forgotten or dismissed as minor contributions" (HAD 2).

The reasons for Grimké's dismissal are complex and multifaceted—much like all of the women poets in this dissertation project. For one, the Harlem Renaissance has been historically considered, up until recently, a male-led movement,[2] which correlates to the other issue surrounding modernism being perceived as the epitome of Anglo-masculine innovation. Aldon L. Nielsen questions why contemporary critics consider African American modernity a kind of "alternative" modernism, writing that it "is as if black writers have had to steal past the disciplinary boundaries erected by whiteness around modernity, to slip inside modernity to demonstrate that they had been there all along" (22). In *The Dialect of Modernism* (1994), Michael North was perhaps the first scholar to suggest that the American avant-garde ventured to align itself with and draw inspiration from the Black aesthetics of the Harlem Renaissance that venerated African American vernacular and colloquialisms, thus emphasizing a new literary and artistic tradition that eschewed European/bourgeois standards and traditions. For example, Langston Hughes's jazz/blues poetry reforms Black subjectivity by transcending an Anglo-centric narrative and repositioning itself into cultural memory and history. Black—and especially Black queer female poets such as Grimké—mediate the historical and cultural spaces between the suppressed Black voice and the cacophonous authorial voices of the White majority that have long monopolized the modernist narrative, which is why we should view these Black voices *within* and as a part of modernity rather than just as a facet or a footnote of it. Having such a limited scope of the canon not only leaves scholars with an incomplete picture of the literary movement, but it is also a missed opportunity to more accurately represent a heterogeneous period that has largely been portrayed homogeneously. But this is only one piece of the puzzle regarding Grimké's near obscurity from the modernist canon.

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[1] Honey does not mean that Grimké was literally or physically at the center of the Renaissance, as she never lived in Harlem, but rather that 1927 was her most successful publishing year for poetry, mainly due to Countee Cullen's *Carling Dusk* anthology, which included sixteen of her poems.

[2] Scholarship that resituates queer/Black women toward the center of the Harlem Renaissance include: Maureen Honey's *Aphrodite's Daughters: Three Modernist Poets of the Harlem Renaissance* (2016), Emmanuel Edame Egar's *Black Women Poets of Harlem Renaissance* (2003), Cheryl A. Wall's *Women of the Harlem Renaissance* (1995), and Gloria T. Hull's groundbreaking *Color, Sex, and Poetry: Three Women Writers of the Harlem Renaissance* (1987), which was the first book study that brought Grimké to our critical attention.

Grimké also faced the issue of being far away from the literary and artistic happenings of the Harlem Renaissance, as she never lived in Harlem and spent most of her career in Washington, D.C., where she worked as a high school teacher. However, while readers might assume, based on the countless pastoral landscapes that paint Grimké's poetry, that her isolation may have been due to her urban seclusion, this was actually not the case, as she lived the majority of her life in the major metropolises of Boston, Washington, D.C., and New York. Rather, we should read Grimké's imagined rural landscapes as a metaphor for the psychological and social rather than geographic isolation she felt throughout her life, in being a queer woman of color.

If Grimké is included at all in conversations surrounding modernism or the Harlem Renaissance, she is mainly known for her short stories and plays, especially *Rachel*, which was first produced in 1916 and published four years later. Even to this day, *Rachel* is the only publication of Grimké's in print, for the rest of her work is scattered about in magazines, newspapers, and Harlem Renaissance anthologies such as Countee Cullen's *Caroling Dusk* (1927) and later Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps's *The Poetry of the Negro: 1746-1949* (1949). More recently, Grimké's work has been included in American, African American, and queer writer anthologies,[3] though she is still considered a niche contributor to the canon, as other Grimké scholars would agree.[4]

Carolivia Herron, Grimké's editor for her posthumous *Selected Works*, cites the reasons her work has been "rigorously ignored": for one, her poetry is "too lesbian," and it is also considered "too sentimental," while her fiction is "too stark in its unflinching descriptions of the violence of lynching" (21). Thankfully, queer scholarship has made leaps and bounds since Grimké's poetry was first published in the early twentieth century, and especially since the 1991 publication of Grimké's *Selected Works*. For instance, in "The New Negro Renaissance," Steven Tracy remarks that "Even the most phallocentric and hetero-normative critic of African American literature must now acknowledge that the gifted queer and women poets of the Renaissance make it impossible to impose male heterosexual attitudes on a diverse, even lopsidely non-'traditional,' artistic community" (6). He also considers Grimké one of the forerunners of the Harlem Renaissance, whose queerness, he asserts (and I would agree), helps inform and shape the poetic landscape of the period. So although Grimké's poetry might have been considered

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[3] Some examples include but are not limited to: *Shadowed Dreams: Women's Poetry of the Harlem Renaissance* (1989), *The Sleeper Wakes: Harlem Renaissance Stories by Women* (1993), *African American Women Playwrights* (1999), *Anthology of Modern American Poetry* (2000), *Double-Take: A Revisionist Harlem Renaissance Anthology* (2001), *A Beautiful Pageant: African American Theatre, Drama, and Performance in the Harlem Renaissance: 1910-1927* (2002), *Witnessing Lynching: African American Writers Respond* (2003), *The Literature of Lesbianism* (2003), and *The New Anthology of American Poetry: Volume 2: Modernisms 1900-1950* (2005).

[4] Every Grimké scholar has addressed this at least briefly, though some are more explicit about Grimké's marginality or absence surrounding scholarship on African American literature and/or the Harlem Renaissance, such as we see in Gloria T. Hull's "'Under the Days': The Buried Life and Poetry of Angelina Weld Grimké" or Melissa P. Kemp's "African American Women Poets, the Harlem Renaissance, and Modernism: An Apology."

"too lesbian" for critics in the past, now its queerness serves as a specific marker of significance for the modernist canon.

Regarding Herron's worry that Grimké is supposedly too "sentimental," Honey also concludes that critics have overlooked her poetry for supposedly being trapped in a traditionalist Eurocentric model (HAD 16), yet perhaps this alleged traditionalism in her earlier work was a way for her to implant African American lyricism into what has been considered high art (HSM 86).[5] Much of Grimké's juvenilia follows more traditional rhyme and meter and centers around famous figures, elegies, racial injustices, and bucolic musings; according to Honey, it is not until Grimké experiences her first queer desires in the late 1890s (when she is a teenager) that her poetics start to change, becoming more abstract, more experimental.

Critics of the past may have viewed Grimké's poetry (in stark contrast with her prose) as being "racially empty" (HSM 84), yet Kemp makes the excellent point that a "recurrent contention during the Harlem Renaissance and beyond is whether writers should have devoted their work to race elevation. Were they being irresponsible if they simply created art?" (793). Grimké's romantic lyricism, especially as it intersects with race and sexuality, should be viewed as a source of innovation within her oeuvre rather than being perceived as potentially "irresponsible" in its lack of explicit devotion to "race elevation." In fact, I would argue that Grimké's most powerful romantic poems stand out because of their nuances between racial and sexual desire. Similarly, Honey situates Grimke's modernist transformation on the axis of her same-sex desire, suggesting that her queer lyricism is what actually catapults her into modernity and away from more traditionally rhymed verse (HAD 22).

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[5] Grimké is not the only Harlem Renaissance poet to implement a kind of traditionalist mastery; Claude McKay, Georgia Douglas Johnson, and Countee Cullen come to mind as well.

However, considering that many of Grimké's poems are undated, it is difficult if not impossible to decipher an exact timeline of her poetic development.[6] Even some of her published poems cannot be dated accurately, for many of them were written years before they were published. The best indicator we have for dating any of Grimké's many undated poems is through contextualizing the notebooks she wrote them in or making inferences based on the kind of paper used or the pattern in her handwriting.[7] This issue also points to a major discrepancy in the 1991 *Selected Works*: Herron did not provide dates for any of the poems, mark if they are undated, or order them in any kind of chronological (or even thematic) order. Coupled with the fact that this collection only contains roughly one third of Grimké's poetry *and* it is out of print,[8] it is no wonder Grimké scholarship has not taken off despite everything else. I think this gross inaccessibility of Grimké's poetry is a major contributor to the inadequacy of recent scholarship.

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[6] I was planning to incorporate archival research from Howard University's Angelina Weld Grimké Collection housed in the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, but the ongoing COVID restrictions made it impossible for me to do so. Thus, my interpretation and understanding of Grimké's archive is at the mercy of other scholars' work. Perhaps I would be able to draw a more accurate chronology of her poetic development, but it is difficult to say without having access to her papers.

[7] For instance, "You" (see Grimké 96) is undated, but Honey dates it anywhere between roughly 1898 and 1910 according to the paper it is composed on and Grimké's handwriting (HAD 40). Though this gives us a general idea of this poem's composition, it is still a pretty significant time lapse.

[8] As of the writing of this dissertation, Grimké's *Selected Works* is difficult to find. Popular online retailers tend to only have one or a few copies that range between $85 and $100 or more, plus shipping costs. At UCR, there is one copy in Special Collections, so students and staff cannot check it out. I imagine it is probably a similar case at other university libraries.

Scholarship of the last several decades that focuses on lynching, violence upon African Americans, and/or Black studies has taken notice to Grimké's significance, though perhaps not always in the most productive way. The newest article on her poetry, K. Allison Hammer's 2021 "'Blood at the Root': Cultural Abjection and Thwarted Desire in the Lynching Plays and Poetry of Angelina Weld Grimké," has shortcomings that may in part be due to their misunderstanding or miscontextualization of Grimké's poetics, which, of course, may not entirely be their fault, considering how difficult it is to even study her poetry. Hammer reads Grimke's queerness as intertwined with the practice of lynching in American during the twentieth century; they posit that when the Black man of the household is killed, the household is "metaphorically castrated" in the same way that the lesbian was perceived at that time as "kill[ing]" domesticity (30-31). Hammer reads "El Beso," for example, as a kind of metaphorical lynching that is haunted by "unconsummated queer desire" (45-46), but I wonder if reading the homoerotic "El Beso" as a kind of unconscious rallying cry against the violence enacted upon African Americans ignores the fact that the intentional incorporation of queerness in Grimké's work is what actually allies her with anti-lynching and anti-racism. I do appreciate Hammer's innovation in offering an analysis that intersects sexuality and race in Grimké's work, though I wonder why they did not focus more on prose such as "The

Closing Door," a homoerotic short story where a lynching occurs, for which this kind of intersectionality absolutely fits.

Another article that comes to mind regarding the inadequacy of Grimké scholarship within the last decade or so is Gloria A. Shearin's 2011 "Black? White? Why Doesn't a 'Both' Exist? Racial Ambivalence and Identity in Angelina Weld Grimké's Poetry," which argues that Grimké's erotic poetry "examine[s] race abstractly" (43). Shearin also claims that there is a lack of "racial" poetry available in Grimké's oeuvre, mistakenly stating that "Trees" is the only explicit lynching poem (52-53). However, Grimké has other poems that discuss lynching explicitly, including "Beware When/Lest He Awakes" (three versions; see 114-120) and "Tenebris," which alludes to a lynching tree: "There is a tree, by day, / That, at night, / Has a shadow…." (113). While this may just be lazy scholarship, I have to give Shearin the benefit of the doubt and offer that perhaps the issue is, again, lack of accessibility to Grimké's work.

Besides Grimké's lynching poems, there are a handful of poems in her *Selected Works* that deal with the hesitancy of motherhood and bringing a Black child into a racist world, which is also a common theme in many of her short stories and plays.[9] These poems include "Nevermore" (34), "The Black Child" (63), "Autumn" (88), and "Lullaby" (2 versions; 94-95). In particular, "Autumn" intersects Black motherhood with the fear that her beloved child could be the victim of lynching, for "[...] she fears each sobbing breath / Will be the last" as summer turns to fall, and an anticipated darkness comes:

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[9] See, for example, "Goldie," "The Closing Door," and *Rachel*.

> Just so the trees, when Fall with chilly breath
> Steals o'er the country in the form of Death
> ……………………………………………
> But as they laugh they see Death's form advance,
> Unsheathing without sound his cruel lance,
> And ev'ry leaf pierced through mid swift surprise
> With deep'ning horror growing in their eyes,
> And baby laughter dying on their lips
> Forgets to cling and sadly downward slips
> —
> Then all the trees o'erwrought with grief and woe
> Join their wild wails with all the winds that blow
> And writhing, lift their hungry arms on high
> Disconsolate, beneath a sullen sky. (88-89)

In the last stanza here, the trees are related to the speaker's child from the beginning of the poem. They "wail" and "writhing, lift their hungry arms on high / Disconsolate," as a fussy baby reaches for their mother, which is the "sullen sky." The mother/sky is "sullen" because she knows that no matter how much she loves and tries to protect her child, "Death" will eventually come for them, and it is very possible that it may come in the form of a lynch mob as racism "Steals o'er the country." Similarly, the second version of "Lullaby" sets an eerie scene, with the "Moon astarin' troo de trees" while the "Shadders [are] comin' [to] creep and creep" (95). Later, the mother speaker tells her child to "laf de w'ile you can" because "You won' laf w'en you'se a man" (96). Shadows are a common thread throughout these handful of mother speaker poems, even in "The Black Child," which seemingly begins as a beautiful ode to childhood innocence, but then the child goes from “Sitting in a gold circle of sunlight” where “The sunlight [is] all about him” (63), to:

> S[itting] in the black shadows,
> ……………………………
> And beating, beating
> The shadows all about him,
> With his little black stick,
> And laughing, laughing. (65)

While the transition from a “gold circle of sunlight” to “black shadows” is potentially threatening, we can perhaps read this as a hopeful ending, for the child is taking agency by “beating / The shadows all about him.” At least he can still have the tools to go through life being able to find humor and beauty despite these imminent “shadows.”

Meanwhile, other Grimké poems examine various forms of racial oppression or difficulty. “Written for the Fiftieth Anniversary Celebration at Dunbar High School” is dedicated to the students whose close relatives were born into slavery but ultimately celebrates their potential: “We know it matters not what we have been / But this, and always this: What we shall be” (104). “Surrender” (two versions; 57-58) also appears to allude to racial oppression and asks that America will be able to find peace after the great sin of slavery:

> …. Uncrowned,
> We go, with heads bowed to the ground,
> And old hands, gnarled and hard and browned.
> Let us forget the past unrest,—
> We ask for peace. (58)

Meanwhile, the speaker in “The Ways O’ Men” seems to wonder why racism exists:

> ‘Tis queer, it is, the ways o’ men,
> With a level look at you, or a crooked
>   As they be passin’.
>   Pouf!
> Sure, ‘tis so fast they’re goin’,
> Does it matter about the turnin’s? (101)

Grimké’s poems that detail the weight of America’s racist history often employ the plural pronoun “we,” as we see in “Surrender,” calling to a kind of collectivity or connection to her people, while others such as “The Ways O’ Men” or the earlier “Lullaby” will assume a voice in the African American vernacular. This is significantly different from the vast majority of Grimké’s poems, which utilize the first person “I” and are overwhelmingly romantic, erotic, and/or depressive and regretful. Considering that many of these first-person poems were never published or prepared for publication (indicated by the fact that they are either scribbled in school notebooks or were not typed out and perfected as other published works were), it is safe to assume that the use of “I” signals Grimké’s own self. As Honey contends, reading Grimké’s lyric poetry through a bio-critical lens makes sense since this kind of poetry tends to be a more inward and personal genre (HAD 3).

Hull identifies Grimké’s poetry into five thematic categories: elegies, love lyrics, nature lyrics, racial poems, and poems about life and universal human experience (“Under” 77), while Herron considers Grimké’s poetry to follow three overarching themes: lost love, commemoration of famous people, and racial concerns (4). According to Herron, Grimké’s poetry focuses on personal grief, which is in stark contrast to her fiction, nonfiction, and drama, which focus exclusively on the cultural grief of lynching and racial injustice (5). Personally, I would argue that the main themes in her poetry are (in order of volume): love (especially regretful and unrequited, though there are definitely some more light-hearted infatuation lyrics), depression and psychological issues, elegies and commemorations, and racial matters—of course each of these categories intersect with each other. I would not categorize any of her poems as "nature" poems, as Hull does, for she often uses nature as a symbol or metaphor within the themes I have outlined above. For example, grass becomes phallic and/or symbolizes queer manual intimacy in poems like "Grass Fingers": "Touch me, touch me, / Little cool grass fingers, / Elusive, delicate grass fingers" (40). Importantly, scholars seem to have overlooked the various poems throughout Grimké's oeuvre that speak to a deep-seated psychological torment that goes far beyond the heartache of lost love, for these poems are rooted in the unique sense of psychological and social isolation Grimké felt in being a queer woman of color during the early twentieth century.

The question, then, becomes: how do we situate Grimké's obviously innovative and seminal poetics in a way that is authentic and responsible? While many of her poems, even her very early poems (such as 1909's "El Beso") are remarkably Imagist, I am not sure if we should categorize her within a movement that was created and dominated by Eurocentric figures like Ezra Pound and Richard Aldington—especially since attempting to include her along with other Anglo-modernists might eclipse her poetry's key intersectionality with race. On the other hand, perhaps including her among other

Imagists could be a way to expand our understanding of the short-lived modernist movement. We can possibly orient her within a kind of Sapphic modernism alongside other New Women (and queer) poets, like Amy Lowell, Gertrude Stein, and H.D., for all of these poets were unequivocal in their presenting of female love objects in their poetry. In alignment with these other New Woman poets, Grimké also resisted adopting a male persona[10] so that her female speakers could exhibit desire for other women. Hull insists that we must resist heteronormative framing of Grimké's love poetry and not assume, as other scholars have, that Grimke is adopting a masculine "I" (*Color* 139). All this to say, we must acknowledge that, though Grimké as well as her New Woman contemporaries all participated in Sapphic modernity, these contemporaries undoubtedly benefited from a White privilege that Grimké did not have access to. However, it is necessary to highlight that Grimké is a pioneer among other New Woman innovators, for she was able to essentially create a poetic form that had not yet been implemented or theorized, and she was able to do so without appropriating previous art forms, as Pound had.[11] Yet, a puzzling aspect of Grimké's poetic classification is that most academics ignore or avoid the fact that she was attracted to both women *and* men. It is therefore misleading to coin Grimké as a pioneering lesbian poetess, for her fluid sexuality does not make her any less queer or her poems any less significant to queer studies; if anything, continuing to categorize her as a "lesbian" poet only contributes to bi-erasure, the idea that bisexuality is not a legitimate sexuality. Especially considering how fluid modernism was in general and the Harlem Renaissance was in particular, it does not really make sense to assign bisexual modernist writers to "*fixed* categories," as Laura Doan and Jane Garrity contend in *Sapphic Modernities*, continuing that the period's "categorizations and boundaries were far more fluid than has previously been acknowledged" (1, original emphasis). So far, Brett Beemyn is one of the only academics to acknowledge that scholarship has misrepresented Grimké and her writing by painting her as a suppressed lesbian even though her diaries and poems clearly show her love for men, too (37).

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[10] The exception to this notion that Grimké does not adopt a male speaker/persona, however, is in the poem "My Shrine," where the speaker does use the "he" pronoun and details his female object of desire (see 49-51). In her analysis, Honey conveniently skips over the line in this poem indicating that the speaker is male. I have not been able to detect any other poems (from what is available in Grimké's *Selected Works* and published in various scholarship from her archive) that assume a male persona.

[11] In perhaps Pound's most famous Imagist poem, "In a Station of the Metro," it has often been noted that Pound may have been inspired by Suzuki Harunobu's *Woman Admiring Plum Blossoms at Night*, an 18th century woodblock print with embossing that he came across at the British Library. In his June 1913 essay (published a couple of months after "In a Station of the Metro"), Pound admits that Japonisme was essential to the poem's genesis (214-215). Additionally, Richard Aldington admits that Pound only established Imagism after having read H.D.'s poems (Carr 490). This is not to say that Pound's poetry was not groundbreaking in its own right, but it is rather remarkable that Grimké was able to procure her own poetic innovations considering that she was isolated from the kind of artistic environments that were so essential to Pound's and other Imagists' work.

Though Grimké was never able to publish a collection of poems in her lifetime, there is evidence in her archive that she was working on a collection that was going to be entitled *Dusk Dreams* (Beemyn 44), though it is unclear when she was planning to have this collection published.[12] Nonetheless, utilizing the planned title for her collection is perhaps the best intervention we can and should use to interpret her poetry. Grimké's use of "dusk" throughout her poetry serves as a mode through which she can express liminality in her sexual and racial identity. Especially since "dusk" means "veiled from sight or understanding" (OED), her dusk poetics serve as a space separate from heterosexual strictures and racial segregation and oppression, a space that challenges the prohibitions placed upon both Black and queer desire at that time. But, dusk also indicates a darkening or gloom, which symbolizes her worsening depression throughout her life. This dusk depression then leads her to "dream," which not only indicates Grimké's desire for death (i.e., the "big sleep"), but also represents the mind's release from depressive thoughts during the day while she sleeps. Her dreams offer her a period of respite where she can imagine an illusory future relationship or partnership. Furthermore, these dreams often take place in natural spaces that are separated from a masculinist urbanity and that serve as a surrogate mother; in nature, therefore, her queer desire for love and companionship can be nurtured and can bloom.

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[12] I assume it would have been sometime before her father's death in 1930, for she moves to New York from Washington D.C., stops writing, and becomes a recluse until her own passing in 1958.

Dusk, as the period between day and night, is a liminal realm that correlates to Grimké's own queerness, a space where her sexuality can be free under the guise of oncoming darkness. The symbol of twilight is a common marker of romantic friendships between women during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As Lillian Faderman relays throughout her chapters on the nineteenth century in *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the Present*, young women in Grimké's social class were actually encouraged to engage in playful and flirtatious friendships with other girls as "practice" for heterosexual courtship. In fact, "lesbian" as a term was not even used until well into the twentieth century, for fear that naming it would somehow give it the power of possibility.[13]

We can perhaps relate this idea to Terry Castle's notion of the "apparitional lesbian," which is queer desire that is both invisible yet persistent; it is a kind of negating of lesbianism even though it might be right in front of us, for "Once the lesbian has been defined as ghostly—the better to drain her of any sensual or moral authority—she can then be exorcized" (6). Grimké's queer desire could definitely fit under this rubric, then, for some scholars argue that most of Grimké's love affairs with women found an outlet only in her poetry but not in her real life. In any case, it is clear that Grimké cultivated, if not romantic relationships with women, then romantic friendships such as would have been encouraged during the period of her adolescence.[14] We can see an example of one such friendship in a class picture from the Fairmount Grammar School in 1892, where a young, shy Grimké apprehensively stares at the camera and holds a female classmate's hand, perhaps for comfort (see Figure 2.1). In "Twilight Moments," Anna Clark argues that these “Passionate friendships between women could be ‘tolerated’ because they were usually not seen as sexual and because they did not destabilize the gender order of traditional marriage” (155). What Clark calls “twilight moments” are the queer moments that occur between people whose sexual identities are fluid: “they indulged in these forbidden moments and then returned to their ordinary lives, just as the twilight fades into darkest night, and night is succeeded by the dawn” (140). Furthermore, Clark utilizes twilight as a metaphor to “fill a conceptual gap in the literature on the history of sexuality,” especially in regards to the liminality present in sexual practices that were neither celebrated, like marriage, nor forbidden, such as incest (141).

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[13] In 1921, the antihomosexual Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 was not amended to include lesbians because they were so afraid that even mentioning it would give people ideas. Castle reads this as "a sort of juridical phantasm" (6).

[14] Armstrong and Honey suggest that Grimké's homosexual desires were just fantasy. However, I do think there is evidence in her poetry that she had physical and not just emotional relationships with women, even though Honey claims that there is also little available material in her archive that indicates *physical* relationships she may have had with women. Honey suggests that the absence of any possible physical intimacy with women in Grimké's personal papers may just have been because of social and legal repercussions she may have faced at the turn of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (HAD 52). I am not sure if I am convinced of this, though, for surely Grimké never expected anyone to read her personal diaries and letters. What is more, if Grimké was concerned about social or legal repercussions if she were "found out," then I doubt that she would have felt comfortable enough putting her innermost desires and wishes to pen and paper, or that she would have published obviously homoerotic poems such as "El Beso," "A Mona Lisa," "Grass Fingers," and others.

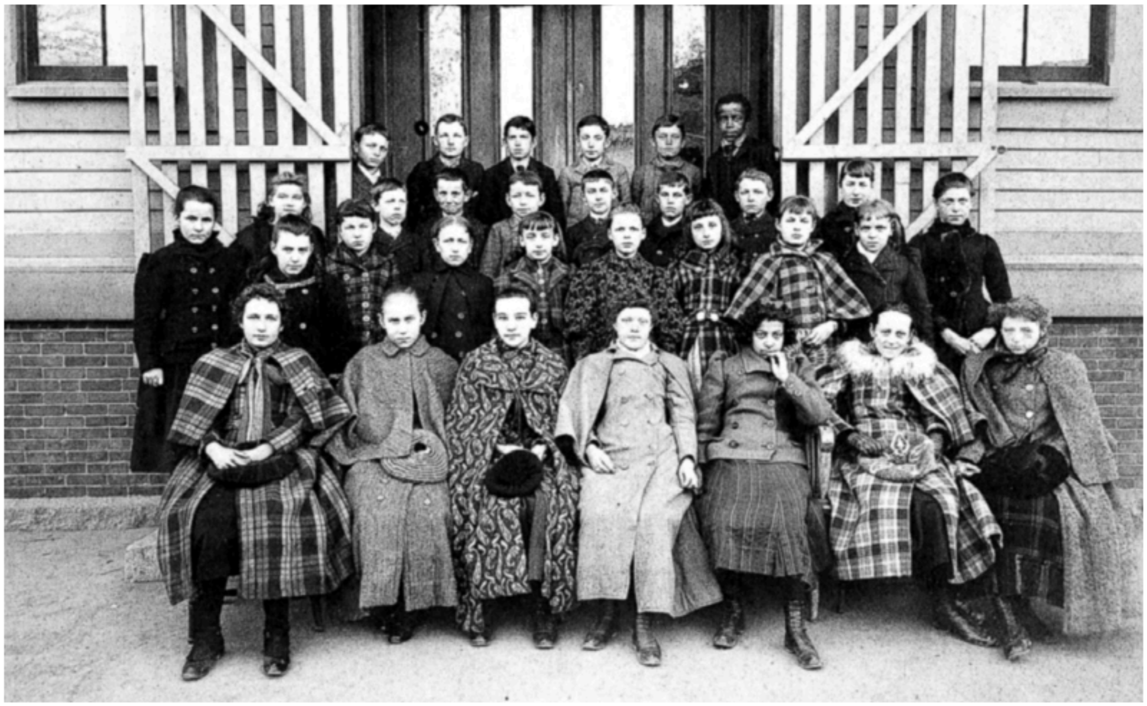

Figure 2.1: Class photo from the Fairmount Grammar School in Hyde Park, Massachusetts, circa 1892. Angelina Weld Grimké is in the front row, third from right (copied from HAD 53).

During Grimké's time at the African American M Street School in Washington, D.C. between late 1894 and early 1895, she met one of her first loves, Mary "Mamie" Burrill. The Burrills lived in close proximity to the Grimkés and attended the church where Grimké's uncle was the pastor.[15] Their romance was not all fantasy (as many other crushes of Grimké's were) but appears to have been mutual based on letters we have between them. Grimké was soon sent off to Carleton Academy in Minnesota later in 1895, and it appears that Grimké's romantic feelings for Burrill soured sometime in 1895 or '96, which may have been due to something Burrill did, as she indicates in a February 26, 1896 letter where she apologizes for "having acted so mean towards [Grimké]" during a previous romantic meeting. Burrill continues:

> Have you forgotten how I used to come and meet you at noon, when you attended that dear old building in which you and I have spent so many pleasant days…. Could I just come to meet thee once more, in the old sweet way, just coming at your calling, and like an angel bending o'er you breathe into your ear "I love you" [?]. (qtd. in HAD 54-55)

In the same letter, Burrill urges Grimké to "take [her] back to [her] home in [Grimké's] heart" and asks directly: "Angie, do you love me as you used to? Answer soon" (qtd. in HAD 55). Though Grimké and Burrill's romance seemed to dwindle, they did keep up their platonic correspondence and friendship throughout their lives.[16] Honey assigns at least two poems in Grimké's oeuvre to Burrill, including "[My sweetheart walks down laughing ways]," which identifies the beloved as Mary, and "Brown Girl," since Burrill was the only known love interest of Grimké's who was not White.[17] Interestingly, "Brown Girl" seems to relay the transition in the relationship, which Grimké signals with sunlight that turns to dusk:

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[15] Angelina's father, Archibald, was working as a consul in the Dominican Republic from 1894-1898, so she was passed around to various family members, family friends, and boarding schools during this period. When Angelina was attending the M Street School, she was living with her aunt, Charlotte Forten, and uncle, Frances Grimké.

> In the hot gold sunlight,
> Brown girl, brown girl,
> You smile
> ……………………………..
> But at fawn dusk
> Brown girl, brown girl,
> I see no smile
> …………………………….
> Your eyes spill sunlight
> Over the dusk.
> Close your eyes,
> I hear nothing but the beating of my heart. (74-75)

In most of Grimké's dusk poems, she colors twilight purple or grey, but here the transition from gold to fawn probably signals not only Burrill's skin tone but also the fact that their relationship—whether romantic or not—did not have to be hidden[18] under the guise of oncoming night. Furthermore, her relationship with Burrill was one of the more positive and unregretful experiences she had with a potential partner in her life, so it makes sense that she would tinge this poem with golden sunlight and warmth, while her other poems that take place at dusk are colored purple and grey, signaling a kind of doom, depression, and regret.

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[16] Burrill and Grimké kept in close contact with each other throughout their lives, and even worked together at the M Street School (later called Dunbar High School) from 1911 until Grimké's retirement in 1926. The fact that they valued their continued friendship is apparent, for instance, in a July 1911 letter Burrill wrote to Grimké: "If I can serve you at all, for the sake of the days that are a long way behind us both, I trust you will let me do so" (qtd. in HAD 56). Grimké had fractured her spine in a train accident that year, so Burrill's referencing of "serv[ing]" her probably has something to do with that, since Grimké would have still been physically recovering from the accident. Burrill also moved to New York City shortly after retiring in 1944, joining Grimké who had been living there since 1930.

[17] This was probably because Grimké attended multiple elite boarding schools throughout her adolescence and was often the only or one of the only African American students.

In these more regretful love poems, the word "Dusk" is even interchanged with "Regret," which are two alternative titles for one of her short poems that has multiple versions. The poem titled "Dusk," first published in April 1924's *Opportunity*, reads as follows:

> Twin stars through my purpling pane,
> The shriveling husk
>
> Of a yellowing moon on the wane,—
> And the dusk. (77)

In comparison, the first version of an unpublished poem titled "Regret" reads:

> Stars through my window's poor pane;
> The shriveling husk
> Of a yellowing moon on the wane;—
> And the dusk.
>
> Star paths descending to earth
> Through the tear drops wet;

---

[18] Grimké's father, though he may not have known the full extent of their past relationship, actually tries to urge her to be more polite to Burrill in a January 11, 1899 letter: "You must not neglect Mamie Burrill, for she was devotion itself to you while home. Please write to her soon, for it would be very bad manners not to express to her your appreciation of all her attention" (qtd. in HAD 55).

And the dusk pain again,—the rebirth
Of regret.

Meanwhile, the second version of "Regret" just has three minor edits in the first stanza: the first line changes to "Stars through my **dull window pane**" (added emphasis), Grimké deletes the dash in the third line, and changes the period to a comma after "dusk" in the fourth line. Then, the second stanza reads:

Star cascades spraying the earth
Through my tear drops wet;
And the soul-sob of dusk,—the rebirth
Of Regret. (71)

Since we do not know when any of these poems were composed, I think that perhaps Grimké was displeased with the second stanzas of the poem and so the final draft was the 1924 quatrain "Dusk" that was published in *Opportunity*.[19] Without the second stanza, the poem is not nearly as personal; even though we have the possessive first person pronoun "my," "Dusk" really just reads as an Imagist poem, a snapshot of the day's ending, and the feeling that scene produces. The inclusion of a second stanza in the first version of "Regret" mirrors the "pain" the speaker feels through the "window pane" in the first stanza. The capitalization of "Regret" in the second version is significant because it could indicate a specific person to whom the speaker is referring. In fact, we know that Grimké's poems of lost love and regret were inspired by love interests and were not merely artistic expression because she admits so herself in an undated letter to an unknown recipient: “These verses were born out of great but temporary happiness & great & lasting regret. If I had never known certain people it would have been impossible to have written them” (qtd. in HAD 31).

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[19] Neither Herron, the editor of Grimké's *Selected Works*, nor Honey, the current leading Grimké scholar, seem to have caught the fact that "Dusk" and the first half of "Regret" are versions of the same poem. While Herron does not make clear whether or not she lists the poems chronologically, the two versions of "Regret" are printed before "Dusk," so that *might* indicate that the "Regret" poems were written first.

Alternatively, the second stanzas of the “Regret” poems may have been absorbed and expanded upon in “The Eyes of My Regret,” published in Cullen’s *Caroling Dusk* (1927):

> Always at dusk, the same tearless experience,
> The same dragging of feet up the same well-worn path
> To the same well-worn rock;
> The same crimson or gold dropping away of the sun,
> The same tints, —rose, saffron, violet, lavender, grey,
> Meeting, mingling, mixing mistily;
> Before me the same blue black cedar rising jaggedly to a point;
> Over it, the same slow unlidding of twin stars,
> Two eyes unfathomable, soul-searing,
> Watching, watching—watching me;
> The same two eyes that draw me forth, against my will dusk after dusk;
> The same two eyes that keep me sitting late into the night, chin on knees,
> Keep me there lonely, rigid, tearless, numbly miserable—
> The eyes of my Regret. (70)

In this poem, the speaker moves from actively crying in “Regret” (“Through my tear drops wet / And the soul-sob of dusk…”) to being so “numbly miserable” from the emotional pain that she is now “tearless” (repeated in lines one and thirteen). Her numbness is also emphasized through the repetition of “same” ten times throughout this short poem. Further, the repetition suggests that the speaker has experienced this kind of emotional toil frequently. In “The Eyes of My Regret,” the speaker is “dragging [her] feet up the same well-worn path” to her house, after having another unpleasant meeting with her love interest, or because she still has not been able to tell her love how she feels. She is reluctant to go home alone because she knows exactly what the rest of her night will entail: peering out her window, watching the sunset, a cedar tree, and the "unlidding of twin stars," which she relays to her love interest's eyes. In this way, the "twin stars" that are out in the night sky serve as a surrogate for her love's eyes that she can only see in her mind but that she cannot stare into in reality.

Grimké's need for a surrogate, or an unconditional love in her life that was either maternal or romantic, was probably due to the childhood trauma surrounding the jarring separation from her mother at age seven. There is no doubt that Grimké's parents, Archibald Grimké and Sarah Stanley, were deeply in love when they married in April of 1879, based on the countless existing love letters we have between them. Though not very much is known about Stanley, who was a fresh graduate of Boston University when she met Archibald, we do know that she was an ambitious young woman who was devoted to her writing and determined to be more than a housewife and mother, though she clearly enjoyed those roles, too, as we can see in this early photograph of Stanley lovingly gazing down at her baby girl:

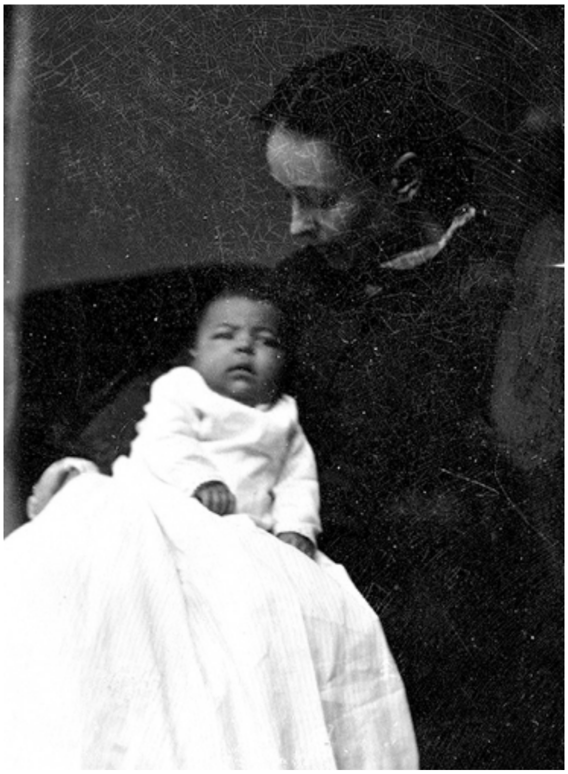

Figure 2.2: Daguerreotype of Sarah Stanley and Angelina Weld Grimké, 1880 (copied from HAD 74).

However, in the spring of 1882, Stanley's feelings for her husband changed during a routine trip to visit family in Michigan, and she never returned to Boston. Though one might be quick to assume that Stanley's family may have turned her against her husband, this was actually not the case, for we actually have letters between Stanley's father and Archibald showing that her father was supportive of the marriage. Perry suggests that Stanley, who suffered from mental illness and who was in poor physical health as well,[20] was probably overwhelmed by the added stressors of being in an interracial marriage (265). Or, perhaps Stanley decided that being a wife was not commensurate with her aspirations to be free to travel and write. In any case, what we do know is that, no matter how much Archibald pleaded for his belovèd wife to return, she never came back to him. Several years later, Stanley decided that caring for Angelina was too much for her as well, so she sent her off on a train to Boston to live with her father permanently in 1887, which Honey attributes to Stanley's "twin desire to pursue her lecturing career and spare her child the trauma of being raised among whites" (HAD 76). But Stanley did express her love for Angelina in multiple letters that were sent to her shortly after her reunion with Archibald. These letters, I think, may also foreshadow her imminent suicide in 1898. For instance, one undated letter reads: "Some time I shall be able to come to you in my Shadow Body and really see you. How would you like that? — And some time we will be together again" (qtd. in HAD 77, original emphasis).

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[20] Stanley suffered from scarlet fever as a child, which resulted in her struggling with heart disease for the rest of her life (HAD 79).

Scholars have suggested that this separation from her mother at such a young age deeply affected Grimké for the rest of her life, and probably contributed not only to Grimké's own vow that she would "never know what it means to be a mother," according to a September 1903 diary entry (qtd. in Beemyn 40), but also impacted the various ways that she detailed the pain and impossibility of motherhood in her plays, short stories, and even a handful of poems. Moreover, the fact that Archibald and Sarah Stanley were never able to reconcile, and her father was never able to move on from the marriage, all most likely contributed to Grimké's own uncertainties about relationships.

But before Grimké's personal vow to never have children or marry, she had considered the roles of wife and mother suitable after falling for a man whose identity has never been confirmed but who is thought to be Hinton Jones, a singer who was in her Boston social circle but later moved to London to pursue his career (HAD 33). Grimké was so distraught after their doomed love that it sent her into a deep depression that was so severe, it left her even contemplating suicide. Suicidal diary passages in her September 1903 diary, for instance, suggest that she talked herself out of it for her father's sake and because she did not want to face God's judgment (Beemyn 47). The poem "Why?" likely displays her fraught emotional state after Jones left for London:

> Ah! Sweet, why did you come
> Unto my humble door?
> Why did you knock with cold
> Sure hand? You knew that I
> ……………………………
> [Would believe] you to be
> My dream-dove, longed-for king:
> …………………………….
> My woman-heart was but
> A folded bud before
> You came, but with you near
> ………………………..
> It grew, and bloomed, and glowed…. (105)

The speaker desires to answer his calling and wants to cross the threshold of her door, thus entering into domestic bliss in marriage. The speaker feels as though he instigated a deep desire within her for this more traditional life, yet its impossibility is hinted at from the very beginning through the object's "cold" hand. The poem continues with a long list of "whys," lamenting this hapless relationship:

> Why did you make it bloom?
> Would 'twere a folded bud
> Why did you watch it grow

> With fierce and jealous eyes?
> Why did you drink and drink
> Its fragrance to the full?
> Why did you tear its leaves
> With harsh and treacherous hands?
> Why did you trample it
> Beneath your brutal feet?
> Why did you laugh meanwhile
> With loud and scornful glee? (106)

The speaker goes from hope in the first half of the poem to hurt in this second half. First, she was reminiscing about the object awakening a love and desire within her, but now she is angry that he made her heart "bloom" in the first place, for his torment has done nothing but emotionally drain her and crush any dreams she had of experiencing true love. He is no longer her "sweet" or her "dream-dove, longed-for king"; now he is "fierce," "jealous," "harsh and treacherous," "brutal," and "loud and scornful." The last lines in the above stanza detailing the object's laughing at her may indicate that Grimké relayed her feelings to him and he might have not only rejected her outright but might have also mocked her for being vulnerable (as also indicated by the subsequent line below that refers to a "mocking voice"). The poem ends with the speaker in a depression so painful that she writes:

> Why is it that my one,
> Mad wish is but to die
> Where I might see your face
> May hear your mocking voice?
> Why is it hate for you
> Cannot survive within
> This breast? Why is it that
> I must forgive you all
> You did or left undone,

> And why? Ah! why must this
> Be too my added curse,
> That I must love you, sweet,
> And I love you just the same? (106)

The speaker hopes that, if they cannot be together in reality, then perhaps they can be united after death. Despite everything the object has done "or left undone," still she cannot find it within herself to blame him, but instead assigns herself to the "curse" of loving him "just the same."

Honey points out that the relationship between Grimké and Jones was entirely emotional and non-physical, as indicated by a diary entry from July 1903 that reads: "I have no presents, nothing to remember you by, not even a kiss, and, dear, if only once you had taken me in your arms and kissed me (how my heart leaps at the thought), I should have been happy forever more. But there is nothing to link you to me, nothing" (qtd. HAD 34). This lack of physical intimacy is consistent with most of Grimké's infatuations throughout her life, and continues to be a major theme in her poetry, through the emphasis of eyes and watching rather than physical touch; or sometimes, she will even describe her love object's "eyes / Kissing [hers]," as she writes in "Your Eyes" (97).

Besides "Why?," several other poems were probably written about Jones, including "Little Red Heart of Mine,"[21] which uses "he/him" pronouns for the love object, "To the Roses Over Him," and possibly "Your Hands," though I think the latter could be interpreted as a male or female love object. Most scholars assume the love object is male because of the way their hands are described:

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[21] This is an unpublished poem with a printed excerpt in Beemyn 39-40.

> I love your hands:
> They are big hands, firm hands, gentle hands;
> Hair grows on the back near the wrist . . . .
> I have seen the nails broken and stained
> From hard work. (56)

However, perhaps we should not assign the stereotype that only men do manual labor. Besides, both women and men have hair on their arms, and both can be "big," "firm," and "gentle." If Grimké's love interest at the time *was* Hinton Jones, then this poem most likely could not be about him, since he was a singer and was not known to work as a manual laborer. Moreover, hands are a common symbol for lesbianism, as they indicate sexual intimacy between women. Considering that Grimké also uses hands/fingers as a queer symbol throughout several of her love poems,[22] it is not a stretch to assume that she is utilizing a similar metaphor here as well. As the poem continues, the speaker seems to mimic a climax resulting from queer, manual intimacy:

> And yet, when you touch me,
> I grow small . . . . and quiet . . . . . .
> . . . . And happy . . . .

We know from Grimké's own diary that her infatuation with Jones was an emotional one, so the kind of physical intimacy she describes here is inconsistent with the nature of her and Jones's relationship. But although most of Grimké's relationships were fantasy, we know that at least one—hers with Burrill—was emotionally reciprocated, and some poems in her canon indicate physical intimacy with women specifically, such as the unpublished poem "[I Let You Kiss My Mouth]":

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[22] Some examples include "Grass Fingers" (40-41), "You" (96), and explicitly an untitled, unpublished poem "[I Shall Remember Eons Hence Her Eyes]," which details the love object's "White and slender," "Pink tipped and rosy pink" hands, as well as the object's "Sweet cool finger-tip against [her] lips" (qtd. in HAD 41).

> I let you kiss my my mouth
> Quite through my curtained eyes
> I felt your eyes upon my eyes, my mouth
> Compellingly and hungrily you fed,
> And then I slipped into your arms
> Forgot all else but just your lips upon
> My mouth. (qtd. in HAD 6)

In "To the Roses Over Him," which was most likely also about Jones (and if not, then another male love interest), this lack of physical intimacy that contrasts with the queer intimacy in poems like "[I Let You Kiss My Mouth]" is confirmed in the penultimate verse:

> I, who knew not the touch of his hands, or his arms, or his mouth,
> I, who keep but the one look he gave me, when we met morn-pure,
> Far from the feet of men. Then our eyes lifted, met,
> Shocked, clung, long, long——I am well content. (68)

The admission that the speaker did not know "the touch of his hands" contradicts the line "when you touch me" from "Your Hands" (and the use of "when" rather than "if" seemingly confirms that this physical contact occurred in the past), further suggesting that "Your Hands" could not have been about Jones. "To The Roses Over Him" was probably written after Jones moved away, when Grimké loses hope that they can be together and then swears herself to celibacy forever. The rough estimation of this poem's composition period could be confirmed not only by the use of the past tense throughout the poem but also due to Grimké's relaying the love object to a dead man whose grave she visits, which is a similar metaphor she uses in other lost love poems (e.g., "The Garden Seat"). In "To the Roses Over Him," the speaker describes the love object "Under the white, white stars, / Under the gold, gold moon," suggesting that he is possibly in the ground. The speaker then comes and "kneel[s]" to "kiss" the "roses red, red, heart-red, dancing over him," which can be likened to the flowers that have been left by mourners at his grave. Once there, she laments not ever being able to experience physical intimacy with him but accepts that at least she can be "well content" with the "one look" that they shared.

Eyes are an important symbol in Grimké's regretful love poetry: they represent the fact that Grimké's loves were usually doomed to be emotional rather than physical or existing in reality. Grimké unfortunately spent her life haunted by love interests she could only watch and dream about but could never actually be with. The first poem in her edited *Selected Works*, "The Garden Seat," seems to allude to the fact that most of her relationships were destined to exist only in her mind:

> So hungry with long waiting and so true,
> I kiss thine eyes, thy lips, thy silky hair,
> I felt thy soft arms twining round my neck
> Thy bashful, maiden, kisses on my cheek,
> My whole heart leaping 'neath such wondrous joy—
> And then the vision faded and was gone
> And I was in my lonely, darkened, room
>
> The old-time longing surging in my breast,
> The old-time agony within my soul…. (27-28)

In this poem, the love object turns into a corpse as the speaker cries above her gravestone. Perhaps it was a way for Grimké to process her queer desire, for if her love is dead, then at least she has a reason not to pursue her; and if the love object is dead, then she is justified in her martyrdom. The numbness that results from unrequited longing is represented with the repetition of "the same" in the earlier discussed "The Eyes of My Regret" as the "old-time" repetition functions in this poem. However, the speaker recognizes that the relationship is illusory in this poem (i.e., "the vision faded"), while the speaker in "The Eyes of My Regret" seems to have accepted her fate, which is that, night after night, the twin stars "Keep [her] there lonely, rigid, tearless, [and] numbly miserable" (70). In "My Star," the speaker seems even more accepting of her lonely fate staring at a star that she "love[s] / Oh! Very much":

> Each dusk I sit with it
> A little while;
> I do not have to make believe,
> Or have to smile.
>
> But just be what I am,
> Until I know,
>
> 'Tis time to kiss my hand
> To it, —and go. (76)

In this poem, the speaker does "not have to make believe" that the stars are the eyes of her love interest, and she does not even have to pretend to be happy; she can "just be what [she is]." This acceptance is really a kind of sacrifice, which is made clearer in the following untitled poem "[As We Have Sowed]," which ends:

…. For me I pray
That one white flower more pure than all the rest
May burst in blossom 'neath the Master's eyes,
That only He may know the sacrifice. (60)

The "one white flower more pure than all the rest" could refer to the speaker's virginity, as she waits to "bloom" before God (i.e., her "Master"). We can relay this sacrifice to Grimké's own vow that she made to herself in 1903, to never love or marry and to devote herself completely to her father and her writing: "I have two reasons only for living, my dear dear father and my writing. They must fill my life absolutely. I can never expect to love again. This shall be the beginning, the real beginning of my effort to crush it out forever" (qtd. in HAD 88, original emphasis).

This vow of voluntary celibacy and an increasing sense of intimacy and eroticism through glances becomes a common theme throughout Grimké's regretful love poetry, such as the three versions of "Give me Your Eyes," the final version of which reads:

Give me your eyes.
I do not ask to touch
The hands of you, the mouth of you,
Soft and sweet and fragrant though they be.
No, lift your eyes to mine;
Give me but one last look
Before I step forth forever;
Even though within that moment's crashing space,
I shall know all of life and death and heaven and hell. (59)

The speaker's directive for the object to "give [her their] eyes" is not so that she can see the world through her lover's eyes but, rather, she means that all she needs is for them to look at her. The speaker requesting "one last look" suggests that she is leaving the object, yet if we are to read “step[ping] forth” as moving *toward* the love object, it seems to contradict her leaving; however, if we look at the first version’s line, “Ere I **go** forth forever” (58, added emphasis), the line is clarified in that the speaker indicates she is, in fact, separating herself from the love object. The speaker can then “go/step forth forever” in peace knowing all she needs to “of life and death and heaven and hell” as long as she can have that final glance from her belovèd.

This distance is most likely self-imposed, but it can also be metaphorical, as we see in “Thou Art So Far, So Far,” which serves as the intersection between Grimké’s bisexuality and her biracial identity:

> Thou art to me a lone, white, star,
> That I may gaze on from afar;
> But I may never, never, press
> My lips on thine in mute caress,
> E’en touch the hem of thy pure dress, —
> Thou art so far, so far.
>
> Thou livest in a world apart
> Created by thy sinless heart; —
> There lilies white, and tall, and fair,
> Are growing, flowing everywhere,
>
> In gardens wonderful and rare, —
> Thou art so far, so far.
>
> A sinner, I may only stand,
> Without thy white heart’s border-land,
> And kneeling humbly worship thee,
> And kneeling humbly pray for thee,
> And kneeling humbly long for thee, —
> Thou art too far, too far. (51)

The naming of the love object as a “white star” who lives in a world with “lilies white” and a “white heart” indicates that the love object is possibly White. Furthermore, as we know from her proximity to White students at the various elite boarding schools she attended throughout her adolescence, most of Grimké’s infatuations were with White women—and Hinton Jones was also probably a White man, for she describes him as having blue eyes in her diary (Beemyn 47). As with the previous poems that emphasize look over touch, this poem also denotes that the speaker will only “gaze on [her love] from afar.” “Thou livest in a world apart” could suggest the emotional distance between them (especially if the love object does not reciprocate the speaker’s feelings). It could also indicate the widening color line (subsequently represented by the “white-heart’s borderland” in the following stanza) that Grimké experienced after having transitioned from integrated boarding schools to the starkness of urban segregation in Washington, D.C., where she moves after graduating from university to begin working as a public high school teacher. If the object is White, then it is troubling that the assumed Black speaker juxtaposes herself with her object, whom they describe as “pure” and “sinless.” Furthermore, the speaker feels she is only worthy to “worship,” “pray,” and “long” for her love object rather than actually pursue a relationship, which may be informed by the realities of anti-miscegenation laws at that time.

Many of Grimké’s unrequited love poems suggest that the love object is White, or these poems allude to the object’s and the speaker’s differing races. For instance, one of her most famous poems, “A Mona Lisa,” describes the desire to drown in the love object’s eyes and then continues in the second stanza:

> Would I be more than a bubble breaking?
> Or an ever-widening circle
> Ceasing at the marge?
> Would my white bones
> Be the only white bones
> Wavering back and forth, back and forth
> In their depths? (70)

The emphasis on the speaker’s “white bones” may not only allude to her mixed race, but may also signal the fact that we are all the same on the inside even though prejudice forces us to focus on the differences we have on the outside. There is also perhaps a desire to close the color line gap, for if the speaker is “an ever-widening circle / Ceasing at the marge,” then that means she has traversed across the waters of segregation and oppression and come to the shore, where hopefully she can now enter a land of acceptance. Since the waters are not tumultuous but are instead “glimmering” and “unrippled” (69), it suggests that love is meant to be calming rather than difficult. The speaker also calls for a hope that their relationship will be monogamous and that she will devote herself *only* to the love object (line 5), while the “Wavering back and forth, back and forth” is erotic, indicating a sexual intimacy that, at this point in time, is only a future hope.

Perhaps most explicit in the depiction of an interracial relationship, the unpublished, undated, and untitled “[She Paused Behind the Gate]” is quite telling:

She paused behind the gate, one white hand resting there
a smile half teasing, half reproachful and half sad. Ah me
upon her lips.

I
Love me today
Leave not for the yesterdays, so giving mockery sweet
Nor for the master plains of tomorrow dim and rear
Love me today.

II
Love me today
you used to think me beautiful, afraid
my hair, oh do you not remember how the wind
blew it, in the old days, ‘gainst your mouth and how you used
to catch in your teeth and kiss it, saying that
you loved it much? My eyes, have you, oh have you
you quite forgotten the way you used to gaze into
their depths, smiling, drinking drinking all that lay
within them there for you. Ah, no you cannot forget.
Love me today. (qtd. in Kemp 798)

The object is pausing at the threshold (“the gate”) between both interracial and queer desire, with the speaker’s gender and race giving the object “reproach” even though she obviously desires the speaker and is “sad” that their love cannot be. The refrain “Love me today” emphasizes the speaker’s wish to live and love in the moment rather than worry about the “yesterdays” or “tomorrow.” The syntax at the beginning of the third stanza is a little off (“you used to think me beautiful, afraid / my hair”), so it is not clear if Grimké meant that the object was afraid *of* her hair—referring to the speaker’s Black, textured hair—or that the object was afraid that the wind would blow it into her mouth. However, the latter reading might not work, since Grimké subsequently writes that the object “kiss[ed] it” and “sa[id] that / [she] loved it much” when the wind would blow the speaker's hair into her mouth. Perhaps, then, if we assign the first reading—that the object was afraid *of* the speaker's hair—then it could be a metaphor for the object being fearful of the speaker's Blackness. This kind of anxiety about the speaker being Othered by the object of her desire due to her race might have been informed by the anxieties surrounding Grimké's parents' interracial and troubled relationship, and her own difficulties with at least one unrequited interracial relationship.

Ultimately, it is clear that these fractures were part of several traumas that significantly impacted Grimké's psychological health and well-being and led to her unshakable depression that only seemed to worsen throughout her life, as she indicates, for instance, in "Futility" (3 versions):

> When I was young and innocent,
> I used to rise and go
> Intó the níght and práy O God[23]
> To feel some love
>
> Now I am old and worldy-wise,
> And walk where shadows grow,
> O! how I yearn for her I was
> So long ago. (108)

This poem marks the transition in Grimké's mental state, from being hopeful and naïve about love, to then accepting that she can only "walk where shadows grow," the shadows representing her worsening depression as a result of living so many years without a loving partner. The speaker wishes she could go back in time to that state of

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[23] Since this poem is in holograph, I think the accents here are meant to mark the stresses of the line, since the prior two versions of the poem indicate that Grimké was trying to perfect the cadence.

“innocen[ce],” but since that is impossible, she instead tries to convince herself to become numb in “[Ask of Life Nothing, Nothing]”:

> Ask of life nothing, nothing.
> Ask only to go greyly, grey ways
> Ask only to touch grey things
>   With grey fingers.
>
> Ask life for numbness only.
> Forget there is love in the world
>   And kisses
>   And a man’s arms
>   And joy
>   And hate. (56)

Though this poem is undated, we can assume that it was possibly written sometime after her fallout with Hinton Jones, since she refers to “a man’s arms.” Her bitterness is palpable, especially since she seemingly contradicts herself by first asking “nothing” of life but then asking for “numbness only,” since numbness is not nothing. Furthermore, she tries to “Forget” love, but then lists all the various ways that she has experienced it, suggesting that she has not actually forgotten.

“The Visitor” is probably the most extensive depression poem in Grimké’s oeuvre that may have also been inspired by Hinton Jones (52-55). In it, the “visitor” after which the poem is titled could be death, though I think it is probably most likely Grimké’s battle with depression, for the speaker oscillates between wanting to die, then wanting to fight for her life and surpass all her demons, before ultimately being consumed by them. It begins:

> Goodbye, sweet earth, goodbye!
> I would that I might see
> The sun rise once again
> ……………………….
> But no—'twere better so,
> That I should meet Grey Death
> Amidst the shades of night,
> For I have never walked
> Within the Sun's fair land,
> But down the vale of Tears. (52-53)

The speaker first appears as though she has given up, that the only option left for her is death. She feels hopeless and at her wit's end, supported by the assertion that she "ha[s] never walked / Within the Sun's fair land."[24] The following stanza details the speaker first giving in to death, exclaiming "Come! Close around me Shades! / That I may give my soul / Into your willing hands," but then as the "Shades" are approaching her, she questions "If [they] be friend or foe," before then deciding that they must be "fiends, / That come to mock at [her] / And make [her] end as black / As all [her] wretched life." With this realization, she then declares "You shall not have my soul!" and describes her change of heart, asserting that she will fight and defend her soul and that she is not ready to give up quite yet: "Dear Life thou'rt sweet indeed / I will not give thee up" (54). Towards the end of the poem, however, the darkness begins to consume her again:

> Why grows the room so dark
> I cannot hear or see
> Your faces are not there!
> But I can feel your hands

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[24] Alternatively, if this poem was inspired by a doomed interracial relationship, then the line could be a metaphor for segregation and/or anti-miscegenation laws, which is supported by the subsequent stanza's line "make [her] end as black," indicating the intersection between her worsening psychological state and her experiences with racial segregation and oppression.

Of chilling, numbing, ice
Creep down my shaking frame—
I fear that this is Death!—
I will not, will not die!
……………………
Remove your icy hands!
They numb my failing, brain,
They strangle at its birth,
Each, feeble, labored, breath—
Give me but time to think!—
Ah God! I fear 'tis o'er:—
It is: I die! I die! (55)

The ending of the poem unravels disturbingly, much like the speaker's mental state. She becomes paranoid that there are demons in the dark room with her that are attempting to drag her to hell. The final lines may also imply that these demons are strangling her, thus exacerbating the speaker's "failing brain" as she experiences a psychological breakdown that ultimately leads to her demise.

"Under the Days" is another difficult poem to read in that it seems to indicate that Grimké felt trapped by her worsening mental health:

The days fall upon me;
One by one, they fall,
Like leaves . . . .
They are black,
They are grey.
They are white;
They are shot through with gold and fire.
They fall,
They fall
Ceaselessly.
They cover me,
They crush,
They smother.

Who will ever find me
Under the days? (114)

The lines and ellipses mimic the falling of leaves that are likened to the speaker's descending depression. As the leaves/days fall, the speaker is reminded that winter will soon come, and then she will be buried frozen underneath the weight of her melancholia. *Dusk Dreams*, the collection of poems that never came to fruition for Grimké, would have begun with the unpublished poem "An Epitaph," which eerily foretells her sad fate:

1
I plead for joy from star-wake until sun
Then whitely tense I waited, —not in vain.
One came, slow came, with eyes enmisted, dun;
And left me, —pain.
2
I plead for love, the love men know but keep
So ill. I waited, waited with bound breath.
One came with eyes repellant, chill, and deep,
And dealt me death.
3
And now I lie quite straight, and still and plain;
Above my heart the brazen poppies flare,
But I know naught of love, or joy, or pain; —
Nor care, nor care. (36-37)

The ending of "An Epitaph" suggests that the speaker is already dead and buried, though she feels a sense of psychological relief from "love, or joy, or pain"; now that she has passed, she no longer has to be tormented by her troubled mind. Though Grimké clearly felt isolated by her "wait[ing]" for "the love men know but keep," isolation is a key aspect of her Sapphic modernity. In the same way that Sappho's being on the island of Lesbos symbolized her independence from patriarchal institutions, Grimké's queer poetics often took place in illusory rural spaces that were beyond masculinist, racist, and homophobic urbanity. Even though these bucolic spaces only existed in her dusk dreams (since she actually lived her entire life in cities like Boston, Washington, D.C., and New York City), they still provided the kind of liminality necessary for her to explore her queer and interracial desires, where nature could be a surrogate for the love that could not yet exist in reality for her. The only real tragedy is that this space *was* illusory for Grimké, for she was never able to experience it in her lifetime. "The days" of the past may have buried her, but I am still hopeful that she will be uncovered again.

Chapter 3

“The Massive Mother of Illicit Spawn”: Birthing Queer Futurity Through Djuna Barnes’s “Disgusting” Poetics in *The Book of Repulsive Women*

In Djuna Barnes’s most recent biography,[1] Phillip Herring barely acknowledges *The Book of Repulsive Women*—even though it was her first significant literary publication—except to say that, if we “truly cared” for Barnes, “very little” would be said about the “disgusting” collection that should have “never been published” (88). It seems as though other literary scholars have held similar opinions about *The Book of Repulsive Women*, for most Barnes scholarship has focused on what is widely considered her magnum opus, the queer modernist novel *Nightwood* (1936), while scholarship on her early career tends to overlook her first poetry collection[2] and instead focus on her journalism during that same period—despite the fact that Barnes dismissively considered it “utterly wasteful.”[3] But perhaps Herring was merely parroting Barnes’s own declaration that her first poetry collection is “disgusting,” for she says herself during an interview in the 1970s that her “first book of poems is a disgusting little item” (O’Neal 98). Apparently this rejection of *The Book of Repulsive Women* continued throughout

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[1] Though it is the most recent one, it’s still over 25 years old, having been published in 1995. This biography has definitely not aged well, either. Herring makes many problematic statements and assumptions throughout his assessment of Barnes’s life and career. As just one example, he refers to the likely incest between Barnes and her grandmother as nothing more than “good-natured fondling” (57). I address Djuna and Zadel Barnes’s relationship later in this chapter.

[2] The most recent academic book study on Barnes, *Shattered Objects: Djuna Barnes’s Modernism*, edited by Elizabeth Pender and Cathryn Setz (2019), glosses over *The Book of Repulsive Women* entirely.

[3] Letter to Dan Mahoney, dated September 8, 1950, DBP/C, Box 11, Folder 31.

Barnes's life, for when I visited her special collections at the University of Maryland, the archivist handed me Barnes's personal copy of *The Antiphon* (1958), opened to the "Also by This Author" page. Much to my amusement, I saw that Barnes had crossed out *The Book of Repulsive Women* with a red ink pen, the color ink she most often used for revisions in her manuscripts and typescripts. It made me wonder why she still continued to "revise" her first poetry collection decades after it was first published, and it also made me consider to what extent her own revocation has contributed to *The Book of Repulsive Women*'s near obscurity over a century later.

It is not uncommon for writers to later reject or dislike certain works, particularly when composed during their early career (as we will see in chapter four with Hope Mirrlees's *Paris*). However, such rejections should not automatically dismiss these works from the canon, especially when they are significant to the literary period in which they were written. *The Book of Repulsive Women* is one such example, for it is not only an early example of queer and disabled poetics, but its innovation also lies in being one of the earliest examples of the flâneuse that I have been able to find in modernist poetry. So then why, with few exceptions,[4] is scholarship on Barnes's first poetry collection scant?

For one, modernist scholars may view *The Book of Repulsive Women*'s formal structures as lacking innovation, as a kind of expired Decadent and specifically Beardsleyan style. While many of Barnes's modernist contemporaries were venturing into free verse and more experimental forms, *The Book of Repulsive Women* is seemingly more simple or rhythmically traditional. However, the eight poems do not all follow the same "traditional" or "simplistic" structure. "From Fifth Avenue Up" and "Twilight of the Illicit" might be considered a variation of the ballad form, except they include sestets rather than quatrains,[5] and there is no set meter. "In General," "In Particular," and "Suicide"[6] could also possibly be interpreted as an alternate ballad form, though "In General" and "In Particular" are only one sestet long, while "Suicide" is also brief, at only two sestets. With such brevity in these three poems, I am not sure we could consider them as ballads individually, though if we are to consider the collection as a whole, then that might work. Yet, the three remaining poems, "From Third Avenue On," "Seen from the 'L,'" and "To a Cabaret Dancer" are all different in terms of rhyme, meter, and stanza formation.[7] Considering that there were other modernists at that time who experimented with more traditional poetic forms[8]—though they may not have been in Barnes's specific literary circle—it is rather short-sighted to overlook *The Book of Repulsive Women* for this reason alone. Moreover, as Daniela Caselli suggests, perhaps Barnes's use of more

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[4] Meghan Fox, Daniela Caselli, Mary E. Galvin, Melissa Jane Hardie, Rebecca Loncraine, and Mary I. Unger have all done important work in highlighting *The Book of Repulsive Women*'s significance. However, with the exception of Fox, no recent scholarship on this collection within nearly the last decade exists.

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[5] Oscar Wilde's "The Ballad of Reading Gaol" (1898) also follows this sestet pattern of ABCBDB.

[6] This only works if we do not count the opening lines "Corpse A" and "Corpse B" as part of the two stanzas. But I think these are really kind of mock titles for the stanzas rather than part of the verses themselves.

[7] "From Third Avenue On" has 5 octaves of AAABCCCB with the triplets in iambic octameter and the "B" lines are iambic tetrameter. "Seen from the 'L'" has 3 sestets and one octave of all varying rhyme schemes and no discernable metrical pattern. "To a Cabaret Dancer" has eleven quatrains of ABAB rhyme in lines that move back and forth from iambic octameter to iambic tetrameter.

[8] For example, Robert Frost, Robinson Jeffers, W.B. Yeats, or Edna St. Vincent Millay, who apparently did not care for Barnes and who also had an affair with Barnes's partner Thelma Wood, which I am sure Barnes was not pleased about (Herring 121; 158).

"traditional" forms was a way for her to be even more original, since it was the opposite of what her Greenwich village contemporaries were doing (75-76). Additionally, if we *are* to read *The Book of Repulsive Women* as an alternative ballad form, considering that a ballad is "A popular, usually narrative, song, *spec.* one celebrating or scurrilously attacking persons or institutions" (OED), then it adds a layer to the collection's significance as one that critiques a modern society that ostracizes women who are deemed "repulsive" for their sexuality, disability, and/or profession.

Besides the chapbook's form, readers' possible "disgust" towards it may be another contributing factor to its obscurity. Some scholars such as Bridgit Elliott and Jo-Ann Wallace have suggested that the collection's problematic title may repel feminist critics from even picking up the collection (137). However, Mary E. Galvin highlights that contemporary critics thought Barnes's use of rhyme was meant to disguise the poetry's "perversity," and that the collection may have snuck past the censors *because* of its title (86). As long as Barnes frontloaded the fact that the women depicted in these poems were "repulsive," then she could maintain a status quo that deemed prostitution, homosexuality, and disability socially unacceptable. For a feminist scholar like myself, I think it is valid to be wary of a poetry collection that—at first glance—may appear to uphold such viewpoints. But especially for a dynamic and complex artist like Barnes, nothing she creates is really surface-level; therefore, I would have to agree with Astrid M. Fellner's point that Barnes is probably "*camouflaging* the female body as repulsive" (148, added emphasis). Perhaps this is all part of Barnes's genius, part of her "impossib[ility]" as T.S. Eliot once said of her: "She is undoubtedly a genius, but impossible."[9]

Many Barnes scholars have either argued that *The Book of Repulsive Women* upholds women's social limitations or that it is even "misogynistic" (à la Herring 157). Critics find the collection's final poem, titled "Suicide," especially problematic, as they read it as a kind of inevitable end for the women depicted in its verses who are queer, disabled, and/or sex workers. For example, Sarah Parker suggests that *The Book of Repulsive Women* serves as a kind of warning to women that their increased urban freedom and visibility could lead to prostitution, rape, and suicide (94). Furthermore, Parker takes issue with Barnes's linking lesbian desire to "death, destruction, and perversity" (101). However, Parker's reading is dependent on what she calls the "dead woman muse" throughout Barnes's work, which would mean that Barnes's characters in *The Book of Repulsive Women* are actually deceased by the end, but I do not think we should read "Suicide"—or any of these poems—literally. Especially if we contextualize the ways in which Barnes writes about death in *The Book of Repulsive Women* with other writings from this period, it becomes clear that her use of death and/or the corpse is metaphorical rather than literal.[10]

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[9] DBP/W, Box 8, Folder 3: "Notes," dated 1981. Barnes also included the comment "Abused by praise" in parentheses after Eliot's quote, which made me laugh. But I do think that Barnes's comment here shows her acute awareness of how women artists were viewed and (backhandedly) celebrated.

As I will examine in this chapter, Djuna Barnes's *The Book of Repulsive Women* makes space for queer, non-married, working, and disabled women within the present-day New York metropolis. Being deemed "repulsive," these women are therefore not included within a patriarchal system that limits women to objects and vessels for reproduction. Rather, Barnes's repulsive women have free movement within urban spaces, are self-sufficient, child-free, husband-free, and are able to own their sexuality as a mode of pleasure, expression, and even compensation rather than a commodity for male consumption that is managed by a patriarchal market. I make use of what José Esteban Muñoz calls a queer "future in the present" (62), whereby the flâneuse observes these women on their journey to accepting and embracing their repulsiveness so that they can exist outside an oppressive culture and foreground their own terms beyond a masculinist capitalist system. Therefore, I argue that repulsion, or Barnes's "disgusting" poetics, is the mode through which Barnes births a queer futurity in the present, for it allows these women to hold autonomy over their bodies and minds by facilitating a kind of metaphorical death of them as objects.

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[10] For instance, her "What is Good Form in Dying?" *Vanity Fair* article from 1923 is a tongue-in-cheek take on what "rules" women should follow—since they must follow rules for everything else—when committing suicide based on their "coloring" (e.g., red heads drown, blondes hang, fat women shoot themselves, etc.). If her satire is not obvious throughout the article, she makes it clear by its conclusion, writing: "for the true aristocrat, the real wit, the utterly superior person….there is but one possible death—the death by boredom" (102).

While Barnes has never explained specifically *why* she detests her first poetry collection, whenever she has mentioned the chapbook, it is always with language that emphasizes the text as an object, such as in a letter dated November 18, 1948 to Erich Linder, an Italian literary agent: “Yes, unfortunately, and to my horror, and against protests, one Oscar Baron has re-printed a booklet of ancient origin (1915 to be exact) called ‘The Book of Repulsive Women.’ I did not know that it still existed, and so did nothing about the copyright” (DBP/C, Box 1, Folder 5). I agree with Melissa Jane Hardie’s point[11] that Barnes’s protesting of the collection may have less to do with the rhythms or drawings themselves and more with the ways in which her first collection was handled by its publisher, Guido Bruno, and then later by Oscar Baron, who republished it against her will in 1949: “Barnes comprehensively represses the existence of the text as object, [as her letters on the subject refer] not to the historical existence of the text, but to the enduring existence of copies of the publication” (120). In the same 1970s interview with Hank O’Neal that was quoted from earlier, Barnes also reveals that she tried to collect as many copies of the chapbook as she could to burn them in her mother’s backyard (98), which again emphasizes her issue with the physical rather than historical text’s existence.

Guido Bruno, who was known as the “Barnum of Bohemia,” strategically used *The Book of Repulsive Women* as the beginning of a marketing campaign for Greenwich

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[11] Mary I. Unger also makes a similar point, suggesting that the commercialization of Barnes’s work for men like Bruno’s and Baron’s own benefit probably aided in Barnes’s detestation towards her first poetry collection (142).

Village, which he promoted as a kind of new American bohemia.[12] The same month that *The Book of Repulsive Women* was published, Bruno wrote a blurb in the *New York Tribune* entitled "An Apostrophe to Greenwich Village," where he exclaims:

> GREENWICH VILLAGE! . . . you playground of sensation—thrifty women with a yellow streak and of men that mistake the desire to sow wild oats for artistic inclination. GREENWICH VILLAGE! Where genius starved and gave the world the best it had, . . . where new ideas are developed into systems, into systems that will be overthrown to-morrow and substituted by others that will not live any longer. (2)

The repeated use of "GREENWICH VILLAGE!" throughout this blurb not only catches the reader's attention, but it also reads as a kind of news headline, suggesting that folks should take advantage of this new "playground of sensation" without delay. Yet Bruno's depiction of Greenwich Village is not just as a place for those with an "artistic inclination" to "sow [their] wild oats," for he also emphasizes it as a space where real philosophical change is created and then indicates how that change has the power to extend beyond the Village and influence the entire world. Moreover, paired with Bruno's apostrophe, David Reid suggests that the Greenwich Village rumor mill additionally heightened interest in *The Book of Repulsive Women* due to its salacious content that slipped through the cracks of the rather conservative literary censors of the time. As a result, Bruno strategically raised the price of the chapbook to fifty cents from the original price of fifteen cents, curating an even more heightened sense of value and intrigue

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[12] Barnes also wrote three articles on Greenwich Village the year after The Book of Repulsive Women was published: "Greenwich Village as It Is," Pearson's Magazine, Oct. 1916; "Becoming Intimate With the Bohemians," New York Morning Telegraph Sunday Magazine, Nov. 19, 1916; "How the Villagers Amuse Themselves," New York Morning Telegraph Sunday Magazine, Nov. 26, 1916.

(Wetzsteon 439). Meanwhile, it is not clear whether or not Barnes was able to financially benefit from the price increase.

When Bruno was attempting to rebrand Greenwich Village as a bohemian paradise in the nineteen-teens, it was actually considered one of the slums of Manhattan; New York City in general was thought to be one of the dirtiest cities in the country throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Charity Organization Society, a movement that aimed to ameliorate urban issues brought about by industrialization, attempted to pass an "antifreak bill" in 1895 which would have "prohibit[ed] the exhibition of physical and mental deformities" (qtd. in Schweik 55). This was just one example of the many "ugly laws" that swept the country during that time. As such, the 1910s saw a kind of aesthetic policing of New York, and Greenwich Village in particular, through campaigns such as the City Beautiful Movement or the Greenwich Village Improvement Society, who believed that the beautification of urban spaces would eventually lead to social reform.[13] *The Book of Repulsive Women* is rife with bodies that would have been deemed "illegal," then, in terms of these ugly laws, with diction and imagery that denote filth and mental or physical deformity, such as "mess," "soiled," "fouled," "ruined," "loud," "uncouth," "crooked," "ghastly," etc. The subject in "From Fifth Avenue Up" is "sagging" and "bulging" (RW 91-92). The prostitute in "From Third Avenue On" walks "Beside the litter in the street / Or rolls beneath a dirty sheet" (RW 94). The subject in "Twilight of the Illicit" is deformed, with her “long blank udders,” “spotted linen,” “Slack’ning arms,” and “knees set far apart” (RW 97). Even the feminine subjects depicted in Barnes’s drawings throughout *The Book of Repulsive Women* are zoomorphically deformed:

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[13] For more on the Greenwich Village Improvement Society, see McFarland 213-226.

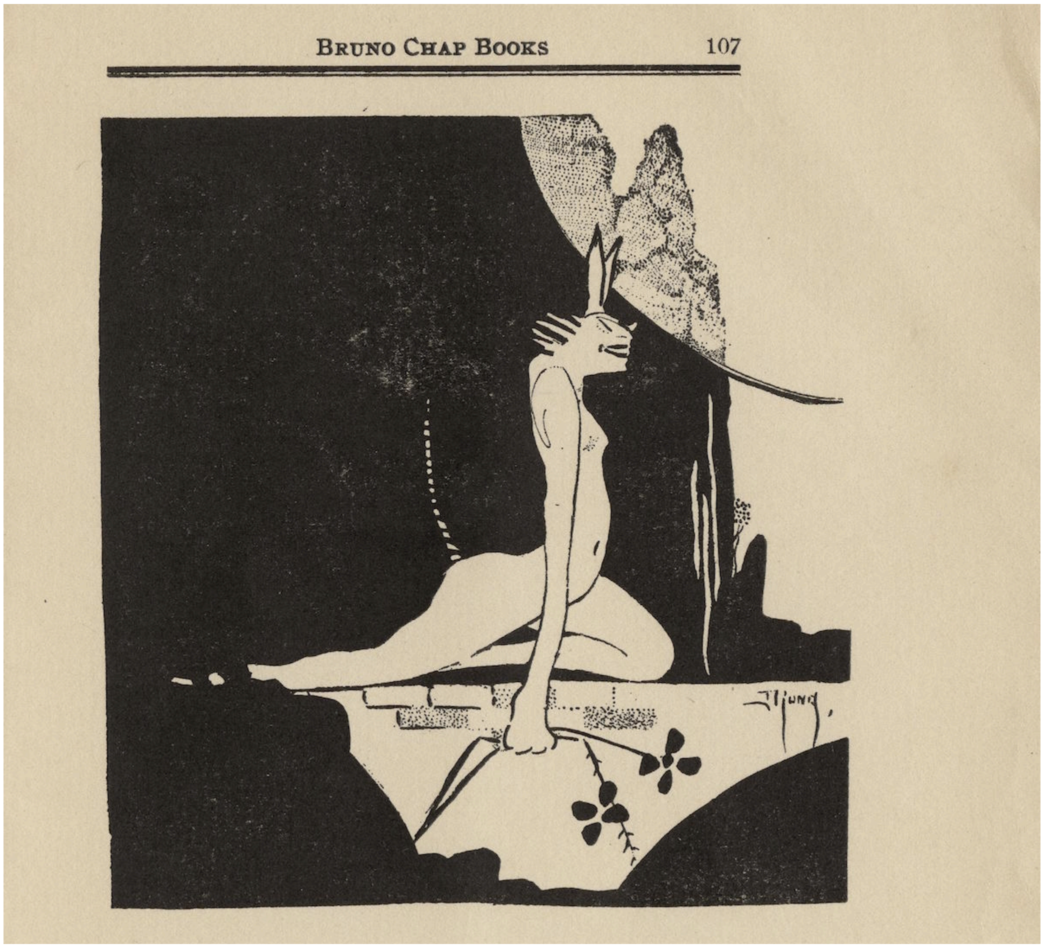


Figure 3.1: Cropped scan of Djuna Barnes’s third drawing from *The Book of Repulsive Women* (DBP/W, Box 12, Folder 10).

This is perhaps an image of the subject’s “Slack’ning arms” from “Twilight of the Illicit,” though this figure also has a tail, rabbit ears, and some kind of spikes or scales protruding out the back of its head/neck. The visage is grotesque and distorted, so that we cannot make out distinct facial features—except that the subject appears to be grinning at nothing, which may signal the kind of "mental deformity" that was abhorred in public at this time.

Many years later, in 1948, Oscar Baron, the founder of Alicat Book Shop Press (an avant-garde, limited edition publishing house), also wished to capitalize upon New York's bohemia by reprinting 1,000 copies of *The Book of Repulsive Women*, with the intention of preserving the collection's mystique. Barnes wrote to Baron multiple times asserting that she "categorically forb[ade]" him to reissue it and that doing so would be at his "own risk and peril." Baron responded by dismissing her wishes, writing that it is "a very fine collection of verse, not at all dated…." and that his intentions stem from the "desire of a bibliophile to communicate a good piece of writing to another" (DBP/C, Box 1, Folder 13). Baron's audacity here is troubling but not surprising. Nowhere in her letters to Baron does she describe her hesitations about it being published due to its potential anachronisms, though he is quick to make such an assumption. Baron is so intent on establishing himself as an unconventional bibliophile that Barnes's wishes for her own work are ignored. How ironic that Barnes's own professional life seems to mirror one of *The Book of Repulsive Women*'s main points: that women need to create space beyond a masculinist capital system that exploits their bodies and bodies of work.

In the years leading up to *The Book of Repulsive Women*'s composition, journalism was the first mode through which Barnes could navigate modern society, as it gave her the space to observe and experience urbanity without gendered suspicions or criticisms as a single woman with free movement in a metropolis. However, Barnes's journalism career began out of financial necessity rather than solely as a desire or interest she wanted to pursue. Barnes was the oldest daughter and second oldest child of Elizabeth Chappell, a housewife, and Wald Barnes, an unsuccessful artist who spent more time having extramarital affairs than working to support his family. Zadel Barnes, Djuna's grandmother and a well-known writer and suffragist, was the sole income-generating family member for most if not all of Djuna's childhood and early adulthood. After Elizabeth and Wald divorced in 1912, Djuna, her mother, and her brothers moved to New York City, where Djuna enrolled in the Pratt Institute of Brooklyn. The following year, Zadel began writing letters to various friends and acquaintances (mostly famous writers) soliciting money or asking if she could interview them so that she could generate some income. With Zadel's (and, as a whole, the Barnes family's) resources and finances dwindling, Djuna then left university to start working as a journalist to support her family at barely twenty years old, a heavy responsibility that I think made her somewhat bitter.

For instance, a letter dated May 20, 1914 shows Zadel's distress after Djuna refused to mail her pictures of her grandsons. Djuna, who was unmistakably annoyed by this request, replied that she did not have the money or "inclination" to have their pictures taken to then send to Zadel. Throughout the May 20 letter, Zadel quotes pieces of Djuna's previous letter verbatim, followed by her reactions to each hurtful sentence. In one such sentence, Djuna had written: "'You get lonesome for our letters, not so much because you love us [i.e., she and her brothers], but because you havn't [sic] anything else to do'" (DBP/C, Box 6, Folder 23). While this may seem like a harsh thing to say to one's grandmother, it is understandable how frustrated Barnes must have been, considering that she was working tirelessly at *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (and other New York outlets) while the other able-bodied and able-minded adult members of her family idled at home. Moreover, Barnes's biting comment emphasizes her own work ethic in sharp contrast with Zadel's, pitting her creative and income-generating labor above and beyond Zadel's maternal labor.

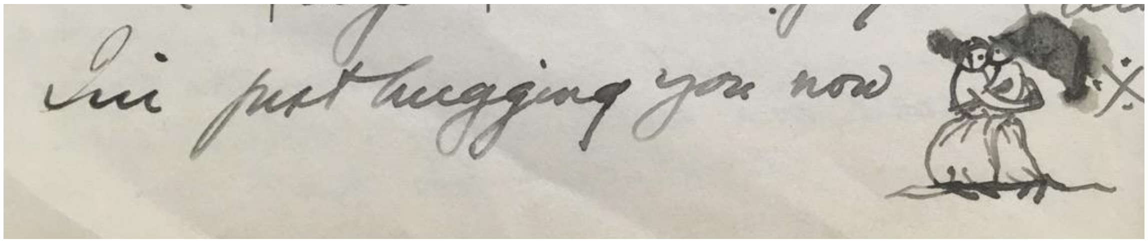
It must be addressed that Djuna and Zadel had an unusual relationship that seemed to mimic a queer, incestuous partnership, with this instance of Djuna refusing to provide photographs of "the boys" mimicking a scuffle that might occur between co-parents. Considering that Djuna and Zadel were the only two people providing for their family, this odd partnership between the women is further complicated by its resemblance to a more traditional spousal dynamic. In reading all of the letters Zadel wrote to Djuna, it is clear that she depended on her a great deal to watch over her younger siblings and that a lot of emotional labor was put upon Djuna to keep all the kids happy, especially when Zadel would have to be away from the home for work. It is unmistakably the kind of emotional labor that one would expect from a mother, resulting in a dynamic between the two women that resembled a doting mother comforting children who might be missing their father who is away working to provide for the family.

Further supporting that the relationship between Zadel and Djuna appeared to resemble a kind of queer, incestuous partnership was the fact that they shared a bed for years. It is not clear if their sharing a bed was out of necessity (i.e., because there were not enough beds in the house); however, the way that Zadel speaks of their shared bed makes it seem as though it was an intentional, romantic choice—such as we see in this undated letter: “I’m glad you slept like a good sensible girl, in our bed. I kiss & love you & miss you & long for you” (DBP/F, Box 6, folder 23; original emphasis). Since Djuna moves to New York City with her mother and brothers in 1912 while Zadel remains in Connecticut, the letter must be before then, meaning that Djuna was most likely a child at the time (and even if Djuna *was* an adult, the letter is still equally alarming).

Nearly all (if not all) of the letters Zadel wrote to Djuna throughout her adolescence and up until Zadel passed away in 1917 from uterine cancer were inappropriate and unusual. “Starbits” (or sometimes “Snickerbits”), as well as “Misriss,” were the most common pet names Zadel gave to Djuna. Meanwhile, Zadel’s nicknames for herself included “Gaga” and “Flitch,” though she most often referred to herself with the plural pronoun “we,” signaling herself and her breasts, which had the epithets “Pink Tops” (or “P.T.” for short), “pink titties,” or “pink ditties.” Additionally, throughout her letters to Djuna, Zadel would frequently insinuate a sexual relationship between them and would persistently describe her breasts, such as we see in a letter from 1909: “...our kinkyness will go pae (?) if misriss isn’t happy….Of course if Misriss is happy we [Zadel’s breasts] shall stay very pink–Oh! Oh! Eff!” (DBP/F, Box 6, folder 21). The uncomfortably sexual tone here, particularly the climactic “Oh! Oh! Eff!” exclamations, would have probably been more appropriate if addressed to a lover rather than one’s own granddaughter.

In other letters, Zadel's frustration with Djuna's lack of attention—as one might relay in a lovers' quarrel—is palpable. For instance, one letter dated September 4, 1915 speaks of Zadel's irritation in not having received a response quickly enough to Zadel's previous love letter: "I sent you a love letter on July 31st—a whole month and four days ago!!!" (DBP/F, Box 6, Folder 23; original emphasis). While we can unmistakably characterize Zadel's neediness and emotional dependency on Djuna, she often crosses over into sexually explicit territory in her letters, such as one dated June 7, 1916: "I shall see your exquisite little body on the pillow in my lap!" (DBP/F, Box 6, Folder 23). Since Djuna would have been twenty-three years old (and nearly twenty-four) at the time this letter was written, it is most unusual that a grown woman would want to sit in her grandmother's lap—or that a grandmother would want her adult granddaughter to sit in her lap. Moreover, the referencing of Djuna's "exquisite little body" is a remarkably uncomfortable way to describe a relative.

In addition to Zadel's explicit language throughout her letters to Djuna, she would frequently include illustrations that insinuated romance between the two women, such as a drawing Zadel drew of them embracing and perhaps even kissing, as lovers might:



Im just hugging you now

Figure 3.2: Cropped photograph of an illustration from a letter dated September 12, 1912 from Zadel to Djuna Barnes. (DBP/F, Box 6, Folder 22).

Zadel’s illustrations were often quite provocative and would depict caricatures of her breasts. Figure 3.3, for instance (see below), may have later inspired the “long blank udders” from “Twilight of the Illicit” in *The Book of Repulsive Women*, especially since Zadel’s figure of herself here shows her walking in New York City, much like Djuna’s flâneuse. Additionally, Zadel’s walking with a cane seems to mirror the first illustration from Djuna’s chapbook (see Figure 3.7).

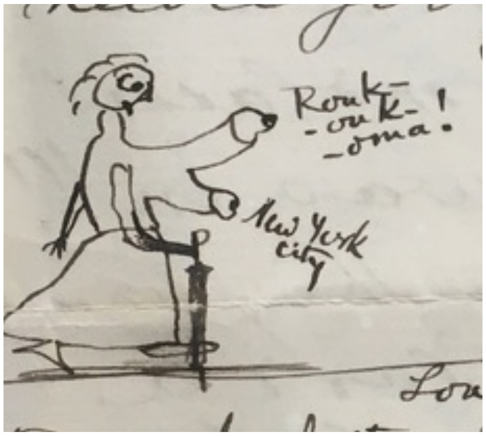

Rouk-k-!
-ouk-
-oma!
New York city

Figure 3.3: Cropped photograph of an illustration from a letter dated July 9, 1905 from Zadel to Djuna Barnes. (DBP/F, Box 6, Folder 21).

Several years later, around 1909, Zadel begins almost exclusively referring to and drawing her breasts as eyes that are “reading” Djuna’s letters:

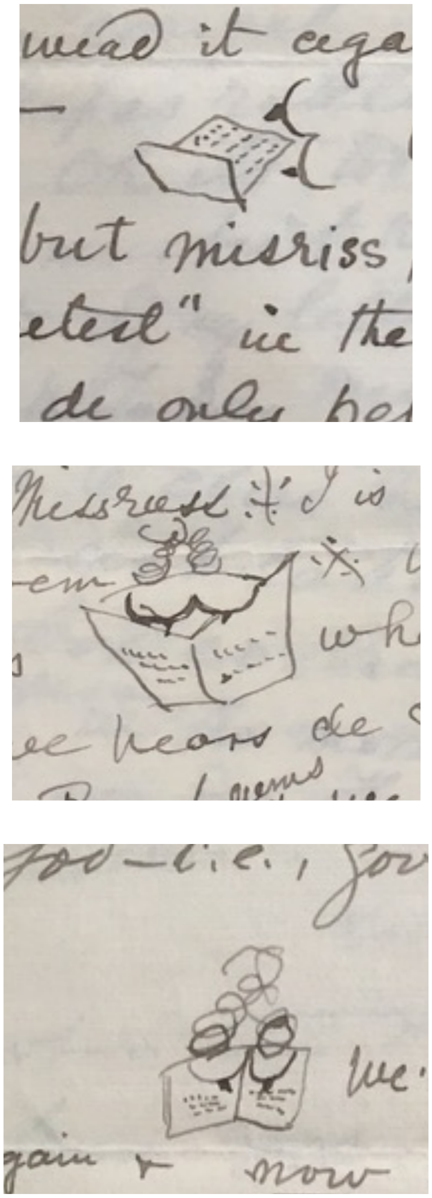

wead it aga
but misriss
in the
de only
wh
hears de
we
gain +
now

Figure 3.4: Cropped photographs of illustrations from a letter dated February 21, 1909 from Zadel to Djuna Barnes. (DBP/F, Box 6, Folder 21).

In a letter dated March 5, 1909 (Djuna would have been seventeen years old), Zadel depicts her breasts knocking Djuna out of a chair and writes: "Oh Misriss! When I sees your sweet hands a huggin' you[r] own P.T.'s—I is just crazy + I jumps on 'oo! Like dis —wiv dis wesult—" (see Figure 3.5 below). While the relationship appears to have been reciprocal in that Zadel refers to Djuna's own action of touching her breasts, the notion of consent is moot since Djuna is still a child at this point. What is more, Zadel appears to even emphasize Djuna's age by drawing her with a bow in her hair, as a little girl would have.

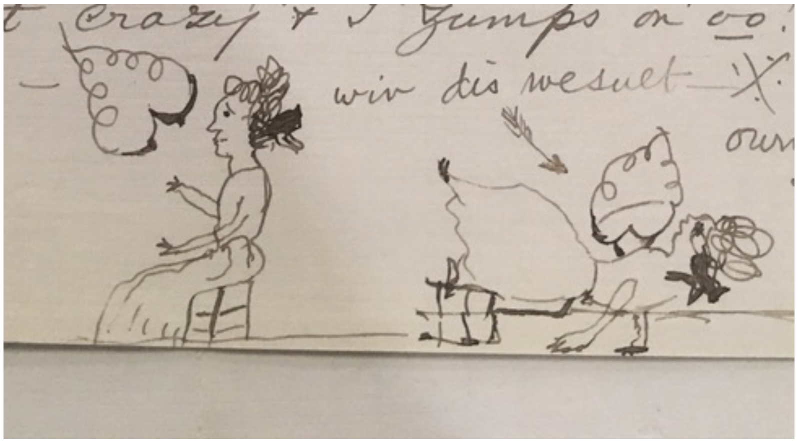


Figure 3.5: Cropped photograph of an illustration from a letter dated March 5, 1909 from Zadel to Djuna Barnes. (DBP/F, Box 6, Folder 21).

Perhaps more coded, one of Zadel's drawings shows her laying down with her "hands clasped in pleading," as she writes in the letter, though she admits that her clasped hands actually resemble a cat, which may be a sexual innuendo denoting her taboo desire for Djuna:

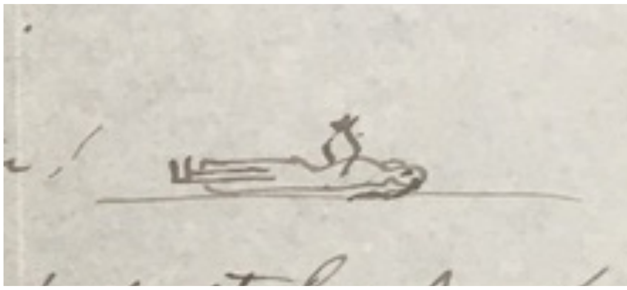


Figure 3.6: Cropped, zoomed in picture of an illustration from a letter dated June 7, 1913 from Zadel to Djuna Barnes. (DBP/F, Box 6, Folder 23).

Based on the extensive archival research I conducted at the University of Maryland's Djuna Barnes Papers, the sexually coded correspondence from Zadel to Djuna is exclusive to their relationship, as Zadel does not include any explicit drawings or innuendos in the letters she writes to her other grandchildren or family members. Unfortunately, there are no letters in this collection that were authored by Djuna to her grandmother, so we do not know to what extent Zadel's suggestive content was reciprocated.[14] While the Barnes family was undoubtedly unconventional in their views on sexuality,[15] I do not think that one could argue that Djuna and Zadel's questionable relationship was germane to the Barnes's apparent eccentricities. Even more puzzling is the fact that Barnes sold her papers, including this personal correspondence, to the University of Maryland toward the end of her life, so she must have considered that these letters might shock some researchers. Elsewhere in her manuscripts, she took the time to cut out entire sections or lines throughout dozens and dozens of pages. Does this then suggest that Barnes was unapologetic about her queer, incestuous relationship with Zadel, or does it mean that she was willing to be transparent about being sexually abused by her grandmother? Even more confusing is Barnes's admission that she was attracted to her long term partner Thelma Wood *because* she resembled Zadel (Herring 152). In any case, though the nature of Djuna and Zadel's relationship is problematic and uncertain, what is clear are the ways in which that unorthodox relationship possibly influenced the composition of *The Book of Repulsive Women*—especially since incest is undoubtedly "repulsive."

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[14] There are, however, countless letters Djuna Barnes had written to other members of her family, which makes me wonder why Barnes purposefully excluded these letters from the sale of her papers to U Maryland.

[15] Wald Barnes was a known polygamist who had his mistress and their offspring living in the same household as a kind of blended family. What is more, the Barnes family was well aware and supportive of Djuna's bisexuality and did not deem it abhorrent or unusual even though it was most certainly viewed in such regards during the early twentieth century.

Tellingly, Barnes never had children in her lifetime, with her father even complaining in a letter dated December 22, 1920: "There's something wrong with you all if none of you want children: Too much self, perhaps?" (DBP/C, Box 6, Folder 2). While Wald is indeed referencing Djuna as well as her other siblings, the letter and point is addressed specifically to her, illustrating the hypocrisy of a man who could not care for his own children but who had the audacity to claim that Djuna's decision *not* to have children was an act of selfishness and that there must, therefore, be something "wrong" with her. In an undated notebook, Barnes once wrote: "You can only serve the people by not being one of them" (DBP/F, Box 4, Folder 7), which is a thought that helps us examine Barnes's conscious decision to devote her life to her work rather than follow the path set out for women at that time. That is, besides providing for her family at the beginning of her journalism career, she also began the pursuit of "serv[ing] the people" by offering them a bird's eye view of New York society in the nineteen-teens.

Barnes's article published in the September 6, 1914 issue of *New York World Magazine*, entitled "How it Feels to be Forcibly Fed," is a stunt journalism piece that performs the process suffragettes experience when going on a hunger strike. In the article, Barnes compresses birth and corpse imagery as she does in *The Book of Repulsive*

Women the following year. On the way to the room where the procedure will take place, Barnes compares the doctor's walk to "that little confiding gait that horses must have returning from funerals," and as she enters the room and glances at the table, she writes that it is "pregnant with the pains of the future" (5). Next, she is wrapped with a sheet up to her throat so that she cannot move: "I lay in [the sheet] as long and unbroken lines as any corpse" (see Figure 3.7 below).

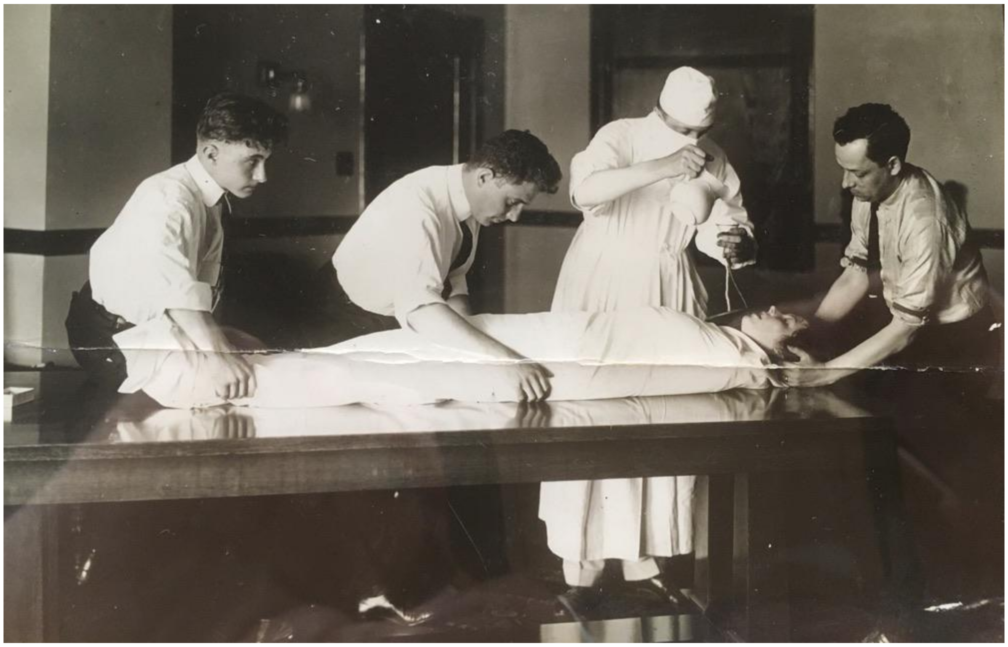

Figure 3.7: Copy of a Photograph of Djuna Barnes being forcibly fed. Taken August 16, 1914. (DBP/P, Box 1, Folder 1).

As the image shows, the doctor is performing the ritual while three men forcefully hold her down, sleeves rolled up as though preparing for a strenuous task: one man holds her head while the other two men hold her hips and ankles, keeping a close eye on her lest she protest. She relates the doctor's "white robes" to "shrouds," which then correlates to the "paradox" of the doctor who is meant to prolong life, but who instead forces the tubing down a woman's throat to the point of choking her to death, all in the name of having to "sternly execute the law" (17). The fact that they are feeding her milk further heightens the tensions and compression between birth and death, as it can both sustain her life but also be the cause of her demise if she chokes on it. Barnes writes that the "torture and outrage of it burned in [her] mind; a dull, shapeless, wordless anger arose to [her] lips, but [she] only smiled" (17), signaling the all-too-familiar, performative smile expected of women who are inwardly seething. Even though "Science had [...] deprived [women] of the right to die" (17), as Barnes concluded in this piece, we will see that Barnes soon reclaims her silent anger and gives it a shape and a voice in *The Book of Repulsive Women*.

As Alex Goody asserts in her chapter from *Shattered Objects* (2019), Barnes's journalism is significant to understanding her modernity as "a becoming rather than an instantiation of an essential, radical otherness" (34). In this way, Barnes's work as a journalist in the years leading up to and during the composition of *The Book of Repulsive Women* helps us to contextualize its flâneuse, the "radical other" (in comparison to the more traditional male flâneur), who leads us through the eight poems and five drawings of the chapbook. Embodying the flâneuse through her journalism,[16] Barnes's flânerie is untraditional, according to Kristina Chesaniuk, because she "is not interested in observations of the crowd as a whole but rather on its composing parts, emphasizing its heterogeneity and overturning gendered conventions of urban mobility" (6). The chapbook's flâneuse, then, is not merely relaying urbanites for the pleasure of spectatorship but, rather, she is specifically underscoring women who freely navigate the city even though they may exist on the margins of society.

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[16] Nancy Bombaci maintains a similar point as well, arguing that Barnes appropriates the flâneur role through her "phallic wit," thus "blending and blurring the positions of subject and object" (169).

Most of the poems in the collection are narrated by an observer, though they do not speak to movement directly—except perhaps the movement of time. "In General," "In Particular," and "Twilight of the Illicit" directly address the object "you/your," whom scholars read as either a prostitute, a lesbian, and/or an aged woman.[17] The final two poems, "To a Cabaret Dancer" and "Suicide," read as almost a kind of feature article for the poems' characters, emphasized through the use of the third person "she/her" object. The illustration that most obviously pairs with "To a Cabaret Dancer," the final drawing in the chapbook (see Figure 3.8 below), further supports the idea that the poem reads as a feature article, since most of Barnes's articles were accompanied by her original illustrations.[18] This drawing in particular is strikingly different from the others in the chapbook, as it is the only one that is defined by white rather than black space. What is more, it is the only illustration that does not feature a grotesque or *grotteschi*[19] style, making it appear more like a portrait (compare with Figures 3.1, 3.9, 3.10, and 3.11).

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[17] See Alex Goody's *Modernist Articulations: A Cultural Study of Djuna Barnes, Mina Loy and Gertrude Stein* and Melissa Jane Hardie's "'Repulsive Modernism: Djuna Barnes' *The Book of Repulsive Women*." Alternatively, Daniela Caselli argues in *Improper Modernism: Djuna Barnes's Bewildering Corpus* that the "you" in this poem is a cross between an idol and a revenant (77), although Caselli's reading here is referring to the poem's resurrection of a kind of "dead" French Decadence.

[18] Since Barnes did not have any journalism experience or formal education before inquiring for a position at *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Barnes was largely hired because she could accompany her articles with original illustrations.

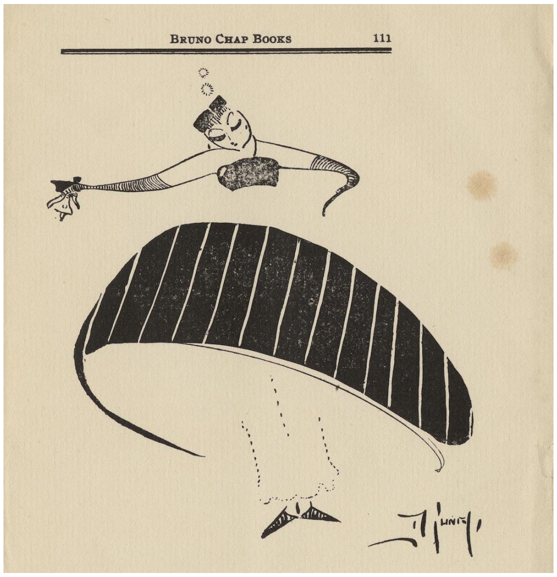

Figure 3.8: Cropped scan of Djuna Barnes's fifth drawing from *The Book of Repulsive Women* (DBP/W, Box 12, Folder 10).

"From Fifth Avenue Up," "From Third Avenue On," and "Seen from the 'L'" are the three poems in the chapbook that best relay the flâneuse's movements, identifiable by their titles but not necessarily through the details in the verses.[20] Significantly, Barnes refers to the eight poems as "rhythms," which emphasizes a "repeated pattern of [...] movement" (OED). In addition to these three movement poems, several of the drawings are also key in understanding the flâneuse's gaze as she navigates the city. The chapbook's opening poem, "From Fifth Avenue Up," denotes the flâneuse's movement from south to north, probably from Greenwich Village to Harlem. Throughout the poem, the flâneuse's position as voyeur is established in the repetition of the perfect progressive "We'd see" or present "We see." The use of the plural pronoun subject "we" in contrast to the singular "you/your" object heightens this sense of the journalistic voyeur, as one whose gaze is part of the collective audience's/reader's gaze upon the object of the piece (RW 91-92).

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[19] A 15th century Italian architectural style that hybridizes animal, human, and plant imagery. Joanne Winning makes this connection in her *Shattered Objects* chapter (101-102).

[20] Ezra Pound's "In a Station of the Metro," written only two years before *The Book of Repulsive Women*, comes to mind as another example of a poem whose space is identified solely by its title.

Next, in "From Third Avenue On," the flâneuse could be continuing north, though she would have had to have moved east at some point to now be on Third Avenue from Fifth. At the time in which these poems would have been composed, the New York metro lines only ran vertically in Manhattan, meaning that the flâneuse must be both walking and riding on the train, signaling her differing modes of mobility and taking up space in varying public environments. Barnes herself did not originally pair any of the illustrations with the poems, as she had the eight rhythms printed in sequence followed by the five drawings.[21] Since each illustration takes up an entire page in the chapbook, I think Barnes's sequencing of the poems and drawings separately was probably a practical rather than artistic choice, so I do think that we can read specific illustrations in tandem with the poems that they seem to visually or thematically parallel with. For instance, this poem, and probably "From Fifth Avenue Up," too, seem to mirror the first drawing from the collection (see Figure 3.9 below), especially if we are to read its main figure as the prostitute who “walks on out turned feet” (RW 94). The image’s vertical rather than horizontal printing helps signal the flâneuse’s movement from south to north, as she does lyrically in the first two poems of the collection. The “cock” between her legs may be an innuendo for that which the prostitute seeks, and it may also signal her control, since another rooster follows her (i.e., not only does she pursue, but she is pursued as well). Moreover, the “cock” between her legs may also disrupt or degender the phallus, thus asserting her sexual power, much like the nude woman in Figure 3.10.

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[21] The 2003 Routledge reprint edited by Rebecca Loncraine does attempt to pair the drawings with the poems, even though this was not the original placement.

Furthermore, “From Third Avenue On” compresses prostitution and marriage, suggesting that marriage is a kind of transactional arrangement, except that if the female subject “settles down,” “It means her powers slip away / It means she draws back day by day / From good or bad” (RW 94). The “draw[ing] back” from “good or bad,” though it may seem like a vague statement, is actually an important assertion, for it signals that marriage would be the end of all her autonomy. Whether she makes “good” decisions or “bad” ones, the point is that she actually has a decision to make; but “settl[ing] down” takes away that “power” of choice from her. At least when she is “walk[ing] out on turned feet” or “roll[ing] beneath a dirty sheet,” she “does not stir to doff her dress, / She does not kneel low to confess, / A little conscience, no distress” (RW 94). That is, when she is in charge of her sexuality, she is not concerned with her appearance—both literal in terms of her dress and physical manner as well as how she is perceived socially. As a prostitute, she does not have to perform the ritual of “distress[ing]” over gendered expectations or “confess[ing]” any perceived sins. As the poem continues, the speaker contends that "those who have their blooms in jars / No longer stare into the stars" (RW 94). If we are to read a woman's "blooms" as her sexuality (especially since flowers are often yonic symbols or can relay fecundity or virginity), then "hav[ing her] blooms in jars" could mean that her sexuality is being suppressed. As a married woman, she "No longer stare[s] into the stars" but instead "watch[es] the dinky cars" drive by outside her window. From this position, she is likened to the nude women the flâneuse observes in "Seen from the 'L.'"

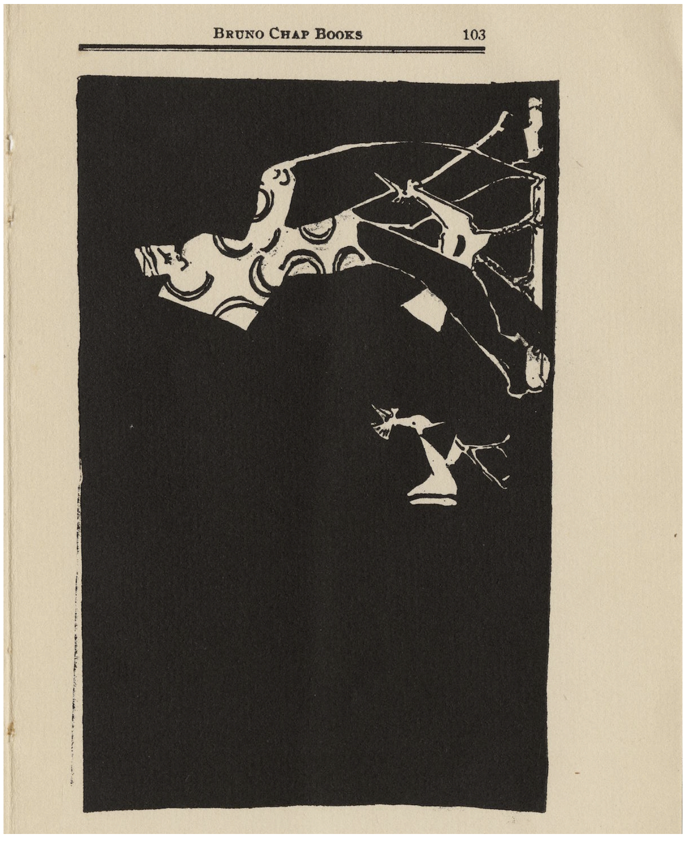

Figure 3.9: Cropped scan of Djuna Barnes's first drawing from *The Book of Repulsive Women* (DBP/W, Box 12, Folder 10).

"Seen from the 'L,'" references the flâneuse's point of view from the elevated train, which does veer east across the Third Avenue Bridge into the Bronx, although the verse itself does not indicate which specific direction the flâneuse is going. "Seen from the 'L'" is the fourth poem in the chapbook, which I would suggest pairs with the fourth drawing from the collection (see Figure 3.10), even though *The Book of Repulsive Women*'s most recent reprint couples it with the first half of "Suicide" (RWOP 23). The scene in this drawing is shaped as though it is being viewed through an arched window, perhaps the "frail mosaic …window" from the poem (RW 95). What is more, the focal point of the drawing is the nude woman at the top, "stretching dully" on what could be a bed, all while resting above several possible phalluses, thus marking her dominance. A kind of cornucopia sits behind her, symbolizing her fecundity, which is strategically positioned above modes of masculinist reproduction; her hand firmly grasping a phallus establishes her sexual and reproductive control. Importantly, Barnes refers to the elevated train as the "L" rather than the "El," its more common diminutive, signaling lesbianism (i.e., the "L" word). In this way, the title not only denotes the flâneuse's vantage point from the train, but it also identifies the flâneuse's sexuality and contextualizes her possible desire as she peers through the nude woman's window.

In addition to the queer flâneuse, what I call "lesbian (m)Other," a symbol of sexual and reproductive alterity, is one of the most significant "repulsive" women figures in the collection. Importantly, Barnes dedicates *The Book of Repulsive Women* to her mother, writing:

> TO MOTHER
> Who was more or less like All
> mothers, but she was mine,-and
> so—She excelled. (RW 90)

Thus, Barnes establishes her chapbook as what I call the "metro of modernity," which is a site of alternative production and creative labor. In Barnes's rhythms, the compressing of maternity and sapphic pleasure subverts heteronormativity by representing reproduction as repulsive and by offering a coded scene of alternate sexuality that exists outside a masculinist aesthetic. Its "repulsion" is further heightened by its potential incestuous undertones, as the subject takes pleasure in breastfeeding from her mother: "...you drew / Your mouth across her breast as / Trick musicians do" (RW 92). The use of "Trick" implies breastfeeding as a ruse when really the subject is receiving enjoyment from having her "mouth across [her mother's] breast." Relaying this "Trick" to musicians likens the ruse of playing music to perhaps an oral fixation, if the musicians are woodwind players.

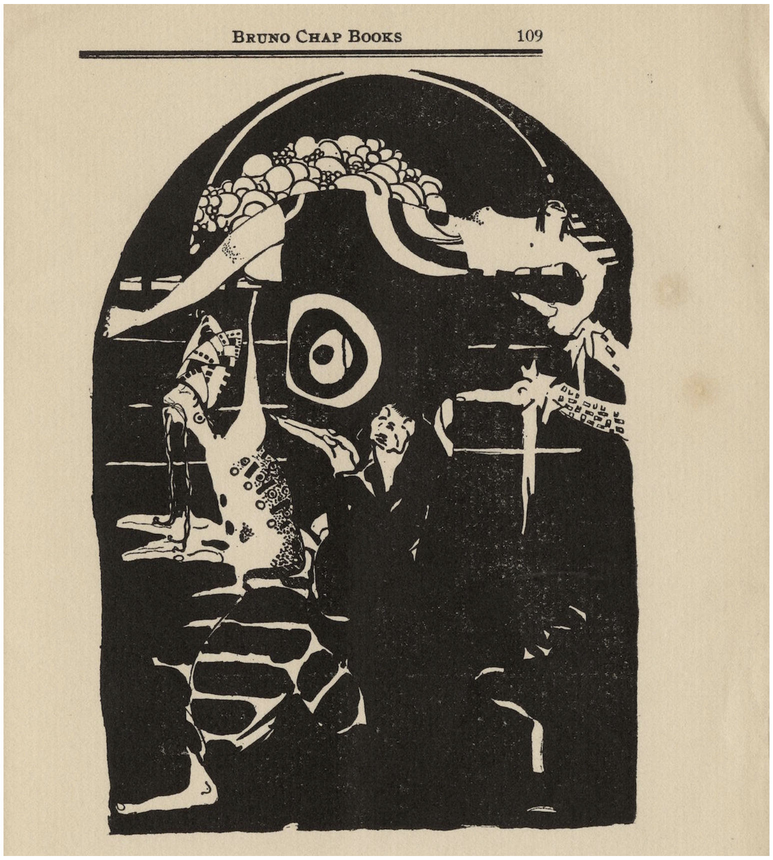

Figure 3.10: Cropped scan of Djuna Barnes's fourth drawing from *The Book of Repulsive Women* (DBP/W, Box 12, Folder 10).

As Barnes compresses birth and death imagery throughout *The Book of Repulsive Women*, she likewise compresses pregnancy/giving birth and sapphic pleasure in "From Fifth Avenue Up" and "Twilight of the Illicit," signaling the "birth" of women's sexuality while simultaneously calling upon the orgasmic zenith of queer desire, which is commonly referred to in French as *le petite mort*, or "the little death." The cosmic imagery that opens "From Fifth Avenue Up" thus serves as a climactic innuendo:

Someday beneath some hard
Capricious star—
Spreading its light a little
Over far,

> We'll know you for the woman
> That you are.
>
> For though one took you, hurled you
> Out of space,
> With your legs half strangled
> In your lace,
> You'd lip the world to madness
> On your face. (RW 91)

Suggestive descriptors such as "hard / Capricious star," "Spreading," "one took you," and "legs half strangled / In your lace" all indicate sexual longing and action. Additionally, the subject's "Spreading [her] light a little / Over far" suggests that she is probably not monogamous and that she enjoys sex freely and with multiple partners. Alternatively, it could indicate that she is also a prostitute, which is further supported by the third stanza:

> We'd strain to touch those lang'rous
> Length of thighs;
> And hear your short sharp modern
> Babylonic cries. (RW 91)

The plural "We" are the subject's potential customers, who will undoubtedly return for her services again and again because they "strain" to "touch" her "lang'rous thighs" and "hear" her "cries." Importantly, her cries are "Babylonic," signaling the Whore of Babylon, the mother of prostitutes.[22] What is more, Barnes's second drawing from *The Book of Repulsive Women* seems to mirror the opening of this poem (see Figure 3.11 below), not only in terms of the cosmic imagery but also regarding the woman's grasping a Chinese lantern, which is a symbol of prostitution and a common marker outside of fin de siècle brothels (Ringdal 201; 253).

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[22] Also see Hope Mirrlees's use of the symbolic Whore of Babylon in Chapter Four.

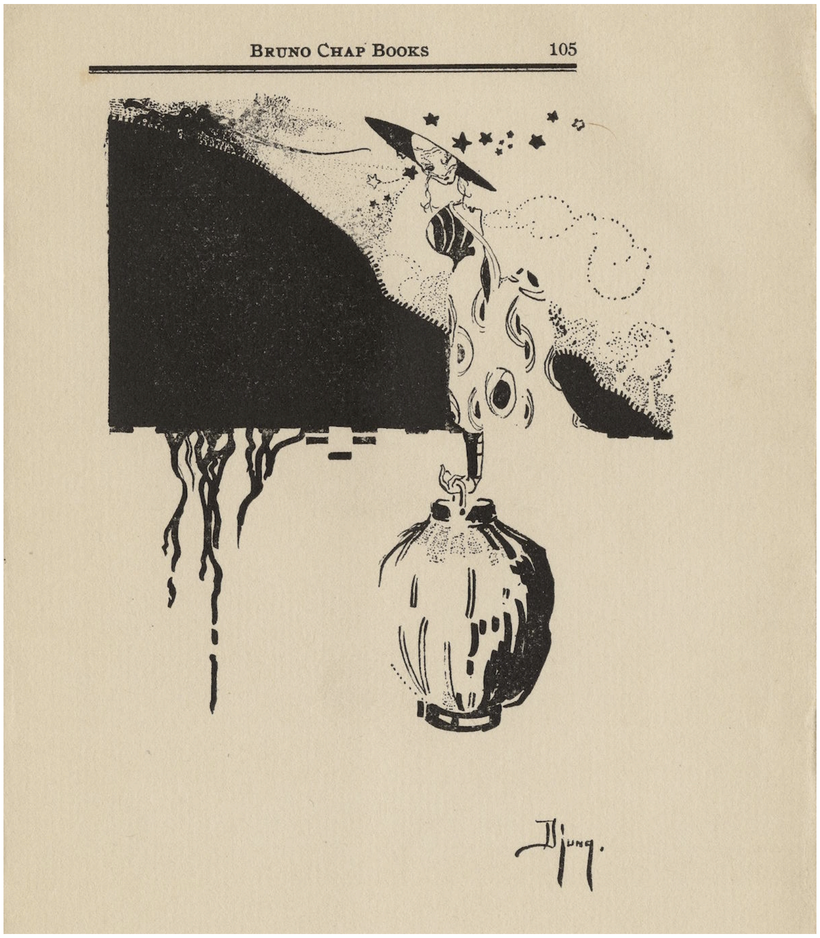

Figure 3.11: Cropped scan of Djuna Barnes's second drawing from *The Book of Repulsive Women* (DBP/W, Box 12, Folder 10).

The sixth stanza most vividly relays the lesbian (m)Other in this poem:

> See you sagging down with bulging
> Hair to sip,
> The dappled damp from some vague
> Under lip.
> Your soft saliva, loosed
> With orgy, drip. (RW 91)

While some scholars, such as Unger, read this stanza as describing a pregnant woman or a kind of metaphorical childbirth (129), and others, such as Fox, argue that it portrays a "thinly veiled sex act," I think it quite obviously references cunnilingus. Especially if we consider Barnes's use of sexually charged descriptors like "bulging," "Hair to sip," "Under lip," "saliva," "orgy," and "drip," the language and imagery here are rather conspicuous. I do agree, however, with Fox's assertion that Barnes advances the poem forward by "describing sex outside of a phallic economy," as all of the lyrical eroticism is undoubtedly yonic.

Continuing with the lesbian (m)Other figure, the sixth stanza in "From Fifth Avenue Up" parallels with the opening stanza of "Twilight of the Illicit":

> You, with your long blank udders
> And your calms,
> Your spotted linen and your
> Slack'ning arms.
> With satiated fingers dragging
> At your palms. (RW 97)

The pregnant woman's body with the "long blank udders" and "Slack'ning arms" is portrayed as being so disgusting that it is zoomorphic. Not only is she dehumanized with her ruminant breasts and simian arms, but she is also dirty, with her "spotted linen." Her "satiated fingers" are a nod to her lesbianism, an intimacy that cannot result in offspring, which is probably why her "udders" are "blank" (i.e., her breasts have no milk). Later in the poem, we see what she *is* able to reproduce via her alternative (m)Otherhood:

> "You, the twilight powder of
> A fire-wet dawn;

> You, the massive mother of
> Illicit spawn;
> While the others shrink in virtue
> You have borne. (RW 97)

While some scholars read the subject of this poem as an aged woman (e.g., Galvin), or even a revenant (e.g., Caselli), I actually read the subject as a young woman. "Twilight," though most commonly referred to as the diffusion of light leading to sunset, can also refer to the period before sunrise. Especially since Barnes refers explicitly to "dawn" in the second line of this stanza, I do not think it is a stretch to assume that she actually means the twilight before sunrise. If we read it this way, then the "Twilight of the Illicit" is relaying the "dawning" of a new age, an era that disrupts what has been considered lawful or proper. Thus, the subject here is bringing forth or giving birth to an alternative modernity, one that does not "shrink in virtue," but instead "bloom[s] vivid and repulsive / As the truth" (RW 95).

The truth is that the women portrayed in this collection are "repulsive" because they do not ascribe to the gendered expectations of the period. But their repulsion provides them a space to navigate freely, where they can "bloom." The penultimate poem's subject in "To a Cabaret Dancer" is often read as a desperate woman whose fate is implied in the final poem's title, "Suicide." However, I would suggest that the "death" the subject faces is a metaphorical death of her as an object of the male gaze: "A thousand lights had smitten her / into this *thing*" (RW 98, added emphasis). But the "thing" shifts later in the poem from her objectification to her queerness:

Yet some wondrous thing within the mess
    Was held in check: –
Was missing as she groped and clung
    About his neck.

One master chord we couldn't sound
    For lost the keys,
Yet she hinted of it as she sang
    Between our knees. (RW 98)

This "wondrous thing" is her acceptance of her queer desire, along with the realization that her sexuality is a "master chord we c[an't] sound." Just because the audience at that time does not understand the song—even though she "hint[s] of it as she s[ings]"—does not mean that the song is not still beautiful and powerful. She has been performing heterosexuality for the benefit of the the men to whom she must "grope" and "cling" in order to survive. However, she recognizes that she cannot continue living this way, for even when she masks her sexuality and who she really is, still folks "[pass] her forty times and [sneer] / Out in the street" (RW 98). She knows now that "Time comes to kill," meaning that her body and her "value" as a sexual object for male consumption has an expiration date:

A thousand jibes had driven her
    To this at last;
Till the ruined crimson of her lips
    Grew vague and vast. (RW 99)

The "this" here is not suicide, as other scholars have suggested[23] but rather the metaphorical death of her as an object and the acceptance of her repulsiveness as a site for queer futurity in the present. Her “lips” are an important symbol throughout the chapbook, for they mark her progression from being silenced to having a voice. The first poem, “From Fifth Avenue Up,” utilizes the perfect progressive “You’d lip the world to madness” (RW 91) to anticipate her finding her voice and her power, though it may cause the world to go mad. Next, the wife in “From Third Avenue On” is only able to speak when she is praying, “Until she breaks it off and swears.” And it is “Somewhere beneath her buried curse / [that] A corpse lies bounding in a hearse” (RW 94), so that her “buried” silence leads to the death of her autonomy. The subject’s lips reappear in “Seen from the ‘L’” as the vehicle through which the truth is revealed: “her lips are vague and fancy,” “They bloom vivid and repulsive / As the truth” after “Ravelling grandly into vice” and “Slipping through the stitch of virtue” (RW 95). Then, the lesbian (m)Other in “Twilight of the Illicit” births “Illicit spawn; / While the others shrink in virtue” (RW 97). In the conclusive poem of the chapbook, the first stanza reads:

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[23] E.g., Galvin, Parker, Fox, and Unger.

> They brought her in, a shattered small
> Cocoon,
> With a little bruisèd body like
> A startled moon;
> And all the subtle symphonies of her
> A twilight rune. (RW 100)

Her body (and thus her as an object) is “shattered,” “bruisèd,” and “shock-abbreviated” (in the second stanza), yet she is also in a “Cocoon,” signaling her transformation into a queer subject. What is more, a cocoon is a vessel through which offspring—or “Illicit spawn,” in this case—can be brought forth. If we carry over our reading of “twilight” from “Twilight of the Illicit” as representing the dawn rather than the dusk, then this crossing over from object to subject is also implied in her being a “twilight rune.” Furthermore, a “rune” is a compressed symbol: first, it denotes “onward movement” (OED), which signals her progressive ascension; secondly, a rune is also a “song, poem, verse, *esp.* a cryptic or magic verse, a spell, an incantation” (OED). In this way, the subject has transformed into the poem itself, and it is in this cryptic, magical space—this “crooked rhyme”—that she can thrive in anticipation of a queer futurity that “bloom[s] vivid and repulsive / As [her] truth” (RW 95).

Chapter 4

"A Ritual Fight for her Sweet Body": The Flâneuse's Creation of Sapphic Space Through Disruptive Poetics in Hope Mirrlees's *Paris*

In August of 1919, Virginia Woolf excitedly wrote to a friend that she was going to publish a "very obscure, indecent and brilliant poem" (L2 385). An entire century later, and that poem, Hope Mirrlees's *Paris*, is still how Woolf initially described it. *Paris*'s obscurity was so evident when it was first published in May 1920 that, even though the various cultural references throughout were less than a year old at the time, Mirrlees still had to include endnotes to make the poem more accessible, as T. S. Eliot would later replicate in *The Waste Land*. Its "indecen[cy]," as Woolf had remarked, was in reference to *Paris*'s remarkable boldness. The poem opens with homosexual innuendos, such as the coded "*Vous descendez Madame?*" (i.e., do you go down?) (CP 3), followed by the suggestion of Leon Gambetta's "obscene conjugal *tutoiement*" with the winged "Esprit Francais...leaning over him, / Whispering / Secrets" (CP 4)—as lovers do (see Figure 4.1 below).

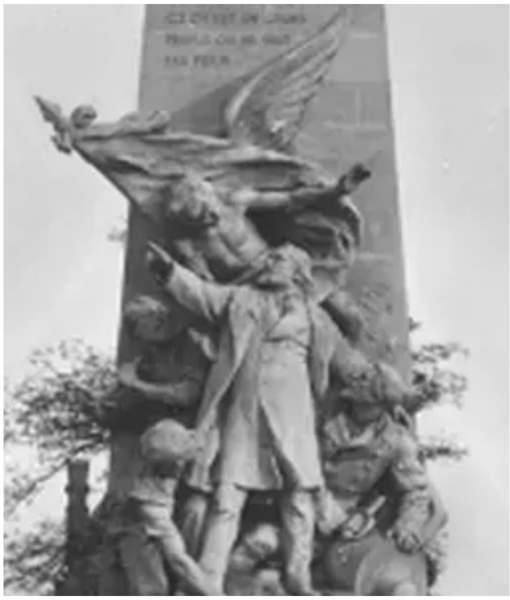

Figure 4.1: Cropped photograph of Gambetta statue, circa 1888.

There is the explicit reference to masturbation or intercourse, “Elles se balancent sur les hanches[1]” (CP 9), followed by the climactic “*Ouiouioui*” and “*A a a a a oui*” (CP 10). One of the poem’s final scenes depicts prostitutes in the Moulin Rouge, where the American audience scoffs at “*the gurls[2] of the night-club [because] they love / women*” (CP 16). The brilliance of *Paris*, though, is Mirrlees’s profound ability to weave together so many modernist idioms before they had reached their apex in what are now considered classic modernist texts. Furthermore, *Paris*’s brilliance is due to the ways it gives a platform for and a voice to the flâneuse and her psychosensuous experience in an urban landscape—and how that experience informs her (or any modern woman’s) identity as she independently navigates through early twentieth-century Paris, the mecca of modernity. Considering this poem's brilliance, then, in addition to its tongue-in-cheek indecency—and especially because of its obscurity—this article's aim is, in part, to reposition *Paris* to its rightful, more central place within the modernist canon.

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[1] “The women rock themselves back and forth on their hips.” Or, could be translated as “the women rock themselves back and forth on someone else’s hips.” (French)

[2] “Gurls” is also French slang for lesbians (BC 126).

As Mirrlees's flâneuse saunters through the city of Paris in this psychogeographic poem that transcends time, space, and consciousness, it is through the flâneuse's lens that we can observe what Megan Beech calls "Sapphic space," which is the intervening in a space that is otherwise heteronormative and masculine (73). I argue that Mirrlees makes room for this Sapphic space in *Paris* via her disruptive poetics, a poetics that is formally and contextually disruptive so as to emphasize women's artistic labor in addition to (or in lieu of) their biological function. Furthermore, Mirrlees's disruptive poetics align with her desire for a poetics that is marked by simultaneity and multi-modality, which transcend the limitations of the written word to attempt to reveal or portray the entirety of urban experience and the complexities of the self. First, however, it is important to establish the poem's provenance and context within the precise historical moment it exemplifies.

Hope Mirrlees was a peripheral figure in English modernism during her time—even being described by Virginia Woolf as "rather an exquisite apparition" (L2 383)—and she continues to be an elusive figure in conversations and scholarship surrounding modernism today. Friends with the Woolfs, the Eliots, and Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas (just to name a few)—many of whom praised and supported her work—she has, for reasons it is difficult to understand, been absent from our depictions of the modernist landscape. And, when looking at *Paris*, which Mirrlees scholar Julia Briggs calls "modernism's lost masterpiece" (BH 261), its glaring abstraction and brilliance makes its absence from the canon that much more puzzling. But despite all its promise, Mirrlees never wrote anything even remotely like it again, and although she coined herself a "poetess" for the rest of her life, she only published a small chapbook of poetry[3] later in her life, in 1976. What is more, her oeuvre does not have any sense of cohesion or progression, with all of her major works being so distinctly different from one another that one would assume they were each written by a different person.[4]

There is little we can piece together about Mirrlees's life that is not largely enmeshed with her partner, Jane Ellen Harrison. Unfortunately, Harrison and Mirrlees's relationship has been highly speculated upon, with many scholars tending to dance around the likelihood that they were partners and instead insisting that they were "friends," or that Harrison was merely Mirrlees's mentor. Even Mirrlees's nephew Robin, in his 2002 *New York Review of Science Fiction* article, claimed that Mirrlees was

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[3] *Moods and Tensions* is a relatively forgetful collection of poems that do not reflect any of the innovations or abstractions of *Paris*. In a short letter dated December 23, 1964, Leonard Woolf wrote to Mirrlees: "They [the poems from *Moods and Tensions*] seem to me very good and I like that sort of poem. I also think it is a very good thing, which few people do, to put a really good poem as the last in the book" (HMP 2/2/9). Woolf's redundant emphasis that the poems are "good" seem to show that he didn't have anything specific to praise about the work and, being a long-time friend of Mirrlees's, I imagine he was trying to be polite and supportive more than anything else.

[4] *Madeleine: One of Love's Jansenists* (1919) is a historical novel taking place in 17th century Spain; *The Counterplot* (1924) is a pre-metafictional novel that takes place in England post-WWI, where the protagonist writes a play that makes up a portion of the novel itself; *Lud-in-the-Mist* (1926), probably her most famous work, is a fantasy novel; *A Fly in Amber* (1962) is a lengthy, unfinished biography of the antiquary Sir Robert Bruce Cotton. She also published some translations from Russian with Jane Ellen Harrison in the 1920s.

"definitely not" a lesbian but only "pretended to be" because it was "the fashion in those days…[after] Oscar Wilde had set the trend" (17-18).

Harrison and Mirrlees initially met in 1910 when Mirrlees began her studies at Cambridge under Harrison; that same year, Mirrlees had broken off an engagement with a captain more than twice her age named Henry J. Ford. After she finished at Cambridge in 1913, she began living with Harrison either sometime that year or the following year, according to letters to her mother (HMP 2/1/3). By at least 1917, Harrison and Mirrlees were lovingly referring to each other as "Elder Wife" and "Younger Wife," since Harrison was nearly thirty years Mirrlees's senior (HMP 1/1/1). Additionally, Harrison wrote several love poems to/about Mirrlees that are part of the Hope Mirrlees Papers at Cambridge (1/4/3 and 1/4/4). Virginia Woolf seemed to confirm their partnership, too, in several letters.[5] Thus, based on my own personal research, especially from what correspondence is available between and about Mirrlees and Harrison in the Hope Mirrlees Papers at the Newnham College Archives at Cambridge, it is rather obvious that Mirrlees and Harrison loved each other deeply and were life partners.

While a poet's personal life is not always relevant when studying their work, Mirrlees's relationship with Harrison is significant in this case, especially when examining sexuality and women's roles in her work, as Mirrlees scholar Sandeep Parmar agrees ("Introduction" xv). Mirrlees herself also confirmed Harrison's influence on her in an undated[6] notebook, currently housed in the Hope Mirrlees Papers at Cambridge's Newnham College Archives: "My books always finish by taking the shape of the E[lder Wife]'s philosophy….I came under the influence of E[lder Wife]'s thought, which was… the spiritual synthesis behind the Greek tragedies—Behind the great (?) word abstractions of Hubris…." (HMP 6/5/7). Harrison was a pioneer for women in academia and the first female scholar to impart theoretical or philosophical meaning to archaeological, mythological, and theological studies of Ancient Greece, with much of her work focused on Hellenistic ritual and women's rites. When it comes to *Paris* specifically, Nina Ravnholdt Enemark suggests that *Paris*'s "atmosphere of liminality, or in-betweenness, [is] central to ritual" because of its dependence upon continued performance and enactment, thereby resisting stasis (99).

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[5] In a 1919 letter to Clive Bell voicing her frustration at reviewing Mirrlees's novel *Madeleine*, she considered it "all sapphism [...]—Jane and herself" (L2 391); in a 1923 letter to Molly MacCarthy, she writes that she will "meet Jane Harrison & Hope Mirrlees who have a Sapphic flat somewhere" (L3 30); in a 1925 letter to Jacques Raverat, she writes "we like seeing [Hope] and Jane billing and cooing together" (L3 164); and in a 1928 condolence letter to Mirrlees after Harrison's death, she wrote: "what a comfort for you to have been all you were to her" (L3 484).

Paris's "atmosphere of liminality," as Enemark writes, is perhaps partly to blame for its evanescence, although I can pinpoint several factors that have undoubtedly contributed to its disappearance. For one, the Woolfs only published 175 copies in 1920, and they did not sell very well. In 1946, Leonard Woolf urged Mirrlees to consider republishing the poem, but she resisted the idea, responding to him in a letter dated March 12, 1946: "I definitely do not wish any of *Paris* to be reprinted" (qtd. in BM 94). She held fast to this decision for nearly twenty years. Finally, the poem was republished in 1973 in the *Virginia Woolf Quarterly*; however, this journal was a short-lived periodical that ended after only a couple of issues. What is more, its 1973 republication had significant edits[7] at the behest of Mirrlees who, after Harrison's death in 1928, had converted to Catholicism and rejected *Paris* for its blasphemy.

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[6] Considering that Harrison passed away in 1928 and Mirrlees uses the present tense, and based on Mirrlees's choice of word "books" (plural), I would date this passage between 1924, when her second book was published, and 1926, when her third book was published.

Paris was the fifth piece of writing the Woolfs published at their newly formed Hogarth Press. Much to Virginia Woolf's frustration, its typographical (and overall) idiosyncrasy contributed to it being the most difficult task she ever undertook as a printer, which was, in part, evidenced by the fact that she had to pencil in several corrections after it had already been printed.[8] Yet despite its difficulty, *Paris*'s unique typography may have informed Woolf's own subsequent use of formal abstractions in works like *Monday or Tuesday* (1921) and *Jacob's Room* (1922), as Megan Beech, Oliver Tearle, and Julia Briggs (among other scholars) have suggested. Briggs, for instance, writes that "Woolf, too [i.e., in addition to Eliot], was to learn from [*Paris*'s] lessons" and concludes that *Jacob's Room* "most clearly reflects the impact of Hope's poem" (BM 91-92). In *Jacob's Room*, Woolf's use of white space on the page to denote life's silences or voids could have been inspired by Mirrlees's own use of blank spaces throughout *Paris*, which is evident from the beginning of the poem, where she uses white space to perform the layout of the Tuileries (CP 3):

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[7] These edits are outlined in the addendums of both Mirrlees's 2011 *Collected Poems* (p. 128) and in Faber and Faber's new 2020 reprinting of *Paris* (pp. 63-64).

[8] For example, we can see her addition of "St." at the start of line 13 (p. 3): https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/paris-by-hope-mirrlees

The Tuileries are in a trance
because the painters have
stared at them so long

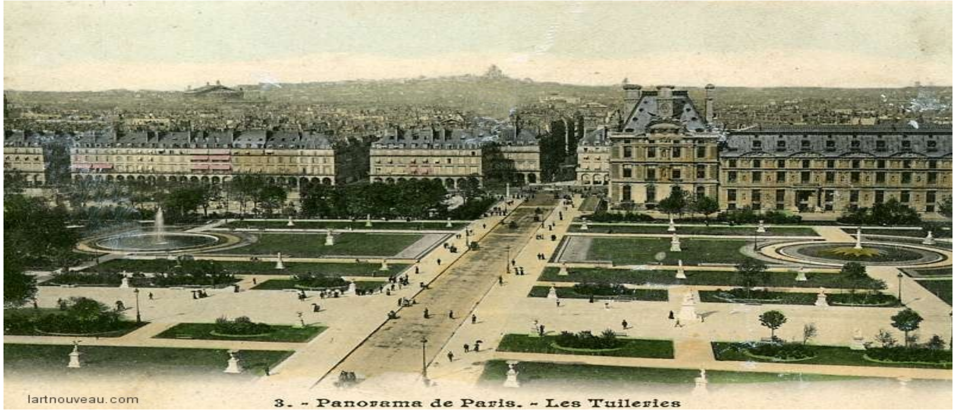

Figure 4.2: Photograph of the Tuileries, circa 1900.

In addition to Woolf, modernist scholars have also suggested the possibility that *Paris* informed T.S. Eliot's canonical *The Waste Land*. As Parmar firmly iterates in her recent afterword to *Paris* (54), there is no evidence to suggest that Eliot was directly inspired by *Paris*. However, we can confirm with near certainty that he was, at the very least, *aware* of Mirrlees's poem. For one, Eliot was very close with the Mirrlees family—so close, in fact, that he gave the loving sobriquet "Mappie" to Hope's mother, Lina. Eliot was also a paying guest at the Mirrlees house in Shamley Green from 1940-41. Years later, Eliot wrote to Hope that staying at the Mirrlees house was "the nearest [home he had] had since [he] was a boy," and that he "did there what will be regarded as [his] best work" (qtd. in Swanwick 49). Additionally, Eliot's *Poems* was published by Hogarth the year before *Paris*, so "the Woolfs would almost certainly have given him a copy of

Mirrlees' poem," according to Michael Swanwick, Mirrlees's biographer (15). When Mirrlees herself was asked about Eliot's thoughts on the poem in 1973, she claimed: "I never discussed *Paris* with him and I am unaware whether he ever saw it" (Bailey 3-4).

Since then, however, scholarship has been fixated on understanding *Paris* in relation to *The Waste Land*, perhaps as some way to anchor its meaning within the context of high modernism. In Oliver Tearle's recent 2019 book *The Great War,* The Waste Land *and the Modernist Long Poem*, for example, he writes:

> If we did not know better, we would place Mirrlees's poem later than Eliot's, identifying it as one of a number of imitations of Eliot's defining poem such as Nancy Cunard's *Parallax*. But this is partly because we are so used to viewing Eliot's poem as the influence and the originator of much modernist poetic technique….The fact that Mirrlees came to many of the same conclusions about the modernist experiment, but independently of Eliot and before him, raises important questions about the development of the modernist poem after the First World War. (43)

While I agree that scholars and critics have been quick to assume that any abstract modernist poem—especially when written by a woman—is a mere imitation of modernist "originators" like Eliot, I wonder if Tearle's framing of Mirrlees's (and Cunard's) significance is not slightly dismissive of her (their) innovation, or if it misses the mark completely. That is, Tearle posits that Mirrlees's poem "raises important questions," but he does not attempt to investigate any of them. And much of his chapter on *Paris* is spent positioning it in relation to *The Waste Land*, as his book title suggests, followed by his assertion that the 1918 serialization of James Joyce's *Ulysses* must have influenced Mirrlees.

When we consider the fact that the modernist movement was largely made possible through the often invisible, behind-the-scenes labor of women like Sylvia Beach, Nancy Cunard, Caresse Crosby, and many others who put forth their own money and efforts to support and publish predominantly male artists, we should not preserve their invisibility by continuing to hyperfocus on modernist giants without widening the scope or altering the perception of our view—such as Nancy Cunard suggests in her appropriately titled *Parallax*. And we should not assume that women's work is either a stepping stone to or an imitation of "male genius." I have to agree with Parmar, who succinctly and eloquently writes: "It is too easy to simply write off these neglected texts as collateral damage to the canonisation of male genius. Likewise it is not enough to account for their absence without carefully stripping away assumptions about cultural value that accrue around (or fail to adhere to) a literary text" ("Afterword" 54). Although Mirrlees herself had a hand in *Paris*'s obscurity by resisting its republication for so long, prejudice also most certainly played a role in its disappearance within the modernist canon, as Parmar suggests.

For instance, a contemporary review of *Paris* from the May 6, 1920 *Times Literary Supplement* review referred to *Paris* as "spluttering and incoherent" and "part of a nursery game…[that] does not belong to the art of poetry" (285). Rather than identify Mirrlees's poetic innovation as a skill or talent, it was diminished as being nothing more than infantile nonsense. Furthermore, there was a mixed review in the May 21, 1920 edition of *The Athenaeum*, which wrote that it was "immensely literary and immensely accomplished," while also critiquing the "defects" of the poem due to its "superfluous pedantry which so often comes shutting down, heavily and darkly, across [Mirrlees's clear, witty vision]" (686). Positive feedback Mirrlees received for *Paris* tended to be exchanged privately between herself and her circle, such as is evident in a letter from Pierre Drieu la Rochelle dated September 27, 1921: "Your poem has prodigiously amused and moved me. I will discuss it in an article that will be published in December [but] I don't know where" **(**HMP 2/2/2)[9]. It was not until the May 1926 British issue of *Vogue* that *Paris* or Mirrlees received acclaim in any kind of widespread publication. In the issue, they lauded *Paris* for being "the only good dada poem in English" and wrote that Mirrlees's "erudition is equaled only by her wit" (qtd. in Swanwick 42).

Paris has received little attention amongst modernist scholars, although that trend does seem to be slowly changing, and will hopefully shift more steadily now that Faber and Faber released a centennial edition this year. The patterns that have surfaced amongst the limited Mirrlees scholarship—with few exceptions—tend to focus on it as a precursor to *The Waste Land*,[10] on its relation to Virginia Woolf and the Hogarth Press,[11] and/or in connection with Jane Ellen Harrison's work.[12] While it is valid to position the unknown

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[9] Translated from French: "Votre poème mia prodigieusement amusé et ému. J'en parlerai dans un article qui paraîtra vers décembre je ne sais où." I have not been able to find the article Rochelle refers to, so perhaps it never came to fruition.

[10] E.g., Bailey, Connor, Gish, Mitton, Pondrom, and Tearle.

[11] E.g., Beach and Briggs.

[12] E.g., Enemark. Also, when visiting the Hope Mirrlees Papers at Cambridge, the archive's librarian assumed I was a Harrison scholar. When I asked her why, she said that most people who visit the Mirrlees archives do so to gain further insight into Harrison.

Mirrlees within the scope of more recognizable modernist figures like Eliot, Woolf, and Harrison, not as much work has been devoted to *Paris*'s significance as a remarkable example of poetic modernism. *Paris*'s brilliance not only lies in its fragmented form, but also in its equally electrifying content, especially due to it being guided by the highly innovative flâneuse instead of the more common flâneur. As Deborah Levy writes in the foreword to the new edition of *Paris*, "When Baudelaire and Rimbaud flâneured the same city, they were societally free to loiter in public space and observe metropolitan life with more ease and entitlement than Mirrlees could do—after all, female streetwalkers were apparently prostitutes and not poets" (ix). In this way, Mirrlees makes space for women —whether they be prostitutes or poets—to move freely and experience the same urban leisures typically only reserved for men at the time.

Paris presents the flâneuse with the illusion of choice: either she must follow the path of Art or the path of Life, with the former being predetermined by fate and the latter being prescribed by social, gendered expectations, therefore transfixing her between a "ritual fight for her sweet body" (CP 11). However, *Paris* rejects the female body as solely a biological vessel and offers it as a vessel for creative and artistic production. Thus, *Paris* recasts the female subject to transcend the cycle of death and rebirth and become immortal through one's art rather than just through one's biological function.

This attempt at immortality was informed by Mirrlees's partner. In Harrison's 1925 essay "Reminiscences of a Student's Life," she writes:

> We are told now that we bear within us the seeds, not of one, but of two lives—the life of the race and the life of the individual. The life of the race makes for racial immortality; the life of the individual suffers *l'attirance de la mort*, the lure of death; and this from the outset. The unicellular animals are practically immortal; the complexity of the individual spells death. The unmarried and childless cut themselves loose from racial immortality, and are dedicated to individual life—a side track, a blind alley, yet surely a supreme end in itself. (345)

In this passage, we see that Harrison identifies a tug-of-war between a woman's pursuit of immortality, which is determined by either her racial life (i.e., having children) or her individual life (i.e., being an artist or "childless"). Although written after *Paris*, we can see Mirrlees's application of this theory in her first novel, *Madeleine*, which was published a year before the poem in 1919. In the novel, Mirrlees's protagonist is betwixt this pursuit of Life or Art, writing in the "Preface" that "Life is like a blind and limitless expanse of sky, for ever dividing into tiny drops of circumstances that rain down.... [while] Art is like the dauntless, plastic force that builds up stubborn, amorphous substance cell by cell, into the frail geometry of a shell" (vii); later, she concludes that "…life is the province of free-will, art the province of fate" (viii). At first, it may seem that the opposite would hold true: art is determined by free-will while life is determined by fate, or what one "must" do or is expected to do. By "free-will," Mirrlees does not mean free to choose; rather, "free-will" is likened to not being bound by fate, as this free-will—or Life—occurs by "tiny drops of circumstances," which, for women, are the prescribed and controlled circumstances of marriage and motherhood. In this way, Art (or Life's opposite) is predetermined; it is the soul—the "amorphous substance"—that forces itself into compartmentalized meaning—the "shell."

Mirrlees's speaker in *Paris* guides readers through this tension between women's biological creation and their artistic creation, as she establishes that she "Scorn[s] the laws of solid geometry" (CP 4). If we consider the etymology of "geometry," we get the Latin *geōmetria* and the Ancient Greek *γεωμετρία*, which both denote the science of measuring. Furthermore, "geo-" (earth) and "-metron" (measurement) indicate spatial/ topographical measurement. Thus, the poem itself defies any kind of mathematical or spatial containment, as Beech agrees: "The confines of print had to wrest with a poem that gestures beyond any kind of confinement. *Paris* is a poem which invites its reader to walk alongside its female protagonist in movement characterized by an ability to transgress boundaries and become fluid and un-mappable" (71). The flâneuse's "Scorn[ing] the laws of solid geometry" also ties into her introduction to the reader: "I want a holophrase" (CP 3). This entry signals that the speaker desires (or lacks) something (or some thing) to represent all the complexities and intricacies of the modern age, the "Little funny things ceaselessly happening" (CP 13). *Paris* is an anticipation of modernity's insufficiency, hyperaware of the literary/artistic limitations of the page, and therefore attempts a radical reimagination of what poetics can do.

Fluidity is a key concept in *Paris* as it relates not only to the Seine, the aorta of the poem and of the city, but also to the flâneuse's queerness. Although Beech suggests that the flâneuse is unmappable, I understand this as meaning that her psyche and thoughts are fluid, for her physical movements *are* mappable up to a certain point in the poem—even though they are interwoven with metaphorical perambulations. It is important to note that the flâneuse's movements are more than just figurative because part of *Paris*'s innovation is giving movement to a young, queer woman in an early twentieth century metropolis. Furthermore, while the flâneuse's consciousness undoubtedly transcends time and space, marking her physical movements is useful so that we can better identify the unmappable ones and also orient ourselves throughout the poem (see Figure 4.3 below).

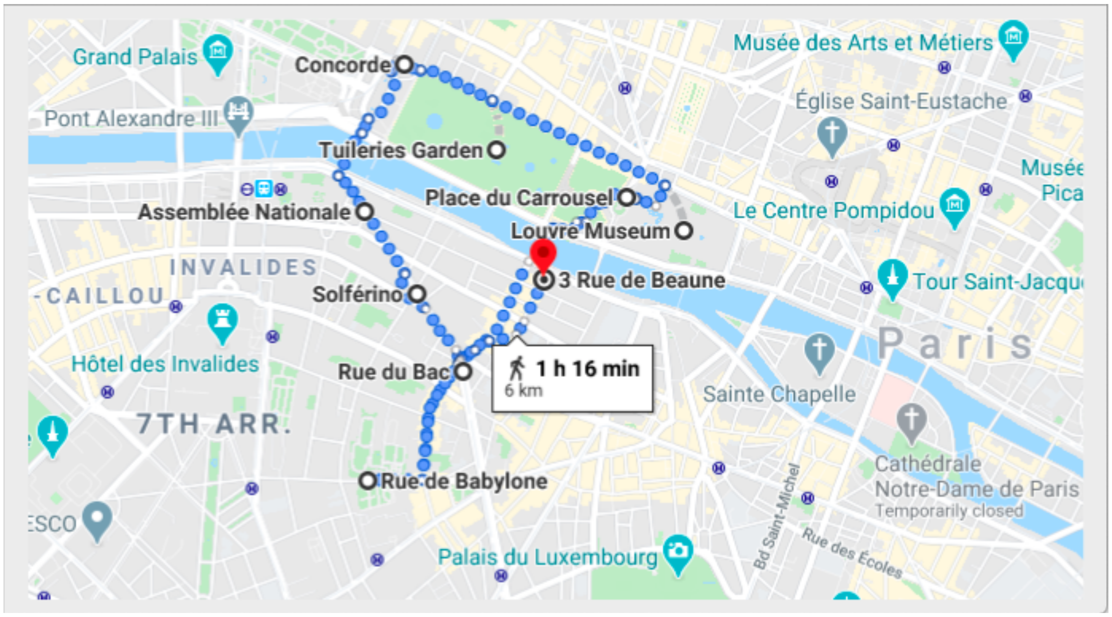
Grand Palais
Concorde
Musée des Arts et Métiers
Église Saint-Eustache
Pont Alexandre III
Tuileries Garden
Musée
Pica
Assemblée Nationale
Place du Carrousel
Le Centre Pompidou
Louvre Museum
INVALIDES
3 Rue de Beaune
Tour Saint-Jacqu
-CAILLOU
Solférino
Paris
Hôtel des Invalides
Rue du Bac
1 h 16 min
6 km
Sainte Chapelle
7TH ARR.
Cathédrale
Notre-Dame de Paris
Temporarily closed
Rue de Babylone
ESCO
Bd Saint-Michel
Rue des Écoles
Palais du Luxembourg

Figure 4.3: Screenshot of the flâneuse's journey, via Google Maps.

Making her way through the span of a single day in spring 1919, the flâneuse starts on the Nord-Sud line of the metro at Rue du Bac heading north, where she exits at Concorde (CP 3). From there, she walks through the Tuileries, passing by painters, children on the merry-go-round, and various statues (CP 3-4). She takes particular interest in the Gambetta statue in front of the Louvre before pausing at Place du Carrousel to get a glimpse of the Arc de Triomphe in the distance (CP 4). Afterwards, she makes her way back across the Seine and strolls past various department stores on rue de Babylone (CP 6-12). In this section, we know that she is ambling between different stores on rue de Babylone because a sign reminding customers that they don't need to close the door weaves in between the description of a local bar-tabac, waiters calling after customers, and overheard conversations between workmen (ouvriers) discussing the news:

> Great bunches of lilac among syphons, vermouth,
> Bocks [beer glasses], tobacco.
>
> *Messieursetdames*
>
> NE FERMEZ PAS LA PORTE
> S.V.P.
> LE PRIMUS S'EN CHARGERA[13]
>
> At marble tables sit ouvriers in blue linen suits discussing
>
> La journée de huit heures,[14]
> Whether Landru[15] is a sadist…. (CP 8)

Finally, she walks back to her hotel on rue de Beaune[16] to continue her "trance" (CP 13) and later watches the sunset below Petit Palais[17] (CP 15). But the poem does not end there; rather, she continues her "trance," staying up through the night to see the sunrise over Nôtre-Dame (CP 17). We know when she is physically navigating the city because she will explicitly say that she is doing so and will use the first person with a verb denoting movement or sight: "we are passing under the Seine" / … / "I must [get off at this stop]..." (CP 3); "I see the Arc de Triomphe" (CP 4); "I gaze down at the narrow rue de Beaune" (CP 13). When the movement or visibility of the "I" is missing, various advertisements will interject the flâneuse's thoughts as she passes,[18] and these ad interruptions cease after she "gaze[s] down at the narrow rue de Beaune" from the vantage point on "the top floor of [her] old Hôtel" (CP 13).

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[13] Don't close the door please ("S.V.P." is short for "s'il vous plaît"). The primus (compressed air device) will take care of it. (French)

[14] "The eight-hour day" (French), was voted on April 17 and 23, but its complicated implementation led to the subsequent strike on May 1 (see CP 10-11).

[15] Henry Landru was a serial killer under investigation during April and May of that year.

[16] Mirrlees wrote *Paris* in Hôtel de l'Elysée, which was at 3 rue de Beaune.

[17] Built for the 1900 World Exposition; sits across from the Grand Palais, west of Concorde.

Besides marking the flâneuse's physical journey, *Paris*'s advertisements also assist in blurring the distinctions between high and low art, challenging what even constitutes art in the first place. The poem goes from referring to famous paintings hanging in the Louvre in one stanza,

> In the Louvre
> The Pieta of Avignon,
> L'Olympe,
> Giles,
> Mantegna's Seven Deadly Sins,
> The Chardins (CP 6),

only to juxtapose those famous artworks with advertisements for milk, cold cuts, and aperitifs in lines soon after:

> LAIT SUPERIEUR
> DE LA
> FERME DE RAMBOUILLET
> ….

---

[18] See the various advertisements on pp. 3, 6, 7, and 12.

CHARCUTERIE
COMESTIBLES DE IRE CHOIX
APERITIFS…. (CP 7).

Throughout the poem, such as we see in this passage, Mirrlees employs modernist citationality, but rather than cite only the esoteric classics, she instead cites advertisements: a kind of art that is accessible to everyone—regardless of class or education—because of its ubiquity. In *Advertising Fictions*, Jennifer Wicke argues that "advertising language is responsible for the techniques of 'high modernism'" (123). For one, ads create a mythos for potential consumers to buy in to the same ways that modernists attempt to transcend a temporal narrative. In this way, both ads and modern art try to fuse the fragments of modern life together by offering a fantasy or a reference to something better. Although Wicke is specifically examining Joyce's use of advertising throughout *Ulysses* as a mode through which it maintains its authenticity, I think the same idea can be applied to Mirrlees's poem. In *Paris*, Mirrlees, too, interjects urban fragments as a way to represent the simultaneity of the flâneuse's experience. But these interjections also mimic the movement of the poem which, though they seem desultory, are actually representative of the ways our thought processes make connections between things, sights, memories, and experiences. Most, if not all, of these references have connections later in the poem: for instance, Manet's and Mantegna's paintings anticipate the "whores" of the Moulin Rouge, where "the Masque of the Seven / Deadly Sins" play (CP 16). "SPRING IS SOLOMON'S LITTLE SISTER; SHE HAS NO / BREASTS" (CP 7) is the line that proceeds the ad for "LAIT SUPERIEUR," showing the thought progression from breasts to milk. Importantly, though, this association between breasts and milk establishes *Paris* as a maternal poem in dedication to a mother city that breeds creativity and innovation.

Before the poem itself begins, the epigraph is the first indicator that *Paris* transcends poetic boundaries:

A
NOTRE DAME DE PARIS
EN RECONNAISSANCE
DES GRACES ACCORDEES

Translated from French, it reads “To our lady of Paris in recognition of graces granted.” The centered text in all caps encased in a rectangular border mimics a memorial plaque, suggesting that the poem is a tangible, historical object in dedication to the city. The poem, too, ends with a final nod to the city, also in all caps: “JE VOUS SALUE PARIS PLEIN DE GRACE”[19] (CP 17). Both the epigraph and ending are as much a historical moment and artifact as they are a religious prayer, alluding to “our lady” (i.e., the Virgin Mary) and Mary’s prayer, “[Hail, Mary], full of grace.” By calling to Mary and eliciting her prayer, which emphasizes the “fruit of [her] womb,”[20] Mirrlees establishes *Paris*’s intention to illuminate women’s labor and production from the onset.

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[19] I salute you, Paris, full of grace. (French)

[20] The full prayer is: “Hail, Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death, Amen.”

The beginning of *Paris* also juxtaposes two opposing mothers: the Virgin Mary ("NOTRE DAME") and the mother of prostitutes and evil[21] ("The Scarlet Woman"), signaling the binate madonna/whore complex pressed upon women (CP 3). However, situating these two extreme symbols of motherhood—the mother of humanity's savior and the mother of its demise—challenges such a limited representation of women, as it reveals the scope of their complexity. It also cements women's power in being able to produce the world's fate, whether good or bad. The presence of women in power is striking throughout the poem, and their power is usually in the form of their sexual ownership, such as we see with appearances by Lysistrata (CP 4), Manet's *Olympia* (CP 6), Anna Karenina (CP 10), and Pandora (CP 12). In particular, the reference to the whore of Babylon is embedded in the flâneuse's stream of consciousness as she rides the metro, her thoughts ("I want a holophrase") punctuated by the advertisements whizzing past—

ZIG-ZAG
LION NOIR
CACAO BLOOKER[22]

—and stations, with more ads—

RUE DE BAC (DUBONNET)[23]
SOLFERINO (DUBONNET)
CHAMBRE DES DEPUTES[24]

---

[21] In Revelations, the whore of Babylon sits on a beast holding a golden cup filled with abominations, of which the inhabitants of the earth have become drunk.

[22] These are brands of cigarette papers, shoe polish, and hot chocolate.

[23] Dubonnet is a brand of fortified wine. Julia Briggs ingeniously notes that the parentheses perform the ad posters on the curved walls in the Paris metro (BC 113).

[24] Rue de Bac, Solferino, and Chambre des Deputes (now called the Assemblée Nationale station) are the three most northern stations on the Nord-Sud line before it crosses the Seine.

—followed by another thought, “Brekekekek coax coax we are passing under the Seine,” before she takes mental note of a fortified wine ad for Byrrh: “The Scarlet Woman shouting BYRRH and deafening / St. John at Patmos” (CP 3). The advertisements that interject the flâneuse’s consciousness on the Nord-Sud line are not just random. Zig Zag performs the movement of the flâneuse’s thoughts as well as the oscillation between thought, sight, and sound on the page. The Lion Noir shoe polish that follows symbolizes the flâneuse’s free movement and also forecasts the “whores like *lions*” (CP 16, added emphasis), who are “hunters” of the night in their search for customers around Montmartre. Subsequently, the reference to Dubonnet anticipates the Byrrh ad, making it easier for the reader to identify it as a wine ad in addition to the sound the Scarlet Woman makes when she shouts at St. John. As with Mirrlees’s use of onomatopoeia in reference to the Byrrh ad, she also makes use of it with the “Brekekekek coax coax” line, which performs the sound of the train “passing under the Seine” and cites Aristophanes’s play *The Frogs*. In the play, “Brekekekek coax coax” (Βρεκεκεκὲξ κοὰξ κοάξ) is the chorus of frogs that Dionysus hears as he crosses Lake Acheron on his way to the Underworld to retrieve Euripides from the dead.

The flâneuse’s travels on the Nord-Sud line is intentional, as this specific metro line connects the two Parisian art districts, Montparnasse and Montmartre, showing her movement between creative spaces. *Nord-Sud* was also an avant-garde magazine which spanned 14 issues from March 1917 to October 1918 that was edited by Mirrlees’s friend Pierre Reverdy, so she was undoubtedly aware of it. Gino Severini’s Futurist 1912 painting *Le Nord-Sud* helps us visualize the kind of simultaneity *Paris* exemplifies with the flâneuse's psychosensual experience on the metro, particularly in the way that the painting compresses the movement of the train and its passengers with various signage throughout the station (see Figure 4.4). In the poem, the flâneuse moves from south to north on the metro, while the vertical lines on the page mimic her movement (ll. 1-19). Once she gets off the train and enters the gardens, both she and the poem move west to east, from the Tuileries to the Gambetta statue[25] in front of the Louvre (ll. 20-42).

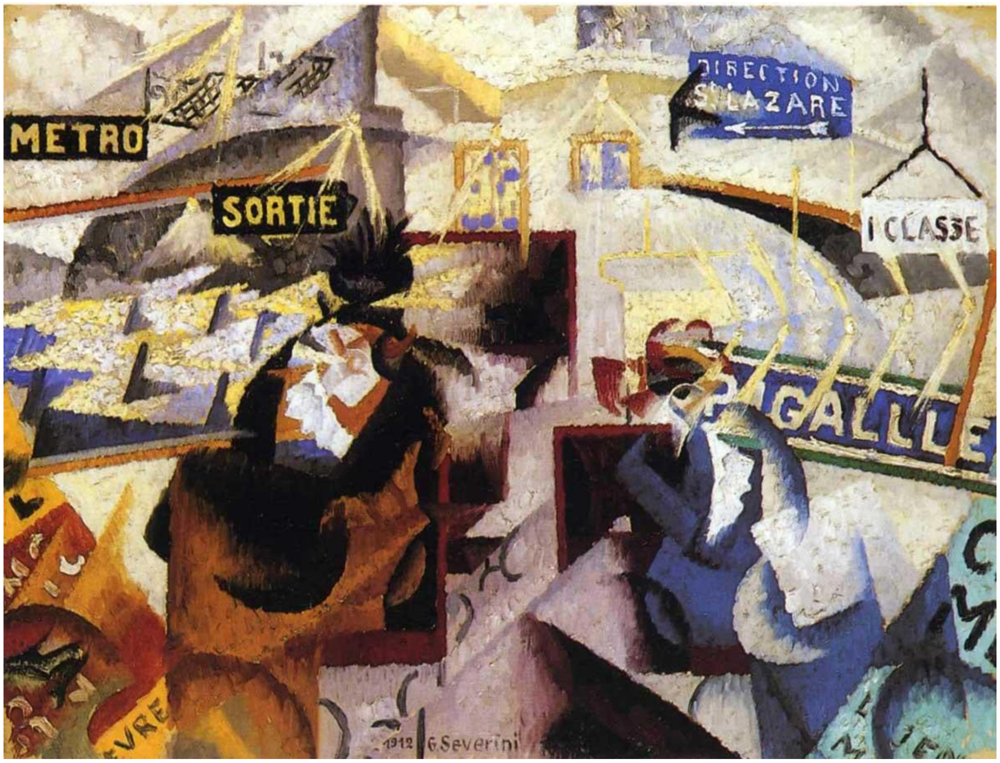

Figure 4.4: *Le Nord-Sud*, Oil on Canvas, Gino Severini, 1912.

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[25] The Gambetta statue was in front of the Louvre until 1982, when it was moved to the Square Edouard Vaillant.

Most importantly, the poem's opening on the metro identifies it as part of what I call the "metro of modernity," which is a feminine/sapphic mode of alternative modernist production. Since "metro" comes from the Greek μητρό, meaning "mother," and "metro-" is short for metropolitan or metropolis, the poem establishes Paris as a mother city of modernist artistry. The flâneuse, then, moves through the underground metro tunnel as a kind of birth canal from which she emerges and achieves full being and consciousness, marked by the shift from her vertical (south to north) to horizontal (west to east) movement that is mirrored in *Paris*'s typography. The metro attendant's questioning "*Vous descendez Madame?*" (l. 14), in this case, could mean "do you get off here?" —as in "is it your time to enter the world or consciousness?" The subsequent lines referring to the motto on the metro scales[26] suggest her answer, as they mimic the immediate act of weighing a new baby just after they have been born. However, she does explicitly answer the attendant in the following lines with "I can't / I must go slowly" (ll. 18-19). In the introduction to Mirrlees's *Collected Poems*, Parmar reads this declaration of "I can't" / "I must" as grappling with the deconstruction of the self due to the sense of anonymity one has in the city, an anonymity which was often beneficial for those challenging heteronormativity (xl-xlii). However, I read it slightly differently: despite the speaker's slight hesitation ("I can't"), she immediately follows up with "I must"—but "slowly," correlating to her flânerie and the agency she has in taking her time. And anonymity is not necessarily a threat to the flâneuse's identity, especially if she is one of the "*gurls of the night-club [who] love women*," for she—unfazed by "American astigmatism" (CP 16)—has the freedom to express and be her true self.

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[26] Lines 15-16: "QUI SOUVENT SE PESE BIEN SE CONNAIT / QUI BIEN SE CONNAIT BIEN SE PORTE" (Those who weigh themselves often know themselves well / Those who know themselves well stay healthy).

As we follow the flâneuse's random thoughts that are inspired by the various sites she sees, her renewed understanding of the present moment due to the recently ended war is apparent:

> The lovely Spirit of the Year
> Is stiff and stark
>
> Laid out in acres of brown fields…. (CP 5)

Likening the year in which the poem was written to a corpse challenges the assumptions brought about by the Peace conference, which was held in Paris during the spring of that year. Perhaps a time of peace is upon us, but the flâneuse seems to ask at what cost. She later mocks President Wilson, who brought his idealistic Fourteen Points plan to the conference, describing him as "...a dog [running] about the city, sniffing with innocent enjoyment [at] the diluvial urine of Gargantua" (CP 7). Only the paintings in the Louvre can "arise" after "their subterranean sleep of five long years" (CP 7), yet we have had to "bury our friends" and mourn their loss "a score of times before [they were even] dead" (CP 9). These senseless lives lost cannot be resurrected, but the one thing that will not die is the immortalization of history through art, though that immortalization may be "'edited.'" The flâneuse imagines WWI soldiers "camping round the gray sphinx of the Tuileries," looking as though their image is being "'edited"' by a "war-artist" who will sell the sketches for “10 francs a copy” (CP 12). “Whatever [has] happen[ed],” the flâneuse muses, now it can be made to “look beautiful”:

Whatever happens, some day it will look beautiful:
Clio is a great French painter,
She walks upon the waters and they are still. (CP 12)

Clio is the Greek goddess of history, whose mother, Mnemosyne, is the goddess of memory. In Greek, “Clio” (Κλειώ) is a verb meaning “to make famous.” In this way, history is the act of making permanent so as to preserve public memory. History can walk “upon the waters” because of its permanence, because each historical moment is a fixed space in time, while the river breeds the flowing of life and its demise as it returns to the source: “The Seine, old egotist, meanders imperturbably towards the sea” (CP 11). Meanwhile, the flâneuse wades through the waters in her bid for immortality. Her contemplations on the war, along with the poem taking place in spring, all aid in the cyclicality of the poem as a representation of maternal production. That is, with death and destruction come new life, and, in the flâneuse’s case, consciousness:

What time
Subaqueous
Cell on cell
Experience
Very slowly
Is forming up
Into something beautiful—awful—huge

The coming to . . . . . .
Thick halting speech—the curse of vastness. (CP 10)

The flâneuse questions “what time / …. / Is forming up” and wonders if it will be “something beautiful” or “awful” that surfaces. For her, we know that she was “subaqueous” at the beginning of the poem, her “Experience” (i.e., her being) “slowly” emerging: “I must go slowly” (CP 3).

Right after the “coming to” of her consciousness follows one of the key passages of *Paris*: Mirrlees’s representation of Labor Day, which is May 1 in France. On Labor Day in 1919, there was a workers’ strike in Paris that turned violent. This disruption is performed in Mirrlees’s unique typography (CP 10-11):

The first of May
T
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i
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o
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t
h
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e
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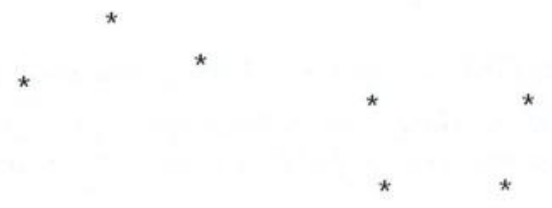
Briggs suggests that the “vertical lettering emphasizes the disruption of normal order, representing the lines of marchers, and possibly the stems of the (absent) lily of the valley, usually sold on 1 May to give to friends or sweethearts as bringer of luck” (BC 120). I suggest that this passage in the poem is a key point of disruption in *Paris*, but not in the literal, historical sense; rather, Mirrlees’s placement of the poem around Labor Day should be understood metaphorically in regards to women’s labor. Specifically, I argue that Mirrlees’s disruptive poetics emphasizes women’s work and artistic production over or in addition to their biological reproduction. In the following lines, Mirrlees writes:

> There was a ritual fight for her sweet body
> Between the two virgins—Mary and the moon
>
> The wicked April moon. (CP 11)

There is a lot to unpack here in these few brief lines. First, Mirrlees’s speaker is presenting us with a “ritual fight… / Between the two virgins,” one being the Virgin Mary and the other being Artemis. While Mary is named directly, we know that the other virgin is Artemis because she is associated with the moon. Furthermore, according to Harrison, Artemis is associated with a maturation ritual, where young girls must be “*confirmed* to Artemis” before they can be married off to “well-born Athenian[s]” (338, original emphasis), “confirmed” meaning pledging their chastity and devotion to their future husbands. Thus, Artemis can be associated with Mirrlees's definition of Life, or what Harrison calls "the life of the race," which is when a woman pursues immortality through motherhood. Second, Mirrlees associates Mary with "the fixed and determined world of art," according to Briggs (BH 266). While the Virgin Mary is a mother herself, her motherhood is her art because it is predestined and results in deification, so it can be aligned with what Harrison calls the "life of the individual."

Later, in the guise of darkness, the flâneuse's thoughts go to the nightlife and queer community of Montmartre, where the "gurls" have agency over their bodies and whom they love, and can choose with whom they go to bed (CP 16). As *Paris* comes to a close, the flâneuse imagines that "babies are being born" in the Abbaye of Port-Royal[27] while the sun rises over Nôtre-Dame, signaling the dawning of a new age for women to have autonomy over their bodies so that they can forge a path for their creative contributions. The Abbaye is a compressed symbol, representing both a maternity hospital and a convent, thus indicating the flâneuse's choice: between a life of the race or a life of the individual. Her choice is coded in the asterisks that form the Ursa Major constellation that concludes the poem (CP 17):



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[27] This was a seventeenth century convent that was used as a prison during the French Revolution before being converted to a maternity hospital in 1795.

Ursa Major, the great she-bear, was a secret signature between Harrison and Mirrlees and stood for their symbolic marriage. While teaching at Cambridge, Harrison was given a stuffed bear that was referred to as Mirrlees and Harrison's "husband" in intimate notes and poems shared between the two women, such as Harrison's private "To Her. A twilight poem," of which the final two stanzas read:

My husband chose her out
To be his concubine
His morganatic wife
And last—O joy divine

We dwell together free from strife
His younger and his elder wife.

Until at last we wend our ways
To far off peaceful Père-La-Chaise
In death an undivided Three
Together He and I and She
The Trinity in Unity. (HMP 1/4/3)

The bear serves as a connector between Harrison and Mirrlees's union. With him, they can live "free from strife" and be together eternally. The "twilight" in the poem's title is the threshold between the closing day and night (i.e., death), perhaps suggestive of Harrison's weariness of her age.[28] In this way, the bear is Harrison and Mirrlees's totem to guide them from the terrestrial to celestial realms. The sign of Ursa Major is, for Mirrlees's flâneuse, a queer constellation, a symbol for a most sacred union that, at that time, had to exist outside of language. Or perhaps love itself lies beyond the confines of the written word, for it is written in the stars.

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[28] Harrison passed away several years after writing this poem.

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