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Urban Exile: City Poetry by Modern American Women

Hatley Clifford

Dissertation submitted
to the Eberly College of Arts and Sciences
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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in
English

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ABSTRACT

Urban Exile: City Poetry by Modern American Women

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Urban Exile: City Poetry by Modern American Women examines women's experience of urbanism in the early twentieth century, as depicted in the poetry of four modernist American women writers: Edna St. Vincent Millay, Amy Lowell, Evelyn Scott, and Lola Ridge. I bring to light a common experience of urban exile: a persistent state of insecurity, displacement, damage, and marginalization of women in cities. My work brings women and American women's poetry into the critical conversation about city literature, a conversation that has mostly focused on the experience of men in cities told by male writers. Recuperating the theme of urban exile reorients the larger story about modernism's relationship to the urban boom, particularly the ways that narrative silences women's critiques of city spaces. My project also redresses the canonical exile of two important, yet overlooked American modernist women, Evelyn Scott and Lola Ridge, and expands existing scholarship on Millay and Lowell by considering their representations of the body and the urban environment. This project is built from detailed close-readings that consider both poetic form and content, and are grounded in the context of urban history and culture. Through an interdisciplinary approach which incorporates feminist geography, trauma theory, and cultural studies, I explore issues related to gender and the integration of women in city spaces, including threats of sexual violence and harassment, marginalization, and discrimination. I use ecocritical theory and urban studies to examine the transformation of the urban space, its effects—like pollution, congestion, and urban sprawl—and its impact on women's bodies and the environment. Through this research, I provide a picture of what it was like to be a woman in the city in the early twentieth century balancing the desire to take hold of new freedom and opportunities, while constantly dealing with environmental and cultural threats.

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Introduction

*Never go walking without your hat pin.
Not even to some very classy joints.
For when a fellow sees you've got a hat pin
He's very much apt to get the point.*

*My Mama, too, set quite a bad example.
She never heeded Grandmama's advice.
She found that if you give a man a sample,
The sample somehow never does suffice.*

*In fact, it's rumored I might not have been
If Mum had not gone out without her pin.*

*Never go walking out without your hat pin.
It's about the best protection you have got.
For if you go walking without your hat pin,
You may come home without your you-know-what!*

(Written by Forman Brown, Performed by Elsa Lanchester)

Before women had key chains armed with tasers and mace, they had hat pins. As many women today know, when going out into public spaces, it is not always enough to be aware of the threat of harassment and assault; often, women must take measures to protect themselves. Unfortunately, this threatening reality is nothing new. Early-twentieth-century cities were swarming with predatory men known as “mashers,” “male flirts” who “had been trying to force their attentions on women on city streets, sometimes merely calling out sexual insults, sometimes physically harassing them” (Freedman 191). These men staked out positions throughout cities, both outside on streets and inside buses and subway cars, and actively hunted women, ogling, verbally harassing, and even physically assaulting them. Countless women experienced these advances, and as this threat became a widely known fact of the city, it shaped the way women experienced the urban space. Women started entering public urban spaces armed with everyday objects that could serve as weapons, such as hat pins, hairbrushes, and umbrellas, and even

trained in ju jitsu (Segrave *Beware the Masher*). This constant threat not only shaped the way women experienced daily life in the city; it also transformed the city itself. As countless women became victims of sexual harassment and assault, the city became a site of individual and collective trauma. But the threats women faced in urban spaces were not limited to mashers. As women tried to enter public urban spaces long dominated by men, they faced gender discrimination which limited their opportunity and access. Working-class women suffered the harsh treatment and damaging environmental conditions of an exploitative labor system built around maximum output and minimal pay. They endured this exploitation to avoid another threat, the crippling poverty of unemployment. Women across classes dealt with environmental threats, such as toxic air, extreme noise and light pollution, and the steady erasure of green spaces in the urban environment. All of the aforementioned cultural and environmental issues caused women to experience a state of urban exile, a persistent state of placelessness, damage, and exclusion.

Urban Exile: City Poetry by Modern American Women is a study of traumatic urban experiences as depicted in the poetry of four modernist American women writers: Edna St. Vincent Millay, Amy Lowell, Evelyn Scott, and Lola Ridge. I bring to light a common state of urban exile, my term for a situation in which women are unable to live freely or find a home in the city because of its cultural and environmental threats. My project is built from detailed close-readings that consider both poetic form and content, and are grounded in the context of urban history and culture. Through an interdisciplinary approach which incorporates feminist geography, trauma theory, and cultural studies, I explore issues related to gender and the integration of women in city spaces, including threats of sexual violence and harassment, marginalization, and gender discrimination. I use ecocritical theory and urban studies to examine

the transformation of the urban space, its effects—like pollution, congestion, and urban sprawl—and its impact on women’s bodies and the environment. Through this research, I provide a picture of what it was like to be a woman in the city in the early twentieth century balancing the desire to take hold of new freedom and opportunities, while constantly dealing with environmental and cultural threats.

Modern American women poets have fallen into a gap in the critical conversation about city literature. When literary scholars talk about city literature, they most frequently turn to male writers. This gap in the research is perhaps best illustrated by the introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to the City in Literature* (2014): Robert McNamara writes, “A chapter devoted to women writers and representations of women’s experiences of the city would have been an important counterpoint to a literary city whose default perspective has been historically male” (13). In the most comprehensive guide to the city in literature, the editor cannot help but note that scholarship on women’s city literature is missing. As Deborah Parsons notes, even when scholars discuss women in cities, they examine this topic through a male writer’s account: “Accounts of women’s urban experience from their own perspective have tended to be overlooked” (84). In *Streetwalking the Metropolis* (2000), Parsons recovers the experience of modern women in cities by analyzing literature by British women writers. While her book helps redress the gap of scholarship on women’s city literature, it is limited to British women and fiction. Thus, with a focus on the city poetry of modern American women, my project adds a critical piece to existing scholarship. While examining urban exile in city poetry by modernist American women, I bring much needed attention to the physical, emotional, and psychological consequences of city living for women.

My project centers on the city poetry of four modernist women who lived in or frequented New York City and wrote city poetry around the same time, 1910-1920. This time period falls at the height of the urban boom, a time when people were experiencing the new sensations and experiences of the city, and also awakening to urban threats. Moreover, this time represents an important moment in the integration of women in urban spaces, when more women than ever before were participating in urban life and when women were clamoring for more rights; but also a time when women's access in the city was still limited by Victorian-era social codes and patriarchal control. Thus, the women writers in this study are perfectly situated to express both the agony and the ecstasy of being a modern urban woman.

I approach this city poetry with a focus on two areas of interest: the female body and the urban environment, and the way the city impacts the poetic form and content. I draw attention to the emotional, psychological, and physical effects of the city on the female body and mind, including rape trauma, isolation, confinement, physical and mental strain caused by light and noise pollution, and sleep deprivation. In regard to environment, I analyze the way these poets represent urban spaces. Throughout this body of city poetry, the urban environment takes on a variety of characteristics, including unnatural, threatening, beautiful, and monstrous. These representations allow us to better understand how modern women viewed the city and their relation to it. In this way, my project adds a literary layer to the work of cultural studies and feminist geography scholars, who interrogate the experience of modern women in the city from a cultural and historical vantage point.

In addition to showing the way the city impacts the female body, I also analyze how it impacts the poetic body. I focus on the way city shapes poetic form as well as how it colors the poets' subject matter. With the rise of the urban environment came new materials and ingredients

for poetry: city lights, electric signs, cars, skyscrapers, etc. I show how these poets make meaning with new urban materials. In regard to subject matter, these American poets used their city poems for a variety of purposes: to give a voice to the voiceless, to express concerns about the hazards of city living for women, to bear witness to the way urbanization impacts nature, and to create a space in which to reclaim power, cross boundaries, and assert their identity. With its formal innovation, imaginative play with new material, and social consciousness, the city poem by modern American women sizzles with artful experimentation and untapped meaning, stretching the boundaries of what we know as modernist literature.

The Urban Boom and its Impacts on Women and the Environment

From the late nineteenth to early twentieth century, America experienced an urban boom, a mass migration of people to metropolitan zones. One of the main causes of America's urban boom was the rise of industry in American cities. As Jonathan Rees points out, "Industrialization and urbanization began long before the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but it accelerated greatly during this period because of technological innovations, social changes, and a political system increasingly apt to favor economic growth beyond any other concern." Technological advancements like the "modern electrical grid" and Henry Ford's assembly line helped increase American industrial output by twenty-eight times between 1859 and 1929 (Rees "Industrialization and Urbanization"). Although technological advancements meant more mechanization of industrial work, the overall rise in industry allowed for an increase in jobs in cities, which led masses of people to migrate to urban zones. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, "In 1910, less than a third (28%) of the total population lived in metropolitan areas, but by 1950, more than half of the U.S. population lived in metropolitan areas" (33). During this

time, industrial centers like New York City showed a dramatic population increase every decade from the end of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century: in 1880, there were just over one million people living in New York City; that number increased to 3.4 million by 1900; and by 1930, it grew to 6.9 million (US Bureau of the Census Table 11, 13, and 16).

As cities expanded and Victorian-era social codes became at least slightly more relaxed, more opportunities opened up for women. Women found work not only in industrial factories, but also in a wide range of other fields. As Sally Ledger demonstrates in “The New Woman in the Modern City,” women began working as “female music hall performers, shopping ladies, shop-girls, glamorized ‘girls in business,’ female charity workers, Salvation Army lasses, platform women, match girls, women journalists, clerks and typists” (155). Women also migrated to the city to further their education at the undergraduate and graduate level. In fact, the rise of women in the city correlates with an increase in the number of doctorate degrees completed by women: “10 percent of the Ph.D. degrees from American universities in 1910 went to women, and in 1920 they received 15.1 percent” (Brittin 120). As women achieved a higher education, in the conventional sense, they were able to secure jobs in fields that had been mostly male dominated, like engineering, advertising, and editing. The financial independence that women secured through employment allowed them to be able to exist outside the conventional heteronormative marriage model. In this way, urban life provided a pathway, albeit a difficult one, for women to set out on their own, inhabit new roles, and enjoy new freedom and opportunities.

This independent and unconventional urban woman was embodied in the cultural and literary figure of the “New Woman,” which emerged during the late nineteenth century. The term “New Woman” arose out of English writer Sarah Grand’s essay, “The New Aspect of the

Woman Question” (1894), in which she says that the “new woman” is one who “solved the problem and proclaimed for herself what was wrong with Home-is-the-Woman’s-Sphere, and prescribed the remedy.” In *A New Woman Reader* (2001), Carolyn Christensen Nelson describes the English manifestation of this figure saying, “She was educated at Girton College, Cambridge, rode a bicycle, insisted on rational dress, and smoked in public: in short, she rejected the traditional role for women and demanded emancipation” (ix). Although the performance of these ideals varied from woman to woman, “what the New Woman did share was a rejection of the culturally defined feminine role and a desire for increased educational and career opportunities that would allow them to be economically self-sufficient” (Nelson x). Because cities were places in which all of these opportunities converged, the New Woman became largely an urban phenomenon. She could be seen on both real and literarily realized streets, such as those in popular novels like Edith Wharton’s *The House of Mirth*. Although stories about her often feature the complications of living an alternative lifestyle, the New Woman has become associated with a sense of liberation.

Urban Exile

We have heard the story of the New Woman’s liberation in the city, but what has been less explored is the way these women dealt with a city filled with threats that seemed determined to take away their access, liberty, and sense of safety. As I will demonstrate, city poetry by modern American women testifies to a persistent state of insecurity, displacement, damage, and marginalization of women in cities. I call this state urban exile. The *OED* defines exile as “prolonged absence from one’s native country or a place regarded as home, endured by force of circumstances or voluntarily undergone for some purpose” (noun, I.a.), “senses connected with

destruction” (noun, II), and “to banish, get rid of, expel, reject” (verb, 2).¹ From these definitions of exile, I draw key terms that pertain specifically to the poetry in my study:

placelessness/displacement, damage/destruction, and exclusion. Women in city poetry by modern American women lack a home or a safe space; they feel the negative impacts of the urban environment on their bodies and minds; and they live as outcasts, banished from certain spaces and denied rights because of their gender, lifestyle, or ethnicity. These urban women also feel a sense of loss at watching a masculine urban culture conquer what they deem a feminine nature, and the physical strain caused by the harmful environmental pollutants resulting from this conquest.

Urban exile resulted, in part, from cultural conditions that pushed back against women’s liberation. As women took on new roles outside the heteronormative marriage and domestication model, they faced discrimination and ridicule. Women entering the workplace were often subject to gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual violence from their male supervisors and coworkers. They were also targeted outside the workplace while walking around the city streets. When women entered the public city space, attempting to enjoy the same access to the city as men, they were often met with predatory behavior from men who ogled, harassed, and even physically assaulted them (Freedman *Redefining Rape* 191). As Linda McDowell shows in *Gender, Identity, and Place*, also limiting their access to the city space was the popular notion that women walking alone in cities were likely “public women” or prostitutes (149). In this way, women trying to enjoy the city space not only risked their safety and well being, but also their reputations, an important social currency. As many urban studies scholars have noted, modern women in cities were in need of a safe space, a place in which to enjoy freedom and access

¹ The writers in my study depict several forms of exile, not just the most well known (place/displacement). The *OED*’s definitions of exile are useful for showing multiple forms of the word and for understanding its etymology.

without the risk of persecution and harm. At this time, such a place did not exist. As a result, women found themselves in urban exile, unable to live freely or find a home in the city. The writers in this study attest to this state of dislocation and instability, and the emotional strain and psychological trauma it causes. They collectively demonstrate that the story of the New Woman in the city is one of balancing the desire to take hold of new opportunities with the harmful and even life-threatening reality of doing so.

Beyond these cultural conditions, urban exile also arose from the rapidly changing urban environment. The urban and industrial boom in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century dramatically transformed America's urban environments. People from all over the world migrated to urban zones to take part in the opportunities the city offered them. The increased need for housing and commerce caused cities to spread outward past their limits into suburban and rural zones; and upward into skyscrapers that took their dominant place in the night's sky. The environment transformed as more and more land became occupied by manmade structures. As populations continued to surge, cities became increasingly congested; open spaces and green spaces became a rarity. Industry and new technology added another layer to this transformation. The rapid proliferation of automobiles and industrial factories in cities caused air quality to decline. Noise levels became notoriously high as a result of industry, automobiles, constant construction, population, and the advent of radios. The early twentieth century, not just the 1920s, began to roar. As noise pollution became a common nuisance, so did light pollution. City light, made up of many layers including the light from skyscrapers, cars, businesses, billboards, and bright electric street lights, claimed dominance over the night sky, completely eclipsing the moon and stars. The byproducts of this urban and industrial boom— congestion, bad air quality, noise and light pollution—profoundly impacted city dwellers every day. Thus, to understand the

urban boom, we need to look not only to culture, but also environment. Although this environmental story has been left out of the story of women's urbanism, the women writers in this study devote much attention to it. As I show in my Millay and Lowell chapters, women's urban exile is about witnessing the conquering of nature by masculine and mechanized urban culture, and dealing with the physical and psychological impacts of the bright, noisy, claustrophobic urban environment.

Modernism and Exile

The story of women's urban exile adds to the larger narrative of exile in modernist literature. Modernist scholars have considered many manifestations of exile, especially in relation to the "Lost Generation," expatriates, and racial and ethnic minorities. In *Imagining Paris* (1993), J. Gerald Kennedy focuses on several influential modernist writers, such as Fitzgerald, Stein, and Hemingway, who lived in self-imposed exile in Paris in the early twentieth century. In his chapter, "Modernism as Exile," Kennedy shows how Fitzgerald and Djuna Barnes used their representations of Paris to express their state of exile as "Lost Generation" expatriates feeling alienated and disoriented by the modern era. Kennedy argues that Barnes' *Nightwood* projects an "unreal" city that imbues the text with uncertainty, "the distinguishing sign of modernist experience" (223). Moreover, this uncertainty is a byproduct of exile and seen in all of her expatriate characters who "suffer a profound uncertainty about who they are, where they 'belong,' and what they desire" (223). While Kennedy brings together city, exile, and modernism, he focuses on the "unreal" or imagined city, as opposed to the material urban environment. As I will demonstrate, the material encounter between women's bodies and the urban environment is a vital missing piece to this larger story of modernism and exile.

For Michael North in *The Dialect of Modernism* (1994), exile and modernism are inextricably linked through African-American language and culture. He demonstrates how prominent white modernist writers, like Conrad, Stein, and Pound, co-opted the exilic position and dialect of African Americans in order to try to place modernist writing on the outside, rather than in the privileged center. For example, in *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, through his use of dialect, Conrad positions himself “as a racial alien, a speaker of gibberish, and helped to situate transatlantic modernism there as well” (58). Similarly, he argues, Stein and Picasso deployed racial masquerade in their work in order to set themselves apart from their cultural pasts and, thereby, step into the new era (66). North claims, “Insofar as its expatriation is willed in revolt against the social constraints and falsehoods of Europe and America,” the role of “racial alien” “completes the process of exile” (67). Thus, for these modernists, the exilic position of the racial other allows them to enter a space outside mainstream Western culture, a space where unfettered originality is possible. Overall, North strikes an effective and uncomfortable balance of revealing a multitude of ways modernism owes much to racial exile, from the groundbreaking works by African-Americans that bear exile’s trace to white modernist’s literary colonization of racial identity.

In stark contrast to North’s exploration of racial exile, Mihai Spariosu’s *Modernism and Exile: Play, Liminality, and the Exilic-Utopian Imagination* (2015) centers on the potential for play opened up in liminal spaces of exile. He shows the way modernist writers have explored the positive, utopian potential of exile. Spariosu begins by acknowledging the negative aspects of exile by saying, exile “is not voluntary or free, and it is not enjoyable” (28). He then argues that exile positions the individual in a liminal space of possibility which gives “him a vast amount of freedom or ‘free play’” (29). After the exiled individual awakens to the potential of this liminal

space, “he can engage in the power game of turning his marginal position into a central one, through political contest”; or “he can try to transcend “his exilic condition, by opting out of the power game” and, instead, “engag(e) in other kinds of (utopian) play” (29). We see this beneficial aspect of exile in Aldous Huxley’s dystopian novel, *Brave New World* (1932), in which a character like Helmholtz views his exilic status as productive and freeing for him as an artist (158). Spariosu opens up the topic of exile to the consideration of its benefits; however, his discussion is made possible through favoring liminality, a between space of possibility, over marginality, an outsider position of restriction; and men over women, not only in his choice of male writers and experiences, but male pronouns. In women’s urban exile, cultural and environmental threats drastically impede creativity, productivity, and freedom. Their marginalization limits, rather than promotes, their ability to find free, safe spaces in the city.

By foregrounding the marginal and the material, Edward Said provides much needed real-world perspective on the concept of exile in modernism. In “Reflections on Exile” (2000), Said begins by saying, “Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience” (173). He ponders the potency of exile in modern Western culture and literature in light of the severity of the exilic state. For Said, exile is “the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted” (173). He suggests that exile, as a concept, has a special relation to the modern age: first, many prominent twentieth-century artists and writers have experienced exilic states and captured that experience in their work; and second, exile has particular power to capture audiences in the modern age because, due to “its modern warfare, imperialism, and the quasi theological ambitions of totalitarian rulers,” the modern age is “the age of the refugee, the displaced person, mass immigration” (174). Although Said stresses that “exile cannot be made to

serve notions of humanism” (174), he says that, for exiles, this outsider point of view can foster self-awareness, originality, and a sensitivity to modes of exclusion throughout society (185-6); it can help inspire these things, secondhand, in people who seek to understand exile through representations. The women in my study represent several of Said’s ideas about exile. Millay’s depiction of women stranded in confining and sickening urban environments, longing to return to their natural homes by the sea conveys Said’s notion of exile as an “unhealable rift” “between the self and its true home” (173). Additionally, in the poet-activist Lola Ridge, we see an example of a writer in exile using her work to bring awareness to the wider issue of exile for immigrants and the working poor.

Although the critical discussion of exile and modernism tends to center on male modernists and male experiences, several scholars have looked at exile specifically in relation to modernist women writers. In *The Poetics of Enclosure* (2002), Lesley Wheeler shows how American women poets from Dickinson to Dove express a need for a space and use the poetic space as a place in which to be themselves. Similarly, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in *No Man’s Land* (1988), focus on self-exile in relation to the public versus private selves of Marianne Moore and Edna St. Vincent Millay. In *Queer Poetics* (1999), Mary Galvin adds to this conception of women’s exile by considering how lesbianism has been exiled from the literary canon and how lesbian writers have long lived as outcasts in American society. Although these scholars have considered many manifestations of exile, they have not considered it in relation to women’s city poetry. My project adds to existing modernist scholarship by looking at women’s poetry in order to reveal the numerous ways modern women experienced an exilic state of being while living in the city. Women in these poems are in need of a space in the city: a safe space, a home, a space in which they feel free, a space in which they are not marginalized, objectified, or

threatened. Because they do not have this space in the city, they experience intense isolation, confinement, paranoia, and fear of bodily harm, and often long to escape to a more natural or unrestrictive environment. This narrative of urban exile is vital to our understanding of not only city literature, but also modernism and modern women in urban spaces.

Chapter One— “Sick of the City, Wanting the Sea”: Millay and Urban Exile

This chapter aims to broaden our understanding of Millay’s work through an examination of the recurring theme of exile in her city poems that have received little critical attention, including “MacDougal Street” (1920), “Afternoon on a Hill” (1917), “Inland,” “Exiled,” and “City Trees” (1921). Although Millay has come to be known as a classic new woman of the city, her poetry features a state of exile experienced by modern women living in the city that has gone unexplored. At a time when women migrated to the city to find opportunity and social freedom, Millay acknowledged the difficulty, restriction, and risks of living in the city in her poetry. She often depicts the following exilic situation: a woman in exile in the city desperately longs to escape and return to a more natural environment, where she can be free. For instance, in “Inland” and “Exiled,” the speakers feel imprisoned and crushed by the city, and they see themselves as fundamentally different from city people, in part, because of their deep connection to nature. Although these women believe the sea or the countryside offers them freedom and a refuge from the threats of city life, Millay suggests the return to nature brings new threats and leads to destruction and death. Thus, these women exist in a perpetual state of exile, as neither city nor country offers them the possibility of freedom and the home they desire. By paying attention to exile and focusing on environment, I open up new possibilities for the study of Millay. Long before the rise of ecocriticism, Millay wrote about people being disconnected from the natural

world and endeavoring to colonize it through a perpetual cycle of buying and building. Before eco-feminism, she represented a connection between the threats to nature and the threats to the female body. In this way, by considering Millay's poetry of urban exile in many of her poems which have been exiled from the canon, we stand to deepen our understanding of Millay and allow her work to enter into the critical conversation in new and significant ways.

Chapter Two— DistURBANce: Women and the Threatening City in Amy Lowell

Like Millay, Amy Lowell uses her city poetry to bear witness to the destruction and danger of urban life. My second chapter is an analysis of the environmental and cultural threats facing women in cities as represented by Amy Lowell. These threats include the debilitating and distressing effects of noise and light pollution, as depicted in "The Sixteenth Floor" (1919) and "New York at Night" (1912), as well as the constant threat of sexual harassment and assault on the city streets, as seen in "The Captured Goddess" (1914). Lowell captures women's urban exile through emphasizing how the city is inhospitable to women's bodies and damaging to their health and well-being. After I trace how this threatening reality shaped women's urban experience, I show how the resulting exilic position inflects the female gaze on the city and the figure of female flâneur in "The Captured Goddess" (1914). At first glance, this poem appears to present a typical flânerie situation; however, Lowell subverts flânerie by using the flâneur position in radically new ways. In the hands of Lowell, the flâneuse is a witness who draws attention to, rather than reifies, the violation inherent in flânerie. The speaker's exilic status gives her the unique desire and ability to reframe the gaze. Scholars have debated whether or not women can inhabit the role of flâneur. Surprisingly, Amy Lowell has been left out of this

conversation, but she is a vital missing piece. Lowell responds to flâneurie by using a woman's exilic identity in order to rewrite the gaze.

Chapter Three— “Quiver under it!”: Sexual Violence, Trauma, and the Haunted City in Evelyn Scott's “Manhattan”

The urban exile in Evelyn Scott's poetry results from the rampant sexual violence perpetrated by men in the city and the trauma women suffered as a result. In Scott's city poetry, we find the imprint of sexual violence and see how the city becomes horrifyingly transformed by the traumatized mindset of a survivor. Scott's “Manhattan” (1920) provides a sexual assault survivor's perspective and reveals the way rape trauma etches itself on her mind, body, and the urban environment, coating her daily life in a layer of horror and pain. In this trauma narrative, the speaker's experience being physically attacked and sexually violated in a crowd in the city causes her to experience symptoms consistent with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Her traumatized mindset turns the city space into a site of death, broken bodies, and violence, primed for the resurgence of chaos. Scott allows readers to see the city through her eyes in order to allow them to better understand the precarious position of women in the city space, as well as the frightening reality of survivors living with trauma. Although Scott has been left out of modernist discourse, her poetry of urban trauma can add a vital piece to our understanding of women's urban experiences and the way those experiences affect poetic form. Furthermore, her work allows modernist conversations to extend to important contemporary issues like sexual assault and PTSD.

Chapter Four— Women Consuming Women: Consumer Capitalism, Labor, and the City in Lola Ridge

Just as I bring Evelyn Scott into contemporary conversations on trauma and PTSD, in my final chapter I invite the critical re-evaluation of Lola Ridge, another remarkable yet lost poet, on the basis of her unique POV, social consciousness, and formal experimentation. Drawing on her experience as an Irish immigrant and member of the working poor, Ridge captures the harsh realities of city living for many marginalized groups, like immigrants and factory workers. In *The Ghetto and Other Poems* and *Sun-Up and Other Poems*, the city embodies the economic extremes of scarcity and excess, embodied through two kinds of female bodies: the often obscured, disheveled, and sick bodies of the working poor and the opulent superabundance of middle-class women/the personified body of city as ravenous consumer. She places women at the center of consumer culture as people who consume, but, also, as people who are consumed by it. Her poetry features several types of urban exile, from immigrants living in political exile, to the plight of Jewish immigrants in tenements, to women across economic classes trapped by consumer capitalism. Coming from the ranks of immigrants and the working poor, Ridge stands out among modern American poets, the majority of whom were middle-class and born in America. Due to her unique point of view and experience, she sympathetically and realistically captures the reality of being a marginal figure in America. She brings social consciousness and activism to modernist poetry—a type of poetry often criticized for being too I-centered or too internal. Additionally, with its formal experimentation, disorienting resistance to logocentric reading practices, and use of new urban materials, Ridge's city poetry can excite critical interest and push the boundaries of what we know as modern poetry.

Coda

Ultimately, *Urban Exile* is about the transformative interaction between the city and bodies, both human and poetic. Elizabeth Grosz claims in “Bodies-Cities” (1992),

The body and its environment, rather, produce each other as forms of the hyperreal, as modes of simulation which have overtaken and transformed whatever reality each may have had into the image of the other: the city is made and made over into the simulacrum of the body, and the body, in its turn, is transformed, ‘citified,’ urbanized as a distinctively metropolitan body. (242)

As Grosz suggests, bodies and cities transform each other. In my study of urban exile in modernist American women’s poetry, I draw attention to this mutually transformative relation between the urban environment and women’s bodies. Women produced the city through their physical and economic presence, labor, recent integration into male-dominated spaces, and in the way the city remade itself to play to a female audience. An example of woman shaping city, as I show in my Ridge chapter, is in the way the city transformed itself with department stores and advertising to sell to women. Additionally, as Grosz claims, women’s bodies were also “citified” or shaped by the city. The writers in this study represent a multitude of ways this occurred. In Millay’s work, women are sickened by the city. Lowell’s women are damaged by extreme noise and light pollution. Scott reveals the way women were both physically harmed and psychologically traumatized in urban spaces where predatory men freely hunted and attacked women. Finally, Ridge’s laboring women bear the scars of exploitative factory labor producing the city; and the bodies of her middle-class women, covered head to toe in jewelry, have been programmed by urban consumer culture to recklessly pursue excess. As bodies and cities shaped one another, they also transformed the poetic body. Modernist poetry became “citified” as the

rapidly transforming city space gave birth to new phenomena, experiences, and sensual ingredients for writers to incorporate into their poetry. The city opened up new vantage points, like skyscrapers and subway trains, and new points of view, like the flâneuse, or the female urban walker. Urbanization also brought on new problems for poets to grapple with in their work, like the way urban technology interrupted lyrical meditations on nature and night. Through the bodies of women writers made citified, modernist American poetry took on the imprint of urban exile.

Chapter One

“Sick of the city, wanting the sea”: Millay and Urban Exile

December, 1920. After rising to prominence on the American literary scene and becoming the most popular woman in Greenwich Village, Edna St. Vincent Millay flees the city. "Dearest, beloved Mother," she writes, "I am all right now, but I have been quite sick, almost ever since I moved in here,--bronchitis for a while, & another small nervous breakdown after that" (qtd. in Milford 200). The city, she believes, has made her "quite sick," infecting her body and overwhelming her mind. Moreover, the urban environment is impacting her work: "I am become sterile here; I have known it would be, & I see it approaching if I stay here.--Also, New York life is getting too congested for me,--too many people; I get no time to work" (qtd. in Milford 200). Millay decides to flee New York, travel to France, and let her body be revitalized by a more natural environment. She leaves the congested, concrete city seeking greener pastures that could nourish her poetry: "my poetry, needs fresh grass to feed on" (qtd. in Milford 200).

We know Millay as the quintessential New Woman of New York City, a woman who thrived in the city and lived by her own rules. However, focusing exclusively on this positive narrative of her urban experience has resulted in an incomplete picture. As this episode from Millay's life shows, the city did not set her free: it often left her feeling sick, broken, and desperate for escape to a greener environment. We see this exilic urban experience not only in her life, but also in her work. Consistently across her city poems, Millay returns to the same situation: a woman in exile in the city desperately longs to escape and return to a more natural environment, where she can be free. In "Exiled," Millay sums up this state of exile with the phrase "Sick of the city, wanting the sea" (4). Although these speakers believe the sea or the

natural environment offers them freedom and a refuge from the threats of city life, Millay suggests that the return to nature ultimately leads to destruction and death. A return to nature means entering a harsh and inhospitable environment that resists the integration of man and man-made elements; it also entails leaving behind the newly found opportunities that city life holds for women. Thus, these women exist in a perpetual state of exile, as neither city nor country offers them the possibility of freedom and the home they desire. Although this thread of urban exile runs through Millay's work, critics have not yet identified it; they have mainly focused on her love poetry, sonnets, and writings that deal with unconventional gender and sexuality, and not attended to Millay's representations of urban environments. In this chapter, I bring the conversation on Millay to urban environments and the recurring theme of urban exile in several poems that have received little to no critical attention: "MacDougal Street," "Inland," "Exiled," "Afternoon on a Hill," and "City Trees"; with the exception of "MacDougal Street," none of these poems have been analyzed at length by any scholar.² Recuperating the theme of urban exile reorients the larger story about modernism's relationship to the urban boom, particularly the ways that narrative silences women's critiques of city spaces.

Millay was one of thousands of American women who found new identities in their urban homes and workplaces. For modern women, cities like Boston, New York, and London represented places of increased freedom, experience, and opportunity. As Sally Ledger demonstrates in "The New Woman in the Modern City," women at the turn of the century flooded the city and began working as "female music hall performers, shopping ladies, shop-girls, glamorized 'girls in business,' female charity workers, Salvation Army lasses, platform women, match girls, women journalists, clerks and typists" (155). Women also migrated to the

² See Nina Miller's discussion of "MacDougal Street" in *Making Love Modern* (1999).

urban zones to further their education at the undergraduate and graduate level.³ Like many women in the early-twentieth century, Millay migrated to the city from the country to take hold of the boundless opportunities that awaited her there. At 21, she left her hometown in rural Maine to attend college at Vassar in New York. After graduating in 1917, she moved to New York City with the goals of becoming an actress and furthering her career as a writer. She established a home for herself in Greenwich Village, where her success as a writer, an author of the popular and critically acclaimed poem “Renascence,” had already secured her a measure of fame, as well as the “general admiration of the Village literati” (Miller 17). For Millay and other new women, the city was also a place to participate in the women’s rights movement alongside other likeminded women. Metropolitan areas in the early twentieth century saw unprecedented numbers of women taking to the streets to clamor for various political changes, like women’s suffrage and labor reform. Thus, to these women, migration to the city often held deep significance: in the city they could not only work to increase their own freedom, but also join in the fight to increase it for all women. But this chance at freedom and opportunity came at a price.

As scholars examining the experience of modern women in cities have shown, urban living, for women, entailed a constant balancing act between freedom and danger. For example, in *The Sphinx in the City* (1992), Elizabeth Wilson details many of the freedoms the city seemed to offer women, including the chance to “experiment with new roles” outside the conventional heterosexual marriage model (65) and also gain greater access to the public space (60). However, she cautions that the city “is a place of danger for women” (8), in the sense that women entering the public space are discriminated against, objectified, sexualized, and granted only limited access to city life. Furthermore, she points out that, to city planners, writers, and many men in

³ According to Norman Brittin, the rise of women in the city correlates with an increase in the number of doctorate degrees completed by women: “10 percent of the Ph.D. degrees from American universities in 1910 went to women, and in 1920 they received 15.1 percent” (120).

cities, women have frequently been seen as “an irruption in the city, a symptom of disorder, and a problem” (9)—a conception that has resulted in the mistreatment and endangerment of women in cities. Similar to Wilson, Linda McDowell, in *Gender, Identity and Place* (1999), cautions that enjoying the opportunities of city life increased a woman’s vulnerability to threats. First, she describes their increased presence in the public space, saying, “as the nineteenth century ended, women became increasingly visible in cities, passing through the streets on their way to the new employment opportunities afforded by the rise of clerical occupations and to go shopping in the growing number of department stores” (155). However, McDowell adds that their increased visibility opened them up to threats, namely, “the intrusive male gaze and, on occasion, actual verbal or physical harassment” (156).

McDowell’s language here belies the unfortunate frequency with which women experienced physical harm in city centers. While attempting to partake of the city’s opportunities and avoid its threats, modern women often found themselves in need of a safe space. Being out on the streets and sidewalks was dangerous because not only did it increase visibility and thereby make women targets for abuse and harassment, but it also resulted in their being labeled prostitutes, or public women. In this way, taking a walk in the city alone meant risking your safety and reputation. Because streets were not safe, women sought safety indoors. Semi-public spaces, like department stores, cafes, and museums, became places in which women could venture from their private spaces unchaperoned and enjoy city life. But these places had their own drawbacks: while in these spaces, women were still subject to the same mistreatment they received in the streets. Women often escaped from the threatening public and semi-public spaces of the city to their houses or apartments, but this too came with its own risks, namely, isolation, boredom, and a suffocating feeling of confinement. Thus, when neither the public nor private

space could give women the protection and freedom they desired, they found themselves in urban exile, existing in a state of placelessness and vulnerability with no true home in the city in which to renew themselves.

This state of urban exile is key to grasping the experience of modern women in cities and unpacking representations of that experience in urban literature. This is true in the case of Millay and her city poetry. Typically, discussions of Millay and the city end here: she was the consummate city woman, a Greenwich Village bohemian, who felt liberated in the city, where she could live the way she wanted to live.⁴ However, while living there, Millay constantly wrote from the position of a woman living in exile in the suffocating, restricting, and isolating city. For instance, in “MacDougal Street,” the speaker finds herself immersed in a part of the city known for freedom, yet in this free environment, people treat her like a bourgeois lady, thereby reinforcing the societal codes from which she wishes to escape. In “Inland” and “Exiled,” the speakers feel imprisoned and crushed by the city, and they see themselves as fundamentally different from city people, in part, because of their deep connection to nature. Similarly, the speaker in “City Trees” finds more community with the trees in the city than with the people; she seeks their “music” as an alternative to the “shrieking city air” (lines 7 and 10). All of these women express their grievances about the city and their burning desire to escape; however, despite the urge to flee, something holds them there in a state of exile. The city offers them the career opportunities and the chance to live independently, but it also distances them from nature and confines them. Nature offers them more freedom and a chance to live outside society and social codes; however, it also threatens them with its violence and destructive power. As Millay

⁴ See Shaun O’Connell’s *Remarkable, Unspeakable New York* (1995) and Nina Miller’s *Making Love Modern* (1999).

reveals, the ideal environment, which offered these women total freedom, stability, and opportunity, was neither city nor country; it simply did not exist.

“MacDougal Street”: Hemmed In

In “MacDougal Street” (1920), Millay chooses to expose this exilic experience inside an area in New York City known for its liberal and bohemian atmosphere, Greenwich Village. Greenwich Village, also known as “The Village,” sits on the west side of Lower Manhattan. Like many New York City neighborhoods, it has seen several transformations throughout its history. According to the Greenwich Village Society for Historical Preservation (GVSHIP), in the early to mid-nineteenth century, Greenwich Village was home to the upper-middle class and the affluent, who took up residence in its newly built houses along Washington Square and Fifth Avenue. In the late nineteenth century, as a wave of immigrants surged into Greenwich Village, many of these upper-crust people vacated the area for the Upper Westside. These immigrants from all over Europe transformed the gentrified, majority white neighborhood into an epicenter of cultural diversity and acceptance (GVSHIP). By the time Millay writes “MacDougal Street,” Greenwich Village had become America’s center of bohemianism, a lifestyle in which a person “leads a free, vagabond, or irregular life, not being particular as to the society he frequents, and despising conventionalities generally” (“bohemian” n. 3 *OED Online*). During the early twentieth century, people migrated to the Village seeking the opportunity to live a bohemian lifestyle outside the norms and rules of mainstream America. Nina Miller, in *Making Love Modern* (1999), describes the intention of this rebellious community saying, “Village counterculture rejected the world of capitalist production to make a refuge in which individuality could flourish through creativity, personal discovery, and romantic love” (19). The Village

became an important community for writers and artists, who wanted to live somewhere inspirational, connected to the art scene, and also cheap. Millay lived in Greenwich Village from 1917-1925 and was regarded “with awe” within the community (Miller 16), due to her status as one of the most popular writers of the time, her bold and rebellious lifestyle, and her personality and beauty. Despite living as the veritable queen of the Village, Millay acknowledged that even in what seemed like the most freeing environment, women were often not free to live the way they wanted to. In “MacDougal Street,” despite being in liberating Greenwich Village, the speaker is paralyzed with fear and anxiety and cannot shake the restricting social codes of mainstream, patriarchal American society. By locating the speaker in Greenwich Village, Millay shows the extent to which the city, even its most progressive area, did not offer women the freedom they so desired.

“MacDougal Street,” one of Millay’s most memorable and vivid city poems, features characteristics common to Millay’s depictions of the city. For one, this poem portrays a woman who is unable to be her true self in the city. Like the speakers in “Inland” and “Exiled,” this woman can envision herself being free, but she cannot attain that freedom. Also, in “MacDougal Street,” the conditions of the city environment impact the woman’s mind and body, to the point at which she cannot control herself. Although the speaker in this poem seems to exaggerate the conditions of the city, her views on the city are not anomalous in the greater body of city poems; on the contrary, she expresses many of the same grievances with city life found in other Millay poems.

The narrative of urban exile that Millay presents in “MacDougal Street” runs counter to much of the scholarly conversation about Greenwich Village, women, and modernist poetry. For instance, in “Women Writing the City” (1993), Liz Heron argues, “Fictions [and poems] of the

city suggest that, whatever the social restrictions imposed on women's mobility, the city itself offers initiation enough to women to ignore these and to follow their inclinations" (7). For the speaker in "MacDougal Street," this is not the case. She cannot get past either the societal codes placed on her while she walks through the city or those she has internalized. Despite her attempt to get outside those rules through her walk in Greenwich Village, her status as a lady makes people treat her like an outsider and place upon her the restrictions from which she wants to escape. She is unable to envision herself behaving outside of those codes, and just the attempt of doing so leaves her emotionally distressed and confused. Through the speaker's struggle, Millay conveys how difficult it was for women in cities to live the way they wanted to live.

To the speaker, the city represents a place where she must operate within societal codes that restrict her freedom. Millay introduces this idea in the first stanza:

As I went walking up and down to take the evening air,
(Sweet to meet upon the street, why must I be so shy?)
I saw him lay his hand upon her torn black hair;
("Little dirty Latin child, let the lady by!") (1-4)

The poem begins as the speaker leaves the confines of indoor environments "to take the evening air." On the surface, the speaker is partaking of the bourgeois tradition of the evening walk; however, as her exasperation throughout the poem indicates, she also takes the walk in order to escape the feeling of being suffocated by the confines of her home. She has a desire to get outside: out of doors and walls, outside into nature, and outside the boundaries that restrict her. As a "lady," she has certain privileges, but she also feels restricted in how she can behave. She recalls the man enforcing codes of behavior by reprimanding the little girl who did not make way for her. Thus, her class status not only restricts her behavior, but also makes people around her treat her as an outsider. These social codes enforced in the city keep her in exile from living in

public the way she wants to. Using the pattern of narration and private reflection, Millay represents the speaker's internal struggle between how she behaves and how she feels. In every odd-numbered line, the speaker relates what happened on MacDougal Street; in every even numbered line, she reflects, in present tense, on what she witnessed there and how it makes her feel. When she thinks, "why must I be so shy?", Millay illustrates how the speaker has internalized the codes of behavior that she also desires to get outside. While she feels she "must" act reserved, she longs to be like the little girl, who runs wild and acts according to her own desires.

The speaker does not feel free either in her private space or in public; additionally, there is a dissolving boundary between the two, as she cannot escape MacDougal Street even in the privacy of her home. As she tries to sleep, images of MacDougal Street haunt her:

The women squatting on the stoops were slovenly and fat,
(Lay me out in organdie, lay me out in lawn!)
And everywhere I stepped there was a baby or a cat;
(Lord, God in Heaven, will it never be dawn?) (5-8)

Her experience in the city lingers with her to the point of disturbing her peace, interrupting her ability to find solace in her private space. MacDougal Street affects her to such an extent because it both repulses and entices her. For instance, she paints an unfavorable picture of the "slovenly and fat" women "squatting on the stoops," making them seem lazy, lewd, and grotesque.

However, after thinking about them, she dreams of being uninhibited like them, and exclaims, "Lay me out in organdie, lay me out in lawn!" "Lay me out" signals her desire to take a posture of surrender and to let go of her impulse to control. She also fantasizes about wearing "organdie" and "lawn," two thin, transparent fabrics worn as undergarments or sleepwear. Her wish to lay out in these revealing clothes communicates her desire to be more free in her body and also to

shed the cultural barriers she has internalized to be more of her bare, true self in public. To the speaker, these “squatting” women inhabit their bodies freely, even though they are in a public space where women were expected to appear dignified and tidy at all times. The moment the desire to inhabit her own body more freely creeps in she reverts to her code of propriety and feels repulsed by MacDougal Street. Her prejudice resurfaces as she says, “And everywhere I stepped there was a baby or a cat.” The image she constructs here of the infestation of babies pouring onto the city street bespeaks common prejudicial views of the lower classes, who were often accused of being excessively fertile. By mixing these babies with cats, the speaker casts them on the same level, thereby, dehumanizing and animalizing the babies, but also the mothers who gave birth to them. The image of babies and cats covering the street and impeding the speaker’s ability to walk also casts them as waste. In her analysis of “MacDougal Street,” Nina Miller connects the excessive sexuality in this scene to waste saying, “MacDougal Street is rank with sensuality. More specifically, it is an overflowing market of female sexuality. Not simply “slovenly and fat,” the “squatting” women of the stoops are implicated in a grotesque fertility by virtue of the teeming babies and cats surrounding them” (*Making Love Modern* 33). Through these negative representations of MacDougal Street people, she tries to rationalize her disgust of them because her desire to be like them scares her. She envies the freedom she sees in them, but she also feels fundamentally different from them and, therefore, outside that state of freedom.

Furthermore, the women on the stoops represent a freedom she desires but an identity from which she wants to distance herself. The description of the women on the stoops hints at the possibility that they could be prostitutes. Not only are they displaying themselves on the stoops, but they are also “squatting,” a posture that could be sexually suggestive. Also, the speaker codes them as creatures of vice by calling them “slovenly and fat.” As the speaker alludes to these

women being prostitutes, Millay represents a common preoccupation with “public women” that city dwellers had at the time. In the early twentieth century, there were more independent women out in public in cities than ever before. In Chicago, for instance, “in 1880 there were 3,800 women living alone in Chicago; in 1910 there were 31,500; and in 1930 there were 49,100” (qtd. in Matthews 152). Society at large was still catching up to the reality of the independent city woman; as a result, women seen alone in public were often labeled as “public women,” a term which designated them as fallen women or prostitutes. This discriminatory labeling was widespread and, unfortunately, common to many women’s experience of living in the city. Women were mindful of this labeling as they walked alone through cities, and it often caused them emotional distress. At this time, as Ledger notes, many middle-class women who enjoyed the freedom of walking alone in the city had anxiety about being mistaken for “public women” found along the city streets (154). The speaker in “MacDougal Street” is caught between the prejudice she has internalized against the women on the stoop and the desire to be like them, to live more freely in public. Millay clearly presents her conflicted state of mind with “The women squatting on the stoops were slovenly and fat, / (Lay me out in organdie, lay me out in lawn!)” (5-6). For the speaker, like many women in cities, there is no neutral identity to assume: she is either a “lady” or a prostitute.

In stanzas three and four, the speaker feels emotionally and physically impacted by the dirty, overcrowded, and polluted city. While describing the experience of walking through a street market, she constantly emphasizes waste: “wet shells trodden under heel” (10), “She haggled the fruit man of his rotting ware” (11), and “He walked like a king through the filth and the clutter” (13). While revisiting these images, she feels overwhelmed with emotion and cannot fall asleep. She says, “What can there be to cry about that I should lie and cry?” (16), indicating

that she can neither control her emotions, nor understand them. The intense physical and emotional response to her experience interrupts her private life at home and takes over her body and mind. In this way, the city completely overwhelms her life, to the point at which she cannot escape it in her own mind. She cannot transcend the city.

As the poem concludes, the speaker finally declares what she wants, but also cries uncontrollably, while knowing she cannot ever attain it. The final stanza reads,

He laid his darling hand upon her little black head,
(I wish I were a ragged child with ear-rings in my ears!)
And he said she was a baggage to have said what she had said;
(Truly I shall be ill unless I stop these tears!) (17-20)

As this stanza indicates, the speaker feels most drawn to the man on the street and the little girl beside him. The phrase “darling hand” reveals a romantic or sexual desire for the man, and her earlier descriptions of this man reveal a desire to behave like him. For instance, she notes twice that he lays his hands on the little girl and scolds her, and she also mentions he walks around “like a king” (13). She envies this man for his control over the environment, dominating presence in the city space, and ability to do whatever he wants. Additionally, as she states, she wants to be the little girl, the “ragged child with ear-rings in my ears!” (18). Millay’s description of this little girl, with her ear-rings and backtalk to authority, frames her as a gypsy: a quintessentially bohemian figure, who embodies the quest to live freely outside societal norms. To the speaker, this little girl is young, wild, and uninhibited. She admires the little girl for shouting at her when she passed because she longs for the same freedom of expression. Being this little girl would allow her to exist outside her class status, ladylike behavior, and the codes that stifle her ability to express herself. The little “ragged child with ear-rings” also represents a state of primitive, exotic otherness that would enable her to get completely outside the societal

codes that bind her. In this way, her desire to be this child also manifests her primitive impulse or desire to escape modern city life and live in the wild. However, although she wants nothing more than to escape her reality, she feels somehow bound to her existence as a “lady,” and the reality that she can only wish to be the little girl causes her to make herself sick with emotion: “Truly I shall be ill unless I stop these tears!” (20). She speaks these words from a position of exile: a perpetual state of being outside the life she wants to lead and the person she wants to be. Millay gives us a figure of middle-class feminine urban distress while at the same time offering the feral bohemian girl as an example of how women can survive in the city. However, at the same time, Millay makes it clear that this option is too remote for the speaker and modern women.

Trapped “Inland”

Like the speaker in “MacDougal Street,” the speaker in “Inland” (1921) feels trapped inside the confining and restrictive city environment from which she cannot escape. Although Millay never mentions the word “city” in this poem, several factors make it clear that it is a city poem. This poem is part of a series of city poems in *Second April* that Millay connects through their form (ABCB, tetrameter, long/short) and their speakers, who are all experiencing some version of urban exile. While writing these poems, Millay felt trapped, stifled, and sickened by urban living and longed to return to a more natural setting.⁵ Her experience of urban exile resonates with the speaker’s experience in “Inland.” Additionally, “Inland” is a city poem because it explores the problem of urban sprawl, also known as suburbanization. In *Dead End* (2014), a study of American urban sprawl, Benjamin Ross points out that in the 1920s America

⁵ See Millay’s December 1920 letter to her mother in which she says, “I am all right now, but I have been quite sick, almost ever since I moved in here,--bronchitis for a while, & another small nervous breakdown after that. . .I am become sterile here; I have known it would be, & I see it approaching if I stay here.--Also, New York life is getting too congested for me,--too many people; I get no time to work.” She continues, “My poetry needs fresh grass to feed on” (qtd. in Milford 200).

was experiencing a “suburban land bubble” due to “rising incomes and easy mortgage credit” (18). Adding to this “bubble” was the fact that many people found the conditions of city living intolerable and were finally able to move from downtown to just outside of town in the suburbs, due to expansions in transportation and roadways (7-12). Despite the benefits of these housing developments, they resulted in the gradual erasure of more of America’s natural landscape. The speaker in “Inland” critiques inland people who are constantly buying land and building housing developments, conquering the natural landscape with each new development. Millay contrasts the rapidly developing and confining city with the open and wild seascape. The speaker, trapped inland in a prison-like room, desperately longs to escape and return to the sea. Although she conceptualizes her return to nature as a way to be free, her return means certain death.

Millay begins by highlighting the significance of environment using the title “Inland.” The title also indicates how the speaker defines place based on relation to the sea: her true home and the environment she believes holds her freedom. As the poem begins, the speaker distances herself and the sea from the inland environment and its “people”:

People that build their houses inland,
People that buy a plot of ground
Shaped like a house, and build a house there,
Far from the sea-board, far from the sound (1-4)

Using the vague, impersonal word “People,” the speaker sets herself apart from the inland dwellers. The word “People” designates them as a mass that outnumbers her. She describes the inland people by their interaction with the land and their distance from the sea. To the speaker, these people, who “buy a plot of ground / Shaped like a house, and build a house there,” want to own and control the land, and transform it into a densely populated city. The repetitious and mechanical unfolding of this description reflects how the speaker sees inland people as a part of

a larger project of housing development that takes land and turns it into a product. These inland people see the land as already “shaped like a house”; they not only lack a connection to nature for itself, but they colonize the land and replace the natural with the man-made. They act against nature by erasing it house by house. The final line of this stanza, “Far from the sea-board, far from the sound,” sets the inland people in opposition to the speaker and the natural environment she longs for, the sea.

Although the speaker presents the inland people as the problem, Millay uses this stanza to show the benefits of the city and the reasons people choose to live there. The description of people choosing a piece of land, buying it, and building a house there recalls the pioneer dream of claiming territory. The repetition of “house” also signals other benefits: property, shelter, and stability. Living in the city may provide more safety and stability than living in a more wild or natural environment. However, Millay later connects it to a prison from which the speaker wishes to escape.

In the second stanza, the speaker contrasts inland with her vision of the seascape that she wants to return to:

Of water sucking the hollow ledges,
Tons of water striking the shore,—
What do they long for, as I long for
One salt smell of the sea once more? (5-8)

The repetition of water in this stanza mirrors the repetition of houses in the previous stanza, but to opposite effect. Here, the natural environment is fluid, open, and boundless, and contrasts the constructed, confining inland environment. Also, in contrast to the pre-planned “build,” “buy,” and “build” pattern in the first stanza, this stanza is more unrestricted with a variety of verb choices, and suggests that life by the sea would be less restrictive and more free. The phrase

“once more” indicates that the speaker wants to return to the sea. She wants to be close enough to the sea to feel its power and smell its saltiness; thus, she longs for the kind of contact with nature that the inland people do not desire or seek. Here, Millay represents a division she sees in modern society between the city people no longer interested in nature and the people wishing to return to a more natural environment.

At first glance, the water in her vision stands for the freedom and life that she thirsts for from her domestic prison in the city. However, Millay also uses the description of water to suggest that the natural environment presents threats to the speaker. Millay associates water with violence: “water sucking the hollow ledges, / Tons of water striking the shore” (5-6). Millay gives water a presence using sibilance: “sucking,” “striking the shore,” “salt smell of the sea.” As the “s” sound repeats throughout the stanza, the sound of water crashing against the shore becomes more pronounced, signaling the destructive power of water. This image shows the power and force of water creating “hollow ledges” and “striking” against the shore. Instead of a peaceful, calm sea, the speaker envisions a sublime and violent sea unleashing its power. The “salt smell” adds to the feeling of imminent danger for the speaker because she wants to make contact with the sea by being so close that she can smell it. Here, Millay emphasizes that the speaker is between two threats: the confinement of the city and the violence and consuming power of the sea.

In the third stanza, we locate the speaker in her inland home longing for a return to the sea and a symbolic return to her childhood. As the speaker continues inquiring about the inland people, Millay further establishes the isolation that the speaker feels.

People the waves have not awakened,
Spanking the boats at the harbor’s head,
What do they long for, as I long for,—

Starting up in my inland bed (9-12)

Her experience in and relationship with nature sets her apart from the inland people, to the point where she cannot even fathom what they desire, apart from the cycle of buying land and building houses. The experience of having waves wake her up separates her from the inland people. The speaker also personifies the waves as a parental figure waking up his or her children; the phrase “Spanking the boats” adds to this effect. The speaker’s vision of a return to the sea may also be symbolically a return to her family and her childhood home, and a former state of innocence. Although the waves seem to take on a nurturing quality, they also represent a threat as they crash against the boats in the harbor, symbolically pushing against the only human elements in the seascape. Here, Millay suggests that the seascape may be inhospitable and dangerous to the speaker.

In the fourth stanza, we learn that the speaker lives inland in a prison-like room from which she desperately wants to escape. Here, Millay further characterizes the city as restricting and confining, and the sea as less restrictive but, ultimately, life-threatening. The final stanza reads:

Beating the narrow walls, and finding
Neither a window nor a door,
Screaming to God for death by drowning,—
One salt taste of the sea once more? (13-16)

Millay imbues this stanza with intensity through the repetition of action verbs—“Beating,” “finding,” “Screaming,” and “drowning”—and the image of the speaker desperately trying to escape. Millay mirrors the action of the waves “striking the shore” (6) with the speaker beating the walls, further developing the speaker’s connection to water and nature. As the speaker hits the walls, searches for a way out, and cries out to God for death, Millay dramatizes the

confinement and restriction that modern women feel when living in the city. After using the house to represent shelter and opportunity, Millay makes it a prison from which the speaker cannot escape. To amplify the feeling of dissatisfaction with domestic city life, Millay adds that this woman would rather die than be trapped in this house in the city.

The final two lines indicate that the speaker's dream for freedom in nature can never be realized. Although a return to nature means release from confining city life, it also means death: "Screaming to God for death by drowning, — / One salt taste of the sea once more?" (15-16). In her dream of oneness with the sea, the sea consumes her while she consumes it. Water not only devours her, but also poisons her because it is salt water. Thus, "One salt taste" reflects the speaker's desire for contact with nature that threatens her life. Her thirst for freedom can never be quenched.

The speaker in this poem, like many of Millay's modern women, exists in a state of perpetual exile between city and sea. For these modern women, the return to nature cannot be attained; it is always fleeting and always a cruel reminder of the freedom that they will always "long for," but never grasp. Although the city presents a chance to "build" and "buy" and settle down in a life, it also can distance people from nature and confine them. For these modern women, nature offers openness and freedom from the rules of modern life, but actually living in the wild can be extremely difficult or even life-threatening.

"Exiled" in the City

Millay continues to represent this exilic experience in "Exiled" (1921), a poem which comes a few poems after "Inland" in *Second April*. "Exiled" overlaps with "Inland" in both form and content and serves as its companion piece by continuing to explore women in exile in the

city. Millay connects these two poems through their verse form by using four line stanzas with a long/short/long/short line length pattern, tetrameter, and an ABCB rhyme scheme. Similar to “Inland,” in “Exiled” the speaker describes her intense longing to escape the confining city for the freedom of the sea. Both speakers feel more of a connection with nature than with people or city life, and feel exiled from their true home by the sea. In “Exiled,” Millay adds a layer to the city/sea binary by linking the city with construction and the sea with destruction. In doing so, Millay deepens our understanding of the environment these women wish to escape from and the place they seek as a better alternative.

The title of this poem signals Millay’s interest in the exilic experience of women at this time. Throughout the poem, the speaker expresses the feeling of being trapped in the city outside her true home, “the coast of Maine” (30), but she never says what holds her there. Instead, the poem focuses on the speaker’s longing to escape the city, the place of construction, and return to the sea, the place of destruction. The poem begins,

Searching my heart for its true sorrow,
This is the thing I find to be:
That I am weary of words and people,
Sick of the city, wanting the sea; (1-4)

The speaker identifies her “true sorrow,” the root of her emotional distress, as weariness with “words and people.” “Weary of words” suggests that she wants to get outside human language, a type of construction that she identifies with the city. An example of this desire to get outside words occurs in the second line when she uses the vague word “thing” instead of a more specific word. In addition to her weariness of words, she also feels weary of “people”—similar to the speaker in “Inland,” who feels fundamentally different from the inland people. The speaker

wants to free herself from the cultural restrictions placed on her and other women by people, through language. She seeks the sea as a place outside the confining codes of people and words.

It may seem ironic that a poem conveying the theme of word weariness is written in a very structured form. However, close inspection of each formal element reveals a tension between regularity and irregularity that Millay uses to further emphasize the opposition of the construction/destruction: the confining and restricting structures of the man-made city versus the freedom of the wild, expansive sea. First, through the ABCB rhyme scheme, Millay captures both structure, with the exact rhyme every other line, and breaking out of structure, with every other line not falling into any pattern. This rhyme scheme, three unrhymed words followed by the completion of the second word's rhyme, also builds in a delay which positions readers in a state of waiting like the speaker who waits to break out of the city. Second, the meter exhibits this duality because there is structure in the sense that most of the lines have four stresses, but a lack of structure, in that, there is no set metrical pattern. Third, the long/short pattern visually signals the presence of a duality. Finally, Millay captures this tension through the form itself; although the poem seems to adhere to the conventions of ballad poetry, it actually breaks several of them: the syllable count and meter are irregular, and does not fit the 4/3 pattern of stressed syllables, and the poem is not strictly a narrative, but rather a mixture of lyric and narrative. Thus, through a mixture of structure and lack of structure, Millay emphasizes the opposition between construction and destruction, and does what the speaker cannot do: breaks out.

The final line of the first stanza opposes city and sea, and locates the speaker in a position of urban exile: feeling the harsh impact of the urban environment on her body, feeling trapped in the city, and longing to return to nature. Millay represents each of these ideas in a single line, "Sick of the city, wanting the sea" (4). The environment of people and words makes the speaker

not only weary, but physically “sick.” She feels imprisoned in an environment that is harming her. Here, Millay draws attention to the city’s destructive capacity and the force it exerts on bodies. “Sick” also signals that the speaker is fed up with the city, desiring to escape from it. She lives in a constant state of “wanting,” of being outside the place she feels most free, the sea. Millay uses form to emphasize this state of urban exile. The comma divides city from sea, displaying the sharp contrast she sees between these two places, as well as the feeling of being in the city and cut off from nature. The caesura in the middle of this line allows us to feel the speaker’s exhaustion after she bemoans the sickening city, and the anticipation as she says the word “wanting.” This breath of exasperation and wanting perfectly embodies the speaker’s exilic state of being.

After describing the linguistic, human environment from which she wants to flee, the speaker imagines the seascape, her true home. The second stanza indicates that the speaker seeks close, sensory contact with the sea:

Wanting the sticky, salty sweetness
Of the strong wind and shattered spray;
Wanting the loud sound and the soft sound
Of the big surf that breaks all day. (5-8)

The repetition of “Wanting” emphasizes the speaker’s position in exile from the place she longs to inhabit. Similar to the speaker in “Inland,” this speaker wants to touch, see, smell, hear, and taste the sea; she wants to make contact with the water. Here again, Millay emphasizes a type of interaction with nature that contrasts the colonizing impulse to buy and build, with a desire for experiencing nature through the senses. The speaker wants to hear the language of nature, “the loud sound and the soft sound / Of the big surf,” instead of human words. As an alternative to the constructive city, she seeks destructive nature in “shattered spray” and “big surf that breaks all

day.” She wants to be outside among the elements, not sheltered or trapped in a house. Millay uses form to bring about this contact with nature. The sibilance in phrases like “sticky, salty sweetness” and “strong wind and shattered spray” brings to life the sound of the waves crashing against the shore, and the repetition of the “w” sound in “wanting” and “wind” captures the breeze blowing over the water.

The fourth stanza elaborates on the nature of the speaker’s exile in the city, and builds the contrast between sea and city. The harsh reality of the city cuts off the speaker’s vision of her life by the sea:

Always I climbed the wave at morning,
Shook the sand from my shoes at night,
That now am caught beneath great buildings,
Stricken with noise, confused with light. (13-16)

By adding herself in this vision through invoking the “I,” the speaker makes the escape to the sea not just about returning to nature, but about recovering part of her identity that she has since lost. In this vision, the speaker lives in harmony with nature, rising with the sun, riding the tide, and mixing with the sand and water. The reality of her exile interrupts her imagined return to nature. She tries to break out of the city, the place of words, by using odd syntax: “That now am caught beneath great buildings.” Millay notably omits the implied first-person pronoun in this line to convey how the speaker is buried, “caught beneath,” the buildings. The speaker feels crushed by the immense weight of “great buildings,” which figuratively stand for constructions like words, rules, and the social codes of city life, and also more literally stand for skyscrapers. The rapid proliferation of skyscrapers during this time drastically transformed the urban space in ways which negatively impacted city dwellers. As urban historian Keith D. Revell points out in “The Search for Ensemble in the Skyscraper City, 1890-1930” (2005), “Skyscrapers robbed

pedestrians of light and air, turning streets into canyons and casting a gloom over neighboring buildings” (40). Similar to the houses in “Inland,” Millay associates these buildings with confinement, entrapment, and exile in the city. These great buildings are the product of the inland people’s urge to buy and build, which continues to separate them from nature.

The constructed world, the man-made city, impacts the speaker’s mind and body. She complains of the noise and light pollution in the city, saying that she feels “stricken with noise, confused with light.” Around the time Millay writes this poem, American cities were louder and brighter than ever before. Several factors led to this rise in noise and light pollution, including population growth, efforts to expand cities through construction, and the proliferation of new technology. Cities roared with the sounds of cars, trains, crowds, and construction projects. A city dweller experiencing this powerful noise remarked,

There is nothing fanciful in the assertion that the pitch of modern life is raised by the rhythmic noise that constantly beats down upon us. No one strolls in city streets, there is no repose in automobiles or subways, nor relaxation anywhere within the range of a throbbing that is swifter than nature. Our nervous hearts react from noise to more noise... (qtd. in Thompson 119-120)

Similar to the speaker in “Exiled,” this man feels “stricken” with the noise of the city that “constantly beats down upon” him, from which he cannot escape.⁶ Like noise pollution, light pollution, at this time, also reached new levels of intensity and caused problems for city dwellers. Streets lights at this time were so bright that they were compared to the sun and people were cautioned not to look directly at them (Jakle 54). Additionally, they were notorious for causing an intense and widespread glare that disoriented drivers and pedestrians, and caused accidents (Jakle 109-110). Other sources of light, like electric signs, car headlights, skyscrapers which

⁶ For more on noise pollution, see chapter two on Amy Lowell and “The Sixteenth Floor”

were often floodlit, combined with the harsh light of street lights and produced unprecedented levels of light pollution. This constant brightness changed night into day, and caused many city dwellers extreme distress and disorientation, not to mention the disruption of their circadian clocks. As the speaker in this poem suggests, people were “confused with” this light.⁷ Reeling from the painfully loud noise and disoriented by the bright city light, our speaker longs to escape to the sea, where she can find relief. However, as Millay demonstrates, the sea offers new threats.

After setting up the opposition of city and sea, Millay reveals more about the destructive aspect of the natural world. In the sixth and seventh stanzas, the speaker acknowledges the destructive power of the sea and its threat to humans, and, more importantly, aligns herself with the destructive natural world, as opposed to the constructed human world:

If I could see the weedy mussels
 Crusting the wrecked and rotting hulls,
Hear once again the hungry crying
 Overhead, of the wheeling gulls.

Feel once again the shanty straining
 Under the turning of the tide,
Fear once again the rising freshet,
 Dread the bell in the fog outside (21-28)

The phrase “If I could” reminds us that the speaker does not feel like this return to the sea is possible. As the title “Exiled” suggests, she cannot break out of the city environment, but she does not specifically reveal why. However, these stanzas present the danger of the sea environment as a potential reason for the woman remaining in the city. Nearly every image in these lines shows the sea overtaking, destroying, or threatening the man-made elements. For

⁷ For more on light pollution, see chapter two on Amy Lowell and “New York at Night”

example, “the weedy mussels” latch on to the skeletons of boats that the sea has battled and defeated. The “wrecked and rotting hulls” memorialize man’s failed attempts to conquer the sea. The “shanty straining / Under the turning of the tide” illustrates the conflict between man’s constructions and the sea’s destructive power. The speaker knows the threat of destruction and feels drawn toward it, wanting to “Fear once again the rising freshet,” or the water overtaking the shore and everything in its path. However, although she desires to live in this threatening environment, she feels unable to return. The sea seems to be overtaking man-made vessels and shelters, as well as the shore. The “straining shanty” and the broken and decaying boats show the danger this destructive environment holds for humans and their man-made structures.

The speaker’s desire to return to and make close contact with the destructive sea symbolizes her desire to break out of the bondage of the constructed, human world and its restricting rules and norms. The violence and destruction attracts her because it seems like a way of severing that bondage and living freely, even wildly. Many aspects of this poem—the binaries of wild vs. domesticated, and destructive vs. constructed, as well as the speaker’s desire for the harshness and violence of the sea —seem like a continuation of the ideas in H.D.’s *Sea Garden*, a book of poetry published in 1916, only a few years before “Exiled.” Many of the poems in *Sea Garden* celebrate the transformative destruction of the wild sea. For instance, in H.D.’s “Sea Rose,” the speaker re-values the broken body of the “meagre” sea rose over the conventionally beautiful body of the domesticated single-stem rose because the sea rose has strength forged in her struggle to survive the elements. Similarly, the speaker in “Sea Lily” exalts the broken but resilient sea lily: “Reed, / slashed and torn / but doubly rich” (1-3). Like the speaker in “Exiled,” the speaker in H.D.’s “Sheltered Garden” finds herself being suffocated by the built, domesticated environment of a garden (“I have had enough. / I gasp for breath.” (1-2)), and seeks

violence, wildness, and natural destruction in order to free herself: “O for some sharp swish of a branch” (12). She says, “O to blot out this garden / to forget, to find a new beauty / in some terrible / wind-tortured place” (54-57). Like this speaker, Millay’s speaker in “Exiled” seeks the transformational power and destruction of that “wind-tortured place,” the place where the wind and waves will test her and wear away the layers of the constructed, human world that bind her.

Like “Inland,” “Exiled” concludes with the speaker longing for water. In the final stanza, the speaker proclaims,

I should be happy, that am happy
Never at all since I came here.
I am too long away from water.
I have a need of water near. (33-36)

The repetition of “I” shows her desire to assert her will and claim the life that she envisions for herself. The speaker tries to break free of words and constructions by using archaic, jumbled grammar and syntax, saying “I should be happy, that am happy.” By doing so, she acts as a destructive force like the water she wishes to return to. At this point in the poem, water represents her former companion, a home, and freedom without boundaries; however, water is also the powerful, destructive force that threatens humans, wrecking their ships and overpowering their shelters. Therefore, like the woman in “Inland,” this woman exists between two threats: the crushing, sickening city and the destructive, life-threatening sea. Although these women long to be one with nature, they cannot because that type of contact and communion threatens their lives. Their desire to return to the sea also reflects a desire to inhabit a place that allows them to be whoever they want to be, outside the rules and institutions of society. As Millay suggests through these poems, such a space does not exist at this time.

We have come to know Millay as a free, uninhibited new woman, who thrives in the city; however, both her city poetry and details of her life suggest that she understood and experienced the feeling of being in exile in the city. As Andrea Barnet notes in “Edna St. Vincent Millay: Imprisoned in the Personal,” while living in New York City, Millay often longed to return to Maine, her childhood home, where she could be surrounded by nature (96). Like the speaker in “Exiled,” Millay felt “sick of the city, wanting the sea”: as Barnet puts it, “She felt increasingly unnerved by the noise, hemmed in by the tall buildings...what she really wanted was the country, the isolation and remove she associated with her childhood” (124). A return to nature would not only benefit her mind and body, but also her poetry. She once said that her poetry needed “fresh grass to feed on” (qtd. in Barnet 115). However, although the country “promised refuge and creative release,” it also came with the threat of “entrapment” (Barnet 124). Like many of the women in her city poems, she found herself between the threats of the city and the sea.

“Afternoon on a Hill”: Finding Greener Pastures

As seen in “Inland” and “Exiled,” Millay’s city poetry is invested in exposing the problem of urban exile, and showing the distress women were experiencing while feeling trapped in the city and cut off from nature. In both of these poems, the return to nature is impossible and the women must find a way of living in the city, and Millay stops short of showing how they can cope in that exilic situation. However, in “Afternoon on a Hill” (*Poetry Magazine* 1917) Millay not only depicts the problem of urban exile, but also offers methods of dealing with it. Similar to the speakers in “Inland” and “Exiled,” the speaker in “Afternoon on a Hill” dreams about spending time away from town in a more natural environment, a grassy hill overlooking cliffs.

This woman deals with her feelings of confinement and separation from nature by leaving town and actively seeking communion with nature. She continues to live in town, but deliberately sets out time to be in the wild. Moreover, key to this method is the unique type of contact the speaker envisions. Millay portrays a nonviolent mode of interaction between the speaker and nature, in which the speaker makes contact with the environment, but does not try to possess, disturb, or alter it. While inland people are buying and building on all the land in sight, Millay is interested in showing the value of the natural world, the benefits of spending time there, and, importantly, how to preserve it while making contact with it.

From the beginning of the poem, we see the speaker's intense love and desire to make contact with nature, but also her restraint in doing so. Although the poem's title suggests that the poem takes place on the hill, as the poem unfolds it becomes clear that the speaker is not on the hill, but is, instead, imagining being there from an undisclosed location. In the first stanza, the speaker envisions the joy she will experience while being in nature:

I will be the gladdest thing
Under the sun!
I will touch a hundred flowers
And not pick one. (1-4)

Millay connects this poem to "Inland" and "Exiled" formally, using four line stanzas and the long/short/long/short pattern. The repetition of "I will" situates the speaker in a forward-looking or imaginary state of mind. In saying she will be the "gladdest thing" (1), she removes herself from a human/nonhuman binary and becomes an undefined "thing," akin to the hundred flowers around her. In her vision of this experience, she blends in with the natural surroundings. Next, she imagines making contact: "I will touch a hundred flowers / And not pick one" (3-4). The number of flowers signals the speaker's intense desire to interact with flowers, but the specificity

of the number, as well as the resolution not to pick any, communicates her restraint. She wants to make contact, but she does not want to possess or alter them in any way.

In the second stanza, the speaker describes how she will make visual contact with the environment:

I will look at cliffs and clouds
With quiet eyes,
Watch the wind bow down the grass,
And the grass rise. (5-8)

Although the speaker does not add details to the cliffs or clouds, she adds specificity to her future gaze, her “quiet eyes” (6). The blend of sight and sound makes this phrase stand out, but also veils its meaning. These “quiet eyes” characterize the mode of nonviolent contact the speaker desires: a way of interacting without violating. The speaker wants to blend in to the environment by not being loud or disruptive, while still experiencing its beauty. Millay hints at this meaning with the second half of the stanza: “Watch the wind bow down the grass, / And the grass rise” (7-8). Instead of starting with “I,” Millay begins with “Watch,” as if the speaker has become less of a human presence and more of an observing entity. Here, the speaker is the quiet eye watching the wind and the grass interact without interfering. Moreover, this line becomes an imperative to the reader, telling us to watch, just as our eyes move over the lines.

As the title suggests, the speaker’s imagined communion with nature is brief, just an afternoon. Like the speakers in “Inland” and “Exiled,” she is, for some reason, bound to town, and, therefore, can only experience temporary contact in brief episodes. In the final stanza, the speaker envisions returning to town after her afternoon on the hill:

And when lights begin to show
Up from the town,
I will mark which must be mine,

And then start down! (9-12)

The phrase “Up from the town” signals the town and country divide. The speaker knows that her visit to the hill will be brief; the lights of town will eventually beckon her to leave. By introducing the town, Millay makes it clear that this is a vision of leaving town for the freedom and beauty of being in nature. However, the speaker does not idealize or distort this natural setting by exaggerating it. In contrast, she completely refrains from embellishing the landscape by not adding color, sensory descriptions, or adjectives to the scene. The minimalist description allows the reader to make contact with the scene without knowing it. The “Up” and “down” motion in this stanza mirrors the up and down motion of the grass blowing in the wind (10-12 and 7-8), which makes the speaker’s journey up from town and back down seem aligned with the movement in nature.

In this poem, Millay presents a restrained and nonviolent mode of contact with nature. The speaker wants to experience the natural world first-hand, but she always limits the contact to avoid interfering with or disturbing her surroundings. The formal elements also show this restraint. For instance, the ABCB rhyme scheme withholds the completion of the rhyme and the rhyme scheme is not excessively used. Also, the long/short line pattern shows a controlled restraint: after the first line overflows, the second line’s brevity enacts a kind of restraint. Even while creating this vision of return, Millay restrains from creating an unrealistic ideal. The result is a realistic vision of a joyful experience in not-so-distant nature. People do not have to take from or possess nature in order to enjoy it. They can enjoy nature through quiet eyes.

“City Trees”: Tune in to Urban Nature

In “Afternoon on a Hill,” “Inland,” and “Exiled,” women journey back to nature through their imaginations. However, even in their visions of returning to nature, they still feel the reality

of their exile and the unsustainable nature of their return. In “City Trees” (1921), part of the urban poem series in *Second April*, Millay provides another method of dealing with urban exile and separation from nature, one that moves beyond the vision of return into the realm of material contact. The speaker in “City Trees” lives in the city and feels isolated, confined, and cut off from nature. She feels like city dwellers do not care about nature in the same way she does. In order to cope, she tunes in to and communes with the nature that still exists in the city. In “City Trees,” Millay conveys the importance of listening and paying attention to the natural world, especially when the sights and sounds of the man-made world obscure it.

The soundscape in this poem draws attention to a conflict between the city and the natural world, as represented by the city trees. The speaker’s sensitivity to the trees and awareness of this sonic battle calls her to advocate for them and encourage others to listen to their quiet music amidst the blaring noise of the city:

The trees along this city street,
Save for the traffic and the trains,
Would make a sound as thin and sweet
As trees in country lanes. (1-4)

Notably, Millay connects this poem to the aforementioned urban exiled poems formally, using four-line stanzas and the long/short pattern. From the first line, the speaker calls attention to the city trees that people tend to ignore because of their location next to the busy street. This stanza develops a contrast between the loud, busy city and the still, quietly musical trees. As the noise of the city drowns out the trees’ music, we see urban life and the rise of technology overshadowing the quiet beauty of the natural world. Like the speaker in “Exiled,” this speaker favors the sounds of nature over the noise of the city. The speaker in this poem defends the city trees’ “natural-ness” by claiming they “Would” make as “sweet” a sound “As trees in country

lanes,” if people listened to them. The implication that no one listens to these trees reflects a concern that city people have turned away from nature. The speaker stands against the traffic and flow of modern life and calls for an appreciation of the natural world. Millay uses sibilance in this stanza to make her readers tune in to the sounds of the poem and, through the poem, to the sounds of urban nature.

In the second stanza, Millay develops a contrast between the city “people” who have turned away from nature and the speaker who speaks on behalf of nature:

And people standing in their shade
Out of a shower, undoubtedly
Would hear such music as is made
Upon a country tree. (5-8)

Here again, Millay uses the impersonal and vague word “people” to stand for city dwellers who have stopped caring about nature. These people do not practice the listening behavior that the speaker calls for and they seem to only pay attention to the trees when it rains and they need shelter. The speaker repeats the same move from the previous stanza by comparing the “music” of city trees to that of “a country tree.” The speaker seems anxious about the naturalness of the city trees, even to the point where she qualifies “city trees” and “country tree(s).” Perhaps because city people do not think nature exists in the city, they do not take the time to pay attention to it. By defending the naturalness of the city trees, the speaker works to disrupt the binary of city and nature in order to bring people to notice and appreciate the natural world within the city. Additionally, she works to compel her audience to tune into these organic sounds by characterizing their sound as “music,” thereby elevating their sound to the level of art. With the phrase “as is made / Upon,” she suggests that these trees are being played, perhaps by the

rain of the “shower,” and implies that there is a veritable environmental symphony to for people to tune into.

As the poem concludes, the speaker addresses the city trees and it becomes apparent that they are her community, not the city people. The final stanza is as follows:

Oh, little leaves that are so dumb
Against the shrieking city air,
I watch you when the wind has come,—
I know what sound is there. (9-12)

After speaking to an unknown audience in the first two stanzas, the speaker directly addresses the city trees. The phrase “Oh, little leaves” manifests the speaker’s sympathy for the trees and position as their advocate and protector. The image of these “little leaves” being overwhelmed by the “shrieking city air” reflects the speaker’s concern for the preservation of the trees in a harsh city environment in which she is their advocate. Using the word “shrieking,” Millay presents the city as both intense and piercingly loud. “Shriek” also associates the city with the feeling of terror or extreme pain, which characterizes the city as a house of horrors. With the phrases “I watch you” and “I know what sound is there,” the speaker addresses the trees like she would a friend. The speaker singles out herself as the one individual who watches the trees and knows their sound, thereby aligning herself with a community of trees, instead of with a community of city dwellers who ignore nature.

Hearing nature, at this historical moment, is particularly difficult, as Millay points out. In the last two lines, “I watch you when the wind has come,— / I know what sound is there” (11-12), the speaker replaces hearing with seeing and remembering the sound of the trees because their sound has been denied her. Just as the speaker adapts to the urban soundscape, so does the poet. In a poem all about the music of city trees, the poet never tries to capture that music

specifically; rather, the poem is more of a eulogy for that sound, a way of celebrating and valuing something that has been lost. In this way, this poem marks an important moment for poetry, a moment when the conditions of the urban environment are changing the available ways a poet writes a meditation on nature. A poem about listening to the music of trees turns into a poem about how the city impedes that experience.

Despite living in the “shrieking” city surrounded by people who are disconnected from nature, the speaker finds a way to appreciate and commune with the natural world. In order to commune with nature in the city, the speaker must deliberately seek it out amidst the city’s commotion and understand the sound of the trees apart from the noise of the city; she has to be able to tune in to nature’s wavelength, while city noise drowns it out. In this poem, the speaker adapts to urban exile by learning to not only see nature all around her, but also listen to what it has to say.

Coda

Although Millay has come to be known as a classic new woman of the city, in her city poetry she frequently returns to theme of urban exile and the impossible return to nature. At a time when women migrated to the city to find opportunity and the possibility of more freedom, Millay acknowledged the difficulty, restriction, and risks of living in the city. She also represented the deep and intense longing to return to a more natural environment that many new women may have felt. Paying attention to this theme of exile opens up new possibilities for the study of Millay. Long before the rise of ecocriticism, Millay wrote about people being disconnected from the natural world and endeavoring to colonize it through a perpetual cycle of buying and building. Before eco-feminism, she represented a connection between the threats to

nature and the threats to the female body. Additionally, Millay's poetry of exile enhances our view of modern women and their life in the city. By considering the theme of urban exile in many of her poems which have been exiled from the canon, we stand to deepen our understanding of Millay and allow her work to enter into the critical conversation in new and significant ways.

Millay deals with urban exile in terms of feeling trapped far from home and distant from nature, not feeling free in the city, and feeling damaged physically and psychologically by the urban environment. We find this third strand of urban exile in city poetry by Amy Lowell, who draws attention to various aspects of the city threatening women's bodies and minds, including noise and light pollution, and a predatory male presence. Together, Millay and Lowell challenge the idea that women were set free by the city, by showing women's struggle to survive the suffocating, sickening, and life-threatening urban environment.

Chapter Two

DistURBANce: Women and the Threatening City in Amy Lowell

There is nothing fanciful in the assertion that the pitch of modern life is raised by the rhythmic noise that constantly beats upon us. No one strolls in the city streets, there is no repose in automobiles or subways, nor relaxation anywhere within the range of a throbbing that is swifter than nature. Our nervous hearts react from noise to more noise, speeding the car, hastening the rattling train, crowding in cities that rise higher into an air that, far above the grosser accidents of sound, pulses with pure rhythm.

From "Noise" in *Saturday Review of Literature*, Saturday, 24 October, 1925 (qtd. in Thompson 1119-120)

American cities in the 1910s and 1920s were sites of significant change. New technology replaced old technology: automobiles started replacing horse-drawn carriages, powerful electric street lights eclipsed gas lights, and skyscrapers raced to claim dominance over the skyline. Cities saw unprecedented population growth and an increase in diversity, as immigrants, women, African-Americans, and country dwellers moved there in hopes of finding freedom and opportunity. The rise in industry, technology, and population drastically transformed the environment in ways that people at that time were only beginning to understand. As one city dweller describes in the above passage, some of the byproducts of this transformation were environmental issues like noise pollution. Although this person, at times, describes this noise in musical terms, "pitch" and "pure rhythm," he or she views the sounds of the city not as music, but as a painful, violent din that "beats down" upon people, causes their hearts to constantly race, and keeps them from being able to relax. As this testimonial demonstrates, the environmental conditions of cities wreaked havoc on people's bodies and minds. Early-twentieth-century cities not only had unprecedented levels of noise pollution, but also light pollution, which caused people intense physical discomfort and mental strain. For women, living in cities meant dealing with threats not only from the urban environment, but also from predatory men. As women

began venturing out unaccompanied into the public space of cities, they became targets of sexual harassment, sexual assault, and sex trafficking.⁸ A woman's walk was a balancing act between freedom and autonomy, and the threat of violation. Destructive aspects of city life, noise and light pollution, as well as a predatory male presence, profoundly shaped women's everyday life. In order to better understand women's urban experience, we must examine how they were impacted by these ever-present threats.

American modernist poetry is an important window to this monumental period in American history. Of these poets, Amy Lowell, in particular, is uniquely equipped to bear witness to this time of environmental and cultural change, and its impact on women. Her appreciation for nature, sensitivity to the conditions and texture of her surroundings, and adept senses make her the perfect poet to represent these changes in the urban environment and their impact on human bodies and nature. In addition to environmental issues, her poetry speaks to gender-related issues, specifically male-domination and the subjugation and endangerment of women in cities. As a woman who frequented cities like New York and Boston, she understood the fraught experience of walking in the city, wanting to enjoy freedom and autonomy, while also being mindful and careful of the risks of sexualization, objectification, and violence. While other modernist poets proclaim the brilliance, excitement, liveliness, and freedom of cities, Lowell bears witness to the destruction and danger of urban life. In this chapter, I examine the environmental and cultural threats facing women in cities, as depicted in three poems that have received little to no critical attention: "The Sixteenth Floor," "New York at Night," and "The Captured Goddess."

After rising in literary popularity and success in the 1910s and 1920s, Amy Lowell died in 1925; soon after, her work fell out of the spotlight. Although she was a prominent figure in the

⁸ See Estelle B. Freedman in *Redefining Rape* (2013) and Kerry Segrave in *Beware the Masher* (2014).

modernist literary scene, her work has been overlooked in modernist studies until recently. Through the publication of *Selected Poems of Amy Lowell* (2002), Adrienne Munich and Melissa Bradshaw have led the recovery effort by making Lowell's poetry available after it has been out of print for half a century. Their collection of essays on Lowell, *Amy Lowell, American Modern* (2004), seeks to reinvigorate the critical conversation on her work and establish her again as a central figure of American modernism. Lowell scholars in this collection focus on her literary influences, influence on modernist poetry, poetic technique and experimentation with form, and her biography, especially her sexuality. In "Amy Lowell, John Keats, and the "Shielded Scutcheon" of Imagist Art," Margaret Homans details Lowell's lifelong affinity for Keats and traces his influence on her work. Mari Yoshihara also draws attention to Lowell's influences in her piece "Putting on the Voice of the Orient: Gender and Sexuality in Amy Lowell's "Asian" Poetry," which shows how Lowell's interest in Asian culture and art directly influenced her poetry. Several scholars focus on Lowell's influence on modernist poetry and her impact on literary history. For instance, in "Amy Lowell and Cultural Borders," Paul Lauter seeks the impetus behind the adversarial treatment of Lowell in past and contemporary literary criticism, and the marginalization of both her and her work. He finds that many people have reacted harshly against Lowell because they see her as a threat, as a dissolver of boundaries they hold dear (qtd. in Munich and Bradshaw 4). Although her boundary-dissolving has marginalized her in the past, Lauter argues that it is a quality that could spark new appreciation for her work now (qtd. in Munich and Bradshaw 7). Bonnie Kime Scott brings attention from the adversarial relations that held Lowell back, to the friendships that supported her. In "Amy Lowell's Letters in the Network of Modernism," Scott draws from Lowell's personal correspondences to reveal her network of allies in the modernist scene, including D.H. Lawrence. H.D., and Margaret

Anderson. Beyond the question of Lowell's influences and her role in literary history and modernism, Lowell scholars tend to focus on Lowell's poetic technique and experimentation, often as it pertains to imagism. Two scholars in this collection look at imagism: Margaret Homans, in her essay on Keats' influence on Lowell, and Jayne Marek in "Amy Lowell, *Some Imagist Poets*, and the Context of the New Poetry." In the latter essay, Marek examines how Lowell helped promote imagism not only as a poet, but also someone working behind the scenes in editing and publishing imagist works. Finally, this collection of essays also explores Lowell's sexuality and its impact on her poetry. Both Lillian Faderman and Jaime Hovey analyze Lowell's *Swords Blades and Poppy Seed* in the context of lesbian desire. In "Remembering Amy Lowell: Embodiment, Obesity, and the Construction of a Persona," Melissa Bradshaw investigates how negative views of Lowell's lesbian sexuality coupled with her obesity and privilege have led to her marginalization in literary history.

Beyond Munich and Bradshaw's collection, there has been very little written about Lowell's life and work. What has been written deals with the same issues explored in the collection, such as Lowell's lesbian identity and her role in modernist poetry. Mary Galvin discusses Lowell's work in relation to her sexuality in *Queer Poetics* (1999), a book which responds to the erasure of lesbian identity in modernist poetry by showing how lesbian or queer identity influenced, shaped, and manifested in modernist poetry. Galvin demonstrates how Amy Lowell uses sparse, natural images in her poetry to hide lesbian themes in plain sight. In this way, Galvin brings together the conversations on imagism and Lowell's sexuality. Beyond Lowell's sexuality, scholars have joined Paul Lauter and Bonnie Kime Scott in discussing Lowell's role in modernist poetry and legacy in literary history. For example, Paul Bradley Bellew weighs in on Lowell and the modernist poetry scene, in "At the Mercy of Editorial

Selection': Amy Lowell, Ezra Pound, and the Imagist Anthologies" (2017). He takes on the misconception that Pound and Lowell fought as a result of their personalities and in a battle over imagism. He argues that their conflict arose from their disagreement over "the central question of what modernism ought to be"; Pound wanted modernism to be in the hands of the literary elite, while Lowell called for a "more collective" and collaborative approach (24). Melissa Bradshaw, in "Outselling the Modernisms of Men: Amy Lowell and the Art of Self-Commodification" (2000), turns to Lowell's role as a modernist poet and businesswoman. She uses Lowell, a poet who understood and actively attended to the marketing side of poetry, while arguing that poet and entrepreneur are not necessarily "mutually exclusive" (142). Collectively, Bellew and Bradshaw show the thoughtfulness, skill, and courage Lowell demonstrated in her career, and, thereby, write against scholars who have ridiculed her and tried to minimize her in the context of modernist poetry.

While Lowell scholars have attended to Lowell's role in modernist poetry, her sexuality, her connection to imagism, and her influences, they have not focused on her representations of the city. In this critical blindspot lies a significant thread of Lowell's poetry: the impact of the city on bodies, especially women's bodies. In the only discussions of Lowell and the city, scholars have either focused solely on her positive depictions of the city, while leaving out her negative depictions; or focused on the figurative and formal aspects of the city poem, itself, and not the negative material experience it represents. For instance, in "Unrelated Beauty: Amy Lowell, Polyphonic Prose, and the Imagist City" (2004), Andrew Thacker shows how Lowell accentuates the musicality, beauty, and "texture" (qtd. Munich and Bradshaw 110) of the city through her use of polyphonic prose in two city poems, "Spring Day" and "Towns in Colour." Throughout his reading of Lowell's city poems, Thacker emphasizes Lowell's celebration of city

life and her desire to capture it in a positive light. For example, Thacker writes, “Lowell’s “Spring Day” might be read with an ear for the noises of modern life, albeit with the difference that barbarism is tempered with a certain pleasure in the sounds of the city” (qtd. in Munich and Bradshaw 110). The other scholar to take up Lowell’s city poetry, Steven Gould Axelrod, draws attention to parts of “Towns in Colour” that show the city in a negative light in his article, “Family Resemblance: Amy Lowell’s ‘Towns in Colour’ and Robert Lowell’s ‘For the Union Dead’” (2000). However, Axelrod only briefly mentions these moments before returning to the main thrust of his article: the similarities between Robert Lowell’s “For the Union Dead” and Amy Lowell’s “Towns in Colour.” Thus, no scholar has yet fully attended to Lowell’s negative depictions of city life. I fill a critical gap in Lowell studies by examining the darker side of the city in the poems that have been overlooked, and by attending to body and environment. As I will show, many of Lowell’s city poems characterize the city as destructive, unnatural, isolating, corrupt, and especially harmful to women.

Amy Lowell depicts the city as a particularly corrosive environment for women. In three city poems, “The Sixteenth Floor,” “New York at Night,” and “The Captured Goddess,” Lowell draws attention to the flow between the urban environment and women’s bodies, and emphasizes the way material and cultural aspects of the city cause physical strain and emotional distress for women. In “The Sixteenth Floor” and “New York at Night,” Lowell represents two environmental issues facing city-dwellers at this time: noise and light pollution, respectively. In “The Sixteenth Floor,” the speaker hears the overwhelming roar of the city and feels it drowning out her thoughts, impeding her ability to think clearly, and eroding her sense of peace. “New York at Night” exposes the issue of light pollution, its harm to bodies, and its interruption of the natural day/night cycle. She builds in a gender framework, male-light-culture and female-nature,

allowing her to simultaneously represent a dominant male presence threatening and violating women, alongside culture's conquest of nature. Lowell also addresses men's violation of women in "The Captured Goddess," in which a woman's walk through the city turns into a nightmare when she sees another woman, a goddess, captured, restrained, stripped naked, and sold in the market-place. The fate of the goddess represents the dangers facing women in the city: sexualization, objectification, violation, and sex trafficking. Throughout these city poems, Lowell captures women's urban exile by showing how the city is inhospitable to women's bodies and damaging to their health and well-being.⁹

Noise DistURBANce

We have come to associate the roar of this era, the roaring twenties, with liveliness, freedom, and excitement; but for many city-dwellers it was an inescapable annoyance and cause of distress, mental deterioration, and discomfort. In *The Soundscape of Modernity* (2002), Emily Thompson, an expert on the sounds of modern American cities, describes the problem of noise in the early twentieth century as "historically unique" (119). According to Thompson, the soundscape in American cities like New York was particularly noteworthy, not only because of the sheer volume of the noise, but also because of the way mechanical and technological sounds layered on top of natural or organic sounds. In the late 19th century, people were applying the term "noise" to "horse drawn vehicles, peddlers, musicians, animals, and bells"; but by 1925, people were complaining of the noise of machines and other technologies (Thompson 117). A 1925 article in the *Saturday Review of Literature* encapsulates this widespread aggravation with technological sounds:

⁹ Lowell's city poetry engages with the noun form of exile that connotes "destruction" (*OED*, "exile," noun 1.II.3).

The air belongs to the steady burr of the motor, to the regular clank clank of the elevated, and to the chitter of the steel drill. Underneath is the rhythmic roll over clattering ties of the subway; above, the drone of the airplane. The recurrent explosions of the internal combustion engine, and the rhythmic jar of bodies in rapid motion determine the tempo of the sound world in which we have to live.

(qtd in Thompson 117)

The temporal language of this passage—“steady,” “regular,” “drone,” “recurrent”—points to the constant roar of this mechanical noise, and words like “clank clank,” “explosions,” and “jar of bodies” give this soundscape a chaotic and violent overtone. People felt disrupted and damaged by this noise. As sound scholar Karin Bijsterveld points out in “The City of Din” (2003), city dwellers at this time saw noise as damaging to “the health and work output of all citizens” (175). People demanded city officials to take action, and they responded with several noise abatement campaigns, and, eventually the establishment of the Noise Abatement Commission in 1929 (Bijsterveld 175).

In “The Sixteenth Floor” (1919), Lowell brings us the physical, mental, and emotional experience of noise pollution, and its many layers of disruption. Like countless city dwellers, the speaker in this poem cannot escape the noise of the city. The powerful noise of the city spreads and covers her neighborhood “like smoke” (3), and overwhelms both her senses and her lyrical mediation. The noise gives our speaker a disheartening sense of being alone, yet completely surrounded; a suffocating feeling of being overwhelmed by something invisible and constantly present; a painful sensation of being grated down to a state of “emptiness.” The noise also adds to her feelings of isolation by drowning out the voice of her beloved. In this brief yet powerful

poem, Lowell captures the distress caused by the noise and other material aspects of the urban environment, as well as the emotional distress of feeling isolated, yet surrounded by people.

In this poem, Lowell also makes use of a new point of view, the more aerial perspective of someone looking down from a skyscraper. Buildings of sixteen or more floors were still a relatively new phenomenon in 1919. Statistics about skyscrapers in New York City in the early twentieth century provide context for building height in cities at the time of this poem.

According to François Weil in *A History of New York* (2004), “In 1913, Manhattan counted fifty-one buildings with anywhere from twenty-one to sixty stories, and nearly 1,000 buildings with eleven to twenty stories. In 1929, there were 188 buildings with more than twenty stories, and 2,291 with eleven to twenty stories” (175). The rapid proliferation of these skyscrapers had a profound effect on the urban space. Skyscrapers changed the skyline from horizontal to vertical, which changed the appearance of cities, but also resulted in buildings blocking people’s view of the sky and the horizon from the street level. As urban historian Keith D. Revell points out in “The Search for Ensemble in the Skyscraper City, 1890-1930” (2005), skyscrapers had a significant impact on their surroundings and on city dwellers: “Skyscrapers robbed pedestrians of light and air, turning streets into canyons and casting a gloom over neighboring buildings” (40). Although skyscrapers brought these negative impacts to the urban environment, many people still viewed them with awe. For some, skyscrapers signaled progress and a new level of achievement for American industry and mankind. Arnold Bennett, a British novelist, remarked, “A great deal of the poetry of New York is due to the sky-scraper... The early night effect of the whole town, topped by the aforesaid Metropolitan Life Tower, seen from the New Jersey shore, is stupendous, and resembles some enchanted city of the next world rather than of this” (qtd. in Moudry 260). Many people like Bennett found in these enormous buildings beauty and a glimpse

of the future. People paid money to ascend these great towers and experience a new way view of the city. People felt empowered by the view from inside skyscrapers, as David E. Nye notes in “The Sublime and the Skyline” (2005): “The new vantage point seemed to empower a visitor, inverting the sense of insignificance that skyscrapers could induce when seen from the ground” (264). From high above the city, people could feel as if they transcended the chaos and congestion at the street level. Also, according to Nye, skyscrapers gave people a “sense of mastery” and a “magisterial gaze” on city life, a gaze characterized by a sense of power, confidence, might, and ownership (266). However, as Lowell illustrates, viewing the city from above could also have the opposite effect.

In “The Sixteenth Floor,” the skyscraper vantage point allows the speaker to see more of her surroundings, but it seems to only inundate her with aspects of the city that she finds aggravating. Here is the poem in full:

The noise of the city sounds below me.
It clashes against the houses
And rises like smoke through the narrow streets.
It polishes the marble fronts of houses,
Grating itself against them,
And they shine in the lamplight
And cast their echoes back upon the asphalt of the streets.

But I hear no sound of your voice,
The city is incoherent—trivial,
And my brain aches with emptiness. (“The Sixteenth Floor” 1-10)

The combination of the title and the phrase “below me” solidify the speaker’s location in a high-rise building looking down. This high-rise perspective seems to distance her from life below and further solidify her feelings of isolation. Locating the speaker on the sixteenth floor gives us

clues about her class status, which affects her experience of this vantage point. This high-rise structure is likely where the speaker lives because this poem is set in the evening, when the street lamps are lit (6), so she would not likely be at work in an office building. High-rise apartments and apartment hotels were associated with the middle-class; although they were semi-exclusive, they were not seen as impressive by the social elite, who lived in highly sought after houses (Jackson 39-40). Consequently, the speaker in this poem frequently mentions the shiny marble houses below, perhaps as a way of indicating her desire to own one or resentment toward their prejudice. Thus, through the title, Lowell specifies that our view of the city will be through the eyes of a middle-class woman—a woman of some privilege that still cannot find peace or intimacy in the city.

As the poem begins, the speaker draws attention to the overwhelming sound of the city. She laments, “The noise of the city sounds below me” (1). What captures her attention is not the view, but the sounds she hears. The word “noise” reveals the speaker’s aggravation or annoyance at the sounds of the city, and also classifies the variety of individual sounds as one collective, harsh amalgam. The city noise remains undefined, as the speaker never specifies exactly what the noise sounds like; it is as if it is beyond language. Additionally, the noise itself gives us a few important details about the city. For one, the fact that the speaker cannot escape the noise even though she is high above the city demonstrates how loud and widespread it is. The loudness, in part, comes from the amount of people crammed into the city; in this way, the noise signals that massive number of people, as well as the business and chaos of city life. In this way, the sound stands for the congestion, chaos, and business of city life, as well as the close proximity of massive amounts of people. Thus, as the speaker complains about the noise, she also alludes to a deeper aversion to the mass of people creating the noise from which she cannot escape.

As the poem continues, Lowell emphasizes the material impact of noise by giving it a body. The speaker says that the noise “clashes against the houses / And rises like smoke through the narrow streets” (2-3). Instead of describing the noise in aural terms, she describes it visually, as if she can see it colliding with the surfaces in her neighborhood. Lowell makes something invisible visible, or something intangible material, in order to illustrate its real, physical impact on people and their environment. With the phrase “clashes against,” Lowell specifies the type of impact the noise makes as a violent, forceful collision; furthermore, “against” designates the antagonistic relation between noise and its environment. This distinct phrasing reveals how the speaker feels assaulted by the noise, as well. She also likens the noise to “smoke,” emphasizing its status of being a pollutant, just like the smoke that fills the city streets. In this way, Lowell takes something that seems merely annoying and designates it as something that is harmful to people, like bad air. By characterizing noise as smoke, Lowell also stresses how noise spreads across boundaries, penetrates into spaces and bodies, and cannot be easily controlled.

In the next few lines, Lowell represents the interaction between the noise and the environment using the metaphor of polishing. Lowell writes,

It polishes the marble fronts of houses,
Grating itself against them,
And they shine in the lamplight
And cast their echoes back upon the asphalt of the streets. (“The Sixteenth Floor” 4-7)

Here, the noise changes from smoke to something more solid, like a polishing rag or brush. This form allows Lowell to draw attention to the nature of the contact between the noise and the environment. As the noise “polishes” the houses, Lowell alludes to its repetitive and concentrated rubbing effect, which communicates the constant and forceful presence of the noise in the neighborhood, as well as its ability to transform the environment. “They shine in the

lamplight” suggests that there is something strangely productive, even beautiful about this polishing. However, the phrase “Grating itself against them” recalls the earlier description of “clashes against” (2), which conveys a violent, antagonistic, harsh interaction. Through these descriptions, the speaker reveals not only how the environment is harmed by noise, but also how she feels the noise clashing and grating against her nerves, continually assaulting her senses.

As the speaker listens to the interaction between the noise and the houses, it is as if she is an outsider listening in to a private conversation. Her description contains a cycle or an echo chamber: the noise interacts with the houses and then the houses “cast their echoes back upon the asphalt of the streets (7), thereby, perpetuating the cycle. Lowell emphasizes this echo chamber effect using the repetition of the words “houses” and “streets,” which return after they have been said, like an echo. She also emphasizes the cycle of the sound rising and falling using the line length pattern of long/short/long. For the speaker, this echo-chamber description not only carries the endlessness of the noise problem, but also the sense of relation going on around her without her involvement. She looks down on the city and perceives a sense of connection that she lacks, a sense that life is carrying on without her; she feels like an outsider.

The speaker’s feeling of isolation builds in the final lines of the poem. Lowell follows the first stanza with a line of blank space. This space between the stanzas displays the speaker’s sense of disconnection and isolation, and also her sense of emptiness and lack. After this blank space, the speaker cries, “But I hear no sound of your voice” (8). Here, Lowell creates an abrupt shift that is palpable. The poem moves from the distant “they,” “them,” “their” to the intimate and personal “you” and “I.” Similarly, the lens moves from the city as seen from high above to the immediate space around the speaker, or from public to private. Additionally, after lingering on the problem of noise throughout the poem, the focus turns to the quiet sound of a person’s

voice; this is also a move from noise to silence, as the sought after voice is not heard. As the volume goes down, we hear the speaker's loneliness and longing more clearly.

In the final two lines of the poem, the language and syntax conveys the speaker's mental deterioration. Lowell's representation of these effects of noise on the mind echoes the theories circulating at the time. As Thompson notes, "Doctors warned of the danger that noise posed to physical and mental health, while efficiency experts proclaimed deleterious effect of noise upon the nation's productivity" (118). Experts were citing, specifically, how noise affected concentration and the ability to execute work-related tasks (156). Put simply, people were recognizing how noise hindered their mental faculties and productivity. Lowell embodies these theories with the last lines of the poem, when the speaker says, "The city is incoherent—trivial, / And my brain aches with emptiness" (9-10). These lines are phrases building off of "But I hear no sound of your voice" (8), and they have a curious syntactical relation to the line that preceded them. They seem more like three separate statements than one complete and coherent thought. Through this odd syntax, Lowell emphasizes the deterioration of the speaker's thoughts and ability to clearly put them into language. In this moment, we see the effects of the noise pollution on her mind. The "grating" and "clashing" of the noise has worn her down and left her without the ability to think and communicate normally.

Lowell adds to this sense of mental fatigue using "incoherent—trivial" (line 9). The speaker finds the city "incoherent," in part, because of this deterioration in her ability to think clearly. She also cannot speak the language of the city or enter the conversation she hears outside her window. With the em-dash after "incoherent," we see her searching for the right word. "Trivial" signals not only the lack of esteem she holds for the city, but also her fatigue and desire to stop discussing it. As she gasps the final line, "And my brain aches with emptiness," Lowell

powerfully illustrates the material effect of the isolation and noise of the city on the speaker's mind and body. She feels the physical pain of her loneliness and the stress that the constant noise has caused. The speaker is empty not only because she lacks the person she most desires, but also because she lives in a city that she cannot seem to understand, one that leaves her feeling like an outsider.

Man-Culture-Light Conquers Woman-Nature-Night

City dwellers in the early twentieth century not only experienced unprecedented levels of noise pollution, but also light pollution. One of the main causes was street lights that were particularly bright and glaring. By 1912, arc lights were becoming the main street illumination technology, and they were extremely bright. According to John Jakle in *City Lights* (2001), the brightness of arc lights was so intense it could be compared to that of the sun: "The arc lamp, in its various forms, was indeed an artificial sun, as the spectrum of light cast was similar to that of sunlight. Under the intense arc light, the eye could see with the retinal cones, as it did during that day" (54). Their intense illumination caused problems. For one, they emitted pools of light that spread in all directions, often obscuring more than illuminating (Jakle 55). They also produced an intense glare "that could be disorienting and dangerous" to drivers and pedestrians (54). Moreover, people were cautioned not to look directly at them because the light was "painful to the eyes" (54). The collective presence of thousands of arc lights all over the city, combined with other sources of light like car headlights, store fronts, and electric signs, resulted in a layer of harsh brightness that actually harmed people and changed night into day.

In "New York at Night" (1912), Lowell exposes the environmental issue of light pollution, which was, like noise in "The Sixteenth Floor," a widely unpopular, highly disruptive

aspect of city life. In this poem, light is a violent, material entity conquering everything in sight, disrupting nature, and damaging the health and well being of city dwellers. For Lowell, light also represents corrupt culture and male dominance. To her discussion of nature and culture, she builds in a gender framework, male-culture and female-nature, that allows her to simultaneously represent a dominant male presence threatening and violating women, alongside culture's conquest of nature. The woman in this poem experiences a state of urban exile, in that, she feels damaged by city culture, and longs for nature's healing presence, but cannot find it. She finds the city unnatural and threatening, not a place she feels at home. In "New York at Night," cultural aspects of the city corrupt and pollute the urban environment, disrupt nature, and harm women's bodies and minds.

After the title evokes the vibrancy and excitement of the big city at night, the first stanza abruptly breaks the fantasy by describing the hellish characteristics of the urban environment. Lowell's urban landscape emphasizes collision of nature and culture, in which culture violates, pollutes, and mars the natural aspects of the urban environment. The first stanza reads:

A near horizon whose sharp jags
Cut brutally into a sky
Of leaden heaviness, and crags
Of houses lift their masonry
Ugly and foul, and chimneys lie
And snort, outlined against the gray
Of lowhung cloud. I hear the sigh
The goaded city gives, not day
Nor night can ease her heart, her anguished labours stay. ("New York at Night" 1-9)

The speaker begins by looking at the horizon, in what seems to be a conventional meditation on night sky. However, as "near horizon" suggests, this meditation gets interrupted. This sets up the

intrusion of culture on nature that Lowell emphasizes through this poem. The first image, the sky being “cut brutally” by the “sharp jags” of the skyline, specifies the violent quality of this mixing of nature and culture. Lowell emphasizes this jaggedness through the use of the jagged form of the poem: the indented lines, long/short pattern, as well as the extra long lines at the end of several stanzas. The language here positions culture as an attacker and the sky or nature as the victim of the attack. As skyscrapers take over the sky, the poisonous byproducts of city life take over the fresh air: “sky / Of leaden heaviness” and “chimneys lie / And snort, outlined against the gray / Of lowhung cloud.” This layer of smog signals the rise of industry in America in the early twentieth century, and also the lack of regulation on factory emissions at that time. The toxic fumes break in to the poem as our speaker breathes them in while trying to meditate on the night sky. Pollution begins shaping the poem.

The final part of the first stanza shows the impact of harmful aspects of city culture on the female body. The speaker says, “I hear the sigh / The goaded city gives, not day / Nor night can ease her heart, her anguished labours stay” (7-9). The woman, the personified female city, sighs as she feels the painful burden of urbanization and industrialization weighing down on her. Her sigh represents her gasping for fresh air, and finding only clouds of heavy, gray smog. She exists in this perpetual state of pain and stress. The assertion that “not day / Nor night” could bring her relief, foreshadows an issue the speaker soon raises: light pollution, specifically, the way there is no night in New York City because city lights create a state of perpetual daytime. Additionally, Lowell builds in to this stanza and the description of the personified female city a theme of violation. After beginning the stanza with a penetrative and violent image of stabbing—“sharp jags / Cut brutally into the sky” (1-2), Lowell fills the soundscape with a woman’s sighs of pain and distress. The phrase, “the goaded city,” emphasizes culture’s violation of the urban

environment/personified female city, as goaded carries a connotation of prodding and forcing someone to do something. This phallic prodding implies a male culture violating a female nature that Lowell establishes in the next stanzas. The final phrase, “her anguished labours stay,” suggests that the rape caused not only the extreme pain and trauma on the woman, but also a perpetual state of pregnancy and labour without the relief of delivery. Importantly, the speaker “hear(s)” the cries of this woman, the urban environment, and acknowledges her suffering because she can relate to her struggles as a woman in the city. She uses the personified female city to embody her own experience and the experience of other women.

In the second stanza, Lowell points to light pollution as a cultural force negatively impacting the environment. She writes,

Below, straight streets, monotonous,
From north and south, from east and west,
Stretch glittering; and luminous
Above, one tower tops the rest
And holds aloft man’s constant quest:
Time! Joyless emblem of the greed
Of millions, robber of the best
Which earth can give, the vulgar creed
Has seared upon the night its flaming ruthless screed. (“New York at Night” 10-18)

The speaker starts by focusing on the streets and the street lights “glittering” all over the city. These “glittering” street lights take the place of stars in this meditation on night because they have eclipsed the night sky. These glaring and bright street lights have also collectively eliminated the darkness of night; thus, city dwellers and the personified female city exist in a perpetual state of daytime from which they can find no relief. In this poem, light also takes on a

metaphorical meaning, by representing culture spreading all over the urban environment, conquering everything in sight.

Just as the city light spreads over the city, so does the influence of the financial elite and the skyscrapers through which they stake their claim: “luminous / Above, one tower tops the rest / And holds aloft man’s constant quest.” The tower here is most likely the 700-foot Metropolitan Life Tower, the tallest skyscraper in New York in 1912 (Landau 361). Located in the heart of the financial district, this skyscraper embodies the corporate “quest” for wealth and power, as well as the fierce competitiveness that fuels capitalism. According to Weil, skyscrapers were emblematic of this competitiveness, as “Architects and large companies tried to outdo each other in audacity in the race to the sky” (173). For the speaker, this tower, a “Joyless emblem of the greed / Of millions,” stands as a constant reminder of corruption. At this time, major insurance companies like Metropolitan Life were steeped in scandal. Liette Gidlow describes this climate of corruption in *The Big Vote* (2004) by saying, “In the first decade of the twentieth century, the life insurance industry was rocked by scandal as investigators revealed irresponsible investments, financial cover-ups, and corrupt dealings with government officials” (168). During the time Lowell writes this poem, Met Life was attempting to rehabilitate its corrupt reputation through “great publicity campaigns to demonstrate their corporate good citizenship and educate the public” (Gidlow 168). However, as Lowell shows, city dwellers like our speaker could detect the corruption and greed beneath their polished veneers.

Additionally, Lowell emphasizes how corrupt corporations are directly impacting female bodies. Lowell alludes to the exploitation of working class women by large corporations through the phrase “her anguished labours stay” (9). Lowell wrote this poem in 1912, a significant time period for working-class women. New York City in the early twentieth century was a central

location of American industry, which was expanding to include more jobs for women workers. Industries at this time famously avoided regulation and, as a result, women workers often labored under dangerous and often life-threatening conditions for extremely low wages. In New York City, between 1909 and 1912, women workers, in unprecedented numbers, united and called for reform. In 1909, 20,000 women workers of the clothing industry held a strike, organized by the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union (ILGWU); "over 700 were arrested" (Kroessler 176). In 1910, 60,000 workers, many of them women, held another strike to demand improved working conditions and wages (Kroessler 177). In 1911, the severity of these working conditions became abundantly clear when a fire burned down the Triangle Shirtwaist Company, killing 146 women workers (Kroessler 178). These working-class women, represented in this poem by the personified female city, labor tirelessly under the life-threatening conditions at their jobs, and bear the burden of industrialization and urbanization on their minds and bodies. Through the sighs and groans that resound throughout this poem, Lowell captures the daily pain and suffering of thousands of women, who were starting to publicly express the atrocities they faced.

To the speaker, this tower also symbolizes the negative influence that these elite companies exert on nature. She calls these corporations "robber(s) of the best / Which earth can give." Corporations have stolen resources from nature, and also taken over the night sky, "sear(ing) upon the night" their "flaming ruthless screed." Here, Lowell links city light with corrupt corporate America. At the time of this poem, skyscrapers were being floodlit at night, which "could make an entire building shine in the night like a sign, helping define a prestigious address and make it attractive" to onlookers (Jakle 185). The lights of towers like this one fill the night sky, turning night into day, and serving as a constant reminder of the power and influence of corporations. To our speaker, this light has a violent, harmful quality, which she reveals in her

description of night being branded by capitalism's "flaming ruthless screed." This branding image adds to the theme of culture assaulting and violating nature. Importantly, while Lowell links corrupt corporations with city light, she also connects both to men, using "man's constant quest," and also the phallic imagery of the tower. City culture—gender dynamics, power corporations and industries, light pollution—disrupts the speaker's experience of nighttime in the city. She cannot look to the sky without being reminded of a threatening male presence, corruption and greed, and the harmful influence of corporations on nature.

In the third stanza, Lowell contrasts the blinding and constant city lights, and the threatening and corrupt city culture they symbolize, with the calming presence of a dark night. The speaker, feeling strained and worn out by constant brightness in a city that never sleeps, cries out,

O Night! Whose soothing presence brings
The quiet shining of the stars.
O Night! Whose cloak of darkness clings
So intimately close that scars
Are hid from our own eyes. ("New York at Night" 19-23)

The speaker repeatedly calls out "O Night!", begging for the darkness that has been eclipsed by harsh city light. She personifies night as a compassionate and attentive mother, who brings healing comfort to her children. This personification of night as a mother adds to Lowell's overall framework of male-culture and female-nature. Her juxtaposition of this stanza after the previous one emphasizes nature's healing and restorative capacity in contrast to culture's pollution and corruption. The descriptions of what she seeks from Night reflect how the overactive, bright, corrupt city affects her. Feeling insecure and endangered, she wants Night's "cloak of darkness" to protect her and shield her from her "scars," the reminders of how she has

been harmed by the city. She wants Night's "soothing presence" to heal her anxious heart and restore her physical health, after persistent daytime has left her sleepless. She wants Night's "cloak of darkness" to envelope her so that she can finally rest.

Through the speaker's story, Lowell brings us a clear example of women's urban exile. This woman is not at home in the city. On the contrary, she feels unsafe and damaged by the city, and longs for nature's healing presence, but cannot find it. Still crying out for Night, she says,

Where art thou hiding, where thy peace?

This is the hour, but thou art not.

Will waking tumult never cease?

Hast thou thy votary forgot?

Nature forsakes this man-begot

And festering wilderness, and now

The long still hours are here, no jot

Of dear communing do I know;

Instead the glaring, man-filled city groans below! ("New York at Night" 28-36)

The feelings of fear and anxiety become more palpable through the urgent and panicked tone in this final stanza. The speaker's panic comes through in her repetition of questions, reiteration of the same idea—there is no night, and extreme diction in phrases like "Will waking tumult never cease?" She feels stranded and helpless in a chaotic, inhospitable environment, in which she can find no rest, "peace," or "no jot / Of dear communing." It is important to realize that Lowell draws attention to the issue of light pollution long before scientists started taking it seriously. She was ahead of her time in understanding the specific health problems associated with light pollution, before they were known. According to scientist Ron Chepesuik, in "Missing the Dark" (2009), as man-made light blocks out the darkness of night, it causes the disruption of the day/night cycle in humans, also known as the circadian clock. Because the circadian clock is

involved in a wide range of physiological processes, its disruption can lead to many different health problems, including “depression, insomnia, cardiovascular disease, and cancer” (6). The speaker in this poem experiences sleeplessness, stress from over activity, and a feeling of hopelessness that resembles depression. Lowell directly ties these symptoms to the light pollution that has disrupted the day/night cycle. While many modernist writers celebrate the glamour and brilliance of city lights, Lowell draws attention to the real physical and mental harm they inflict on many city dwellers.

The speaker’s panic in the final stanza also comes from the unsettling reality that city culture has overpowered nature, by disrupting the natural cycle of light and dark. As a result, the city is unnatural in that it does not conform to the laws of nature; and against nature, in the way city culture negatively impacts the natural aspects of the urban environment, like air, human bodies, and night. “Nature forsakes this man-begot / And festering wilderness” speaks to this unnatural or nature-less city idea. Characterizing the city as a “man-begot” and “festering wilderness” reiterates how city culture, linked specifically to men, infects the urban environment like a harmful bacteria, causing damage and deterioration. In the final line, Lowell presents the unsettling culmination of city culture’s conquest of nature and women: “Instead the glaring, man-filled city groans below!” The combination of city light and the corruption it signifies, as well as the threatening and dominant male presence, holds power over women and nature. In this unsettling final image, Lowell foregrounds the body of the personified female city, who has been violated by men and is now pregnant with men. Men are taking over her body through raping her, occupying her body, and feeding off her, while she wastes away. Blinded by violent light, overrun by men, and left without the possibility of rest or relief, the speaker and the personified female city can only cry out its pain. In this image of men conquering the personified female city,

Lowell figuratively represents men and culture harming women and the urban environment. The image grows even more unsettling because it implies, through her pregnancy, that she will soon give birth to another hoard of men who will continue to violate and destroy.

Although this poem has received no critical attention, it provides an important window into the transformation of the urban environment during the early twentieth century. Through the speaker, we see culture take over nature, turning night into blinding day. We feel the strain of searching for the peace and comfort of darkness, and finding only the glare and over-activity of the bright, never-ending city. Lowell completely rewrites the conventional usage of light as a positive symbol, by associating it with pain and distress. In doing so, she also counters the narrative of city light signifying progress and pleasure. Additionally, this poem provides insight into what the light signified at the time: man conquering nature, and the power and influence of corrupt corporations. The gender framework in this poem builds in a sense of women and nature being violated by male-culture, making it clear that this light felt like a violation in more ways than one. Although light was believed to increase safety, for many women, this light felt more dangerous than darkness because this persistent light made them constantly visible to onlookers and eliminated the protection of shadows. As Lowell points out in “The Captured Goddess,” this visibility could be extremely dangerous. After examining environmental threats in “The Sixteenth Floor” and “New York at Night,” in “The Captured Goddess” Lowell turns to the cultural threat of predatory men hunting women in urban spaces.

“In the city I found her”: The Flâneuse as Witness

For women in the early twentieth century, walking in the city was not simple; it was often frightening and dangerous. Being out in the city made women increasingly vulnerable to threats

of sexual harassment, stalking, and sexual assault. From the late nineteenth through the early twentieth century, this threatening reality manifests itself in the public outcry against “mashers.” According to Estelle B. Freedman in *Redefining Rape: Sexual Violence in the Era of Suffrage and Segregation* (2013), mashers were so called “male flirts” who “had been trying to force their attentions on women on city streets, sometimes merely calling out sexual insults, sometimes physically harassing them” (191). These men staked out positions throughout cities, both outside on streets and inside buses and subway cars, and actively hunted women, ogling, accosting, verbally harassing, and even physically assaulting them. Many women who experienced unwanted advances by mashers spoke out in cities across America, testifying to the threat mashers posed to women and calling for action.¹⁰ For instance, in 1893, a woman in D.C. reported that the masher threat was so prevalent that she believed every woman had in some way experienced it themselves. She describes a typical scenario by saying that the masher approaches a woman with her hands full and “hugs her” and then “generally succeeds in throwing her down, because he runs against her roughly, and then scampers away” (qtd. in Selgrave 16-17).

Women in cities not only faced sexual harassment and assault; they also faced the threat of sex trafficking and abduction. As Ruth Rosen points out in her study of prostitution in the progressive era, *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900-1918* (1982), Americans were obsessed with and deeply concerned about sex trafficking, known at that time as “white slavery.” “White slavery” carried with it the violent reality of men capturing women, forcing them into sex slavery, and not allowing them to escape (Rosen 112-113). As many scholars note, the “white slavery panic” was made worse as groups co-opted it in order to spread their own messages: anti-immigrant groups used it to try to spread fear about immigrants, who were often

¹⁰ For more of these first-hand accounts, see Kerry Selgrave’s *Beware the Masher: Sexual Harrassment in American Public Places, 1880-1930* (2014), and Estelle B. Freedman in *Redefining Rape: Sexual Violence in the Era of Suffrage and Segregation* (2013).

believed to be the traffickers; other groups used it to try to keep women out of the public sphere and confined to more traditional domestic roles; religious groups used it to stoke existing anxiety about sex.¹¹ Despite exaggeration from these groups, however, the fear of sex trafficking at this time correlated with an actual sex slavery and abduction problem threatening women in cities throughout America. In *History of Women in the United States: Prostitution* (1993), Nancy Cott says “even a superficial sampling of contemporary evidence leaves no doubt that a white-slave traffic existed in the United States” (254). Similarly, Rosen finds the reality of sexual slavery during this historical moment corroborated by an overwhelming amount of data: “testimony given by escaped prostitutes, convictions of white slavers after the passage of the Mann Act 1910 (prohibiting the interstate traffic of women for the purposes of prostitution), data and conclusions drawn from federal studies on white slavery, along with results of investigations undertaken by the Federation of Women’s Clubs, the W.C.T.U., rescue workers, and the National Vigilance Committee” (116). The fear of abduction grew as large numbers of women moved to the city and disappeared: Rosen points out, “in New York City alone, 1,439 girls disappeared in one year” (123). Sex slavery cases dominated the headlines; between 1910 and 1915, “1,057 persons were convicted of white slavery in the United States” (Rosen 118). The public fear increased as some victims who escaped sex slavery came forward and testified to the horrors they endured. Many of these women described being captured while they were “simply walking on the street” (Rosen 127). The reality of sex trafficking verified the reality that the female body was a target of men’s exploitation and stoked anxieties that women already had about walking alone in the city.

Sex slavery had become such a widespread problem that many modernist playwrights felt compelled to raise awareness about it through their literary works. According to drama scholar Katie Johnson, between 1898 and 1922, approximately fifty plays featured sex slavery or

¹¹ See Brian Donovan’s *White Slave Crusades* (2006) and Ruth Rosen’s *The Lost Sisterhood* (1982).

prostitution ("Damaged Goods" 48). In 1913 in New York City, several playwrights staged a series of plays featuring prostitution; scholars have named them the brothel plays. One of these plays in particular, *Ourselves* by Rachel Crothers, draws attention to the cultural, economic, and moral problems that feed into the sex trafficking problem, as well as the physical, mental, and emotional trauma that women in sex slavery experience. As Crothers points out, many women became involved in sex slavery by simply being out in public, where men could easily capture them. For countless women, beauty and the desire to walk in the city would lead to their demise.

Similar to the women and women writers who personally attested to or represented the threat of predatory men hunting women in cities, Amy Lowell also found it necessary to respond. In "The Captured Goddess" (1914), Lowell illuminates these dangers, as a woman's walk through the city turns nightmarish when she sees another woman, a goddess, captured, tortured, stripped naked, and sold like a piece of property, and then flees the scene in fear. The fate of this woman represents the real and present danger of women being sexualized, objectified, and even physically assaulted by men in the city.

An aspect of literature and popular culture that fed into this objectification and sexualization problem was the proliferation of the flâneur and his mastering gaze on women in the city. The flâneur, a literary and cultural figure popularized in the 19th century, is a spectator of city life, a man who leisurely wanders around the city and hungrily gazes at, classifies, and analyzes all he sees. Baudelaire develops and shapes the flâneur through his essays and poetry. In a landmark essay, "The Painter of Modern Life" (1863) he describes the flâneur's passion for being in the city: "To be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world--such are a few of the slightest pleasures of those independent, passionate, impartial natures which the tongue

can but clumsily define. The spectator is *prince* who everywhere rejoices in his incognito" (Baudelaire 9). The flâneur loves being amidst the busy, chaotic city, and feels at home in a crowd of strangers. The flâneur has the ability to "remain hidden" and "incognito," while being surrounded by people. This invisible voyeur gazes at everything and everyone, and, using his "power of analysis" (8), orders and explains it all. In addition to classifying city life, the flâneur also has a tendency to sexualize and objectify women. In "To a Woman Passing By" (1855), an often-cited flâneur poem by Baudelaire, a flâneur describes his brief encounter with, or glimpse of, a woman in the city:

Around me roared the nearly deafening street.
Tall, slim, in mourning, in majestic grief,
A woman passed me, with a splendid hand
Lifting and swinging her festoon and hem;

Nimble and stately, statuesque of leg.
I, shaking like an addict, from her eye,
Black sky, spawner of hurricanes, drank in
Sweetness that fascinates, pleasure that kills. (1-8, trans. by McGowan)

In this typical flâneurie situation, the flâneur encounters a woman in the city and becomes intrigued by her beauty and mystery. He reduces her to the sum of her body parts, and takes sexual "pleasure" in drinking her in. Although the speaker has only briefly seen this woman, he claims intimate knowledge of her mental and emotional state: "in mourning, in majestic grief." This tendency to objectify, sexualize, and classify is a clear example of the mastering gaze characteristic of flâneurie. In "The Captured Goddess," Lowell works within and against established traditions of flâneurie through the figure of the flâneuse and her empathetic gaze.

As literary scholars trace this figure throughout literary and cultural history, they have often wondered if a female flâneur, a flâneuse, exists. In "The Invisible Flâneuse" (1985), an essay which catalyzed a modern debate on the female flâneur, Janet Wolff argues that a flâneuse is an impossibility, due to women's lack of mobility, access, and freedom in cities in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Elizabeth Wilson, in *The Sphinx in the City* (1992), disagrees with Wolff, saying that often this restriction is overexaggerated, and "Women did participate actively as well as passively in the spectacle," especially in Paris (56). Wilson, however, mentions that this participation often came at a price: their "oversexualization" (56). In her study on women's urban walking, *Streetwalking the Metropolis* (2000), literary scholar Deborah Parsons says that women can be flâneuses, but their gaze differs from the flâneur's in important ways. As an example of a flâneuse, Parsons points to la passante, the woman who walks by the flâneur and returns his gaze in "To a Woman Passing By" (6). Her gaze differs from the flâneur's because she does not look to master; by returning his gaze, she challenges male authority and resists becoming an object (Parsons 72-3). Parson's flâneuse is marginal, elusive, and often self-conscious in the act of looking (10). There is no question that women in the early twentieth century did walk the city and had a certain level of freedom and access that they did not previously have. However, as all of these scholars point out, women entered the public space of the city being mindful of the dangers therein, dangers that they faced on the basis of being women. Because of their experience walking the city and being objectified, sexualized, and often threatened, women simply could not embody the urban walker in the way men could. Consequently, a flâneuse is not just a female flâneur. She is a walking critique of the flâneur.

Surprisingly, throughout this flâneuse debate, women's urban walking in American poetry by women writers has been largely overlooked, as most critics have focused on fiction,

especially British writers like Woolf. An examination of city poetry by American women deepens our understanding of the flâneuse, and reveals how her exilic experience of the city inflects the gaze. In “The Captured Goddess,” the flâneuse is a woman who witnesses the assault, capture, and commodification of another woman in the city. She flees the scene of this violation, knowing that she is powerless to intervene and recognizing that her gender makes her a target, just like the goddess. Consequently, she understands the experience of being the object of the gaze and wants to combat mastering gazes. Her painful memory of the captured goddess, combined with her experience of being a target and feeling the constant threat of the male gaze, make her walk different than a flâneur's. Lowell figuratively represents the violence of the mastering gaze, through the way the men in this poem treat the goddess as a sex object and lay claim over her body. Lowell resists the mastering gaze of the flâneur by using an abstract, prismatic, empathetic, non-sexual gaze, through which she draws attention to the violation, rather than perpetrates it. She turns the position of flâneur/observer into the ethical position of witness. In “The Captured Goddess,” Lowell displays the dangers of women's urban walking and uses the gaze to bear witness to, not commit, violence.

From the beginning of the poem, we see the speaker's mind bringing up the painful memories of the assault she witnessed. While the speaker recounts the story of the goddess as a bright and magical fantasy, the harsh and violent reality of the goddess' fate bleeds through.

Over the housetops,
Above the rotating chimney-pots,
I have seen a shiver of amethyst,
And blue and cinnamon have flickered,
A moment,
At the far end of a dusty street.

Through sheeted rain
Has come a luster of crimson,
And I have watched moonbeams
Hushed by a film of palest green. (“The Captured Goddess” 1-10)

Through the use of past perfect verbs—“have seen,” “have flickered,” “have watched”—Lowell indicates that our speaker recounts this story from memory. She has already been on this walk through the city and already seen how the goddess has been violated. The way she recounts her experience allows us to not only witness it ourselves, but also understand how it has affected the speaker. Lowell wants us to pay attention not only to the story, but also to the storyteller’s method and state of mind. In these first two stanzas, the speaker oscillates between fantasy and reality, between the supernatural aspects of the goddess and the flat, stark realism of the city. Beautiful streaks of color and light radiate from the goddess, and stand out amidst the muted colors of the city, and its mundane accoutrement: “housetops,” “chimney-pots,” and “dusty street.” The fantasy vs. reality theme shows how the speaker sees the goddess a true wonder with value and beauty beyond the things of this world. Lowell uses subtle cues in these stanzas to foreshadow the goddess’ nightmarish fate. Her colorful light shines above the colorless city, a place in which her color and light and power will be stripped from her. Lowell uses odd word choice in phrases like “shiver of amethyst” and “moonbeams / Hushed” in order to draw attention to the words that carry elements of foreshadowing. “Shiver” gives us a glimpse of how the goddess will end up in the speaker’s story: cold, frightened, and vulnerable. Lowell uses “flickered” and “Hushed” to foreshadow the goddess’ loss of power, voice, and vivacity. “Lustre of crimson” carries both the brilliant light and color of the goddess, and the pain and bodily harm she endures. The speaker’s use of these oddly placed words reveals how the goddess’ fate weighs

on her thoughts, even while she directs her attention to more positive things. The speaker suffers the secondary trauma of a witness; she cannot escape the memory of her pain.

While the speaker describes the goddess, Lowell establishes an alternative gaze, a way of representing and looking at the poetic object without trying to master. In the first two stanzas, Lowell draws attention to the gaze using the phrases “I have seen” (3) and “I have watched” (9). These phrases locate us in the position of looking through the speaker who directs the gaze. However, instead of focusing intently and closely on the goddess’ face or body, like a typical objectifying and mastering gaze, Lowell pulls the lens back, adding distance to the poetic object, and allowing the picture to appear abstract. For instance, instead of a clear image of the goddess, we see the color and light she emits. Lowell’s use of synesthesia—“blue and cinnamon have flickered” (4) and “moonbeams / Hushed by a film of the palest green” (9-10)—adds to this abstraction effect by not allowing us to get a clear sensory description of the goddess. Lowell also adds to this abstraction effect through the rapid movement of the lens created by prepositional phrases: “Over the housetops, / Above the rotating chimney-pots” (1-2), “At the far end of the dusty street” (6), and “Through sheeted rain” (7). In the third stanza, the lens finally stops and focuses on the goddess:

It was her wings,
Goddess!
Who stepped over the clouds,
And laid her rainbow feathers
Aslant, on the currents of the air. (“The Captured Goddess” 11-15)

Lowell isolates and emphasizes the poetic object, “Goddess!” By doing so, Lowell conveys her power and uniqueness, and invites the reader to pause and look at her. However, in a moment which invites a direct gaze, the speaker continues to resist objectifying the goddess. Instead of

describing her body up close, she pulls the lens back, again, and only gives brief glimpses of her body in phrases like “her wings” and “rainbow feathers.” Instead of sexualizing her, she draws attention to her power and magnitude: “stepped over the clouds, / And laid her rainbow feathers / Aslant, on the currents of the air.” Here, Lowell brings us to what appears to be a typical flâneur moment: a woman catches the eye of the speaker; but completely rewrites the gaze, so that instead of reducing the woman, she magnifies her and allows her to spread beyond the confines language.

Lowell continues to build and subvert traditions of flânerie through the fourth stanza. After catching a full glimpse of the goddess, the speaker starts following her:

I followed her for long,
With gazing eyes and stumbling feet.
I cared not where she led me,
My eyes were full of colours:
Saffrons, rubies, the yellows of beryls,
And the indigo-blue of quartz;
Flights of rose, layers of chrysoprase,
Points of orange, spirals of vermilion,
The spotted gold of tiger-lily petals,
The loud pink of bursting hydrangeas.
I followed,
And watched for the flashing of her wings. (“The Captured Goddess” 16-27)

Her encounter with the goddess has awakened a fervent desire to pursue her further and see what wonders might occur along the way: “I followed, / And watched for the flashing of her wings.”

By having the speaker follow the goddess through the city, Lowell uses a convention of flânerie. One of the most famous examples of a following flâneur is in Poe’s short story “The Man of the Crowd” (1840), in which the flâneur/narrator becomes obsessed with an old man,

whom he cannot categorize, so he follows him for several hours through the city trying to understand him. Although Lowell visibly signals the *flâneurie* situation, she departs from that model through altering the gaze. Lowell deliberately mentions her “gazing eyes,” in order to draw attention to the gaze, but does not give us a mastering gaze typical of a *flâneur* situation. Moreover, the speaker does not sexualize or objectify the goddess. Instead of focusing on the goddess’ body or face, the speaker focuses on bursts of color she sees; she even mentions, “My eyes were full of colours.” This prismatic gaze multiplies and abstracts the goddess, instead of reducing and knowing her. The flashes of color signal the goddess’ power and magical abilities, which the speaker appreciates, but does not try to understand or explain.

“With gazing eyes and stumbling feet” (17), the speaker begins her urban walk, just like a *flâneur*. After walking us into a *flâneurie* situation, Lowell abruptly changes direction in order to show the dangers of women’s urban walking and consequences of the mastering gaze:

In the city I found her,
The narrow-streeted city.
In the market-place I came upon her,
Bound and trembling.
Her fluted wings were fastened to her sides with cords,
She was naked and cold,
For that day the wind blew
Without sunshine. (“The Captured Goddess” 28-35)

For the speaker, the city goes from a place of possibility to a scene of violation. Lowell makes this shift more palpable through changing the color scheme from colorful to colorless. At this critical turn, Lowell also changes the gaze. For the first time in the poem, the speaker focuses the gaze on the goddess’ body, and the gaze changes from abstract and distant to hyper realistic and close. Lowell deliberately shifts the gaze here in order to draw attention to the goddess’ violation

and suffering. She finds the goddess “Bound and trembling,” with her wings tied down. The goddess, a symbol of female power and beauty, has been taken captive and rendered powerless and terrified. This demonstrates that no woman, not even the most powerful, was safe from the dangers of the city. Additionally, perhaps her power and beauty made her an even bigger target. Her captivity symbolizes the societal restriction of women at the time; the binding of her wings stands for the limited mobility and access of women in the city. Her nakedness suggests violation, sexualization, and objectification, all widespread threats that women faced in their walks through the city. Through this horrifying image of the captured goddess, Lowell reveals the logical conclusion of the mastering gaze on the female body, an approach which reduces women to sex objects and seeks full knowledge and control of them.

As men lay claim to the goddess’ naked body in the market-place, Lowell metaphorically represents another problem facing women in cities: sex trafficking. The speaker describes this exploitation, saying, “Men chaffered for her, / They bargained in silver and gold, / In copper, in wheat, / And called their bids across the market-place” (36-39). This passage displays the power and dominance of the men in the city; men have the money and the resources, the control of the market-place, and the ability to do what they want without consequences. The men in the city have reduced the magical and powerful goddess to a commodity that can be bought and sold. Here, as a woman’s walk into the city ends with her captivity, Lowell represents the cruel fate that many women suffered at the hands of sex traffickers.

In the poem’s final lines, Lowell draws attention to the goddess’ helplessness and pain, and the speaker’s fearful reaction after witnessing the troubling scene. Lowell writes,

The Goddess wept.
Hiding my face I fled,
And the grey wind hissed behind me,

Along the narrow streets. (“The Captured Goddess” 40-43)

Naked, bound, cold, and afraid, the goddess can only weep and await her terrifying fate. The soundscape at this moment speaks volumes about the power dynamic in this scene. The loud haggling of men in the market-place underscores their dominance, while the goddess’ quiet weeping bespeaks her complete captivity. Lowell ensures that we hear her quiet weeping by setting that line apart. Lowell stops and focuses the camera on the goddess, who embodies the way the city can take a powerful and beautiful woman and leave her violated, helpless, and deeply afraid. By surrounding this line by blank space, Lowell also conveys the fact that the goddess is left on her own; the speaker flees the scene: “Hiding my face I fled.” The speaker runs away because she fears for her life at the hands of the merciless men in the city. Despite feeling an attachment to the goddess and wanting her to survive, the speaker recognizes she is powerless to intervene. The speaker hiding her face could suggest that she is ashamed at not being able to intervene and save the goddess; or she is turning away and shielding her face from the horrifying scene. However, it also suggests she hides her face because she does not want the men to see her, another woman walking alone, and try to capture her. In this moment, she feels hyper aware of how her body makes her a target.

Through the final image of the poem, a woman hiding her face and fleeing the scene of another woman’s violation, Lowell emphasizes how the city presents real, severe threats to the health and well being of women. By concluding the poem with a sexualized auction block, Lowell presents perhaps her strongest condemnation of *flâneurie* as an acquisitive male gaze, while also showing the profound empathy inherent in the gaze of her *flâneuse*. The *flâneuse* in this poem resembles a *flâneur*, in that, she sees a woman, becomes interested in her, and follows her through the city. However, unlike the *flâneur*, she does not have the ability to feel at home in

the city, be invisible in the crowd, or casually and freely stroll around; in fact, she is hyperaware of her visibility and how it makes her a target. Unlike the flâneur, her gaze is empathetic, not mastering. She understands the inherent violation in a mastering gaze, and uses her representation to testify to the violation, rather than reify it.

Coda

Modern women, like all city-dwellers, dealt with the environmental issues caused by the rise in industry, technology, and population. They could not sit at home without hearing and feeling the roar of the city surrounding them, interrupting their thoughts and activities. They could not see the night sky beyond the blinding glare of city lights. They felt the strain of constant daytime and no rest. Modern women lived with the awareness of the threats they faced not only from the environment, but also from men. A woman's walk was a balancing act between freedom and autonomy, and the threat of violation. With each step they took, they made the choice to move forward, despite that danger. Like the speaker in "The Captured Goddess," Lowell bears witness to the struggle and suffering of women in cities. She reminds us that the increase in freedom and opportunity that many women found in cities came at a price.

Similar to Lowell in "The Captured Goddess," Evelyn Scott uses her city poetry to expose the predatory male presence threatening women in cities. While Lowell uses the flâneuse to bear witness to sexual violence, Evelyn Scott's city poetry provides an account of sexual assault and rape trauma from the survivor's perspective. As Lowell and Scott show, claiming a position as a woman in the city space came with the ever-present risk of becoming a walking target.

Chapter Three

“Quiver under it!”: Sexual Violence, Trauma, and the Haunted City in Evelyn Scott’s “Manhattan”

Modernist scholar Walter Kalaidjian finds, “The urgency of coming to terms with trauma’s relation to narrative, material culture, and society has never been more pressing” (*The Edge of Modernism* 1). Twentieth-century America was marked by a range of traumatic events, including two world wars, the Great Depression, racial segregation, and the AIDS crisis. These traumatic events left an indelible imprint on twentieth-century literature; and one way we can understand the experience of this dramatic era is to listen in to the trauma narratives recorded therein. Often absent from lists of traumatic events is sexual violence against women, a crisis no less widespread or impactful.¹² Although modernist literary studies has tuned in to the trauma of war, it has neglected the trauma of being a woman. Countless women in the twentieth century shared the experience of being hunted, attacked, and sexually violated by men. A societal change that added to this problem was the urban boom and the sudden integration of women into the male-dominated city space. Predatory men took advantage of their privileged and dominant position in city spaces and actively hunted women, thereby policing the borders of women’s freedom and access.¹³ The experience of sexual violence and its resulting psychological trauma became common for women in cities. These women experienced urban exile not only because they had to live as targets for sexual predation, but also because the city became a site of their trauma, affecting their ability to freely and fully experience the urban space. This crisis of sexual violence is part of not only women’s history, but also American history. Therefore, it is vital that

¹² According to RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network), “1 out of every 6 American women has been the victim of an attempted or completed rape in her lifetime”; and “9 out of every 10 victims of rape are female” (“Scope of the Problem: Statistics” *rain.org* 2016).

¹³ For more on sexual violence in cities see my chapter on Amy Lowell.

we pay attention to this experience in modernist literature. Although she has long been left out of literary studies, Evelyn Scott stands ready to enter critical conversations through her representations of trauma. In “Manhattan,” the first section of poems in *Precipitations* (1920), Scott provides the survivor’s perspective, and reveals the way trauma etches itself on her mind, body, and the urban environment, coating her daily life in a layer of horror and pain. In this chapter, I aim to recover the work of this lost but important modernist poet, and also show how her work can enhance our understanding of trauma and the modern woman’s urban experience.

Scott experienced several traumatic events in her life. When she was only five, she had malaria which caused her pain and suffering, and also disfigured her, covering her in boils that left permanent scars on her body. As an adult, she experienced more health problems after a botched delivery of her son Jig. First, a doctor failed to examine her after the birth and, thereby, “missed the fact that she had been torn by the delivery” (28). The tear caused her debilitating and constant pain, and the surgery to repair it made things even worse. Her account of the operation reads like an account of rape: “I did not like them. I felt cold and helpless and antagonistic. I was very conscious of being looked at by men—not doctors, and I knew they were conscious of it too although they were trying to pretend otherwise...Taking off one’s clothes strips one of so much mental covering...I see where hatred of the flesh comes from. It is through the flesh that you are at everyone’s mercy” (*Escapade* 107). Like many victims of sexual assault, she felt the terror of complete powerlessness and vulnerability, and being subject to the control of men she did not like or trust. To make matters worse, after receiving twenty-four stitches in her vagina, she dealt with persistent infections and illness, and had to get more invasive and traumatizing operations done. As Scott biographer Mary Wheeling White notes, Scott lived with constant pain: pain which “shaped her identity” and “the kind of pain only a woman could feel” (*Fighting the*

Current 33). There is evidence to suggest that she may have suffered other trauma at the hands of men. In *Eva Gay* (1933), “her most autobiographical novel” (Scura xv), Eva, the nine-year-old main character, is molested by her older cousin (Scott 22-25). Although Scott depicts this within a fictional story, she claimed this novel “was based on her own experiences” (White 11). Like many people who have experienced traumatic events, she lived with symptoms consistent with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: “major depression” (White 3-4), paranoia (White 233, Scura 28), drug and alcohol problems, and suicidal tendencies (White 3-4). While scholars have noted these issues, they have written them off as “personality disorders,” but never connected them to the trauma she endured throughout her life. The misunderstanding surrounding her psychological condition even harmed her career and contributed to her exile from literary studies. Although her trauma hurt her career and legacy, I would like to suggest that it is her representations of trauma and the experience of living with the psychological effects of trauma that can enable the reconsideration of her work and rehabilitation of her legacy. In my chapter, I focus bring together three fields of study that have not typically come together: Trauma Studies, women’s issues, and modernist poetry by American women writers. I trace how her traumatized psyche writes itself on the poem’s form and content, and how the language not only manifests but also enacts her PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) symptoms, and even induces them in the reader.

Evelyn Scott, first christened Elsie Dunn, was born in Clarksville, Tennessee in 1893 to Maude Thomas and Seely Dunn. Her mother’s side of the family was well established gentry in Clarksville, but they were relatively poor. As Dorothy Scura notes, “Although she entered this world in the large, white, imposing mansion of her maternal grandparents, she and her parents lived in a small cottage in Clarksville, and the family moved frequently, eventually settling in

New Orleans, where her paternal grandparents lived, when Elsie was a teenager” (xiii). In New Orleans, she attended the Sophie Newcomb Preparatory School, the Sophia Newcomb Art School, and Tulane. In 1913, she abruptly dropped out of Tulane and eloped with the dean of Tulane’s School of Tropical Medicine, Frederick Ceighton Wellman, who was then married to another woman (Maun *Collection* xxix). Elsie and Frederick re-named themselves Evelyn Scott and Cyril Kay Scott and journeyed to Brazil, where they spent over five years before returning to the United States in 1919. They settled with their son Jig, born in Brazil, in New York City, where Evelyn spent the majority of her adult life (Scura xi). Cyril divorced her in 1928; she married English writer William John Metcalfe in 1930. Her southern upbringing, exile in Brazil, and life in the city inspired her writing.

Evelyn Scott began publishing her work during her time in Brazil, but her career started to take off once she settled in New York City. Over the span of her career, Scott published in a multitude of literary forms, including poetry, novels, short stories, drama, autobiography, and literary criticism. She embarked on her career as a poet and published a few poems in literary magazines like *Poetry* and *The Dial* (Maun *Collection* xxxi), before publishing *Precipitations* in 1920, a volume of imagist poems largely drawn from her experience living in Brazil and New York City. Her first volume of poetry was largely well received by critics. Lola Ridge, writing for *Poetry*, begins her review, “I shall not forget the sensation—something like the suppressed excitement that you feel at the first inkling of some momentous event—with which I first read some of these poems” (*Poetry* 334). Ridge continues, “These poems show an astonishing and essentially modern awareness” (*Poetry* 336). Ridge was not alone in her praise of *Precipitations*; as Maun notes, critics like Mark Van Doren of *Nation* and Padriac Colum of *New Republic* also found her work noteworthy and modern (57-58). However, her success as a poet was soon

overshadowed by her flourishing career as a novelist. Between 1921 and 1941, Scott published twelve novels; several of them, namely *The Narrow House* (1921) and *The Wave* (1929), became popular and received critical acclaim during and after her lifetime. As Caroline Maun notes, “*The Wave*, a best-seller, became Scott’s most critically acclaimed work, and it remains important in literary history in part because of its tremendously ambitious structure. Composed of many short-story length vignettes, the novel focuses on the Civil War as an event that affects nearly a hundred lives” (*Collection* xxx). Overall, the first ten years of her career were marked by success. Karen Overbye, a scholar studying the critical reception of Scott’s work, sums up this early period by saying,

From her first novel, she was hailed as an important writer, and most critics were impressed with her work, writing which was usually experimental and strongly critical of the dominant ideologies of gender, race, and class. Critics described her and her works as “original,” “intelligent,” “brilliant,” and even, on occasion, as “genius.” (qtd. in Scrura xvi)

However, despite her critical success and relative popularity in her first ten years, her fame reached its peak with the success of *The Wave*, and then started to decline steadily throughout the rest of her life. Although she continued to publish, she could never again gain a foothold with American readers or literary critics.

Her fame and the attention on her writings had completely faded by the time she died in 1963 (White 4). Scholars attribute Scott’s exile from literary studies to several factors. The conditions of the American economy, political scene, and literary world at the time of Scott’s career were part of the problem. Immediately after Scott became a best-seller and critically acclaimed writer with *The Wave*, the Great Depression hit the United States and hurt the careers

of many writers. As White acknowledges, publishing houses wanted to publish what could sell, not what had greater literary value (235). The political climate made things even worse for Scott, who rebelled against what she saw as “communist dictation of the arts” and thereby fell out of favor with much of the publishing world (Wheeler 376). Gender politics also contributed to her demise. In “Gendering Genius,” Karen Overbye argues that the sexism in the literary world kept Scott’s work on the periphery and kept her from being integrated into the American literary canon (qtd. in Scura xvi). Like Overbye, Scura cites sexism as a major factor, and also points to the censorship problems Scott faced while trying to publish “graphic and frank” explorations of female sexuality, pregnancy, and childbirth to a literary community and American public who viewed such things as scandalous (xvii).

Scott’s personality and personal life added to her difficulty in claiming a lasting place in literary history. According to Scura, Scott was often hostile toward publishers and editors: “She was inflexible with regard to her writing, not open to criticism or suggestion, and she frequently blamed the publisher if a book did not sell well” (xvii). Beyond the problems posed by the literary community and the American readership, Scott’s career was also bogged down by the problems she faced in her personal life, including frequent illness, poverty, and rootlessness, all of which brought instability into her working life (Scura xviii). As White notes, Scott also battled mental illness: “Beginning with her stormy adolescence, she experienced chronic bouts of major depression. Doomed love affairs, alcohol and drug use, several suicide attempts, and other patterns of destructive behavior suggest that a personality disorder may have made her life an emotional roller coaster” (3-4). Her struggles with mental illness caused her literary reputation to become “buried under the lurid details of her demise” (White 4).

In recent years, a few scholars have tried to recover Scott from literary exile. Two biographies have been published: D.A. Callard's *Pretty Good for a Woman: The Enigmas of Evelyn Scott* (1985) and Mary Wheeling White's *Fighting the Current* (1998). Of the two biographies, White offers a more comprehensive account of Scott's life and work, and the personal and professional circumstances that affected her writing career and hurt her legacy. Similar to White, Karen Overbye in "Gendering Genius" (1994) investigates Scott's literary reputation and other factors that negatively impacted her ability to publish and forge a lasting writing career. In addition to these biographical works, there have been a few pieces that focus exclusively on Scott's literary works; the majority of which have focused on her prose. Two volumes on women's literature of the South each contain a piece about Scott: in *Southern Women Novelists and the Civil War* (2014), Sharon Talley writes about Scott's Civil War novel *The Wave*; and in *The History of Southern Women's Literature* (2002), Mary Wheeling (White) gives a brief overview of Scott's Southern heritage and work. Both of these works help further Scott's legacy through interjecting her into existing conversations about Southern and Civil War literature. In *Evelyn Scott: Recovering a Lost Modernist* (2001), the most comprehensive recovery project to date, Dorothy Scura and Paul C. Jones gather together scholarly works about Scott's writings in an effort to awaken the critical conversation and establish her again as a central figure of American modernism. Section I in this collection focuses on Scott's autobiographical works, *Escape* and *Background in Tennessee*, and section II focuses on her fiction, including her major work *The Wave*, as well as her more minor works, like *Migrations* and *The Golden Door*. The final section examines more of Scott's prose, including her plays, short stories, and nonfiction. While this collection has done much to recover Scott's work, it has

avored prose over poetry and left much work to be done in the conversation about Scott as a poet.

To date, Caroline Maun is the only scholar who has published on Scott's poetry. Hers is the only piece in the collection that focuses on poetry, "The Loneliness That Sings': Evelyn Scott's *Precipitations*," which she later reworked and republished in *Mosaic of Fire: The Work of Lola Ridge, Evelyn Scott, Charlotte Wilder, and Kay Boyle* (2012), a book that illuminates the social network of several modernists. In her analysis of *Precipitations* (1920), Scott's first book of poetry, Maun argues that Scott critiques modern culture through depicting the forces and urges in the modern world that threaten rational thought, such as "maternal instinct, mob violence, and narcissism" (165). According to Maun, Scott also develops in this work a trademark persona, the "isolated self, who sees the world from the standpoint of an outsider (163). This persona is detached from what she sees, distant from people, wary of unthinking crowds, and anxious in city spaces (164-168). Maun sees these qualities as part of Scott's technique in capturing "the isolation of individuals and their control by natural urges within the framework of civilization" (166); however, she does not pursue where the speaker's distant and fearful perspective comes from. As I will demonstrate, through the speaker's paranoia, anxiety, and agoraphobia in city spaces, Scott presents the traumatized mindset of a person who has faced real, rather than philosophical or figurative threats. In my analysis of "Manhattan," the first section of *Precipitations*, I will show how the poems read as a trauma narrative told from the perspective of someone who has already been attacked and violated in a crowd and is now viewing the site of her traumatic event, the city, as a haunted and horrifying place, primed for a resurgence of violence. Her experience of urban exile lies in the fact that the assault she suffered

in the city stays with her and coats the urban environment, destroying her ability to feel safe or free there.

Trauma and Literary Studies

The scholarly discourse surrounding trauma, Trauma Studies, began to develop in the 1990s, a few years after post-traumatic stress disorder was included in the DSM for the first time (Whitehead 4). The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition* (DSM-5) defines trauma as “exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence”; this exposure can be direct or indirect, as in the case of witnessing or learning about a traumatic event second-hand (American Psychiatry Association “Posttraumatic Stress Disorder”). Leading the interdisciplinary conversation about trauma was the so-called “Yale School,” consisting of Geoffrey Hartman, Shoshana Felman, and Cathy Caruth, each of whom sought to apply the developing medical and psychological theories about trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder while examining textual representations of trauma.¹⁴ Their contributions helped develop models for analyzing trauma narratives and also brought about a question which remains central to discussions of trauma texts: to what extent can trauma be represented? Since the development of Trauma Studies, two camps have emerged in response to this question: those who believe trauma can and cannot be represented. Members of the Yale School and other early theorists seem to align with Caruth, who argues that the traumatic event is “not precisely known in the first instance” (*Unclaimed Experience* 4); therefore, because the experience of traumatic events blocks the victim’s ability to know and process the event while it is occurring, it severely impedes his or her ability to represent that event afterward. It is as if trauma creates a black hole

¹⁴ See Felman’s *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992), Hartmann’s “On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies” (1995), and Caruth’s *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995) and *Unclaimed Experience* (1996).

in memory and experience. In contrast, more recent scholars, like Michelle Balaev, claim that trauma is not always unspeakable because every individual's experience of trauma is different, and not everyone's meaning making ability is stalled at the moment of trauma; therefore there is "active potential for meaning in the moment of harm" (Balaev 6). The majority of recent trauma scholars ascribe to this pluralistic trauma model, as Balaev calls it; as a result, the analysis of representations of trauma has gained ground in literary studies.

Several literary scholars, including Laurie Vickroy in *Trauma and Survival* (2002) and Anne Whitehead in *Trauma Fiction* (2004), have analyzed trauma narratives to better understand how the experience of trauma impacts the form and content of the text. For instance, Whitehead shows how trauma narratives tend to incorporate a nonlinear structure, which manifests trauma's disruption of time and memory. Also, both Vickroy and Whitehead describe the haunting atmosphere that characterizes many trauma narratives. In *Shattered Subjects* (1998), Suzette Henke brings the literary conversation to women's life-writing. She shows how trauma causes fragmentation within the subject and the narrative, but that the act of writing helps the subject achieve some degree of reassembly, cohesion, or healing: "The act of life-writing serves as its own testimony and, in so doing, carries through the work of reinventing the shattered self as a coherent subject capable of meaningful resistance to received ideologies and of effective agency in the world" (Henke xv). As Henke's work demonstrates, there are many points of connection between women's history and literature, and trauma; yet, surprisingly, Women's Studies and Trauma Studies have not typically come together. In their recent book, *Trauma Narratives and Herstory* (2013), Sonya Andermahr and Silvia Pellicer-Ortin start the process of forging more connections between the two disciplines through analyzing representations of female trauma in texts by and about women. They speak to a range of traumatic experiences, including "loss,

incest, rape and sexual assault, murder, torture, racial discrimination and injustice, migration and dislocation, and the Holocaust”; and they discuss several genres, including fiction, film, and graphic novels (Andermahr and Pellicer-Ortin 5).

As the aforementioned sample of criticism demonstrates, much of the existing scholarship about literary representations of trauma has been about fiction and nonfiction; poetry, especially women’s poetry, has largely been left out of the conversation. Two books have attempted to remedy this, Walter Kalaidjian’s *The Edge of Modernism* (2006) and Dale Tracy’s *With the Witnesses* (2017); however, they focus more on public trauma and the witness position, rather than survivor’s accounts of private trauma. In this chapter, I bring the modernist conversation on trauma to poetic depictions of the survivor’s experience. I analyze Scott’s “Manhattan” as the story of one woman’s sexual assault in a crowd in the city and reveal the way that experience inflects her subsequent experience of the urban space.

Overview of Trauma Symptoms in “Manhattan”

Scott begins *Precipitations* with a section of poems set in New York City entitled “Manhattan,” which contains two cycles or subsections, “The Unpeopled City” followed by “Crowds.” The poems are set in numerous locations in and around Manhattan, from the Brooklyn Bridge to the more natural spaces, like the Hudson River and Central Park. All of the poems in “Manhattan” can be read with the same speaker in mind: a woman who has been traumatized after being attacked in a crowd of people and raped by one or more men. As the speaker in “Manhattan” experiences and describes the city, Scott signals how her traumatic experience haunts everything she sees and every place she goes. As a result of being physically attacked and sexually assaulted, the speaker experiences symptoms consistent with Post-

Traumatic Stress Disorder. According to the DSM's description, PTSD symptoms include the following:

“Avoidance of stimuli associated with the traumatic event(s)”—including thoughts and emotions, as well as people, places, etc., “recurrent, involuntary, and intrusive distressing memories of the traumatic event(s),” “flashbacks,” persistent negative expectations such as “The world is completely dangerous,” “persistent negative emotional state (e.g., fear, horror...),” “feelings of detachment or estrangement,” “hypervigilance,” “exaggerated startle response,” and “persistent or recurrent experiences of unreality of surroundings,” a.k.a. “derealization.” (DSM-5 “PTSD”)

The speaker's avoidance manifests in her effort to stay away from crowds. Psychologists identify fear of crowds, or agoraphobia, as a common symptom of PTSD in rape victims, as well as a predictive factor of chronic PTSD (Darves-Bornoz, et al. “Predictive Factors”). In order to cope with this fear, the speaker tries to imagine the city without people in the first cycle of poems aptly named, “The Unpeopled City”; however, she reveals a constant preoccupation with people as she frequently personifies her surroundings. As the inanimate city morphs into crowds of violent and haunting people, Scott illustrates the overwhelming reality of agoraphobia, paranoia, and “derealization.” In this first cycle, Scott also captures the speaker's hypervigilance and fear of bodily harm, as well as her “persistent negative emotional state,” specifically horror, by establishing an ominous sense of looming danger through breaking into otherwise serene moments with images of death, pain, and broken bodies. As violence and death break into these moments, we see the speaker experiencing flashbacks. The speaker's fears escalate throughout the cycle as she feels the approach of the crowd. In the next cycle, “Crowds,” the speaker gives

her account of the traumatic event. She captures her experience of being devoured by a crowd both visually, through their inescapable gaze, and physically through being swarmed, physically attacked, and sexually violated. As this section concludes, the speaker lays on the ground bleeding and coming in and out of consciousness, an image that signals the severity of the threats facing women in cities. This is the traumatic encounter that haunts her every move in the city and coats her lyrical snapshots of the city in a layer of horror. She waits to reveal this until the very end of this section of poems because revisiting it causes her distress; she discloses it and endures the emotional pain in doing so because she wishes to warn others about the threat, so that they can avoid a similar fate.

Scott's use of form emphasizes the way the speaker's traumatized state of mind inflects her experience of the city. Mostly all of the poems in "Manhattan" are short lyrics, averaging between six and ten lines each. Scott consistently uses free verse, but also includes a few instances of poetic meter and rhyme to add emphasis to key moments. Through these imagistic snapshots, Scott captures brief moments in various spaces throughout Manhattan. The brevity in these moments speaks to the fact that the speaker does not want to linger in these spaces for long because she does not feel safe. Scott also captures the detachment from people through the way she does not speak to or directly engage people in the city. Additionally, the speaker hardly ever brings her self into these poems through first-person references, demonstrating how she wants to view these scenes from a safe distance, while remaining as hidden as possible. She also hardly ever draws attention to her body in her lyrics, which underscores how her trauma has resulted in her wanting to both conceal and protect her body constantly, so as to avoid another attack.

The Haunted and “Unpeopled” City

Despite the title, “The Unpeopled City,” people are the unspoken main subject of this cycle. In these poems, the speaker tries to envision the city without people and simply focus on the city setting, itself. However, due to her mental fixation on crowds, she sees people in things: street lights, trees, houses, and the moon. Her meditations on different locations in the city often begin with bright, serene imagery, but soon become dark and horrifying, as images of death and violence. Scott begins this cycle with “Midnight Worship: Brooklyn Bridge,” in which the speaker’s meditation on the famous landmark turns dark and hellish as she envisions a crowd marching to their death. As the mindless mass marches toward death, Scott reveals how the speaker’s fear of the crowd is linked to conformity and death of individuality. For the speaker, the city is a breeding ground for crowds and, thus, a constant threat to her individuality, as well as her body. The poem begins,

In the rain
Rows of street lamps are saints in bright garments
That flow long with the bend of knees.
They lift pale heads nimbussed with golden spikes. (1-4 “Midnight Worship:
Brooklyn Bridge”)

The image of the Brooklyn Bridge lit up against the night sky makes the city seem peaceful and inviting, like a beacon of light. Streetlights are transformed into “saints in bright garments” with halos of “golden” light emanating from their heads; they appear to float along “with the bend of knees,” as if in an attitude of prayerful reverence. The speaker not only personifies the setting, but also sanctifies it, imbuing it with a holy and spiritual quality. On one level, this treatment of the Brooklyn Bridge suggests the speaker is in awe of the scene and has, herself, a holy reverence toward it. However, beneath this angelic, holy surface lies something darker. Even though saints are traditionally associated with positivity, here they usher in the theme of

mortality and link the city with death; saints are, after all, sanctified through their earthly death. The description of their halos “nimbussed with golden spikes” characterizes them as sharp and penetrative, like crowns of thorns, and, thereby, sets these saints up as people who have died violent deaths. The images of these saints signify not only the speaker’s traumatic past, but the violent deaths of other city dwellers. For the speaker, every part of the city is haunted by these images of death.

Scott also uses this heavenly surface to set up a shock of contrast to the next part of the poem. Scott often uses a duality of opposites in her city poetry in order to engineer moments of surprise. After bringing readers into the bright, heavenly scene, Scott emphasizes the darkness underlying it:

Up the lanes of liquid onyx
Toward the high fire-laden altars
Move the saints of Manhattan
In endless pilgrimage to death,
Amidst the asphodel and anemones of dawn. (5-9 “Midnight Worship: Brooklyn Bridge”)

She immediately contrasts the light in the first stanza with the darkness of the streets, the “lanes of liquid onyx.” In contrast to the sanctified street lamps, these streets are infernal, like rivers of volcanic material, able to burn up anything in their path. Scott adds to this hellish imagery with “high fire-laden altars,” which sets aflame the scene of “Midnight Worship,” thus, reorienting the march toward the holy altar, with a march into the fires of hell. As the poem ends the speaker makes it clear that this saintly mass is headed on an “endless pilgrimage to death / Amidst the asphodel and anemones of dawn.” Although the final line seems to bring levity through flower imagery, the flowers themselves carry added death and darkness. In Greek mythology, asphodels signify the Asphodel Meadows, part of the Greek underworld (Reece). Thus, in this poem,

asphodels mark a path to death. Also lining this path to death are anemones, flowers that connote death, but more specifically imply bloodshed. According to Greek mythology, after Adonis' death, these blood-red flowers sprouted from his blood (Daly 3). In the asphodels and anemones, we see the speaker's preoccupation with death, but, specifically, death through blood-shed.

The speaker also fears the conformity of crowds; thus, she often connects crowds with not only death, but death of individuality. Scott uses the religious frame of the poem, and other poems in this cycle, to help build a theme of conformity. The title, "Midnight Worship," suggests conforming to religious rituals and sacrificing the self to something bigger. Scott also builds the theme of conformity through the image of the saints. She describes "rows" of saints (1), conveying the sense that they are not individuals, but a well organized mass, like soldiers in a formation following the lead of the person in front of them. These saints dress the same, in "bright garments," and move as one: together, "They lift pale heads" and flow "in endless pilgrimage to death" (2-4 and 8). Their individuality no longer exists; they look, think, and act as one. For the speaker, this mass of saints demonstrates the danger of crowds and conformity as they mindlessly process toward death, after sacrificing their individuality at the "fire-laden altars" (6).

In the next poem in this cycle, "Ascension: Autumn Dusk in Central Park," Scott continues to capture the speaker's anxiety in city spaces through the way her mind interjects her fears into her meditations on the city. As the speaker describes an evening in Central Park, she imbues the scene with her fears about crowds, conformity, and death. The first stanza reads,

Featureless people glide with dim motion through a quivering blue silver;
Boats merge with the bronze-gold welters about their keels.
The trees float upward in gray and green flames.
Clouds, swans, boats, trees, all gliding up a hillside

After some gray old women who lift their gaunt forms

From falling shrouds of leaves. (1-6 “Ascension: Autumn Dusk in Central Park”)

In the first line, people enter the “Unpeopled City” for the first time; notably, they are not individuals with unique characteristics, but rather “Featureless people,” who look and act the same. Their lack of features highlights the speaker’s belief that they have each lost their individuality while becoming part of the crowd. Their featurelessness also indicates how the speaker views them from a distance, so as not to become just another faceless member. Scott continues to build this theme of conformity through the repetition of plural subjects who are all engaged in the same activity. Man-made objects and natural entities exhibit this uniformity: “Boats merge,” “Trees float upward,” and “Clouds, swans, boats, trees, all gliding up a hillside.” Similarly, the “gray old women” also move in unison as they “lift their gaunt forms.” Each part of the scene engages in an upward motion—“float upward,” “all gliding up,” etc.—that contributes to the “Ascension” of the collective scene.

Although this image of all entities, human and nonhuman, moving together as one conveys harmony and cooperation, Scott signals the presence of chaos, decay, and death, once again linking conformity to death. She conveys the theme of death using entities that are diminishing or decaying. We see this in the image of the old women: “some gray old women, who lift their gaunt forms / From falling shrouds of leaves” (5-6). Scott emphasizes death and decay through the time-worn bodies of the women and the leaves that are slowly burying them. She also does this through contrasting the rising motion with falling. The poem is set at dusk, when the sun is falling in the sky, and during fall, a season of natural decomposition. The image of the boats adds to the falling motion, as “the bronze-gold welters about their keels” suggests the rising and falling of waves (2). “Welters” also serves as a noun signaling a state of turmoil or chaos within the scene. Additionally, “welters” ushers in the word “welt,” a mark of illness or

injury, and the idea of bodily harm. “Quivering” adds to this unsettling atmosphere, indicating instability or even pain (1). The “gray and green flames” enhance the infernal imagery of “Midnight Worship: Brooklyn Bridge,” while adding a note of destruction or volatility to the landscape. Thus, although all of these entities rising as one, they also fall into chaos, flames, and death. In this way, Scott reveals the speaker’s fear of conformity and her inability to experience the city without thoughts of death.

As the poem proceeds, it becomes darker and more overtly horrifying, and the theme of death becomes more pronounced. The second stanza reads,

Thin fingered twigs clutch darkly at nothing.
Crackling skeletons shine.
Along the smutted horizon of Fifth Avenue
The hooded houses watch heavily
With oily gold eyes. (7-11 “Ascension: Autumn Dusk in Central Park”)

Scott uses form and content to build the theme of decay and death. As the poem progresses from one stanza to the next, it shrinks: stanza two is one line shorter than stanza one, and it has shorter lines. Similar to the first stanza, stanza two contains images of death and decay alongside images of conformity, plural subjects acting in unison. The trees have lost their leaves and seem to reach out “at nothing,” further highlighting their state of lack. The phrase “clutch darkly” implies something evil or deviant about them, and shows the speaker’s fearful state. “Crackling skeletons” conveys the image of the stripped trees, but also reveals the speaker’s fixation on death. The addition of “shine” suggests that there is something radiant about this deathly image. Perhaps the speaker is captivated by the scene, even though it also scares her. Although there are no people mentioned in this stanza, the speaker sees them everywhere, in the personified trees, the “crackling skeletons,” and the houses that “watch heavily / With oily gold eyes.” Her paranoia about crowds causes her to personify everything, and her fear about crowds imbues the

images with death and horror. She is simultaneously afraid of and fascinated by them, and her experience of the city is profoundly affected by them.

In the next poem, “Startled Forests: Hudson River,” the speaker seeks solace in nature, away from the more populous areas of the Brooklyn Bridge and Central Park. However, she finds the natural landscape haunted by images of death and violence. After experiencing the horrifying scene at Central Park with its “crackling skeletons” and “shrouds of leaves” slowly burying the gaunt old women, the speaker carries her unsettled state of mind into this scene at the Hudson River. The term “Startled” indicates the fear she still feels as she views this scene. She projects this fear onto the landscape and its personified forests. “Startled” also foreshadows a disturbance, the idea that these woods hold something shocking. The poem begins,

The thin hill pushes against the mist.
Its fading defiance sounds in the umber and red of autumn leaves.
Like a dead arm around a warm throat
Is the sagging embrace of the river
Laid grayly about the shore. (1-5 “Startled Forests: Hudson River”)

Similar to “Midnight Worship: Brooklyn Bridge,” this poem begins with a seemingly serene and beautiful image. As the “hill pushes against the mist,” Scott echoes the rising imagery of “Ascension: Autumn Dusk in Central Park.” On one level, this image of the hill with “fading defiance” trying to peak through the mist evokes a hopeful feeling of persistence, a determination to rise above impediments. On another level, the image ushers in a theme of death and violence, a fight to the death. At the center of this image is “thin hill” with its “fading defiance,” yet another body wasting away, like the gaunt old women and the skeletal trees. Scott uses the unusual description “pushes against” to allow this natural image to signify a fight. As the speaker looks at the mist surrounding the hill, she sees herself being surrounded and

overpowered by a crowd in the city. Her fear of crowds and bodily harm interrupts her experience of nature by encoding everything she sees in human violence. Her fear also changes how she hears nature. She says, “Its fading defiance sounds in the umber and red of autumn leaves.” Her state of mind has changed the sound of leaves rustling into the sound of futility, the sound of the single, thin hill losing its fight against the larger mass.

After this foreshadowing, Scott abruptly brings in a more direct reference to death and violence: “Like a dead arm around a warm throat” (3). With this line, Scott breaks any illusion of serenity and forces our attention toward a dead human body. The directness of this line contrasts with the more muted foreshadowing of the first image and causes a shock, the one hinted at by the “Startled Forests.” Scott often builds in shocking moments of horror and death into her poems in this cycle; for instance, the “crackling skeletons” in “Ascension.” These shocking moments are meant to induce fear and anxiety in readers, allowing them to experience the city the way the speaker does. After experiencing these shocking moments, readers may experience a persistent unsettling, paranoia that follows them into each new lyric, the kind of feeling the speaker carries with her in the city. With this image of the “dead arm around a warm throat,” Scott adds to the implicit theme of a fight to the death. The language implies a person dying while trying to strangle another person, as if the person being strangled killed the other person. In this dead arm, Scott reveals the fate of the “thin hill” and its “fading defiance.” As the poem continues, we learn what this disturbing simile refers to: “the sagging embrace of the river / Laid grayly about the shore” (4-5). This simile tells us more about the speaker than the landscape. The strength of her imagination allows her to come up with a highly unusual description for the river flowing through the city. However, her imagination also feeds off her paranoia and fear, turning an otherwise peaceful scene into a crime scene. She can find no relief, not even in nature.

In “From Brooklyn,” a poem in the latter half of this cycle, the speaker feels the crowd drawing nearer to her. As she feels them approaching her, her fear of becoming trapped and her desire for protection become apparent:

Along the shore
A black net of branches
Tangles the pulpy yellow lamps.
The shell-colored sky is lustrous with the fading sun.
Across the river Manhattan floats—
Dim gardens of fire—
And rushing invisible toward me through the fog,
A hurricane of faces. (“From Brooklyn”)

As the title indicates, the speaker views crowd-filled Manhattan “From Brooklyn.” The speaker’s desire for protection manifests in her location “Across the river” from Manhattan. She finds protection in the distance between her and the crowd, and also from the river between them. Her desire for protection comes through in the image of the “shell-colored sky.” This unusual description signals her anxiety about being attacked by the approaching crowd and her desire to shield herself in a layer of protection. From a relatively protected vantage point in Brooklyn, she focuses her attention on the landscape around her. However, while describing the shore of the East River, her fears come through in images of ensnarement. She mentions a “black net of branches / Tangles the pulpy yellow lamps,” as she thinks about being trapped by the crowd. “Tangles” denotes not only a feeling of ensnarement, but also confusion, a feeling commonly brought on by being surrounded by a mass of people. To the speaker, being caught in a crowd means a state of both physical and mental debilitation. Additionally, this is a moment in which we see the speaker’s claustrophobia converging with her agoraphobia, both common symptoms of PTSD. This image of the net of trees maps claustrophobia onto the riverside. Natural places

commonly associated with openness and broad vistas, like the Central Park and the Hudson River, become ensnaring nets. They sensorily become places that feel confining and dense with fog; and they drift upward disorientingly. For someone mapping the experience of sexual violence on the city, there is no refuge or safe space, no place to run.

Her fears about the crowd also manifest in the darkness setting in around her. The sun is setting and the sky is pale: “shell-colored sky is lustrous with the fading sun.” The soft light of the “pulpy yellow lamps” is being obstructed by the “black net of branches.” Amongst the darkness in Brooklyn, the lights of Manhattan stand out as “Dim gardens of fire.” The speaker specifies that the light in populous Manhattan is a beautiful, floral light, but a light that nonetheless burns. The duality in this description represents how the speaker is both fascinated and frightened by masses of people. The infernal quality of city light echoes her earlier description of the “high fire-laden altars” on which the “saints of Manhattan” sacrificed their individuality on their “endless pilgrimage to death” (6-8 “Midnight Worship: Brooklyn Bridge”). The infernal light emanating from Manhattan signals the terrifying presence of a mass of people living a life of conformity, bound for death.

Looking across the river to Manhattan, she sees the crowd and feels chaos and destruction bearing down upon her: “And rushing invisible toward me through the fog, / A hurricane of faces” (7-8). “Rushing” signifies how she believes the crowd moves with speed and urgency, as if in an emergency or an attack. She panics knowing that the crowd moves quickly and is, therefore, hard to escape. “Toward me” reveals how she is the sole target of this speeding mass of people. This is one of the rare moments when the speaker uses first-person pronouns and enters the space of the poem more visibly. Scott spares these first-person moments to make each one stand out and to clearly draw attention to the speaker in relation to the moments she enters.

Here, the use of “toward me” emphasizes her vulnerability and singularity as an individual as opposed to the mass of people in the crowd. She wants to retain her individuality and not lose it to the crowd, which, to her, represents conformity. She describes the crowd as “invisible,” revealing that she cannot yet see them, but she knows they are there coming straight for her. Here again Scott emphasizes her state of paranoia and hypervigilance; she constantly feels the threatening presence of crowds, even when she cannot see them. Her experience of the city is haunted by terrifying masses of people. The crowd also remains invisible to her at this moment because of a layer of fog that has settled on the city. As the crowd moves “through the fog,” Scott reconnects with the image of the mist surrounding and overwhelming the “thin hill,” from “Startled Forests: Hudson River” (1). In this moment, she feels herself awaiting a similar fate, being engulfed by a moving mass. Then, finally in the last line, we see the crowd: “A hurricane of faces” (8). The speaker dehumanizes the people in the crowd by turning them into a storm; she sees them not as individuals, but as one swirling mass. To her, the crowd has the destructive power, vastness, and chaos of a hurricane. She feels powerless as it barrels toward her.

The final two lines of this poem resemble Ezra Pound’s famous imagistic snapshot of city life, “In a Station of the Metro” (1913). Scott’s reference to Pound’s poem enables us to see put these poems into direct comparison and see the fundamental difference between a woman’s traumatized perspective of the city and a privileged male’s. Side by side, these poems bear a striking resemblance:

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;	And rushing invisible toward me through the fog,
Petals on a wet, black bough. (Pound)	A hurricane of faces. (Scott)

Both poets use an imagistic approach by trying to capture a brief moment vividly, without using superfluous descriptions, and by using the rhythm of everyday speech, rather than a strict, metrical structure. Both poets use a long/short line length pattern, with seven words in the short

line. In terms of content, these poems deal with “faces in the crowd,” and the idea that the crowd is both simultaneously visible and invisible. Pound’s use of “apparition” makes the crowd seem like they are rushing toward the speaker, like the crowd in Scott’s poem. Both of their respective speakers dehumanize the crowd through naturalizing it: Pound’s speaker likens the crowd to flowers and Scott’s uses the metaphor of a hurricane. In these metaphors for the crowd lies the main difference between these poems. “Petals on a wet, black bough” casts the crowd in a beautiful and tragic light: beautiful, in that, they are flower petals, but tragic because they are cut off from their life source after falling from their stems and landing at the base of a tree. Thus, Pound’s speaker views the crowd with admiration for its beauty, but sadness at the fleeting nature of the life they lead. In contrast, Scott’s speaker views the crowd as a threatening and chaotic force aiming straight for her. While Pound draws from the picturesque, Scott draws from the sublime. Perhaps this difference is due to the gender of their respective speakers. Pound’s male speaker is able to face the crowd and contemplate the wider human condition because he has not been victimized by crowds; whereas Scott’s female speaker has awakened to the danger of crowds through being violated by them.

In one of the final poems of this cycle, Scott symbolically lays to rest all of the suffering, diminishing, and dead bodies scattered about these poems in, appropriately, a potter’s field. “Potter’s Field” is set in New York City’s potter’s field, better known as Hart Island, a mass burial ground for the city’s unclaimed dead. According to Hart’s Island historians Melinda Hunt and Joel Sternfeld, this small island off the coast of Manhattan, purchased in 1869, has served as the final resting place for criminals, Confederate soldiers, still-born babies, minorities, the poor, and the homeless, and anyone who has died without being identified or claimed by family. Prisoners from Riker’s Island maintain the grounds and bury the bodies in mass graves with

bodies stacked three people deep. These people are buried without individual headstones; the only markings above ground are small posts with numbers that serve organizing, rather than memorializing purposes. Until 2013, visitors were prohibited; even families of the dead were barred from visiting their loved ones there. In addition to its main function, the island has also been the site of a prison facility, an asylum, a contagious disease hospital, and more recently, a rehabilitation center (Hunt and Sternfeld 19-28). In many ways, this island has long been less of a cemetery and more of a dumping ground for outcasts, bodies that the city chews up and spits out. Here, where the casualties of the city are buried in a nameless pile, Scott fittingly sets one of the final poems in “The Unpeopled City.” This setting embodies several of the cycle’s main threads. For one, the mass burial ground highlights the theme of death and also brings all of the figurative death to a more concrete manifestation. This place not only symbolizes death, but also dehumanization because it is a place where human bodies are treated like waste and reduced to a number on a post. This method of burial embodies the loss of individuality that the speaker fears. The people buried here are stripped of their names and stories, separated from their loved ones, and marked not as one, but as one of many. In this potter’s field, the speaker sees her deepest fears about the city and crowds realized.

Like many poems in “Manhattan,” “Potter’s Field” begins with a seemingly positive image that soon morphs into something violent and dark. The poem begins,

Golden petals, honey sweet,
Crushed beneath fear-hastened feet... (1-2 “Potter’s Field”)

Scott sets up yet another moment of shock with the pairing of these lines. The first line ushers in brightness and sensory pleasure that sets off the poem with an upbeat tone. Immediately after, the second line shatters the illusion of peace as the onrushing crowd crushes the flowers. Scott builds in this moment of shock to induce fear and anxiety in the reader, and to establish a

haunted and terrifying atmosphere around this scene. The method of violence here is key. The speaker envisions the flowers being trampled because she has thoughts of being trampled, herself, by crowds—a fear she brings up in the next cycle, “Crowds.” Fear-hastened feet conjures up earlier imagery of the crowd, the “hurricane of faces,” “rushing” toward the speaker (“From Brooklyn”). In the crushed flower petals, she sees a fate that haunts her, one she wishes to avoid. Here, Scott, in a rare moment, uses regular meter and rhyme, creating a rhyming couplet. The regular trochaic tetrameter of this couplet creates the sound of marching feet of the crowd trampling the flower petals. This is the sound of the death of not only beauty but also innocence. The flowers are harmless victims of the rushing onrushing mass. Adding to this soundscape is the exact rhyme of “sweet” and “feet.” The exact rhyme adds a feeling of resolution, symmetry, or harmony; and ending both lines on stressed words adds a rising effect to the lines, which carries a feeling of optimism. In this way, Scott builds shock into the poem by creating an optimistic, harmonious foundation that is crushed by violent content. Setting the soundtrack of this violent image to the tune of a nursery rhyme-like pattern makes this trampling scene all the more startling and unsettling.

The combination of the golden color, the “fear-hastening feet,” and the idea that the feet are marching on flower petals brings us back to the first poem of the cycle: the saints on their march to death over the “asphodels and anemones of dawn” (9 “Midnight Worship: Brooklyn Bridge”). By linking with this poem, Scott imbues this scene with its theme of crowds leading to death and death of individuality. Additionally, both of these poems also have a ceremonial air about them; alluding to “Midnight Worship” in this poem amplifies the ceremonial aspects of this poem. In “Potter’s Field,” the pairing of the title and the setting it invokes with the golden flowers in the opening line suggests an act of commemoration, as if flowers are being placed at a

burial site to honor the dead. As the flowers are then trampled, Scott represents the lack of a memorial for these bodies and the utter in dignity of being buried in this manner.

In the second stanza, the speaker continues her attempt to memorialize in order to re-humanize the nameless, unclaimed body in the potter's field.

Silver paper lanterns glow and shudder
In flat patterns
On a gray eternal face
Stained with pain. (3-6 "Potter's Field")

We see this memorializing in the first line with the "silver paper lanterns" shining. In American in the early 20th century, these paper lanterns had become a fad. In fact, paper lanterns appeared on the cover of *Vanity Fair* in 1916 and *The Green Book Magazine* in 1919, during the time Scott composed this poem (Schiller *rockwell-center.org*). Americans used them for a variety of reasons, but usually in order to celebrate something. Traditionally, the Chinese and Japanese use paper lanterns not only in celebration, but also to ward off evil. They appear at this burial ground perhaps to both celebrate the dead, but also protect the dead from dark forces. The meter of this line also accentuates the celebratory nature. The trochaic pentameter makes this moment feel harmonious and poetic. However, Scott emphasizes how this memorial falls apart with the inclusion of the word "shudder," which marks something wavering or fleeting about this ceremony. The meter of the word "shutter," with its first stressed and second unstressed syllable, makes this line fall at the very end, carrying with it a pessimistic or negative mood. After this, the meter stops completely, notably in the line "In flat patterns," which draws double emphasis to the break in the pattern. The disruption that's Scott builds into this memorial emphasizes the lack of memorial given to these unclaimed bodies that the city seems to dispose of. She identifies

with these people because she has experienced what it is like to be chewed up and spit out by the city, left to die.

In the final two lines, Scott shines a light on the dead person in order to rehumanize him or her and simultaneously draw attention to his or her cruel fate. She describes this person, saying, “On a gray eternal face / Stained with pain” (5-6). Scott highlights the loss of individuality of this person by not giving him or her a name, age, or gender. This “gray eternal face” could belong to many of the unclaimed dead of Hart Island. However, she also rehumanizes this person: first, by shining the light on his or her face, a person’s most humanizing feature, and second, by drawing attention to the suffering “stained” on that face. While this method of mass burial strips a person’s history from them, this stain of pain reclaims part of that lost history. Moreover, it is a detail which draws attention to the plight of other marginal people in cities, who often live lives full of suffering and pain, die, and then become yet another body in a pile of other disposable bodies. This encounter with a dead person marks a significant moment for the speaker. After the previous poems in which the speaker imagines dead bodies everywhere, in this moment she meets death face to face. Her experience of pain and suffering in the city makes her relate to this person. At the same time, as the “shudder(ing)” lantern indicates, she feels frightened because she sees in this dead person the material realization of her fears of violence and death in the city.

The Danger of “Crowds”

Scott follows “The Unpeopled City” with “Crowds,” the second and final cycle of “Manhattan.” This cycle begins with a few poems that metaphorically reflect frightening or dangerous aspects of the crowd, such as their powerful, invasive gaze. As the cycle progresses,

the distance between the speaker and the crowd continues to diminish, until the final three poems, in which she gives her account of her traumatic assault by the crowd. “New York,” the second poem in “Crowds,” reflects the speaker’s fear of being trampled by a crowd. Like in “From Brooklyn” when she turns the crowd into a “hurricane,” here she dehumanizes the crowd by turning them into elephants. The speaker’s description of the crowd as a trampling herd of elephants further establishes her feeling of vulnerability in city spaces. Here is the poem in full:

With huge diaphanous feet,
March the leaden velvet elephants,
Pressing the bodies back into the earth. (“New York”)

The speaker draws attention to feet because she fears being trampled by them. These “huge” feet signify the immense size of the elephants and also their power and strength. While the speaker thinks of the overwhelming magnitude of the crowd, she feels aware of her comparative smallness and weakness, which increase the threat of her being overrun. The unusual descriptor “diaphanous” adds the idea that the enormous crowd is also see-through or somehow present and absent at the same time. This reference to the crowd’s invisibility echoes the earlier reference, “And rushing invisible toward me through the fog, / A hurricane of faces” (7-8 “From Brooklyn”). In both instances, the speaker feels the crowd bearing down on her, but does not necessarily see them in front of her. Her experience of the city is haunted by the constant presence of a threatening crowd; she can never feel safe, knowing that at any moment they could swarm her. As the present-tense verb “March” indicates, they are actively moving now. She not only fears being physically overpowered by the crowd, but also losing her individuality. Using the word “March,” the speaker characterizes the unified movement of this threatening body. Here we see another iteration of the “saints of Manhattan / In endless pilgrimage to death” from “Midnight Worship: Brooklyn Bridge” (7-8). The crowd in both references moves as one body

after its many members have sacrificed their individuality at “high fire-laden altars” (6 “Midnight Worship: Brooklyn Bridge”).

As Scott reveals the subject of the poem, “the leaden velvet elephants,” she emphasizes the threat of trampling. “Leaden” carries with it both density and weight, indicating how the speaker associates them with a feeling of being weighed down upon. This density and weight of “leaden” seems to counteract the transparency and lightness of “diaphanous.” However, taken together, they present both the elusiveness and omnipresence of the crowd, along with their heavy material presence. The “velvet elephants” further enhance this feeling of heaviness and make the threat of being trampled easy to visualize. Using the tongue twister “leaden velvet elephants,” imbues the line with the feeling of being impeded, adding to the theme of being swarmed or trampled by a crowd. The repetition of the “eh” sound in this line is like the monotonous sound of the elephants feet marching in unison. After alluding to trampling, Scott overtly represents it with the final line, “Pressing the bodies back into the earth.” Here again, death enters the speaker’s mind. The crowd stomps multiple bodies into the ground, not only crushing them, but also burying them. “Back into the earth” also carries with it an idea of erasure, as if the crowd stomps people out of the city, entirely. This idea of erasure, combined with the image of crushing bodies, brings us back to “Potter’s Field,” with its unknown, unmemorialized dead and its flowers “crushed beneath fear-hastened feet” (2). Scott uses the form of this poem to visually represent people being trampled into the ground: she puts the bodies being crushed in the bottom line of the poem, under the elephants in the first two lines; in this way, the elephants actually press down on the bodies. Scott also builds in the effect of being buried through burying the subject of the sentence in layers of adjectives and an introductory clause. Although this poem clearly focuses on trampling crowds, Scott does not want us to lose

sight of the city itself. By calling this poem “New York,” Scott emphasizes that the experience of being overwhelmed, harmed, and erased by a crowd is, in itself, the experience of being in the city. To the speaker, this is what it feels like to live in New York.

In the next poem, “Sunset: Battery Park,” Scott transitions from the threat of trampling to that of the gaze. Scott sets this poem in Battery Park, which sits at the edge of Manhattan, at the place where the East River and the Hudson River meet. As its name indicates, Battery Park was once a military base established to protect New Amsterdam from incoming attacks; its positioning at the edge of the island offered a valuable vantage point that could help thwart attacks. In the nineteenth century, the park transitioned from being a military base to being a primary port for handling immigration. Later in the nineteenth century, Battery Park became more of a recreational area, with gardens, an aquarium, and a great view of the ocean and the Statue of Liberty (Kroessler).

In “Sunset: Battery Park,” the park’s famous vantage point becomes one that promotes an offensive, rather than a defensive gaze. The poem begins,

From cliffs of houses,
Sunlit windows gaze down upon me
Like undeniable eyes,
Millions of bronze eyes,
Unassailable,
Obliterating all they see: (1-6 “Sunset: Battery Park”)

The opening line establishes a sublime feeling of being dwarfed by “cliffs of houses.” The elevation of these houses adds range to their vantage points. While the sun sets and lights up the windows of these houses, the speaker imagines the windows as eyes that “gaze down upon” her. In this moment of personification, the speaker’s paranoia and frightening sense of visibility become apparent. She cannot be safe anywhere in the city because the city itself watches her

every move. The forcefulness of this gaze comes through in the speaker's simile, "Like undeniable eyes." The speaker feels she cannot escape this gaze. The speaker's language continues to escalate as she adds, "Millions of bronze eyes." For the speaker, the widespread nature of this gaze makes it all the more threatening. Here, she imagines the city as the crowd she has been trying to avoid. In this moment, she feels that crowd making contact with her through their gaze. She characterizes this gaze as "Unassailable," thereby signaling that it cannot be attacked; it is singularly offensive and aggressive in nature and there can be no retaliation. As signified by the one-word line and the comma, the speaker slows down in this moment because she feels the gravity of her state of powerlessness. She then describes the destructive power of this gaze, saying, "Obliterating all they see." Thus, to the speaker, this omniscient gaze means not only surveillance, but total annihilation; this gaze destroys things to the point at which there is nothing left. Similar to the stampeding elephants stomping "bodies back into the earth" (3 "New York"), the city's gaze erases people.

As the poem continues, the focus shifts to the crowd that has gathered in the park. The colon at the end of "Obliterating all they see:" suggests that the gaze is not only pointed at the speaker, but also this nearby crowd. The poem continues,

The warm contiguous crowd in the street below
Chills,
Mists,
Drifts past those hungry eyes of Eternity,
Melts seaward and deathward
To the ocean. (7-12 "Sunset: Battery Park")

This is a significant moment in "Manhattan" because it is the first time the speaker calls the crowd by name. Here, they are not figuratively embodied through personification; they are actually there. This is also a key moment because the crowd is close to the speaker. We see the

location of the speaker in relation to the crowd when she says, “The warm contiguous crowd in the street below.” Both the speaker and the crowd are in the park, under the gaze of the on-looking city. However, she does not place herself in the crowd because she is not directly in their midst; she observes them from outside. As “warm” indicates, although she is still separate from the crowd, she is close enough to feel their heat. Scott uses the warmth of this crowd to convey their embodied presence and to signal the body contact in the crowd that produces this heat. The speaker overtly mentions this contact by calling the crowd “contiguous.” The speaker immediately mentions this quality of the crowd because it is one of the most threatening to her; it leads to violation, entrapment, and even disease.

The language here alludes to the speaker’s fear of the crowd as a source of contagion. “Warm contiguous crowd” draws attention to her mindfulness of their close proximity and body temperature. She feels herself becoming surrounded by other bodies and the invisible, yet palpable impact those bodies exert on her. Through the sound of “contiguous,” Scott subtly alludes to contagious. “Chills” picks up on this theme of contagion by carrying the terror of being contaminated by a crowd of strangers and also the physical symptoms of chills that often accompany infection and other illness. Finally, through the verb “Mists,” the crowd becomes the airborne threat of disease itself, even more dangerous because of its ability to spread and penetrate into and infect bodies without being detected. Through bringing together Battery Park, mist, and the threat of contagion, Scott voices a common societal concern about water, fog, and mist in city parks spreading disease. According to Julia Daniel in *Building Natures* (2017), some people believed that the dampness in Central Park would “spread disease” (2). For the speaker, this threat of contagion caused by a moist park is made worse by the presence of the crowd pressing in on her.

As Scott connects the crowd to mist, she emphasizes how it has the quality of being a material presence, a sprawling mass, that you cannot grasp or control. Like the “undeniable” gaze of the city, the crowd cannot be thwarted by the speaker. The speaker continues, saying that the crowd “Melts seaward and deathward / To the ocean.” “Melts” conveys the destructiveness of the crowd’s heat and, implicitly, the crowd’s contiguousness, which the speaker finds threatening. As the crowd melts, it flows toward death, like the Manhattan saints in their “endless pilgrimage to death” (8 “Midnight Worship: Brooklyn Bridge”). By once again linking to this image, Scott emphasizes the crowd’s conformity that leads to the death of individuality. Conformity also comes through as the crowd is now a melting mass; its individual parts have fused together into one body.

The setting of this poem brings with it the possibility of another threat: entrapment. As Scott implies through the structure of the poem, Battery Park lies between the houses and buildings at the edge of Lower Manhattan and the ocean. The speaker’s description of the setting sun reflecting on the windows of the houses locates her in the park, between the houses and the water. The crowd is close to her moving toward the ocean. Through the setting and the location of the speaker and the crowd, Scott implies the possibility that the speaker may be in the crowd’s path, trapped between them and the ocean, with nowhere to run. The danger in this moment increases as the sun sets and darkness envelops the park, making it more difficult for the speaker to navigate around the incoming crowd. Also, as darkness sets in, the possibility of the speaker being physically harmed increases, while the possibility that someone will be able to see and intervene to help her decreases.

“Something monstrous and horrible”: The Speaker Discloses Her Violation

In the final three poems of “Manhattan,” the speaker reveals the traumatic event that profoundly shapes her daily experience of urban life. All of the poems leading up to this disclosure represent her experience of the city after the assault. After being physically attacked and sexually violated in the crowd, the city transforms into a haunted and anxiety-inducing space, ripe with potential for violence and death. These last three poems show us the roots of the speaker’s paranoia, agoraphobia, and constant thoughts of death and violence. She begins her narrative of this event in the poem “Crowds,” in which she relays her thoughts and the sensations she feels as she enters the crowd for the first time. In these first moments in the crowd before she is attacked, she feels the freeing anonymity of being lost in a sea of strangers and does not think of the potential risks involved in her actions. In the next poem “Riots,” her immersion in the crowd shifts from bringing her pleasure to causing her intense pain, as she is attacked when the crowd turns violent and riotous. In “The City at Night,” the final poem of “Manhattan,” the speaker alludes to a body being raped by a powerful, uncontrollable male force. The juxtaposition of this poem and the previous suggests that the speaker was raped in the crowd; because describing being sexually assaulted could be extremely distressing and re-traumatizing, the speaker describes it by adding a layer of narrative distance by not referencing herself and using abstract, rather than detailed imagery. Nonetheless, she makes it clear that there is a violent male force running wild in the city, taking countless victims like her.

Formally, these poems stand out amongst the other poems in “Manhattan.” For one, they are all relatively long; two of them are the longest poems in the entire section. Compared to the majority of imagistic poems in this section, these longer poems feel less tightly controlled, as a

result of the difficulty the speaker has recounting the traumatic events therein. Additionally, “Crowds” and “Riots” feature more first-person than most other poems, as well as more of embodied presence by the speaker. Scott uses first-person references to trace the change occurring in the speaker: before her assault, there is a rare frequency of the first-person; then, during the attack the first-person starts to diminish; afterward, the first-person is replaced with more of a third-person perspective. Through this, Scott reveals how the speaker’s assault has resulted in a feeling of vulnerability that makes her want to be concealed in the background, rather than be the center. As a result, the other poems in “Manhattan,” poems that explore the traumatized perspective on the city, seldom feature a visible speaker or reference the first-person; they also never depict the speaker directly interacting with another person.

Scott opens this three-poem series “Crowds” with what seems like a narrator setting the scene before the events unfold. This preamble stands out in “Manhattan” because it has a sense of regularity or orderliness conveyed through the symmetry in the line length and the use of eight words in both lines.

The sky along the street a gauzy yellow:

The narrow lights burn tall in the twilight. (1-2 “Crowds”)

Night has fallen on the city streets, but there remains a “gauzy yellow” in the sky, presumably from arc lights which were notorious for the yellow glare they produced. The description of this light draws attention to the way street lights at this time often obscured more than illuminated their surroundings. From this we know that the speaker enters the crowd in relative darkness, lit only by a blinding yellow cloud of light. Thus, this description ushers in an ominous note of danger. “Gauzy yellow” also points to danger through alluding to bandages and the yellow hue of infected wounds beneath them. This reference to injury foreshadows the violence and bodily harm the speaker will endure in the crowd. The word “burn” in the second line adds to the

undercurrent of danger and also helps introduce the crowd itself, which has previously been associated with heat and fire: “warm contiguous crowd” and “Toward the high fire-laden altars / Move the saints of Manhattan” (7 “Sunset: Battery Park” and 6-7 “Midnight Worship: Brooklyn Bridge”). The heat of the crowd connotes both pain and pleasure: the pleasure of the close body contact, but the pain of that heat getting out of control and burning. As the speaker experiences the crowd, she will oscillate between these two extremes. After this line, Scott includes a blank space, signaling the shift from the preamble to the speaker’s in progress account of her experience in the crowd. Scott also marks this transition with a shift in form: after the orderly, composed preamble, the form becomes more erratic with the constant variation in line length. The tone also shifts from objective to subjective and emotional.

After the speaker sets the scene, she enters the crowd for the first time. She describes the pleasure of being lost in the crowd and making contact with the bodies around her. She says,

The cool air sags,
Heavy with the thickness of bodies.
I am elated with bodies.
They have stolen me from myself.
I love the way they beat me to life,
Pay me for their cruelties.
In the close intimacy I feel for them
There is the indecency I like. (3-10 “Crowds”)

As her body first enters the crowd, she thinks of the people around her in terms of heaviness, the way their collective weight pulls the air downward. The form in these first two lines enacts the viscosity of the crowd, the “thickness of bodies,” as the first line pauses at the comma before continuing in the next line, slowing down the reading process. Her use of the word “bodies” draws attention to how she views the people around her. She frames them in anatomical rather

than personal or individual terms because she is interested in impersonal and physical contact, and not being known by them. She describes her intense pleasure in this moment, saying, “I am elated with bodies.” In this line, the first-person emerges and starts taking over the poem. Key to this line is the use of the word “with,” which shows that she is among the bodies herself; her close contact with other bodies brings about her sense of elation. She continues, “They have stolen me from myself.” Thus, in addition to the physical contact, she also finds pleasure in being lost in the crowd. The crowd allows her a space in which to experience anonymity, to be just another body in a crowd. In this state, she can let herself be free and lose control. However, this anonymity and contact come at a price. As this line indicates, in entering the crowd, she gives up control of herself to the mass of strangers around her, a relinquishment that brings her elation now, but will lead to pain and trauma later.

The crowd becomes a space for her to claim control over her body through temporarily giving that control away. She continues by saying, “I love the way they beat me to life, / Pay me for their cruelties.” This statement conveys a sadomasochistic pleasure in violent contact. “Beat me to life” suggests that this violent contact has the effect of revitalizing or awakening her. However, importantly, she is able to feel pleasure because she feels herself in control of this interaction. “Pay me for their cruelties” signals the way she views this interaction as a transaction: they beat her, but pay her for the right to do so. This transactional language keeps this interaction at the impersonal level; it also acknowledges that she knows her body is hers to sell or use the way she chooses. In a way, she claims ownership over her body, while she allows it to enter in to the crowd in this way. Even though this gives her a feeling of elation, her body is nonetheless sustaining a beating; there is both pain and pleasure in this moment. While her language emphasizes the pleasure, Scott keeps the language alluding to pain along with it to

remind us that this is taking a physical toll on the speaker. Although the speaker focuses on her body making contact in the crowd, she recounts this in a disembodied, de-sensual way, not actually describing the physical sensation of the contact she feels. In this way Scott emphasizes that the speaker is not mindful of the potential consequences of her immersion in the crowd; she is more focused on the emotional experience than the physical pain. She says she feels a “close intimacy” with the bodies in the crowd. Although their interaction is impersonal and transactional, she likes feeling close to people and even being touched by them. She also notes that in this type of impersonal yet intimate contact is an “indecent” that draws her in. She takes pleasure in acting outside social codes of decency and, instead, using her body how she wants to. Additionally, she exercises her independence in this moment by going out by herself into the city at night and entering the crowd, even though it is dangerous for a single woman to do so. In this way, the crowd becomes a space in which she can subvert social norms.

At the end of the poem, the speaker defines her relation to the crowd using a transactional framework:

I belong to them,
To these whom I hate;
And because we can never know each other,
Or be anything to each other,
Though we have been the most,
I sell so much of me that could bring a better price. (11-16 “Crowds”)

The crowd has purchased her and, therefore, she belongs to them, at least temporarily. This language invokes prostitution, in that, she is being bought by somebody who then assumes some manner of ownership over her. The prostitution metaphor conveys how her relation to the crowd is casual, not personal, and involves some degree of physical interaction. Her use of “I sell” implies that this is ongoing and not a permanent transference of ownership; she retains control

over herself. The transaction in the context of her involvement in the crowd consists of her selling her self through immersion in the crowd. She temporarily loses control of herself and opens her self up to contact and interaction from the crowd. In return, she gets the benefit of physical contact and interaction with other people without strings attached. In this way, she maintains control over herself, but also gets to interact with other people. She also enjoys the anonymity that the crowd provides. She specifies the reason she sells herself to them: “because we can never know each other, / Or be anything to each other.” Therefore, she desires impersonal interaction, not a relationship; contact with the crowd without being known by them. Also, by entering the mass of strangers, she gets the opportunity of being nobody and anybody. However, these benefits come with their own risks. She devalues herself by selling “so much” of herself “that could bring a better price.” She also risks her social status and reputation by being a woman walking alone at night and willingly immersing herself in the crowd. Additionally, she puts herself in a potentially dangerous situation by selling herself to the crowd and giving them temporary control over her. There is no guarantee that the crowd will not abuse that power by turning against her and harming her. What is clear is that she is not thinking of these risks; she only thinks of the short-term benefits she experiences.

The risks of immersion in the crowd become painfully clear in the next poem, “Riots,” as the crowd turns violent and harms the speaker. The poem begins,

As if all the birds rushed up in the air,

Fluttering;

Hoots, calls, cries.

I never knew such a monster even in child dreams. (1-4 “Riots”)

As the crowd suddenly morphs into a dangerous and volatile mass, the speaker searches for language to represent it, and uses images and sounds from nature. The opening image of birds

suddenly taking flight conveys the abrupt shift in the crowd, which has suddenly turned from peaceful to violent. The sudden flight of the birds signals the presence of danger or an incoming threat. Scott brings in a classical reference here by alluding to augury, an ancient Roman practice of divining the future through the flight pattern of birds. In this poem, Scott's reference to augury not only foreshadows, but prophesizes future harm for the speaker. She describes the rushing crowd using the sound of birds "Fluttering." Also, in the troubling of the birds, we hear the commotion of the riot, the mass of people quickly scattering around. In the imprecision of the sound description, we glimpse the speaker's confusion amid this chaotic scene. Using this description, Scott represents the speaker's state of fear, the rapid "fluttering" of the speaker's heart, sparked by the crowd's violent turn. Using "Hoots, calls, cries," the speaker continues to describe this scene through bird sounds. Through "Hoots" and "calls," the speaker captures sounds of alarm and sounds of protest resounding throughout the scene. The "cries" she hears mark the harmful consequences of the riotous crowd: people are in pain and distress, and crying out for help. In the final line of this stanza, the speaker reveals the severity of this threatening crowd, saying, "I never knew such a monster even in child dreams." This crowd is more dangerous, powerful, and frightening than the monsters in her childhood nightmares because it is real and perpetrating actual violence right in front of her.

As the poem continues, the speaker surveys the impact of the riotous crowd on the immediate environment. The second stanza reads,

It grows;
Glass smashed;
Stores shut;
Windows tight closed;
Dull, far-off murmurs of voices. (5-9 "Riots")

The monstrous crowd continues to grow in strength and power, as more and more people join in the chaos. Consequently, the threat of being harmed by the crowd also grows. In the broken glass of the surrounding buildings, the speaker reflects the crowd's violent nature and destructive power. As "Stores shut" and "Windows tight closed" indicates, people have become aware of this threat and are battening down the hatches in the attempt to protect their property and themselves. The crowd is like a hurricane blowing in, causing destruction, and forcing people to retreat for their own protection. This description reminds us that, unlike these people hiding indoors, the speaker remains outside in danger, surrounded by the destructive mass. Scott uses form to convey the speaker's state of mind. Almost all of the lines are brief and fragmentary, and all of them end with a pause or a stop. The fragmentary nature of these lines reveals the speaker's disorientation and reactionary state. She is in the midst of this crisis and is, therefore, operating in a fight or flight, rather than a processing state of mind. She can simply list what she sees and hears in the moment. The final line of this stanza adds to the speaker's state of mind. On the one hand, she may be hearing the "Dull, far-off murmurs" of people who are hiding in the surrounding buildings, or of people in or around the crowd. However, the idea that she could hear anything faint amidst the riotous crowd is dubious. What is more likely is that she is losing her faculties after being injured in some way. After she hears these faint murmurs, a stanza break marks a moment in which the speaker fades out of consciousness.

When she awakens, she finds herself bleeding, disoriented, and continuing to come in and out of consciousness. She thinks,

Blood—

The soft, sticky patter of falling drops in the silence.

Everything inundated.

Faces float off in a red dream.

Still the song of the sweet succulent patter. (10-14 “Riots”)

In the first line, her perspective narrows and focuses on the blood flowing from her wounded body. The em dash indicates her shock at this discovery; she notes the blood and then cannot continue for a moment. As she looks at her bleeding body, the reality of her vulnerability sets in. After giving herself over to the crowd, the crowd has turned against her and left her bleeding on the street. In shock, she focuses on the hypnotic dripping of her blood: “The soft, sticky patter of falling drops in the silence.” Eerily, this continuous dripping signifies her drawing nearer and nearer to her own death: each pitter patter marks another drop of lifeblood draining from her body. While she marks time by the spilling of her blood, she begins to lose consciousness again. She thinks, “Everything inundated,” as she feels a wave of disorientation flood over her; in a fog, she imagines, “Faces float off in a red dream.” With “red dream,” Scott emphasizes how the speaker’s wounded and bloody body has affected her mental faculties. While the crowd fades away, all that remains for her is the “sweet succulent patter” of her blood hitting the ground. The use of taste in this description suggests that she can not only hear her blood, but also taste it. This combination of this description and the speaker’s diminishing mental faculties points to a head injury. Right after this line, there is another stanza break, another moment in which the speaker fades out; then, there is more blood:

Blood—

I think it oozes from my finger tips.

—Or maybe it drips from the brow of Jesus. (15-17 “Riots”)

When she regains consciousness, she again surveys her body and finds blood. She attempts to assess her injuries, but cannot be certain in her disorientation. She “think(s)” it comes from her fingertips, but does not know for sure. Then, she speculates it may be of divine origin, coming “from the brow of Jesus.” On one level, this odd reflection points to the speaker’s mental

impairment and the fact that she may be hallucinating. She may also be thinking of the divine because she feels herself drawing near to death. On another level, Scott uses this description to connect this riotous crowd with the mob that demanded the crucifixion of Jesus. Through this allusion, Scott enhances the innocence of the speaker and condemns the violence, conformity, and mindlessness of the crowd. Also, by placing the wounded speaker on the same plain as Jesus on the cross, Scott adds significance to her suffering and calls us to take notice in hopes that her story will raise awareness about the predatory threat facing women in cities.

In the next poem, “The City at Night,” the speaker moves from the first-person account of the violent crowd in “Riots,” to a more abstract, metaphorical representation of sexual assault in the crowd. The poem begins.

Life wriggles in and out
Through the narrow ways
And circuitous passages: (1-3 “The City at Night”)

The enjambment in these lines enacts life moving through the narrow passageways, as the sentence flows over each line into the next. At first glance, the opening image of “life wriggling” “through the narrow ways / And circuitous passages” seems like a bird’s-eye view of people moving through the narrow streets and walkways around the city. Scott sets up for this initial reading with the juxtaposition of these lines and the title, which locate the scene in the city at night. However, the word “life” helps usher in an added layer of meaning. When we consider the word to referring to human life in its early stages, it becomes clear that this opening image is of a female reproductive system through which human life develops and eventually passes through when entering the world. Along these lines, life could be a fetus or the seminal fluid that helps create life. In this way, Scott brings us another instance of the female body as city, like Amy Lowell in “New York at Night.”

Like the female body as city in Lowell's poem, this female body is also violated by a threatening and predatory male presence, as becomes clear in the next part of the first stanza:

Something monstrous and horrible,
A passion without any master,
Male sexual fluid trickling through the darkness
And setting fire to whatever it touches. (4-7 "The City at Night")

The speaker specifies that this life force infiltrating the female city is a dangerous threat:

"something monstrous and horrible." She warns that this monster is not only powerfully destructive and "horrible," but also out of control, "A passion without any master." "Passion" brings a lustful quality to this threat, indicating that this threat is an out of control sexual desire. After stair-stepping her way through these descriptions, she finally names the threat: "Male sexual fluid." She clarifies that the monster is specifically male and sexual in nature. As we know from the opening image combined with "trickling through the darkness," male sexual fluid is circulating through this female city like semen entering a female reproductive system. Through the phrase "Setting fire to whatever it touches, the speaker warns that contact from this male force means certain destruction. This warning contrasts with her earlier descriptions in "Crowds" of pleasure from contact in the crowd. Now, in this moment after being attacked in a crowd, she has full awareness of the danger that can come through contact. She uses her knowledge to warn her audience to be mindful of this threat and take measures to avoid it.

Although the speaker does not describe this as her own story, she uses language that connects her assault in the crowd with this allegorical scenario. For instance, the word "monstrous" links this presence with the monstrous crowd in "Riots" that wreaked havoc in the city and physically harmed the speaker. Also, the phrase "through the darkness" connects this scene with the previous poem in which the speaker was assaulted in a crowd running wild

through the city at night. These allusions link the injured body of the speaker with the violated body of the female city at night, thereby implying that the speaker was not only injured, but also sexually assaulted. The speaker saves this significant disclosure until the very end of “Manhattan” because of the difficulty of returning to this traumatic event. Because discussing her own sexual assault could be painful and distressing, she adds narrative distance by not invoking the “I,” keeping her own body out of the poem through an omniscient and distant persona, and using a metaphor of this city as a stand-in for her body being violated by male sexual threat. The title also adds narrative distance making it seem like the sole subject of the poem is merely the city at night. Although the speaker’s proximity to this event remains veiled, the threat itself is clear: a male sexual threat is terrorizing women throughout the city.

With the final lines of this poem and “Manhattan,” the speaker illuminates the disturbing power dynamics involved in the violation in an effort to caution people to avoid the male sexual threat. The speaker exclaims,

That is the master
Bestowing a casual caress on a slave.
Quiver under it! (8-10 “The City at Night”)

She brings the male sexual violation of a female body/city into the context of the master/slave relation. Doing so reveals the absolute supremacy and dominance of the male sexual threat, and the complete lack of power or control of the women being violated. Although the contact, the “casual caress,” is unwanted, the woman cannot thwart it. In the context of the speaker being sexually assaulted in the crowd, she could not escape for several reasons: the crowd surrounded her and vastly outmatched her in strength and power, and the crowd turned violent so rapidly that she hardly had time to react or defend herself. Moreover, she had no allies in the crowd, no people who knew her and would feel compelled to come to her aid. In this way, the anonymity

that she sought in the crowd increased the danger of the situation for her. Knowing fully the devastating and cruel power of the male sexual threat, she concludes the poem with a warning: “Quiver under it!” “Quiver” reminds us of the dangerous nature of this monster’s touch: the monster “set(s) fire to whatever it touches.” “Quiver under it” not only applies to the touch itself, but the wider threat of men in the city sexually assaulting women. The understood “you” implied in this warning reveals the speaker’s altruistic purpose in telling her story. Through revealing her assault and its psychological and physical effects, she means to inspire a fearful vigilance in her audience to keep them from experiencing the horrific violation she experienced.

Coda

It has been said that modernity is “marked by the sign of the wound” (Seltzer qtd. in Nadal 1). I would suggest that wound is not only a sign of modernity, but, more specifically, modernist women’s poetry. Furthermore, that city poetry by modernist American women bespeaks a very particular wound, sexual violence: a wound that is yet to be fully examined in literary studies. Writers like Amy Lowell and Evelyn Scott lived with a threatening male presence in cities, understood its harmful effects, and used their poetry to expose it. While Lowell brings us the perspective of a witness, Scott illustrates the experience of a survivor and shows how her pain and emotional distress extend well beyond the moments of the assault into her daily life. Her work allows us to glimpse the wounds we cannot see and better understand how they impact survivors. In this way, Scott can enter current conversations about sexual violence, PTSD, and survivorship. Her city poetry also allows for conversations across disciplines, including Trauma Studies, Urban Studies, Women’s and Gender Studies. Scott

shows us that survivorship is not defined by the wound, but by the strength it takes to get through each day and the courage it takes to bear witness.

Although modernist poetry is often criticized for being too focused on the self, poets like Scott demonstrate the opposite. Scott's trauma narrative is both an inward turn toward the self and its psychological landscape, and an outward turn toward the threats urban culture holds for women. We also see this outward turn in the work of Lola Ridge, another remarkable yet lost modernist poet, who was actually close friends with Scott.¹⁵ Drawing on her experience as an Irish immigrant and member of the working poor, Ridge captures the harsh realities of city living for many marginalized groups, such as immigrants and factory workers. Just as Scott places the female body at the center of her exploration of violence and trauma, Ridge uses a variety of female bodies—the sick and broken bodies of factory workers and the superabundant bodies of middle-class consumers—to illustrate the consequences of urban consumerism.

¹⁵ For more on Scott's friendship with Lola Ridge, see Caroline Maun's *Mosaic of Fire* (2012).

Chapter Four

Women Consuming Women: Consumer Capitalism, Labor, and the City in Lola Ridge

One tall, thin figure of a woman stepped out alone, a good distance in the empty square, and when the police came down at her and the horse's hooves beat over her head, she did not move, but stood with her shoulders slightly bowed, entirely still. The charge was repeated again and again, but she was not to be driven away. A man near me said in horror, suddenly recognizing her, "That's Lola Ridge!"

(Katherine Anne Porter "The Never-Ending Wrong" 1977)

During her lifetime, Lola Ridge could not help but throw her body on the cogs of injustice. Hours before the scheduled execution of Sacco and Vanzetti,¹⁶ two immigrants set to be executed on erroneous murder charges, Ridge took to the streets in protest and she would not be moved, even in the face of charging horses and hostile police. As an immigrant herself, she could not silently watch the corrupt and discriminatory justice system take down two of her own. Her dedication to social justice and advocacy for marginalized groups fed into her poetry. As an immigrant who came out of poverty, lived in squalor, and fled multiple countries trying to find a better life, she is able to authentically represent the struggles of marginalized groups like immigrants, the working poor, homeless people, and the racially persecuted. Her marginal perspective also gives her a unique lens on urban life, enabling her to not only see the city's bright, shimmering surface, but also the broken and exploited bodies building and maintaining it.

¹⁶ Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, two Italian immigrants who came to the U.S. in 1908, were arrested and charged for the murder of F.A. Parmenter and Alessandro Berardelli, a paymaster of a shoe factory and his guard, respectively. In 1921, Sacco and Vanzetti were found guilty of murder in a trial that many people found "less than fair," saying that "the defendants had been convicted for their radical, anarchist beliefs rather than for the crime." They were executed in 1927 (Britannica Academic). Mass protests broke out in support of their innocence; these protests included writers like Lola Ridge, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Dorothy Parker, and Katherine Anne Porter.

She brings this dual awareness to her depictions of urban consumerism. In “Broadway” and “The Woman with Jewels,” she draws attention to both the benefits and pitfalls of consumerism for women consumers. In “The Ghetto” and “In Harness,” she shows how the glamorous world of urban consumerism is made possible by the exploitation of the labor class. Through these poems, Ridge reveals a chain of interconnectedness: women consuming women.

Lola Ridge was born on December 12th, 1873, in Dublin, Ireland, and christened Rose Emily Ridge. Although these are factually the details of her origin, she would continually rewrite them. Rewriting her own identity allowed her access that could be denied her on the basis of her ethnicity, age, and name. Opportunity had continually been denied her throughout her tumultuous early years. According to Terese Svoboda’s biography, *Anything that Burns You: A Portrait of Lola Ridge, Radical Poet* (2016), after her parents split when she was still a baby, she and her mother were thrown into the difficult life of forging a stable home in a struggling Irish economy with little prospects for a single mother (Svoboda 8). In 1877, her mother moved them to Australia to stay with family, and there she took up work as a seamstress, but never made enough money to pull them out of poverty (Svoboda 11). Shortly thereafter, they moved to New Zealand, following the gold rush in hopes of establishing a better life (Svoboda 13). However, difficult times persisted as they settled in a three-room shack in an isolated bush town with her mother’s new husband, a violent alcoholic who would eventually go insane and be admitted into an asylum in 1894 (Svoboda 20-21). Soon after he was committed, Ridge and her mother moved to Hokitika, New Zealand and Ridge married Paul Webster, a man with prospects in the mining industry. The next few years were difficult for Ridge: the 46 member town was “claustrophobic” for her; the climate was wet and cold; and she lost a child (Svoboda 23-24). However, she rose out of these circumstances and began her metamorphosis. She started publishing short stories and

poems. In 1900, she gave birth to a son, her only surviving child. Feeling suffocated in the tiny, isolated town, she sailed with her mother and son to Sydney, leaving behind her husband. Upon her arrival, she began reinventing herself and the details of her life to gain her entry into the world of writing and publishing. She claimed, “I am an Australian” (Svoboda 33), throwing off her ties to Ireland and New Zealand; and she dropped her married name and began publishing as Lola Ridge (Svoboda 34). She also changed her birth day from 1873 to 1883 in order to help her escape her husband and begin a new life (Svoboda 54). She became one of the most successful poets in Australia (Svoboda 44), but she wanted to pursue writing on a bigger stage. She sailed to the United States in 1906 and settled in New York City in 1908.

While starting out in New York as an immigrant from across the world, she lived a difficult life common to many immigrants at that time. She lived in squalor in a 5 x 7 room in an East Side tenement and became acquainted with the harsh and life-threatening conditions of sweatshop labor (Svoboda 101). She would later draw from this experience while writing *The Ghetto*, which depicts the lives of East Side immigrants. As an immigrant without proper papers, she also knew the frightening reality of being hunted by the government (Svoboda 92-93). Ridge spent the years right before and during World War I, a time period marked by anti-immigrant tensions, living a nomadic lifestyle, traveling with her new husband around the United States, but also hiding from authorities (Svoboda 93). After resettling in New York in 1917, she published her first book of poetry, *The Ghetto* (1918), and her career soon began to take off. Her talent and tireless drive would eventually allow her to become not only a successful writer, but also a leading figure in modernist poetry.

Although she remains outside the contemporary conversation on American modernism, Ridge was a prominent figure in the modernist literary scene during her lifetime. Over her career,

she published five books of poetry: *The Ghetto* (1918), *Sun-Up* (1920), *Red Flag* (1927), *Firehead* (1929), and *Dance of Fire* (1935). Many of her poems were published in the top literary magazines like *Poetry* and *The Dial*. Her first book, *The Ghetto*, was praised by critics who said, “Miss Lola Ridge is capable of that powerful exaltation on the wings of real feeling which brings a new world into vision”; and “Nothing is forced or artificialized in her energetic volume, which contains some of the most vibrant utterances heard in America” (qtd in Svoboda 98-99). After the publication of her second book, the *New York Times* said of Ridge, “she takes a foremost place of any American woman writing poetry” (Svoboda 158). Beyond her career as a poet, she claimed a prominent place in the literary scene as an editor for the literary magazines *Broom* and *Others*, a publication known for featuring highly experimental writers like Mina Loy and Man Ray alongside more mainstream writers like Sherwood Anderson (Svoboda 124). She was also involved in modern poetry as a critic who published reviews in *Poetry*, *The Saturday Review of Literature*, and *The Nation*.¹⁷ In addition, she hosted frequent gatherings of prominent literary figures including William Carlos Williams, Marianne Moore, H.D., Jean Toomer, and Hart Crane (Svoboda 180). At these parties, “American modernism was the topic, but also the importance of multiple aesthetics, and how to make a mix of genres and sensibilities interesting” (Svoboda 179). As a poet, she received several noteworthy accolades including a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Shelley Memorial Award, and Poetry magazine’s Guarantor’s Prize, also received by William Carlos Williams and Yeats (Berke “Electric Currents” 28). As further proof of her influence, “her *New York Times* obituary eulogized her as one of America’s leading contemporary poets” (Berke “Electric Currents” 28).

¹⁷ Among the modernist writers Ridge reviewed are Alfred Kreymborg, William Carlos Williams, and Evelyn Scott.

Despite her prominence in the modernist literary scene, her work has been exiled from the literary canon. While discussing her erasure, Ridge scholars tend to agree that her socially conscious poetry did not cohere with the more inwardly-turned poetry that became canon. Much of her poetry deals with the struggles plaguing various marginalized communities. But her activist poetry was not viewed favorably by those forming the literary canon. As Berke claims, this “political subject matter, as it represented a resistance to the dehumanizing practices of early-twentieth-century life, placed the poet against the mainstream of canonical modernism” (*Poets on the Left* 35). However, it is exactly her activist bent that could allow her to regain her prominence in modernism.

Although Ridge remains in literary exile, a few scholars have made strides to bring Ridge into literary discourse through their recognition of her unique activist point of view. Nancy Berke, one of the forerunners of Ridge scholarship, focuses on Ridge as a social and political poet in her chapter “Writing the Radical Body of Modernism: Politics and Pain in Lola Ridge’s Poetry” from her book *Women Poets on the Left* (2001). Through analyzing various poems in *The Ghetto and Other Poems* (1918) and *Dance of Fire* (1935), Berke shows Ridge’s interest in social justice issues, such as the death penalty, racial injustice, and exploitative labor practices, Ridge felt that modernist poetry tended to turn inward on the self too much; she wanted her poetry to “reach outward” to reveal the pain and injustice in the world around her (Berke 33). Berke also explores Ridge’s outward turn in her article ““Electric Currents of Life”: Lola Ridge’s Immigrant Flâneuse” (2010), which focuses on the way Ridge uses the unique perspective of a female immigrant flâneuse who “engages and critiques the modern city from her position as a new American” (31). Berke argues that the flâneuse in *The Ghetto and Other Poems* draws attention to the extremes of “hope and despair” present in the rapidly diversifying,

yet exclusionary city (“Electric” 31). Like Berke, Caroline Maun also writes about Ridge as a socially engaged poet in *Mosaic of Fire* (2010), which reveals the writings and friendships of several modernist American women writers: Ridge, Evelyn Scott, Charlotte Wilder, and Kay Boyle. In a chapter on Ridge, “Imagism, Socially Engaged Poetry, and Lola Ridge,” Maun delineates Ridge’s work from other modernists, like Yeats and Auden, who expressed how poetry should be like self-contained and self-referential, “its own enclosed symbolic system” (29). Among this group, Ridge stood out for her activist poetry and her belief that poetry “would always be about both beauty and the world” (30). She traces this outward engagement in poems like “The Ghetto” (1918) and “Sun-Up” (1920) that show the difficult plight of the immigrant working class. In addition to these critical examinations, Terese Svoboda has recently published the first full-length biography on Ridge, *Anything That Burns You: A Portrait of Lola Ridge, Radical Poet* (2016). Her portrayal of Ridge brings out the revolutionary in her in a way that will surely inspire more scholars to engage with her work.

To this crucial body of scholarship, I add the first exploration of Ridge and consumerism, a theme which brings together the extremes we see in her city poetry—poetry that features the bright, spectacular city and also the squalor and suffering of the working class. I provide the first detailed analysis of three poems, “Broadway,” “The Woman with Jewels,” and “In Harness”; and I look at the most discussed poem, “The Ghetto,” in a new way by focusing exclusively on Sadie as an exploited laboring body. In “Broadway,” Ridge uses the bright lights of Broadway to illuminate both the freedom and entrapment of urban consumer culture. Then, in “The Woman with Jewels,” she presents the damage of consumerism on the body of a lonely, bejeweled, and obese woman causing a scene in a café. Through two labor poems, “The Ghetto” and “In Harness,” Ridge deepens her examination of the consequences of consumerism for women by

turning to the exploitation of female laborers in garment factories. Through showing the harm consumer capitalism inflicts on the bodies of these women workers, Ridge warns that consumption is an ethical act. Throughout these poems, Ridge uses a sensory palate that is at times excessive, fluid, synesthetic, sexual, disorienting, queer, and violent to display the both the benefits and dangers of consumption for women.

Early 20th Century Consumerism and Women

The early twentieth century saw the rapid rise of consumer capitalism, “a mode of capitalist organization based on the sale of primarily mass-produced and mass-marketed goods” (Finnegan 8). During this time, America experienced a transition from a “producer ethic” to a “consumer ethic” (Fox and Lears qtd. in Tiece 15). This consumerist movement started to take shape after the Civil War when, according to Margaret Finnegan in *Selling Suffrage* (1999), “large-scale industrialization, urbanization, immigration, and capital development changed the social and economic face of the nation. Mass production required mass consumption, and new urban institutions such as department stores proved quick to market the fruits of industrial labor and to tempt buyers with increasingly elaborate displays and sales methods” (9). The surge in technology and industry in the nineteenth century spawned new possibilities for mass production of material commodities. Mass production and the rapid proliferation of department stores and other commercial outlets allowed people to obtain necessary and luxury items relatively easily and cheaply. Cities were central to this movement as sites of industry and retail outlets, but also as runways for consumers to display their newly purchased fashions. Around this mode of consumer capitalism formed consumer culture, also called consumerism, a culture concerned

with “acquisition and consumption as the means of achieving happiness” (William Leach *Land of Desire* qtd. in Finnegan 8).¹⁸

Women, particularly middle and upper-class white women, found themselves at the center of consumerism. For one, women were the main purchasers for their families. As Jennifer Scanlon notes in “Advertising Women” (2000), “Women were the purchasing agents in the nation’s homes. In the 1920s, researchers estimated, women purchased at least 80 percent of the total goods accumulated in families. They bought food, clothing, electrical appliances, linoleum, and home furnishings” (202). In addition, as Mary Ryan asserts, for middle-class urban women, shopping was seen as a “responsibility” and a way of achieving “respectability” (qtd. in Finnegan 10). Simply purchasing commodities was not enough; consumption was often made conspicuous as a means of gaining admiration, respect, and securing or maintaining one’s social status. Women were targeted by advertisers hoping to capitalize on their duty as domestic purchasers and homemakers, as well as their desire for commodities and fashions to enhance their daily lives. Department store owners also sought to target women through designing their stores to cater to women’s needs and desires. Marshall Field, of Marshall Field & Co., gave his store the motto “Give the lady what she wants” (Hendrickson 82); he hired women to work in the lingerie department, a novel idea at the time, to make women feel more at ease there (Hendrickson 83). Alexander Turney Stewart, owner of the Marble Palace in New York City, what has been called America’s first department store, catered to women by doing things like hiring the “handsomest young men in the city” to draw in female customers and creating a “Ladies Parlor” with a full-length mirror so women could “preen” themselves (Hendrickson 35). Large department stores offered women a place to freely roam, make choices without

¹⁸ Numerous scholars have provided useful studies on twentieth-century consumerism. See, for example, Jennifer Scanlon’s *The Gender and Consumer Culture Reader* (2000), Steven Miles’ *Consumerism: As a Way of Life* (1998), Peter Stearns’ *Consumerism in World History* (2001), and William Leach’s *Land of Desire* (1994).

supervision or pestering from retail assistants, and indulge in the luxury of the ornately designed space and tempting selection of commodities. Department stores were semi-public spaces within cities in which women could get outside their normal routines and their homes, and seek pleasurable diversions. These stores were also places where women could mingle with other women. Beyond their roles as consumers, women were also involved in consumer capitalism through their jobs selling commodities as advertisers and retailers or shop girls, and also through their jobs as factory workers producing them.

Women in the early twentieth century experienced both the benefits and pitfalls of consumer capitalism. Benefits included jobs and the opportunity for financial independence and participation in life outside the domestic sphere. As consumers, women could purchase items to make daily tasks quicker or easier, bring them comfort, and improve their daily lives. They purchased new fashions to help them express themselves in new ways or make them more mobile, like shirt-waist dresses which became popular during this time. While shopping in department stores, women found community with other women, exercised their freedom of selection, and enjoyed the ability to freely roam unaccompanied. Consumer culture also helped bring women political power as the American suffragist movement began selling commodities to support the campaign for women's rights. As Finnegan describes, suffragists

mastered modern means of advertising, publicity, mass production, commercial entertainment, commercial design, retailing, and publishing. They put up billboards and colorful posters; they created artful window displays; they wore sandwich boards, badges, pins, and mass-produced suffrage fashion accessories...they hawked suffrage wares through special stores and catalogs (11).

In addition to their co-opting of consumer capitalist techniques, suffragists also valorized women's responsible consumerism by linking it with their capacity to responsibly exercise their right to vote (Finnegan 11). In this way, women were taking advantage of the many ways consumer culture could benefit womankind. However, consumerism also had many damaging effects for women. For one, the pressure to consume caused some women devastating financial consequences, thereby threatening the stability of their lives. Women found themselves spending not only money, but also time trying to "dress up," to present themselves as respectable and fashionable in pace with women of means. One working-class woman lamented that she felt such pressure to stay up with these trends that she spent all her free time making hats and dresses, instead of reading or staying abreast of the "general topics and questions of the day" (qtd. in Finnegan 20). As this woman attests, consumerism brought many women into a spending cycle, in which they perpetually felt a devastating sense of lack and sought to remedy it through spending time and money toward being in fashion. Beyond these effects, consumerism also exploited women: advertising sexualized and objectified women in order to sell products; and factories used and abused female laborers, pushing their bodies to the limit and paying them almost nothing in order to produce commodities at a high rate and keep costs low. In this way, women's consumption indirectly harmed other women. Whether knowingly or unknowingly, women perpetuated this exploitation with every purchase.

The Freedom and Bondage of Consumerism in "Broadway"

Ridge draws attention to the benefits and pitfalls of urban consumer culture for women in "Broadway," one of the opening poems in her collection *The Ghetto and Other Poems* (1918). She begins by using the bright lights of Broadway as a symbol for consumer culture. Through

light, she illuminates consumerism's creative and expressive possibilities, as well as its ability to entrap. She then draws women and consumer culture to the fore through her depiction of Broadway as a woman who embodies both the power and captivity associated with consumerism. Throughout this discussion, the poem not only describes the city, but also becomes it through various formal innovations.

"LIGHT", the first and most repeated word in "Broadway," directs our attention to one of Broadway's most characteristic features. This light also embodies several layers of the city itself. First, it stands for the recent transition from gas to electric lighting and, as such, it also embodies the shift from old to new technology.¹⁹ Second, light is also city dwellers, the people for whom the light is being used. Third, city light, especially the lights of Broadway, embodies consumer culture. In the early twentieth century, Broadway was known as "The Great White Way," because of its constant brightness produced by its street lights and billboards advertising everything from entertainment to shopping and dining. Broadway was the center of consumer culture and light was the vehicle through which it promoted consumerism. A visitor to Broadway in 1920 said it looked like a "perpetual thunderstorm" filled with "Not only white lights, but yellow, red, green, mauve, blue; not only fixed, but moving, hanging, revolving, flowing, zigzagging, rolling, vertical, horizontal, dancing, epileptic" (qtd. in Weil 226). Broadway's blinding, colorful, multidirectional light seemed to move and actively pursue people, assaulting their senses and almost forcing them to comply with its many messages. Like this awestruck spectator, Ridge captures the power, movement, and strange effects of Broadway's light.

In the poem's first stanza, Ridge uses form and content to become the city, but also leaves cracks that show how the city cannot be fully contained in language. Ridge opens the poem,

¹⁹ For more on light and cities, see my chapter on Amy Lowell.

LIGHT!

Innumerable ions of light,

Kindling, irradiating,

All to their foci tending . . . (1-4 “Broadway”)

The grammatical form of this stanza, with this every line building off of light and light building off of Broadway, enacts the layering of city light, people, and things within the city. The way the sentence spreads, changes, and never stops captures the city’s constant transformation and nonstop pace. “LIGHT,” the first word of this stanza, in all capital letters and punctuated by an exclamation mark, becomes a sign like one of the many lining Broadway. “Innumerable ions of light” captures the brightness and magnificence of the light on this street and points out that there is so much light that it is beyond what can be known or quantified. The form of the first two lines makes them accelerate in speed to mimic the pace of the fast-moving city. Following the three unstressed syllables in “innumerable” with a more rapid succession of the two stressed syllables, one in “ions” and one in “light,” gives the sense that the line is speeding up by the end. This speed continues with the opening stress of “Kindling” and also the implied action in active verbs in the next two lines. Then, light starts moving: “Kindling, irradiating.” Like the city itself, this light is alive and active, and seems to be constantly renewing itself as if from its own energy. The “ing” at the end of “Kindling, irradiating” and “tending” reflects the active feel of Broadway. The final phrase, “All to their foci tending,” on a surface level, scientifically describes what is happening in this magnificent spectacle. Beyond this, however, the description itself is another example of trying to put language or systems of knowledge to something new and mysterious that seems to be beyond those systems. The scientific language stands out because it does not seem to adequately capture the scene; it leaves so much unsaid. Thus, it brings out the difficulty in putting the city into words. The ellipses at the end of this line keeps

that scientific definition from resolving definitively; in doing so, it allows the city to spread beyond science.

In the second stanza, Ridge moves from the bright visual of light to the sound of light. The second stanza reads,

Light that jingles like anklet chains
On bebies of little lithe twinkling feet,
Or clingles in myriad vibrations
Like trillions of porcelain
Vases shattering . . . (5-9 “Broadway”)

“Light” pours into this stanza from the very beginning and is a constant presence throughout the poem, just as it is in the city. Light is totally unbridled, not even bound by one sense. By describing light sonically with “Light that jingles,” Ridge communicates how the city and its light invades all senses. This moment of synaesthesia enacts the sensory confusion brought on by urban spaces. Describing light sonically also represents a moment of sensory expansion and boundary crossing. She describes the sound of light like “the jingle of anklet chains / on bebies of little lithe the twinkling feet.” This sound would initially seem little and faint; however, it is magnified by multiple people and a high-pitched sound like a bell or tambourine which actually can be perceived from far away. Light is also likened to a noise that is produced by people’s movement; thus, it is a perfect sound to capture an active and populated urban zone. Ridge also uses the form of this passage to turn up the volume. For example, this passage is percussive with the repetition of hard consonants in words like “light,” “anklet chains,” and “twinkling.” Additionally, the repetition of the “L” sound in “light,” “like,” “anklet,” “little,” “lithe,” and “twinkling” carries the sound of the word light into each “L” word, thereby allowing light to spread throughout the poem. Moreover, as light becomes a sound, just as the line describes light

as sound, Ridge enacts sensory boundlessness. The sound carries us into the second half of the stanza with the exact rhyme of “jingles” and “clingles.” Ridge playfully rhymes on “clingles,” a word not found in dictionaries, thereby expressing how this city light is beyond traditional modes of expression and calls for the invention of new language. Beyond light as sight and sound, with the phrase, “in myriad vibrations,” Ridge gives us light as a tactile sensation, something that can be felt in the body. In doing so, Ridge uses the concept of city light to expand sensory possibilities cross sensory boundaries.

While crossing sensory boundaries, light also draws attention to other kinds of boundaries and restrictions. In contrast to light’s boundlessness, Ridge introduces physical and cultural restraints with the two objects emitting sound: “anklet chains” and “porcelain / Vases.” Both of these objects are man-made objects, rather than natural or organic matter, and signify consumerism and man-made cultural boundaries. The anklet chains worn by “bebies” of people are like fashionable objects consumed by the masses worn as an act of fashion and freedom of expression. They also denote freedom by resembling the ankle bells worn by gypsies. Worn in the early-twentieth century, they suggest a connection to the bohemianism or at least bohemian fashion. However, the word “chains” brings in a note of captivity, rather than freedom. In this way, the “bebies” of people bound by these anklet chains resemble prisoners or slaves; the use of mass-produced anklets as their restraints makes it clear that are captives of consumerism. Like the anklet chains, the porcelain vases signal consumer culture’s bondage. The soundscape amplifies with the sound of these “trillions of porcelain / Vases shattering,” a sound which lends a destructive quality to the light it describes. Both these vases and the anklet chains are objects associated with women; the vases also invoke women as target consumers of domestic objects. Early-twentieth century department stores like Macy’s in New York City and Selfridge’s in

London, often put household goods like porcelain vases in the entry floor to draw women, the primary purchasers of home goods, into their stores. In this way, home goods mark the entry of women into consumer culture. In the sound of trillions of porcelain vases shattering, we hear the destruction of the limited role of women as domestic creatures and the desire to break out of the bondage of consumerism. Thus, with anklet chains and shattered vases, Ridge signals that this light, this consumer culture, holds both creative and liberating possibilities of self-expression, and also the potential for entrapment.

In the third stanza, light and the consumer culture it signifies, emerges as a material presence taking over the urban environment. The third stanza reads,

Light over the laminae of roofs,
Diffusing in shimmering nebulae
About the night's boundaries,
Or billowing in pearly foam
Submerging the low-lying stars . . . (10-14 "Broadway")

Light spreads into this stanza through the first word just as it spreads into the sky, "Diffusing" over the "laminae of roofs." The boundlessness of this light, this "shimmering nebulae," contrasts with the finitude of "night's boundaries." After this, Ridge likens light to ocean waves "billowing in pearly foam / Submerging the low-lying stars." Like light as nebulae, light as ocean waves carries vastness and materiality without borders. Like ocean waves, light constantly flows and changes, weathering its environment. In the image of light "submerging" the stars, Ridge points to culture taking over nature, similar to Amy Lowell in "New York at Night." Through this image of light engulfing the stars, Ridge symbolizes not only the theme of consumption, but consumer culture consuming the urban environment. Giving urban consumer

culture a material presence not only in light, but in matter like waves, allows people to see it exerting influence over other material entities, people and environment.

After alluding to light as a symbol for consumption, Ridge more overtly links the two by invoking literal consumption—eating and drinking, as well as opulence. She writes,

Light for the feast prolonged—
Captive light in the goblets quivering . . .
Sparks evanescent
Struck of meeting looks—
Fringed eyelids leashing
Sheathed and leaping lights . . .
Infinite bubbles of light
Bursting, reforming . . .
Silvery filings of light
Incessantly falling . . .
Scintillant, sided dust of light
Out of the white flares of Broadway—
Like a great spurious diamond
In the night's corsage faceted . . . (15-28 "Broadway")

With the first line, Ridge connects light to consumption in terms of feasting. The second line builds on this oral consumption theme through invoking drinking in the image of light in "goblets." Sensorially, Ridge continues to expand ways of communicating light through likening it not only to something you can see, hear, and feel, but also taste. In this stanza, light becomes champagne in "goblets quivering," with "Sparks evanescent" and "Infinite bubbles of light / Bursting, reforming." Linking light to champagne ties it to both consumption and excess. Ridge also signals excess through the idea of a feast prolonged: not only an extravagant meal but also one that continues beyond expected time limits, seemingly without end. Words like "evanescent," "Infinite," "and "Incessantly" add to this theme of boundless excess. Then, the

final image compares light to “a great spurious diamond / In the night’s corsage faceted,” connecting light to both excess and conspicuous consumption.

Beyond the diction and imagery, Ridge also uses form to link light and excess. She repeats the word “light” six times in this stanza and several times in rapid succession. She also repeats the “L” sound throughout the stanza and, in doing so, she keeps the language pointing back to light. The repeated “L” sound also makes the mouth mimic the shape of licking, another way Ridge connects the stanza to consumption. Ridge also creates excess as each new description modifying light builds in the feeling of layers of excessive language. While Ridge presents the boundlessness of consumerism as light, she also alludes to its entrapment with phrases like “Captive light,” “leashing,” and “Sheathed.” Although consumption offers “the feast prolonged,” it comes at a price, as we see next through the Broadway woman.

In the fifth stanza, the poem shifts from light to Broadway, the center of consumer culture. Through representing Broadway as a powerful and vulnerable woman, Ridge shows how we are at the center of consumer culture and experienced both the benefits and pitfalls of consumer culture. Ridge writes,

Broadway,
In ambuscades of light,
Drawing the charmed multitudes
With the slow suction of her breath—
Dangling her naked soul
Behind the blinding gold of eunuch lights
That wind about her like a bodyguard. (29-35 “Broadway”)

Broadway takes over light’s space as the first word of every stanza and simultaneously becomes the focus. The position of Broadway in light’s place also signals that Broadway is light, and, therefore, everything that has been describing light, has also been describing Broadway.

Broadway taking the central position draws us closer to the implicit subject of consumerism because Broadway was America's consumer capital in the early twentieth century. We learn through the phrases "her breath" and "about her" that Broadway is gendered female. By making Broadway a woman, Ridge reflects the reality that women were at the center of consumer culture: women as the targets of advertising, the main purchasers for their households, and the people most associated with shopping in the city. The Broadway woman represents these women, but also consumer culture itself, the force luring them in: she "Draw(s) the charmed multitudes / With the slow suction of her breath." Here, Ridge displays how consumer culture operates in the way the Broadway woman entices the masses. First, "charmed multitudes" suggests that she casts a spell over the masses allowing her to exert control over them. The "charmed multitudes" are the mindless consumers succumbing to consumer culture's attempts to turn them into addicted purchasers. The phrase "blinding gold" also points to this blind consumption. Then, she sucks them in as if she is consuming them. As she consumes them, Ridge reveals the contrast in the power and control of the marketing engine and the lack of power and consciousness in the masses being devoured by the system. These descriptions of the Broadway woman enticing and charming the multitudes, and "Dangling her naked soul" also frame her as a sexual temptress. By sexualizing this description, Ridge shows how sex is instrumental in marketing and also suggests that the draw to the consumerism is potent as lust.

Although the Broadway woman exerts this power and control over the masses, she is also a captive herself. She is not only the light itself, but she is also trapped "*in ambuscades of light*," and "*Behind eunuch lights / That wind about her like a bodyguard*." The Broadway woman consumes women, but is also consumed like them by consumer culture. Her own vulnerable state of mind comes through in words like "naked" and "eunuch": "Naked" connotes a bare,

unguarded state; “eunuch” signifies bondage in terms of sexual slavery and also a loss of power in terms of castration. Through highlighting Broadway’s vulnerability, Ridge emphasizes the pitfalls of consumerism: loss of power, entrapment, and blind allegiance. After the final phrase, “That wind about her like a bodyguard,” Ridge ends the line with a period, thereby ending the long run-on sentence which began in line one. Grammatically, this shows that Broadway has been the subject all along and everything before was a long introductory clause modifying it. Additionally by ending in a period, Ridge highlights the word “bodyguard,” which perfectly encapsulates both power and vulnerability, in that, a person with a bodyguard has power but they have a bodyguard because they are vulnerable.

In the next stanza, Ridge describes Broadway as a snake monster who commands traditionally male kinds of power over the city:

Or like a huge serpent, iridescent-scaled,
Trailing her coruscating length
Over the night prostrate—
Triumphant poised,
Her hydra heads above the avenues,
Values appraising
And her avid eyes
Glistening with eternal watchfulness . . . (36-43 “Broadway”)

As “a huge serpent,” she is wild, dangerous, and powerful. By “Trailing her coruscating length / Over the night prostrate,” she claims the dominant position over night. Just as light “submerg(es) the low-lying stars,” Broadway as woman and consumer culture conquers night; another moment in which culture conquers nature. The sexual overtones of this moment of conquest come through in the phallic serpent dragging its body over a prostrate night; however, claiming both the phallus and the dominant position is a woman. Furthermore, she is dominating another

woman: we know that night is female from the earlier reference to “night’s corsage faceted” (28). Thus, Ridge presents a moment of queer sexuality in which the Broadway woman claims the dominant position over another woman. This embodies the way the Broadway woman consumes women as consumer culture and is also consumed by consumer culture, herself. Thus, in this moment of queer sex, the Broadway woman assumes both the position of power and vulnerability. She again assumes the dominant position through the phrase “Triumphant poised / Her hydra heads above the avenues.” Describing the Broadway woman as victorious and in a striking position over the city reflects consumerism’s dominance over the city and its people. As “Values appraising” implies, the Broadway woman also reclaims the ability to establish value within the urban space. As consumer culture, she not only designates the value of things, but also controls, through marketing, where people place value. Finally, as revealed through the final lines, “her avid eyes / Glistening with eternal watchfulness,” she has the gaze, a power typically claimed by men in the city. Through showing the Broadway woman assuming typically masculine types of power and influence, Ridge reveals how consumer culture allows women to claim power and control within the city.

Several references in this description of the Broadway woman indicate that Ridge may have had *Cleopatra* in mind while creating her. In 1917, a popular silent film called *Cleopatra* was playing on Broadway at the Lyric Theatre.²⁰ As film scholar Kelly Robinson reports, the film was a popular success, breaking box office records and “selling out performances well into the next year” (“Theda Bara’s *Cleopatra*”). The film itself was known for its excess: it was “the most expensive production ever at the time”; it was advertised as a “Super-Production”; the

²⁰Released October of 1917, *Cleopatra* was directed by J. Gordon Edwards and starred Theda Bara, Fritz Leiber, and Thurston Hall. Although the film was a tremendous success and an important historical silent film, there are no complete surviving copies, in part, due to two different fires: one at a storage facility and one at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (Robinson).

actress playing Cleopatra had 50 different costumes; and “one single tent interior had cost \$50,000 in furnishings” (Robinson).²¹ The film was promoted using provocative advertisements of sex symbol Theda Bara in little more than a metallic coiled snake brassier and snake headpiece (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Source: Kelly Robinson “Theda Bara’s Cleopatra”

Ridge might be alluding to an advertisement for this film through the lines “Her hydra heads above the avenues” and “her avid eyes / Glistening with eternal watchfulness.” Like Broadway, who draws the multitudes to her, Cleopatra was also an attractive and powerful woman who exerted much influence on the people around her. “In ambuscades of light” behind the blinding gold could refer to Cleopatra’s adornment in layers of jewelry her propensity to display her wells in layers of jewelry and fashion. In this way, Cleopatra was a conspicuous consumer in her time, just like the masses of women drawn in by Broadway’s consumerism. The “huge serpent” alludes to the way Cleopatra chose to die by taking control over the snake and directing its

²¹ Even its publicity was over-the-top. As Robinson reports, “In advance of *Cleopatra*, Fox sent out a press release (with a straight face, it seems) that actually said Theda Bara’s coming was foretold by ancient Egyptians” (Robinson).

venom into her breast. She, like the Broadway woman, takes control over the phallic snake. Cleopatra in Shakespeare's *Anthony and Cleopatra* becomes the center of masculine power, in contrast to Anthony who is continually emasculated. However, like Broadway, Cleopatra is also vulnerable; in her case, that masculine power could be turned against her. The "huge serpent," in the context of Cleopatra and Broadway, is for women like the double-edged sword of consumerism: both a source of power and destruction. Furthermore, Ridge's allusion to Cleopatra may be a warning for a materialistic American society. Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* features two decadent empires in decay. Cleopatra's excessive sensuality and decadence are not only her downfall but also the downfall of a kingdom. In this way, Cleopatra in "Broadway" serves as a harbinger of impending destruction for an increasingly decadent America.

The Weight of Excessive Consumption

In "The Woman with Jewels" (1918), another poem from *The Ghetto*, Ridge gives an example of a conspicuous consumer, a woman in a café covered head to toe in jewelry. She is the picture of excess in her consumption of not only jewelry, but also food. Her ravenous consumption harms her physically and turns her into a spectacle. Beneath her layers of adornment, she seems to be in physical and emotional distress. Ridge uses this woman as a warning against excessive consumption.

In the title, the generic subject, "The Woman," specified by the phrase "with Jewels," demonstrates syntactically how the woman is defined by her excess and opulence. She is also nameless and solely defined by her jewels, as if her identity has been swallowed by her

conspicuous consumption. Even though she wears jewels to stand out, this nameless woman could be one of many ravenous consumers in the city. The poem begins,

The woman with jewels sits in the café,
Spraying light like a fountain.
Diamonds glitter on her bulbous fingers
And on her arms, great as thighs,
Diamonds gush from her ear-lobes over the goitrous
throat. (1-6 “The Woman with Jewels”)

The first line again introduces her by her jewelry and points out that she “sits in a café,” the kind of setting that typically does not call for such adornment, as the speaker later implies. The setting makes her opulence stand out, but not necessarily in a good way. Additionally, the café setting brings in the idea of consumption as eating and drinking, as well as a place to display conspicuous consumption. Also, like in “Broadway,” Ridge represents consumption through light. The image of her jewelry “Spraying light like a fountain” throughout the café makes it clear that she is a spectacle. In all her radiance, she resembles the Broadway woman “in ambuscades of light” (“Broadway” 30).

“Spraying light like a fountain” is also an image of overflow, a motif that continues throughout the poem, conveying the idea of superabundance, but also excess and waste, a byproduct of consumption. We see this emphasis on excess in the way the speaker lists the numerous locations from which the “Diamonds glitter.” As the speaker notes, diamonds cover the woman, from the multiple rings on her fingers to those glittering from her arms, ears, and throat. The speaker’s attention is not on how beautiful the diamonds are, but how many there are. “Diamonds gush from her ear-lobes,” another reference to overflow, conveys this idea of superabundance as waste. In addition to conveying excess, these descriptions of her body also emphasize her obesity, a harmful state of abundance. “Her bulbous fingers,” her “great” arms,

and “goitrous / throat” point to a level of consumption that is hurting her physically. The word “gush,” although grammatically associated with the diamonds and not her body, resounds with this idea of bodily harm by denoting an explosive and violent purging, like a body forcefully emptying itself. She has consumed past the point her body can sustain. Ridge uses the enjambment of the “goitrous / throat” to express how her body overflows, just as the phrase flows beyond the limit of the line into the next.

Next, the speaker goes into a description of the woman’s typically beautiful features; however, while doing so, she acknowledges the pain and darkness seeping through her glittery veneer. The speaker says,

She is obesely beautiful.
Her eyes are full of bleared lights,
Like little pools of tar, spilled by a sailor in mad haste
for shore . . .
And her mouth is scarlet and full—only a little
crumpled—like a flower that has been pressed
apart . . . (7-13 “The Woman with Jewels”)

At first glance, the phrase “She is obesely beautiful” appears to be a compliment; however, the speaker, who could have just said she is beautiful, instead adds “obesely,” thereby qualifying her beauty and again emphasizing her obesity. Taken this way, the compliment seems more like mockery. To the speaker, the woman’s superabundance overshadows her beauty. The speaker also sees an underlying darkness beneath her bright exterior. “Her eyes are full of bleared lights,” another nod to abundance, conveys this darkness. Her eyes are not bright with light; as “bleared” implies, they are full of blurry or dim light, or obscured as if by tears. Here, Ridge extends her use of light to capture this sadness, a sadness that is tied up with consumption. This inner turmoil comes through again as the speaker likens the woman’s eyes to “little pools of tar, spilled by a

sailor.” Her eyes are like “pools of tar” and therefore dark, signaling an internal darkness that the speaker can detect beyond her shiny exterior. Despite her excess and consumption, the woman may be deeply unhappy and depressed. “Spilled by a sailor in a mad haste,” another allusion overflowing liquid like “gush” and “fountain,” conveys the idea of waste. The image of the sailor spilling the tar carries with it a haphazard or lack of carefulness a hurriedness leading to disorder. The enjambment of “mad haste / for shore” enacts the sailors spilling the tar and the motif of overflow. Next, the speaker describes the woman’s mouth as “scarlet and full,” but also “crumpled.” By directing attention to her mouth, Ridge emphasizes consumption as eating, which may have contributed to the speaker’s obesity. Her scarlet mouth displays her overuse of lip color which, like her excessive adornment, pushes the boundaries of fashion and appropriateness. Her “full” mouth again denotes her excess, but also the idea that her mouth could be full of food, completing the speaker’s portrait of her as a consumer. Her full mouth is also “crumpled—like a flower that has been pressed / apart.” Her “crumpled” mouth betrays the stress and sadness she feels. The speaker specifies that it’s “like a flower that has been pressed apart,” which carries with it something being unnaturally contorted and shaped, something exerting a transforming force on her. To the speaker, her eyes and mouth betray an inner turmoil and distress that the woman may be covering with her ostentatious accoutrement.

In the next stanza, the speaker pauses and considers why this woman is in this place. She asks,

Why does she come alone to this obscure basement—
She who should have a litter and hand-maidens
to support her on either side? (14-16 “The Woman with Jewels”)

The blank line between the first and second stanzas sets up this moment of contemplation with a pause and invites the reader to also pause and consider the strangeness of a woman like this in a

in a café “alone.” The woman being unaccompanied in the café, on one level, speaks to her independence: she, like many women at this time, embraces her access by exploring the city on her own, without the supervision of an escort. Cafés like this one were semipublic spaces where women could enjoy city life close to but shielded from the city streets. They were sites of leisure and places where women could reclaim the gaze as spectators, instead of spectacles. However, on another level, her being alone could also reveal her isolation or loneliness, which would explain her dark eyes and “crumbled” mouth. While scrutinizing the woman, the speaker thinks she should have “hand-maidens / to support her on either side” because, as her bejeweled appearance implies, she is obviously from the upper class. Furthermore, because she looks like she’s from the upper class, she is out of place in this “obscure basement.” On another level, this line of questioning the speaker could also be implying that the woman is not actually rich, but she is just playing rich, as did many conspicuous consumers. In this way, perhaps the woman is not out of place in this “obscure basement,” and her coming here reveals her actual middle-class status. The speaker pausing to ask this question hyperbolically draws attention to her facade. With the question, itself, the speaker implies that there can be a wrong and right place to consume and that even rich people, despite their privilege and access, can find themselves in the wrong place. In this way, Ridge reveals the exclusionary and classed nature of consumption. Additionally, Ridge uses the “hand-maidens” in this question to point to the laboring women that support this woman’s lifestyle of consumption with their exploited and broken bodies. In doing so, she reminds her readers of the people who support the system of consumption, but are not privy to it themselves.

In the final stanza, Ridge emphasizes the damaging health effects of the woman’s consumption. She writes,

She ascends the stairway, and the waiters turn to look
at her, spilling the soup.
The black satin dress is a little lifted, showing the
dropsical legs in their silken fleshings . . .
The mountainous breasts tremble . . .
There is an agitation in her gems,
That quiver incessantly, emitting trillions of fiery
rays . . .
She erupts explosive breaths . . .
Every step is an adventure
From this . . .
The serpent's tooth
Saved Cleopatra. (17-29 "The Woman with Jewels")

As the woman ascends the stairway, she is on full display for the café, and the spectacle of her appearance causes more overflow: the waiters "spilling the soup." Ridge uses enjambment in the phrase "turn to look / at her" to cause readers to turn their gaze to look "at her" along with the waiters. It is unclear what about her causes such a spectacle, but we can infer from the speaker's reaction to her that she stands out because of her multitude of sparkling jewels and, possibly, her obesity. The speaker's fixation on her obesity could belie her own lower-class status and infrequent experience with over-consumption, as a result of a lack of means. Like the speaker, the waiters, members of the working class, stare at her with fascination because they are used to scarcity instead of abundance. The waiters might also be looking at her "dropsical legs in their silken fleshings," visible beneath her "lifted" dress. As she climbs the stairs, the waiters may be able to see more than just her legs. "Dropsical legs"—dropsy being a condition in which the body fills with infectious fluid—points to a fullness that is harmful and dangerous to the body; it is another description like "gush," the "goitrous throat," "bulbous fingers," and the "full" mouth

that implies connects her body's abundance to physical illness or malady. These descriptions suggest that her consumption is causing her body to burst at the seams. We also see this distress in her body's tremulous movements: her "mountainous breasts tremble," and "there is an agitation in her gems, / That quiver incessantly." Beneath her bejeweled façade, her body shows signs of distress, pain, and fatigue. Consumption has taken a toll on her, to the point at which she cannot ascend steps without shaking all over. As "she erupts explosive breaths" indicates, her breathing is desperate and labored, a sign of poor health and the strain that obesity has put on her body. Ridge emphasizes the damage consumption has exerted on her body in order to warn others to avoid being sucked in to a life of consumption.

This didactic undertone comes through in the closing lines: "From this... / The serpent's tooth / Saved Cleopatra." Ridge uses these references to Cleopatra and the serpent to connect this poem to "Broadway," and thereby emphasize the double-edged sword of consumption, which can both empower and entrap women. The implication here is that Cleopatra, herself a conspicuous consumer, may have ended up just like the nameless, bejeweled woman had she not taken her own life with the serpent. Although the speaker has sympathy for the woman and the inner turmoil she can detect within her, she views her as ridiculously over-the-top, a walking embodiment of a common societal evil to be avoided. She represents conspicuous consumption that consumes the consumer. But Ridge does not stop here: in "The Ghetto" and "In Harness," her examination of urban consumer culture goes one step further by showing how excessive consumption also consumes the city's factory workers. Collectively, these poems depict the interconnectedness of women in the city, a place where women's consumption is supported by the exploitation of women workers.

Early 20th Century Labor and Women

While the expansion of American commerce and industry allowed the middle and upper classes to enjoy excess, it further drove the lower class into scarcity and squalor. As Huyssen points out in *Progressive Inequality* (2014), although this time period is known as “The Progressive Era,” which conjures up notions of societal improvement, this era actually led to an increase in inequality: “Despite three decades’ worth of similarly hopeful, widely varied reformist activism and regulatory innovation, inequality between the rich and poor became more, not less acute, all the way up to the stock market crash of 1929” (Huyssen 2). As the middle and upper classes began consuming more and more, the demand for goods increased which, in turn, increased the pressure on factory workers to produce more products faster than ever before. Surprisingly, this increase in work did not also correlate with a wage increase. According to Melvyn Dubofsky in *Labor in America* (2017), a “surplus of labor” created by the influx of immigrants and the rise of “labor-saving machinery” held wages down and also “heightened the feeling of insecurity among workers over whom the dread shadow of unemployment always hung” (156). Knowing that they could be fired at any moment and, thus, lose vital financial support for them and their families, workers were pressured into enduring dangerous, dehumanizing, and even life-threatening working conditions. Laborers in a variety of industrial jobs commonly worked sixty to seventy hours every week (Weil 211) in cramped, overcrowded, and intensely hot factories. Factory owners often made these conditions more dangerous by ignoring fire and health codes, and labor regulations in an effort to save costs and push workers to produce as much as possible. As a result, fires, injuries, and other health problems were common. According to Huyssen, “American industry averaged more than half a million worker injuries and 35,000 fatalities every year from 1880 to 1900” (156). Around 1911, an average of

one hundred or more workers died in America every day (Von Drehle 3). Many of these injuries and fatalities resulted from the pressure factory owners and foreman exerted on workers, a direct result of the pressure on factories to produce at an extreme rate in order to capitalize on ravenous consumers with money to burn.

In New York during this time, women made up almost one third of all factory workers (Von Drehle 45). Women dominated the garment industry, the industry that Ridge chooses to focus on in “The Ghetto” and “In Harness.” A majority of these female garment workers were immigrants from Russia and Italy, who came to the United States to escape dangerous political and environmental situations in their home countries. In Russia following the assassination of Czar Alexander II in 1881, Russian Jews, an already marginalized group, were blamed for the attack and became the target of violence and discrimination. Over the next ten years, hundreds of thousands of Russian Jews escaped to the United States, and many settled in New York City (Von Drehle 90-91). In Italy, private land owners caused massive deforestation in an effort to “sell the lumber” and “expand the fields,” causing soil erosion to ruin farms, runoff to turn water sources into swamps that bred malaria spreading mosquitoes, and leading to a “deadly combination of tropical disease and desertlike aridity” (Von Drehle 108). Over two million Italians fled to the United States between 1900 and 1910. While living in the United States, these immigrants found that America offered them safety from their political and environmental problems at home; however, they also found themselves still in exile in a capitalist economy that preyed on their cheap labor and desperate circumstances.

The women working in garment factories faced many threats of illness, injury, and mistreatment from their supervisors. When garment factories were inspected by the Joint Board of Sanitary Control from 1910-1911, they found an array of health problems perpetuated or

caused by a lack of regulation. Most of the workers “suffer(ed) from anemia” and “possess(ed) a stooping gait” (qtd. in Huyssen 159). Health codes regulating garbage disposal and bathrooms were not followed, resulting in sanitation and air quality problems that worsened health problems for workers (qtd. in Huyssen 160). It was also widely known that many garment workers suffered from tuberculosis, which was even nicknamed “the tailor’s disease” (Huyssen 160). Diseases like TB easily spread between workers within these cramped and poorly ventilated spaces. Another malady typical of garment workers was “faulty posture,” presumably from sitting and leaning over their work all day; this led workers to experience constant pain throughout their bodies while they worked. Sewing also presented the constant risk of being stabbed with the powerful needles of industrial sewing machines. In addition to these health concerns, workers also experienced harsh treatment from their supervisors. Pauline Newman, a former garment worker and I.L.G.W.U. organizer, describes her experience being mistreated by saying, “there was constant watching you, lest you pause for a moment from your work...you were watched when you went to the lavatory and if in the opinion of the forelady you stayed a minute or two longer than she thought you should have you were threatened with being fired” (qtd. in Huyssen 162). Thus, these workers were stripped of their freedom and privacy, and treated like criminals. They were also commonly subject to sexual harassment and unwanted touching from their bosses (Huyssen 160). The decision to retaliate or resist these advancements put these women at risk of losing their jobs; as such, many women suffered in silence. For these women workers, their bodies were not their own. Once they became a part of this industrial system, their health, freedom, and voice were sacrificed to the mission of production and profit.

However, many of these workers did not remain silent about the abuses of power, exploitative treatment, and damaging conditions. During the early twentieth century, garment

workers became leaders in the labor movement. As Von Drehle points out, garment workers became “the vanguard(s) of the American labor movement” after taking a leadership role in organizing protests and strikes to advocate for labor reform (172). These women workers chose to openly resist even though they knew they could face harsh repercussions, including “foreman threatening them, strikebreakers punching them, private security personnel kicking them, police arresting them, or judges fining them and sentencing them to the workhouse on unsubstantiated charges” (Huyssen 153). While these resistance efforts resulted in some positive reforms, much of the abuses persisted and even worsened after World War I, when industry sought to “free itself from all government control, check any further advance of unionization, reassert its power, and roll back union gains” (Dubofsky 195). In this time period around the end of WWI, Ridge publishes “The Ghetto” and “In Harness,” poems which bring attention to the consequences of exploitative labor practices on female garment workers and also note their efforts to resist. In order to illustrate this interconnectedness between urban women as consumers and workers, Ridge focuses on an industry that connected them, the clothing industry. In making these workers visible, Ridge forces readers to confront the ethics of their consumption.

The Exploitation of Women Workers in “The Ghetto”

In *The Ghetto and Other Poems* (1918), Ridge pairs her exploration of urban consumerism, in “Broadway” and “The Woman with Jewels,” with depictions of urban labor. In the title poem, “The Ghetto,” Ridge illuminates the exilic experience of Jewish immigrants and factory workers living in New York City. This long narrative poem written in free verse contains nine sections that, as Berke points out, “show fragments of immigrant Jewish urban experience: history, family life, childhood, mercantilism, ritual old-world attitudes, new world activism,

evening's passions, and the celebration of life" (*Women Poets on the Left* 68). Ridge captures what life is like for immigrants and the working poor using the distant, yet empathetic perspective of a boarder staying with the Jewish immigrant family in a tenement house on Hester Street. Of all of Ridge's poems, "The Ghetto" has received the most critical attention. In *Mosaic of Fire*, Caroline Maun describes how Ridge uses this poem to show how the ghetto was both a trap and a shelter, a place of great suffering and hardship, but also a space of community. In her article, "Electric Currents of Life," Burke describes how the speaker in the ghetto is an example of a flâneuse, through whom Ridge shows how the city for immigrant women is a space of both possibility and "drudgery," "enchantment and disappointment" (39). She argues that the city offered Jewish immigrant women the chance to walk the city as flâneuses, but also the hardships of factory work, poverty, and tenement living. Berke offers a more in-depth analysis of "The Ghetto" in her book *Women Poets on the Left*. Here, she demonstrates how Ridge's poem is special because it uses the language of modern poetry to raise awareness about problems facing immigrants in America (68). She finds that Ridge constructs a nonjudgmental gaze: "unlike the majority of modernist poems, Ridge's narrative voice wholly embraces rather than distances itself from its subject; she positions herself as a keen and admiring observer" (Berke 69). In her analysis, Berke points out that the Jewish immigrants in this poem exist in a state of exile not only by virtue of their history as a persecuted people, but also as a marginalized group struggling to survive in the city. According to Berke, "The Ghetto" "reflects [Ridge's] recognition of the difficulty of exile and the sense of fragmentation and dislocation it creates for those who must live in it" (72). To this conversation on "The Ghetto," I add a detailed analysis of Sadie, a member of the poem's main immigrant family and a factory worker. Through Sadie's experience as a factory worker, Ridge illuminates the exploitative nature of labor practices and their

damaging consequences on workers' bodies and minds. Her story provides a vital counter point to Ridge's depiction of women as conspicuous consumers in "Broadway" and "Woman with the Jewels" because it shows how this urban consumption is built on the aching backs of the city's working poor.

In the second section of "The Ghetto," Ridge introduces us to Sadie, who works in a garment factory. Through this snapshot into Sadie's life, Ridge represents the physical and mental hazards of factory work that many laborers experienced during this time. The speaker introduces us to Sadie saying,

Sadie dresses in black.
She has black-wet hair full of cold lights
And a fine-drawn face, too white.
All day the power machines
Drone in her ears . . .
All day the fine dust flies
Till throats are parched and itch
And the heat—like a kept corpse—
Fouls to the last corner. (II.28-36 "The Ghetto")

As a factory worker, Sadie dresses in a plain, black uniform, a marker of her class. This shapeless and unremarkable uniform causes her to blend in with her fellow workers, thereby stripping her of her individuality and the ability to express herself with her clothing. In her black dress, she starkly contrasts the conspicuous consumers walking past her on the street. Ironically, she spends all of her waking hours making fashionable clothes, but she does not get to wear them. Despite Sadie's drab attire, the speaker notices her beauty: her "black-wet hair full of cold lights" and her "fine-drawn face." Through noting these features, the speaker helps her stand out in the crowd. Then, she signals with "too white" that beneath her beautiful features lie health

problems. Her extreme paleness could indicate a range of health problems that were common to factory workers at this time, including anemia, malnutrition, and Vitamin D deficiency from lack of exposure to sunlight.

As the speaker continues, she focuses on more of the harmful effects of factory work on the bodies of the workers. “All day the power machines / Drone in her ears . . .” represents the mind-numbing sound of the industrial machines assaulting her senses, surrounding her every minute. As the inescapable sound envelops her, she becomes contained within it, another way in which her body merges with the machines around her. By using ellipses at the end of this line, Ridge allows the sound to continue past the end of the line in the same way that the sound continues all day for Sadie. In micro, the juxtaposition of this powerful machine sound next to Sadie’s “too white” face emphasizes her lack of power, and in macro displays the rise of machine technology and the way it threatens human life. Ridge repeats the phrase “All day” to stress the excessive length of the workday. This repetition also builds in the monotonous feeling of Sadie’s workday, in which she repeats the same task over and over again.

The factory also wreaks havoc on her body: “All day the fine dust flies / Till throats are parched and itch.” Ridge draws attention to the toxic conditions of the garment factory, in which machines, materials, waste, and bodies combine to create a toxic stew of polluted air. Air in garment factories was filled with exhaust from industrial machines, tiny particles of fabric, dust, body odor, and the stench of garbage. Often, these buildings were not properly ventilated or aired out and, as a result, this polluted air never circulated out; it just stagnated and grew worse every day. Breathing this air all day caused workers a range of health problems, making their daily work even more uncomfortable. In addition, this toxic and dusty air was primed for stoking fires that could arise on the factory floor. This hazard helped feed the triangle shirtwaist fire of 1911,

one of the deadliest industrial accidents in United States history, which claimed the lives of 146 garment workers, the majority of whom were young women (Von Drehle 3). Although many workers clamored for improved conditions, little was done to reduce the air pollution or protect workers from its damaging health effects. After noting the air pollution, the speaker then draws attention to the extreme heat, which “like a kept corpse— / Fouls in the last corner.” This intense heat fills the entire space, making it impossible for the workers to find relief, thus perpetuating the bad and odorous air problem. Ridge uses the phrase “kept corpse” to remind her audience of the high mortality rate in factories. Like the corpse that is slowly decaying, the bodies of the workers are being eaten inside and out by toxins in the air, as well as the physically damaging and mentally distressing nature of their work.

In the next stanza, Ridge shows how these harsh working conditions are taking a toll on Sadie’s body and her ability to work. She writes,

Then—when needles move more slowly on the cloth
And sweaty fingers slacken
And hair falls in damp wisps over the eyes—
Sped by some power within,
Sadie quivers like a rod . . .
A thin black piston flying,
One with her machine. (II.37-43 “The Ghetto”)

As the needle moves “more slowly,” “sweaty fingers slacken,” and her “hair falls and damp wisps over her eyes,” we see heat and fatigue wearing down her body and her capacity to work. This moment vividly illustrates what was happening for thousands of workers throughout the workday. Feeling overtaken by long hours, hot and polluted air, and strenuous work, she draws from her remaining reserves “some power within” to keep going. The phrase “Sadie quivers like a rod” expresses both her failing strength and her will to persist. Through likening her body to an

engine rod and “A thin black piston flying,” Ridge suggests that Sadie’s body has become machine-like. The mechanomorphism here highlights how her body is being stripped of its humanity and used like a tool in a system of production. In moments when she feels overcome by the pain and fatigue, she must minimize her human qualities of emotion, sensation, and thought, and become the machine which persists mindlessly and without feeling; she must become “One with her machine.” Her body has not willingly become part of the machine; it has been sacrificed to the machine and forced to adapt.

In the next stanza, Ridge emphasizes Sadie’s lack of power and the ways in which she attempts to reclaim it. Her quiet resistance comes through in subtle gestures as she works. Ridge writes,

She—who stabs the piece-work with her bitter eye
And bids the girls: “Slow down—
You’ll have him cutting us again!”
She—fiery static atom,
Held in place by the fierce pressure all about—
Speeds up the driven wheels
And biting steel—that twice
Has nipped her to the bone. (II.44-51 “The Ghetto”)

Ridge describes her sewing technique as “stab(bing) the piece-work.” She may be a part of a production line, but while doing her tasks she expresses her aggression and violent desires that the exploitative system produces inside her. While giving over to the system bodily, she still retains her internal dissent. Her “bitter eye” also reveals her internal resistance. In addition, she uses her voice and knowledge of the system to resist. By ordering the girls around her to “Slow down,” she reclaims some power and control. Maun points out that Sadie does this in order to “prevent their wages from being cut,” adding that “the more productive workers in this system

were, the lower the price set per piece by the employer” (38). In this way, Sadie threatens the system and undercuts her superiors by undermining the workers’ productivity, but also by rising up as a leader—an act which foremen constantly tried to resist because it could lead to revolt.

Ridge accents this quiet moment of power and defiance by adding that Sadie is “a fiery static atom.” “Fiery” displays her passion and the anger simmering within her. However, as Ridge notes, Sadie is also a “static atom,” a description that emphasizes her smallness and stasis rather than strength and action. Taken together, “fiery static atom” is Sadie’s power that she possesses, but that the system wants to suppress within her. It does so through “fierce pressure,” the constant threat of losing her job and thereby hurting her ability to support her family. This pressure holds her “in place” and keeps her from openly resisting her superiors; it also causes her to “speed up the driven wheels” after she has instructed the girls around her to slow down. This same pressure caused many workers to speed up their work, which, in turn, caused many injuries in sewing factories. For example, in Leon Stein’s *Workers Speak* (1971), one garment worker describes a similar experience that led her to injure herself, saying, “Sometimes in my haste I get my finger caught and the needle goes right through it... I bind the finger up with a piece of cotton and go on working... Where the needle goes through the nail it makes a sore finger, or where it splinters a bone it does much harm. Sometimes a finger has to come off” (qtd. in Huyssen 161). As Huyssen points out, her “casual” tone while describing extremely painful injuries “reflects workplace culture, actively fostered by managerial structures, in which laboring bodies were not only considered unworthy of protection, but were commonly understood as intended for objectified expenditure” (161). Like this woman worker, Sadie has also been repeatedly stabbed “to the bone” by her machine, but she is not permitted the luxury of fearing

her machine and avoiding it because she needs to continue working. Losing productivity could be a loss of so much more: the money her family needs to survive.

In the next stanza, Ridge continues to draw attention to Sadie's effort to resist these exploitative labor practices. The speaker describes Sadie using her free time to protest for labor reform. At night, Sadie "spits her fire out in some dim manger of a hall, / Or at a protest meeting on the Square, / Her lit eyes kindling the mob..." (57-59). As "spits fire" indicates, Sadie channels her anger about work into activism. She uses the fire simmering inside her to "kindl(e)" or stoke the activism of others. Like other garment workers at this time, Sadie takes this risk of publicly resisting because she believes passionately in making conditions better for her sister workers. Her long days of work and long nights of protest cause her to wake the next day "a little whiter, / Though up and keyed to the long day, / Alert, yet weary . . ." (61-63). Each day she rises still carrying the fatigue from the day before. "Like a bird / That all night long has beat about a light" (63-64), she feels the immense weight of the futility of her resistance efforts, but somehow she rouses the energy to keep working and keep fighting.

Bondage, Dehumanization, and Resistance

Ridge also exposes the hardships facing women in factories in "In Harness," from her second collection of poems, *Sun-Up, and Other Poems* (1920). In this poem, Ridge focuses on the dehumanizing conditions factory workers endure, the imprint they leave on their bodies and minds, as well as the creative ways the women resist being enslaved by the system. While depicting these deplorable conditions, Ridge also alludes to the excess of the people outside the factory, people who stand to benefit from the exploited workers.

The title “In Harness” alludes not only to the type of work in this factory but also its exploitative nature. On one level, “in harness” means to be in the routine of daily work (OED n. 4b). Harness is also “the apparatus in a loom by which the sets of warp threads are shifted alternately to form the shed” (OED n. 6). Thus, this title introduces the idea of sewing work, thus signaling the setting, a garment factory. Beyond this, “in harness” likens the condition of working in a garment factory to being a work horse; in both cases, bodies are bound and controlled by an outside force, and exploited for their use. In this way, Ridge suggests that the women in these factories are not free and they are treated like slaves and animals. Thus, through the title, Ridge also calls out the dehumanization and lack of autonomy implicit in this type of work. “In Harness” also focuses the attention of the poem on the workers, as opposed to their managers who are controlling them. In this way, Ridge primes her audience to think about this situation from the position of a bonded body.

The first stanza reveals the foreman as the dominant force in charge of controlling the factory workers. The poem begins,

The foreman’s head
slowly circling . . .
White rims
under yellow disks of eyes. . . .
Gold hairs
starting out of a blond scowl . . .
Hovering . . . disappearing . . . recurring
the foreman’s head. (1-8 “In Harness”)

The use of the word “foreman” in the first line locates this poem in a factory and makes it clear that a man is in control of this space and the workers in it. Ridge directs her attention to the foreman’s head and eyes to show how he surveils the workers. She uses short lines and ellipses

to lead the reader's eye slowly and carefully over the words in the same way the foreman looks at the workers. He has the gaze, the privilege, and the power. His omnipresence represents the constant threat of punishment, firing, and harassment that presses on the workers, keeping them in line. His "Gold hairs," and "blond scowl" set him apart from the garment workers, who, at this historical moment, are mostly of Jewish or Italian heritage, and, as such, less likely to have blond hair. "Gold" also designates his status as a member of a higher class.

In the second stanza, Ridge draws attention to the monotonous and dehumanizing nature of this type of work. The stanza begins with the overwhelming sound of the industrial machines:

Droning of power-machines . . .
droning of girl with adenoids . . .
Arms flapping with a fin-like motion
under sun burning down through a sky-light
like a glass lid. (9-13 "In Harness")

The word "droning" sets the soundscape buzzing from the machines and describes the nature of the work as monotonous. "Droning of girl with adenoids" implies that we are in a factory primarily employing women workers because factories were mostly segregated. Girl accurately represents how young many factory workers were at this time. The repetition of droning draws attention to the fact that the girl, like Sadie, has merged with the machines around her. As part of the machine, her body is not her own; it is dehumanized equipment exploited for production. "Droning" also denotes the mindlessness of the work itself as workers often perform the same task thousands of times within a single day. Using the phrase "girl with adenoids," however, Ridge does not allow her to get lost in this dehumanization process. She wants us to remember that she is still a girl although she is being swallowed by this machine. Her use of "adenoids" also directs attention to her throat and voice, which is being drowned out by the machines. The

dehumanization continues with the phrase “arms flapping with a fin-like motion,” which characterizes the girl as a fish, thereby stripping her of her humanity and animalizing, as implied by the horse reference in the title. Ridge then notes “the sun burning down through the sky-light / like a glass lid,” which conveys not only the heat and confinement of the factory, but also the feeling that these women are trapped inside. The “glass lid” makes it seem like they are jarred up like a product being sold. Indenting this phrase makes it stand out, while also visually conveying the feeling of being inside something.

As the stanza continues, Ridge uses light to lead us to consider the harsh conditions of factory work. In contrast to the light in “Broadway,” this light illuminates scarcity, rather than excess. Ridge continues,

Light skating on the rims of wheels . . .
boring in gimlet points.
Needles flickering
fierce white threads of light
fine as a wasp’s sting.
Light in sweat-drops brighter than eyes
and calico-pallid faces
and bodies throwing off smells—
and the air a bloated presence
 pressing on the walls
and the silence a compressed scream. (14-24 “In Harness”)

As the light shines “on the rims of wheels / boring in gimlet points,” Ridge locates the poem in a garment factory. The phrase “boring in gimlet points” reflects the technique of putting buttons on clothing. Beyond this, “boring” also reflects the mindless and tedious nature of this work. As the light moves over “gimlet points,” “needles,” and “wasp’s stings,” Ridge signals the threat of penetration, pain, and injury in this line of work, making the dangerous nature of this work clear.

Next, the light shines on the bodies of the women workers. “Sweat-drops brighter than eyes” reveals the heat of the factory, the strenuous work of making garments, and the women’s state of weariness and hopelessness that steals the light from their eyes. Their “calico-pallid faces” are spotted and white, signifying an array of health conditions common in factories at this time, like anemia and malnutrition. Additionally, through this reference to calico, which is also a type of cotton cloth, Ridge implies that these women are inseparable from the product that they make. Because the laborers are often forgotten in the process of marketing, purchasing, and using products, Ridge uses this poem to remind readers of the interconnectedness between this product and the exploited bodies who produced it.

Next, Ridge describes the air that is thick with the smells from hot, sweaty bodies pressed together. “Bodies throwing off smells” represents the hot and cramped conditions they work in and also the unpleasant sensory experience of working in that environment. The air is so thick that it is a bloated presence pressing on the walls, an image which expresses the workers’ desire to escape this confining and putrid environment. “The silence a compressed scream” further stresses this desire to escape, as well as the feeling of helplessness and agony, and the inability to speak out. Ridge repeats the word “press,” in the words “presence,” “pressing,” and “compressed,” and builds the sense of pressure that the women workers feel every day wanting to escape but being unable to do so.

As the poem continues, Ridge emphasizes the ways the women workers push back against these harsh conditions and try to reclaim power and voice. In stanza three, a little Russian starts defiantly singing “La Marseilles,” the French national anthem, a song written in the spirit of rising up against tyranny and oppression. Soon, other women join her. Like the members of

the French Revolution, these women unite their voices to call out abuses of power under the guise of singing a national anthem. The song brings a small amount of renewal to the women:

And life—surging, clamorous, swarming like a rabble
crazily fluttering ragged petticoats—
comes rushing back into torpid eyes
like suddenly yielded gates. (31-34 “In Harness”)

This act of singing is also an act of resisting dehumanization and pushing back against the silencing of their voices. As the “suddenly yielded gates” imply, to these women, singing feels like a moment of freedom. It’s something that they’re choosing instead of something that has been chosen for them, and as such, it is a way of reclaiming their power and agency in a vocation in the situation that has continually stripped them of both.

Attempting to join with these voices is the “girl with adenoids,” who engages in her own quiet form of resistance. The fourth stanza reads,

The girl with adenoids
rocks on her hams.
A torrent of song
strains at her throat,
gurgles, rushes, gouges her blocked pipes.
Her feet beat a wild tattoo—
head flung back and pelvis lifting
to the white body of the sun.
Mates now, these two—
goddess and god. . . .
Marchons! (35-45 “In Harness”)

Singing this song does not come easy to her: the song “strains at her throat, / gurgles, rushes, and gouges her blocked pipes.” As the song tears through her throat, Ridge draws attention to her lack of voice and implies that her voice may be impaired by a physical malady. The repetition of

adenoids combined with the fact that she is old enough to work in the factory implies that her adenoids should have been removed by now and that she still has them because she lacks the means to get them removed safely. Consequently, she is unable to use her voice in this moment. Nonetheless, with the aid of her sewing machine, she manages to wage her own form of dissent. The descriptions, “rocks on her hams,” “head flung back and pelvis lifting / to the white body of the sun,” and “Mates now, these two,” suggest she’s using her machine to experience a moment of sexual pleasure. Svoboda explains, “Climax happened frequently to women who pressed their thighs together while using the treadle for so many hours, and foremen were told to listen for runaway sewing machines” (166). This moment of pleasure temporarily lifts her out of the bleak factory. Through using her machine in this way, she takes back control of her body and becomes the one harnessing the power of the machine for her own ends.

Ridge concludes this poem by reminding us of the system of excess perpetuating this exploitative factory system. She juxtaposes an image of excess with a moment of bondage and entrapment:

To-day
little French merchant men
with pointed beards
and fat American merchant men
without any beards
drive to a feast of buttered squabs.
The band . . . accoutered and neatly caparisoned
 plays the Marseillaise. . . .
And I think of a wild stallion . . . newly caught
flanks yet taut and nostrils spread
to the smell of a racing mare,
hitched to a grocer’s cart. (50-61 “In Harness”)

These merchant class men directly benefit from the exploitation of workers by making money off the products they produce under these harsh conditions. The use of “little” and “fat” casts these men in a ridiculous or demeaning light because we are not meant to sympathize with them. The fat American merchant man driving to the “feast of buttered squab” is also a picture of excess which starkly contrasts the sweaty hopeless “calico-pallid faces” of the women working in the factory. Rich wants us to think of their excess as linked to the scarcity of the working class. The final image of the “wild stallion . . . newly caught” symbolizes these workers whose power and potential is being harnessed for someone else’s benefit.

Coda

In her examination of the cross-class effects of urban consumerism on women, Ridge displays the transformative interaction between bodies and city, a process Elizabeth Grosz describes when saying, “the city is made and made over into the simulacrum of the body, and the body, in its turn, is transformed, ‘citified,’ urbanized as a distinctively metropolitan body” (“Bodies-Cities” 242). We see this mutually transformative relation in the case of the urban consumer culture transforming the city space with its department stores and advertising selling to women. Upper and middle-class female bodies, like that of the bejeweled woman, became ensnared by the consumer-driven city space, which sought to entice them at every turn. Women’s bodies also more literally produced the city through factory labor. The bodies of these women helped manufacture the city and were also transformed by the environment: they breathed in the toxic air of factories, frequently injured themselves on the job, and, over time, their bodies became physically shaped by lack of sunlight, the constant standing or sitting, as well as the repetitive movement of their tasks. Outside factories, their bodies were further shaped by the

deplorable living conditions of the poorest urban zones, like the disease-ridden tenements in the Lower East Side. In the hands of Ridge, the city is simultaneously bright and bleak, enticing and threatening, freeing and ensnaring. And one woman's new dress is made possible by another woman's impaled finger.

Epilogue

The story of urban exile has remained untold largely because the modernist conversation on city literature has primarily focused on male writers and male experiences. Despite its absence from modernist studies, urban exile is a major thread running through women's modernist poetry, one that challenges established notions within modernist studies. For instance, modernist poetry is criticized for featuring the external world merely as a way of symbolizing the self; however, city poetry by modernist American women often centers on real material encounters between the urban environment and female bodies. Nature in these poems does not serve a symbolic function; it stands alongside the female speaker as another physical body experiencing the damaging consequences of the conquest of male culture. Moreover, poets like Millay and Lowell address issues like environmental pollution decades before doing so became mainstream. In addition to its non-environmental reputation, modernist poetry is also known for being self-centered, inwardly turned; however, poets like Ridge contradict that notion. Ridge's city poetry turns an empathetic gaze toward some of the city's most vulnerable inhabitants and implicates urban consumers in their struggle. Instead of focusing on the excitement and vibrancy of urban life, Ridge makes visible the invisible bodies that build and maintain the city and its consumer-driven culture. Her socially-engaged city poetry provides an important counter to depictions that tend to glamorize urban life. Similar to Ridge, Lowell resists this glamorization of the city by, instead of standing in awe of the city's bright lights, showing their harmful consequences. City poetry by modernist women also provides a noteworthy indictment of *flâneurie*. Instead of focusing on the excitement of being lost in a crowd, Scott reflects the vulnerability and loss of power that a woman experiences in crowds. Her poetry of trauma shows what it is like to live as the object of the gaze, constantly feeling the "obliterating"

stare, understanding that your body in urban spaces is conceived of as a target.²² Lowell takes the male sexual fantasy inherent in many representations of flâneurie to its logical conclusion by depicting the goddess captured by men, stripped bare, and sold in marketplace. Lowell positions the flâneuse as witness and through her lens draws attention to the violation of the male gaze, instead of reifying it. By showing both the cultural and environmental threats women faced in urban zones, these writers put forth a narrative of exile that clarifies our understanding of what it felt like to be a modern woman in the city. They challenge prevailing notions of the New Woman feeling liberated in city spaces by showing the opposite: women were often traumatized by the mechanized and masculine city. Without this narrative of urban exile, the story of the New Woman remains incomplete.

Moving forward, in order to more fully understand urban exile and modern women in cities, we must look to the city poetry of African-American women. At this point, we know of several African American women poets who lived in cities during this period, including Sarah Collins Fernandis, Helene Johnson, Georgia Johnson, Jessie R. Fauset, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, and Gwendolyn Bennett. However, only a few of their poems have been published and within that body of poetry the city is seldom mentioned.²³ Further recovery work is needed in order to make this poetry available for study. Despite this, there is great potential for their city poetry to deepen conversations on topics like the flâneuse, urban trauma, urban nature, and women's access to urban spaces.

²² See Scott's "Sunset: Battery Park."

²³ Of all these poets, Dunbar-Nelson has the most available poetry; however, in her body of work, there is very little city poetry. Emmanuel Eggar's *Black Women Poets of the Harlem Renaissance* (2003) and Maureen Honey's *Shadowed Dreams* (2006), both collections of women's poetry of the Harlem Renaissance, are important pieces of this recovery process.

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