

THE LOSS OF BEAUTY GIVES IT LIFE: A PARADOX OF LOVE
POETRY & INTELLECTUAL POETS

by

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This thesis explores how the structure and subject of poems from the British Romantic Era and broader Modernist Poetic Movement represent love as it relates to literary tradition. The general chronology of literary tradition and the social life that shapes it, tends to place these movements in opposition despite their shared ambitions: to redefine contemporary poetics so as to honorably represent the varied and constantly evolving modern experience. The title of this thesis is “The Loss of Beauty Gives it Life: A Paradox of Love Poetry & Intellectual Poets” because to live is to experience loss—and to experience loss is to have experienced love. I understand poems as a figment of life that inherently assumes loss—the loss of the poet’s life, the loss of the experience they wrote of, the loss of language to clearly articulate feeling, and so on. Because loss is working on so many levels, “love” in this thesis is not merely affection—of a person, place, or thing; love is a critique of literary tradition and the conventional understanding that love is something overwhelmingly pleasurable.

Additionally, the “intellectual poets” described in the title refers to poets belonging to either the British Romantic Era or Modernist Poetic Movement. I use “intellectual” as an umbrella term to close in the gap between both movements, as each is composed of stylistically

different poets—all of whom deeply engage with the paradox of life and loss in their poems. Through modes of formal analysis such as close reading and intertextuality, this thesis organizes poems from both movements into three categories: love of the beloved, love of location, and love of all emotion. Their placement in a category derives from an examination of its form, diction, imagery, and (outward) subject matter. Placing these qualities in conversation works to expose their emotional and/or political currency for which I consider them love poems representative of (British) Romanticism and Modernism; to do so, this thesis considers how the origin of a poet and their poem contribute to their different representations of love under a unified movement. Using a philosophical lens (*love of wisdom*), this thesis establishes a paradoxical relationship between two movements objectively at odds with each other.

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I. *LIFE + LOVE = LOSS & LOVE POETRY*

The term “paradox” refers to the logic of “an apparently absurd or self-contradictory statement or proposition, or a strongly counter-intuitive one, which investigation, analysis, or explanation may nevertheless prove to be well-founded or true.”¹ As an English major, I frequently conduct literary analysis on sources of various mediums whether they be novels, films, essays, music, paintings, poetry, etc. Although the subject of each analysis remains distinct, there is a consistent paradigm for such analytical work: the paradox. In almost every written assignment, I find the idea of the paradox at play in some capacity. The persistence of the word on the page led me to explore the concept outside of the literary sphere, where I am now suspended within the paradox that has become the framework for which I characterize the largeness of a human life against the uncharted universe.

Life in its simplest state is but a series of paradoxes; life cannot exist without loss, nor can happiness exist without sadness, or speech without silence, or sleep without waking up. Paradoxes are embedded in human existence. Although life is innately a subjective experience, which depends on infinite external (socio-political) factors—the ability to think, feel, and breathe are qualities every person shares. Yet, when you consider the human condition to die, the actions we take to sustain everyday life are rendered obsolete: to be human is to exist in contradiction—to be caught in the liminality of life (a paradox).

On and off the page, the logic of a paradox is naturally complex. The term itself is a contradiction, where this exposition is simply an overanalysis of an ordinary experience—the human experience; this includes the ability to produce and criticize literary phenomena. While I

¹ *OED definition of the term “paradox.”*

realize the impossibility of this thesis to tackle something as complex as the human experience, it is people's subjective experiences that operate within the limitations of their paradoxical existence that become an eternal life source—to create art that lives beyond the body by which it was created. Among all artistic mediums, poetry closely mimics the motions of a human life for its articulation of the imagination. Poetry is an emotional and often political currency; writing is a conversation—between the self and the soul, the writer and the reader, the imagination and the reality where its written documentation exists tangibly.

It is poetry's potential to elicit emotional responses in readers across then and now that fascinates me most. Therefore, this thesis will offer a critical analysis and comparison of love poems produced in the British Romantic Era and Modernist Poetic Movement. I am interested in texts that are revolutionary for their conceptualization of beauty in all of its different forms and therefore distill almost infinite interpretations; such interpretations are entirely subjective and often contradictory due to the socio-political circumstances surrounding each movement and their ability to reach audiences across generations.

The British Romantic Era will provide a framework that represents literary tradition—or conventional love poetry from which many Modernist poets depart. Popular assumptions about Romantic poetry hinge on the idea that love poems should celebrate the beloved, while many Modernist representations of love highlight the limitations of its traditional representations—primarily those perpetuated during the Romantic Era. Because Modernism is often considered a reaction against Romanticism, poets from each movement have produced (love) poems which take up drastically different subjects and structures. However, within both movements, these poems create a paradox of life and loss—a paradox sutured together by love, allowing love poetry from both movements to inform interpretations of each other. I understand their

differences in form and intellectual ideologies as a point of intersection rather than a point of divergence: paradoxically, the commonality of both movements lies in their objectively different representations of love in poetry.

Love can manifest in virtually anything, including pain and pleasure—pain being the loss of love's representability, and pleasure being the ability to create a poetic form that encompasses this loss (of beauty or the love of someone/something). Life is then transferred from the poet to a poem through words which their mind ascribes agency through the act of writing and its spatial distribution on a page. In both Romantic and Modernist displays of love, in spite of their classification as opposites, it is the loss of beauty that gives life to love poetry.

II. MOVEMENTS IN OPPOSITION

Poetry produced in both the British Romantic Era and Modernist Poetic Movement have been extensively studied and debated by scholars. There are countless papers on the subject that span across and beyond both movements, all with varying opinions; one of the most popular beliefs among academics argues that Modernism is an overt reaction against Romanticism. While I believe there to be truth to that sentiment, the point of this thesis is to offer an idea of poetry that alternatively contextualizes this claim: to understand how the seemingly antithetical origins of these movements allow for commonality in their contributions to scholarship and social life. Just as Modernism can be considered a reaction against Romanticism, Romanticism is often characterized as a reaction against the Age of Enlightenment; it is the idea these movements are against each other that I find problematic.

All poetry is a kind of reaction whether it be the poet's reaction to their personal experience in the world, or a reader's reaction to a poem itself. Therefore, it is the subjective aesthetic of poems that remains independent from a scholar's understanding of their existence under a specific movement. Although the poets whose work I wish to examine are openly associated with a poetic movement, I believe that their classification as such invites interpretations regarding a poem's aesthetic production to embody the broader movement's interests. These movements are largely a result of the socio-political circumstances of their time, yet this idea tends to overlook a poem's individual value.

I understand a poem's aesthetic production in terms of its structure and subject to concern beauty as presented by the poet and its effect on the reader—how they choose to interpret the poem. Because I offer close readings of these poems in chapters III, IV, and V, this literature

review hinges on critical essays to contextualize the British Romantic Era and broader Modernist Poetic Movement that are imperative for my analysis.

Like human life, poems exist as paradoxes. Their agency as aesthetic objects stem from the subjective experience of the writer—to write a poem with the potential to initiate an aesthetic experience in the reader. Recorded poetry sustains a unique position between past and present, allowing generations of readers to interpret its meaning relative to their contemporary (modern) experience. Poems relate to the time in which they were written, to the past of the poet and poetic tradition, and to the present time where they currently exist. Because of this ability, the movements in which Romantic and Modernist poetry were produced become more or less obsolete in understanding their significance to audiences beyond academics. However, each movement must be contextualized so as to reveal the relevance of factors that constitute its emotional and political currency to be appreciated within and beyond traditional scholarship; these factors may include a poet's gender, education, nationality, intellectual beliefs, etc. because they inform the construction of their poetry to exist as both a reflection of their personage and the greater movement's efforts.

Philosophy & the Paradox: “Man is the great paradox of creation” — Blaise Pascal

The Greek translation of the term “philosophy” translates to “love of wisdom.” In both philosophy and poetry, writers seek knowledge that is not necessarily accessible but through rumination of the personal and political dimensions of human existence. Although philosophers Immanuel Kant and Blaise Pascal predate the Romantic Era, I find their insights helpful in

understanding the aesthetic production of British Romantic poetry and the greater efforts of poetics to concern political matters with inherent personal stakes.

Kant's "Critique of Aesthetic Judgement" highlights the human ability to judge and discern objects that trigger aesthetic experiences; nature is the object through which we encounter beauty—an idea embedded in Romantic tradition. British Romantic poetry is largely characterized by its sublime and spontaneous ability to have a residual effect on readers. A poem is the poet's articulation of an experience, where feeling is purposefully ordered. The subject of the poem is what Kant would consider a poet's "object of interest"; in its written form, a poem becomes an object to the reader. An "aesthetic experience" is a poem's ability to translate emotion or feeling from the writer to the reader through the precision of their words. However this is only an opportunity, not a guarantee; these experiences are subjective and beyond one's immediate control. The aesthetic value of a poem depends on the reader's singular experience with it, which allows for a vast range of—and often contradictory interpretations. As an "object of interest," a poem contains innate beauty for which it is an aesthetic experience itself; it is an object produced by the poet's encounter with the natural world.

In his account of the sublime, Kant also discusses the concept "negative pleasure," which coupled with beauty, are defining aspects of Romantic poetry. I understand the sublime as the dissonance between realism and surrealism that manifests in composition, presentation, and a poem's existence as an entity; it is a collision of pain and pleasure, where beauty is largely defined by its departure. Pleasure can only exist because of pain, where the sublime reveals the physical dimension of words to enact a sensory experience. For example: a poem's diction might be outwardly dissonant, yet the ordering of words to represent emotion is something beautiful because it allows readers to attain an aesthetic experience.

Therefore, I believe Kant's "Critique of Aesthetic Judgement" represents this thesis's argument that poems are paradoxical for bringing life to the loss of a poet's experience with the world and how their articulation of it affects the reader—bringing new life to an otherwise lost moment. Therefore, poetry is an expression of a poet's love of wisdom—of philosophy; love is then embedded in a poem's creation and a reader's emotional encounter with it, where its formal construction (diction, imagery, form, etc.) acts as a catalyst for the reader's aesthetic experience.

The excerpt, "Paradox of the Greatness and Wretchedness of Man" from Blaise Pascal's "Pensées," supplements Kant's notions of aesthetic experience and the heightened awareness by which philosophic texts and poetry are produced. Pascal was a French Catholic philosopher and mathematician from the seventeenth century who considered the contradictory nature of the human condition. Although his work tends to conflate religion with knowledge, I find his paradox of (human) greatness and wretchedness emblematic of poetic ideals relative to the sublime. This excerpt is undoubtedly a religious doctrine, but it is also a testament to Pascal's love of wisdom; he asserts that the love of wisdom can be sustained through faith in God because the inability to objectively prove God's existence motivates the human pursuit of knowledge.²

While Pascal credits God for man's desire to obtain knowledge, he understands the prominence of the physical senses in constructing one's perception of their (human) existence. Similar to Kant's aesthetic experience, Pascal notes that one's senses operate independently from reason and are "often the masters of reason."³ The human desire to feel is an undeniable force which compels people to seek out physical pleasures, often without acknowledging reason.

² "In order to make man happy, it must prove to him that there is a God; that we ought to love Him; that our true happiness is to be in Him, and our sole evil to be separated from Him; it must recognise that we are full of darkness which hinders us from knowing and loving Him; and that thus, as our duties compel us to love God, and our lusts turn us away from Him, we are full of unrighteousness. It must give us an explanation of our opposition to God and to our own good."

³ "The senses, independent of reason, and often the masters of reason..." .

Pascal believes this to be a consequence of the human condition, where the ability to think and feel are at odds with each other. Thus, man is suspended between torment and temptation.

I understand Pascal's paradox evident in Romantic poetry for exposing the dissonance between the sublime capabilities of the mind and its limitations to accept them as "images of the truth."⁴ Romantic poets such as William Blake largely reject Pascal's religious beliefs while preserving the idea that knowledge stems from sensory experience. Romantics were largely anti-reason, passion driven individuals; they believed that the universe and man's existence within it is infinite and unknowable. Most Romantic poets did not gain notoriety until after their deaths, yet the Romantic Era gained legitimacy because it offered an alternative understanding of the universe that divorced knowledge from objective reason.

Although Romanticism explicitly pushes back on principles from the Enlightenment, I remain hesitant to consider Romantic texts a reaction against the prior movement. Romantic poetry would not exist had it not been for the ideals set forth during the Age of Enlightenment to center reason. Because Romantic poets recognized a problem with such logic, I understand their poetry as a critique of the philosophical convention that inspired their creation. Therefore, I do not believe that Romanticism necessarily stands against the Enlightenment. Rather, it continues the pursuit of knowledge to preserve the love of wisdom in ways that adapt to changing socio-political circumstances. Romanticism emerged from the Enlightenment's inability to accommodate their understanding of knowledge—that the mind and/or the imagination is the ultimate source of knowledge; it characterizes human existence within the natural world in terms of subjective experiences. It is because Romantic poets' largely lost love for knowledge as it was

⁴ "Everything possible to be believed is an image of the truth." William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790).

perpetuated as universal truths that gave life to their poetry. In this framework, Romanticism is a patchwork of singular aesthetic experiences that represent the efforts of the greater movement.

Experimentalist Tradition: “The past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past” — T.S. Eliot

Modernist poetry critiques literary tradition similarly to the Romantic’s critique of reason during the Age of Enlightenment. Literature must constantly evolve to encompass the circumstances of contemporary life—circumstances that reflect previous literary tradition, where no movement can exist entirely isolated from the past it seeks to reject. Just as Romanticism shifts away from logical explanations to existential questions—looking inward to the self and the imagination for answers—Modernism shifts focus onto objects of the modern world; because the movement emerged around the second Industrial Revolution, the technological development of society heavily contributes to the development of modern thinking and Modernist poetry. One of Modernism’s major critiques of Romanticism concerns this shift from the self to outward society. A primary characteristic of Romantic poetry is introspection: the poet’s articulation of a personal experience with a subject, which has the potential to initiate an aesthetic experience in readers. Alternatively, a key aesthetic of Modernist poetry is impersonality—a mode of disrupting literary conventions proposed by the Romantics. The stylistic differences in Romantic and Modernist poetry can be attributed to the values that governed the aesthetic production of poetry to oppose reason and logic through different degrees of distance from literary tradition. It is each movement’s radically different takes on unconventionality for which I consider them

most similar; all poetry, regardless of its classification under a certain movement, sits on a continuum of tradition.

Essays by Modernist writers T.S. Eliot and Mina Loy defend their poetic styles as representative of both their individual interests and the efforts of the broader Modernist movement. Although Eliot is a considerably more prominent Modernist writer than Loy, these supplementary essays reveal how the differences in their intellectual beliefs inform the aesthetic production of their poetry to be included under the same movement. Eliot's, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," and Loy's, "Feminist Manifesto," are opinion pieces; they express each writer's various critiques and modes of Modernist writing as products of both larger societal concerns such as the second Industrial Revolution, and aspects of their individual identities such as gender.

Eliot's essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," articulates his personal interests as both a classicist and Modernist⁵. Because it was published in tandem with his other written works to guide their public reception and contribution to literary scholarship, I find it emblematic of classical thought.⁶ As I mentioned earlier, impersonality is a defining feature of Modernist poetry; Eliot asserts its function in *his* writing, attributing it to the success of broader poetry and the literary tradition he infiltrates. The goal of his essay is twofold: (1) to define his subjective understanding of tradition and (2) to defend his engagement with impersonal modes of artistic expression as it relates to his definition of tradition.

⁵ In the Preface to *For Lancelot Andrewes: Essays on Style and Order* (1927), T. S. Eliot described himself as "classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and anglo-catholic in religion." A year prior, he wrote in his essay, "The Idea of a Literary Review" (1926), "that the modern tendency is towards something which, for want of a better name, we may call classicism... There is a tendency—discernable even in art—toward a higher and clearer conception of Reason, and a more severe and serene control of the emotions by Reason."

⁶ T.S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" was initially published in *The Egoist* (1919). Two years later, Eliot included the essay in his first book of literary criticism, *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (1920).

Tradition, as Eliot understands it, includes a “historical sense.” It is an awareness of the history from which poetry is produced. As a poet, he positions himself as a medium for poetic expression where the result is a “self sacrifice”; it is an exchange Eliot believes eliminates any trace of personality within a poem, giving new life to traditional ideas. Additionally, he exclaims that poetry is “an escape from emotion... [and] from personality.” Because a poem sustains a unique position between the past, present, and future, it modifies the past as much as it informs the present; poetry will also adapt to the future where a poem inevitably becomes an artifact of previous poetic tradition. Therefore, this essay exposes the paradoxical relationship between Romanticism and Modernism which simultaneously contextualizes Eliot’s views as a classicist relative to his personal and academic interests.

Eliot considers tradition a continuum where it is his responsibility as a poet to continue the pursuit of knowledge in a way which modifies the past. He directly opposes the *OED*’s definition of “Modernism”⁷ because it is poetry’s relationship to the past that he believes inspires its creation. Yet, Eliot is perhaps the most prominent Modernist poet despite this dissonance between his personal values as a classicist and those of the broader (Modernist) movement. Because Eliot’s stance as a classicist pushes back on objective Modernist efforts, I believe this essay supports this thesis’s argument that Romanticism and Modernism maintain a paradoxical relationship. If Modernism is considered a modification of the past, then it is a critique of Romanticism rather than a rejection of it. Eliot explicitly situates his work within literary tradition and assumes its prominence in the field precisely because he expresses a heightened awareness of the past; the past which Eliot refers to only becomes tradition because it is

⁷ “Any of various movements in art, architecture, literature, etc., generally characterized by a deliberate break with classical and traditional forms or methods of expression.” The part of this definition that clashes with Eliot’s views as a classicist is the *OED* claiming that “Modernism” is defined by a “deliberate break” from tradition.

established as something successful—something to be taught and learned from. In this framework, it is Eliot's love of wisdom that erases the limitations imposed by poetic movements to mount them in opposition.

Although Mina Loy's polemic "Feminist Manifesto" is much more radical, I see it functioning similarly to Eliot's essay in its critique of modern thought. Where Eliot provides more of an exposition that outlines his goals as a Modernist writer, Loy's approach is more of a call to action that highlights her hope to reform literary tradition so as to encompass women's equality. While both texts are testaments to Loy and Eliot's Modernist motivations, the disparity in their publication process should first be acknowledged—"Feminist Manifesto" was not finished, nor was it published in Loy's lifetime;⁸ it did not guide the reception of her poetry as Eliot's did until long after her death. However, it does reveal an intentional deviation from the mainstream Modernist movement.

To best understand Loy's mode of feminist impersonality, I find the etymology of "manifesto" worth noting; it pertains to futurist efforts that expose the dynamic energy of objects through an expression beyond that of their physical appearance at a particular moment in time. The term "manifesto" has Italian origins, roughly translating to "make public" or "make obvious." I find this interesting because the physical presentation of Loy's manifesto reimagines its traditional definition—it makes obvious certain words or phrases like "inadequate," "reform," and "absolute demolition." The result is a somewhat violent expression of femininity; it acts almost as an exposé of the obvious inequalities between men and women, demanding they be acknowledged. But this demand is more or less empty because Loy did not publish the manifesto

⁸ Mina Loy's "Feminist Manifesto" was written in 1914 and published in 1982.

herself, making it inaccessible to the public when her poetry was first published.⁹ This irony seems to manifest in her alternative understanding of impersonality—one that is likely founded on an ambivalence for the impersonality Eliot advocated for.

Her manifesto proposes the idea of “relative impersonality” as a means of centering female subjectivity and visibility that is lost in Eliot’s “self-sacrifice.” In doing so, she highlights the limitations of literary tradition while operating within them so as to accommodate for the adverse position of women writers within the Modernist movement. She believes that women such as herself cannot display the impersonality that is characteristic of the Modernist movement; the impersonal male is much different than the impersonal female in literary scholarship. The idea is that impersonality in poetry is relative to male identities—it is a consequence of patriarchal tradition which renders the woman writer invisible; female impersonality then inhibits Loy’s feminist efforts to establish (visible) female subjectivity within the Modernist movement.

I consider Loy’s “Feminist Manifesto” as another critique of tradition which includes the development of Modernism as an emerging literary movement. Its physical form and obvious subject matter work to disrupt literary conventions by demonstrating the intersection of gender politics and poetic tradition. She invents a new style of writing that balances (her) female individuality and Modernist impersonality to define the aesthetic value of her work. Loy acknowledges the past similarly to Eliot, except the “historical sense” she is concerned with is patriarchal; her experimental aesthetic “alters the present,” where her poetry sits on the continuum of tradition. The composition of Loy’s manifesto reflects her understanding of literary

⁹ Loy shared a draft of her “Feminist Manifesto” in a letter to Mabel Dodge Luhan (1915), calling it “an absolute resubstantiation of the feminist question... easily to be proved fallacious—there is no truth—anywhere.” Such a claim suggests Loy’s hesitance to publish the manifesto, as she acknowledges its radical and overtly controversial stance on sexuality and autonomy.

tradition to privilege male writers—and it is because her work operates within these limitations that she can expose them. Consequently, her writing aesthetic extends her subjective experience as a feminist and futurist to broader Modernist efforts.

In juxtaposition with Eliot's essay, the collision of competing identities and ideologies in Loy's manifesto further represent that of the larger movement. Like Romanticism, Modernism is made from poets' singular experiences that are often at odds with each other. It is a movement's ability to find cohesion among objective differences such as those in Loy and Eliot's intellectual ideologies, that define a poetic movement. This thesis is concerned with this intersection of differing ideas; the production of poetry is perpetuated by oppositions within a distinct movement and movements prior. It is the inability of literary tradition to authentically represent every poet's experiences that often becomes their motivation to create a form which encompasses those limitations. I believe that understanding poetry as reactions to ideological differences, even within the same movement, obscures those in which the Romantic and Modernist movements were founded on.

III. LOVE OF THE BELOVED

The beauty of literature and of poetry in particular, is its subjectivity. Poems are products of the circumstances of their creator—the time period in which they lived, where they were born, where they travelled, who they interacted with, their status, wealth, and gender. Poems are a reflection of a poet's subjective understanding of the world that is not constant throughout their lifetime, precisely because subjectivity is multifaceted. Therefore, poems are also influenced by the contributions of earlier authors; poetic movements emerge when a community of poets wish to be recognized for their efforts to remain distinct from their predecessors. As a result, the poets whose work I examine possess a different kind of subjectivity within their poetry that is not entirely separate from the objectives of their associated movements. For this reason, poetry produced under the same movement varies immensely. Because poems are inherently different, their placement under a specific movement becomes less significant. Poetry immortalizes the imagination; it preserves a poet's perception of the world that no longer exists as something tangible. To tend to ordinarily transient moments through ordered language is to express a philosophical love of wisdom—to expand poetic tradition so as to encompass the subjectivity of poets and their poems.

The concept of love can be extended to any number of things, yet in the context of love poetry one of the most common preconceptions is that love poems typically praise a person or lover. This chapter, along with chapters IV and V, will focus on four poems—two from the British Romantic Era and two from the Modernist Poetic Movement—that center the speaker's love for someone. I will examine how poets' representations of love vary throughout and across both movements to better understand their importance to literary tradition and how the time

period in which they were produced influence their aesthetic production. I will offer my own interpretations to consider how the motivations of poets interact with the interests of their associated movement. My goal here is to deconstruct the perceived differences between both movements so as to reveal how alternative representations of love are born from the marriage of a poem's subjective and inherent beauty; language is the agent which ascribes these poems with the potential to elicit emotional responses in readers.

"She Dwelt among the Untrodden Ways"

William Wordsworth's "She Dwelt Among the Untrodden Ways" is a 12-line ballad most often regarded as one of five poems in the ambiguous series known as "The Lucy Poems." Although Lucy can be considered a person within the world of these poems, there is no evidence that suggests her character is based on a real person.¹⁰ This fact informs the framework for which I analyze this poem; her character, as well as the general poem, is as enigmatic as the concept of loss. The specificity of Wordsworth's language alongside its form pushes back on its interpretation as a traditional love poem. The speaker does not praise Lucy as one might expect, but rather, he dwells on her lack of life. As a result, it reads as a satirical—almost grim demonstration of love, where I believe Lucy's character stands in for the concept of humanity and love's role within Wordsworth's writing.

Each stanza of the poem moves through the stages of Lucy's life from her adolescence through her death. Despite its overarching ambiguity, the language is confident and concise, where the reader is dropped into the poem without any preconceptions prompted by a title. "She

¹⁰ F.W. Bateson, among other scholars, speculate that Wordsworth's sister Dorothy inspired Lucy's character. Similarly, many believe that Lucy's lover was Wordsworth himself.

dwelt among the untrodden ways” (1) is a statement; the reader does not yet know who “she” is or why she lives in isolation “beside the springs of Dove” (2). Lucy’s character is othered by the speaker as a result of her seclusion; her beauty is only noticed in contrast to nature such as the springs of Dove and “a violet by a mossy stone” (5). It is through these associations to the natural world that reduce Lucy to something conceptual—adjacent to death.

Where the first two stanzas describe Lucy as something absent in which the speaker himself is removed, it is not until the final stanza that the speaker directly mentions her death. The poem is cohesive with no objective deviation from its vague language: the only difference in the last line is that the speaker mentions himself in the aftermath of Lucy’s death: “She lived unknown, and few could know / When Lucy ceased to be; / But she is in her grave, and, oh, / The difference to me!” (9-12). It is not until after Lucy has died that the speaker notices or reflects her beauty; it cannot be conveyed through outwardly beautiful language, but is defined by the lack of it. Lucy’s life is an afterthought and her isolation “among the untrodden ways” metaphorizes the uncertainty of death. No person can accurately expect all that death entails—it is a singular, isolating experience that everyone must endure. Wordsworth simplifies the anticipated complexity of death, using Lucy as an example. Perhaps it is the idea of death that created Lucy’s character and inspired this poem. She has a “grave” impact on the speaker and the recognition of Wordsworth’s poetry by extension. The speaker does not recognize Lucy’s beauty until she dies just as the reader cannot understand the poem’s beauty until its end. The particularity of Wordsworth’s language impersonalizes the relationship between Lucy and the speaker. Her character desensitizes and deconstructs perceptions of death that paint it as something daunting. Every description of Lucy is intentionally lackluster for the purpose of reminding both the speaker and reader that death is ordinary. Consequently, the speaker’s

relationship to Lucy resembles the reader's experience with the poem. Because the reader can attain an experience parallel to the speaker, Wordsworth attributes agency to the physical dimension of words that are often seen as something passive. Although beauty is not outwardly described, the poem is beautiful for being the vitality Lucy lacks in her (imaginary) lifetime. Every aspect of the poem seems to be lacking something—agency, elaboration, perspective—yet it is the lack of these things that are layered with meaning.

“Love Song XIII”

Mina Loy's collection *Songs to Joannes, or Love Songs*, is a rather paramount text for understanding its profound contributions to Modernist poetry as an emerging school of thought and its evolved significance in twenty-first-century scholarship. The collection is constructed contrary to traditional love poetry by dissecting its defining aspects and “making them new,” a Modernist slogan coined by Ezra Pound. Her notions of love are more abstract and adept to the deeply ironic dichotomy of love and loss, being almost indistinguishable from one another. Where most love poetry is commonly defined by its celebration of the beloved, *Songs to Joannes* extends the concept of loss to instead be its defining feature. Loy formally and figuratively deconstructs not only the semiotics of traditional love, but also of respected poetics in scholarship. It is for these reasons that I consider it the Modernist counterpart to Wordsworth's “She Dwelt Among the Untrodden Ways.” Lucy represents the loss of love as a subject (death), where Loy describes the loss of love as an idea in her poem, Love Song XIII. Both poems resist the limitations of love and its traditional representations through different methods of distorting language. Perhaps Wordsworth uses the ballad, a fixed form, to infiltrate and expand long

standing literary tradition. Alternatively, Loy employs an experimental form in free verse to supplement her adverse idea of love that cannot be confined to a respected form.

Songs to Johannes experiments with love's abstractions and articulation in traditional love poetry to demonstrate the subjectivity of love's experience(s); the songs together demonstrate the immense depth of love to be more than its celebratory aspects—they track the evolution of love and look beyond to its loss, simultaneously documenting everything in between as alternative, yet equivalent definitions. I understand Loy's radical critique of love in this collection as a larger critique of literary tradition. She is both a Modernist and Futurist poet—movements that “called for a rejection of past forms of expression.”¹¹ However, one cannot reject previous literary tradition without first acknowledging it. As a result, poems from the Romantic Era and Modernist Poetic Movement share similar motifs; these motifs function differently in respect to the interests of the broader movement, thus contributing to the evolution of poetic tradition.

Loy's choice to name the collection *Love Songs*, or *Songs to Joannes*, despite the speaker's overwhelmingly dissonant relationship to the subject, demonstrates the collection's ability to function on a personal and political level; the title addresses both a specific relationship (Joannes) and a broad concept (love) as a means of critiquing conventional love poetry. Doing so expands, or erases, existing limitations of love that focus on its admirable qualities, often disregarding its challenges. In this collection—and especially Song XIII, love is something conditional. The tension between the title and poems then revolutionizes the meaning of love poetry as it relates to Loy's aesthetic preferences as a Modernist poet. Song XIII utilizes free verse differently from its use in many of the collection's other poems, where their forms

¹¹ *The Poetry Foundation*, Glossary of Poetic Terms: “Futurism.”

likely distort that of the sonnet, a form commonly used to express love. Song XIII does not stay as close to the sonnet form. Its use of free verse transcends poetic tradition, where Loy invents a new form to accommodate the kind of love she advocates for: free love. The poem is unconventional and radical in the way that free love is; it is all-encompassing and nonconforming to the idea that love should be bound by marriage, nor poetry by form.

Free love includes the loss of formal structure in relationships: Loy's relationship to poetics lacks the conventional structure of love poetry to represent love in a positive light. Instead, Song XIII celebrates the loss of intimacy with the beloved. The poem evenly distributes agency between all of its aspects—form, content, imagery, sound, etc. The physical presentation of the poem is equally as important as its contents; their intersection is key to Loy's progressive and comprehensive understanding of love and poetics. Her idea of love as this all-encompassing concept produces her poem's unique forms that vary immensely throughout the collection; their subtle differences express the variance and often contradictory experiences of love.

Song XIII begins in an ambiguity similar to Wordsworth's "She Dwelt Among the Untrodden Ways," where the speaker and reader can experience the poem's revelations simultaneously. As the poet, Loy's language implores the reader, while the speaker implores her lover to witness the poem's construction in real time: "Come to me There is something / I have got to tell you and I can't tell" (1-2). She cannot speak of love's experience in a clear, concrete way for the reader or her lover to understand—she can only show them. The physical gaps within the poem may indicate the loss of accurate representations of Loy, or the speaker's idea of love. The spaces draw focus to the diction, which is profusely vague; because the words are so ambiguous, they might also speak to loss in terms of lack of language (speech) to represent the relationship between Loy and poetics, and the speaker with Joannes. Initially, it is

unclear what the speaker is referring to, as she repeatedly describes it only as “something.” This repetition is an active attempt to give name to the nameless and structure to the shapeless. She creates something new—“A new dimension, A new use, A new illusion” (5-7), which I take as a metaphor for the collection’s articulation of the diverse nature of free love; it exists as a new illusion, in a new dimension, with a new use, where love can manifest in anything, including pain and pleasure—pain being the loss of love’s representability as Loy and/or the speaker has experienced it, and pleasure being the ability to create a poetic form that encompasses such loss without the use of words to describe it.

The physical gaps within the first half of the poem attempt to articulate what Loy does not, representing their distance from her grasp. They suture the paradox of the speaker’s capacity to desire knowledge, yet actively resist it at the same time: they are her hesitation to understand love in its freest form. She explores its impressions on her through sensory details, where love is “ambient,” or subtle, yet still obvious—“Something shiny [but] only for you” (9). It is unclear whether the “you” is her lover or the reader—whether she is speaking of the difference between her and her lover’s perspectives on love—or the difference between traditional love and the adoption of free love. Regardless, the physical spacing distinguishes her experience as something singular. Where love is often seen as something exciting and advantageous, it is “Something only for you / Something [she] must not see” (9-10). Loy’s use of the personal pronouns “I” and “you” creates a stark contrast between the speaker and her lover’s experiences: love is fulfilling only for others’ because they celebrate its admirable qualities while excluding its shortcomings. She might feel ostracized by the limitations of stereotypical love as something shiny and celebratory. However, it is her supposed lack of love which is “Something very resonant / Something that you must not hear” (11-12). Loy does not define love by its attractive qualities,

she values it for its subjectivity to include her contrasting perspective that she is not obligated to share; it is “only for [her]” (13). These oppositions create a dissonance crucial to understanding Loy’s notions of love as inclusive of loss—the loss or lack of speech that creates space for silence—a silence that says as much as her speech. The diction portrays love as something metaphysical, where a concrete image would undermine its subjectivity. Because the diction fixates primarily on *feeling*, the loss of specific imagery could be a means of maintaining Loy’s alternative relationship to writing and representing love in a way that resonates only with herself. Perhaps the poem’s vague nature is to keep the reader at a distance because they cannot share her individual experience with love in personal or poetic relationships, leaving her words up to the reader’s interpretation.

Songs to Joannes revolutionizes modern love poetry by reconfiguring not only its form, but also its subject matter to make them reflective of free love’s fluidity and rendering it somewhat unidentifiable. Her use of free verse is almost incomparable to fellow Modernist poets like Eliot and Pound; free love meant sexual autonomy, it meant liberation from patriarchal control. In her “feminist manifesto,” she makes bold claims that marriage is no better than prostitution and chastity is a social construct used to control women. The only path to sexual liberation and autonomy is to destroy the idea of female purity—something that is not really possible. And in her attempt to destroy the gender binary, she demolishes popular assumptions about the capacity of (love) poetry.

Loy’s poetry presents free love more as the manifestation of loss, where the collection is a collage of sonic and imagistic dissonance meant to represent its (love’s) almost incomprehensible capacity. Her power to inversely articulate emotions through the metaphorization of a feeling rather than an image is what differentiates her as a poet and defines

her as both a Futurist and Modernist. She redefines love poetry by creating linearity between physical imagery and metaphysical feeling, where feelings are an extension of imagery. Both aspects and the dissonance of their collision are crucial for understanding Loy's progressive contributions to Modernist love poetry.

"To Constantia, Singing"

The relationship between the speaker and subject in Percy Bysshe Shelley's "To Constantia, Singing" is not ambiguous like Wordsworth or Loy's poems, but his use of language reveals a similar line of existential thought that is equally as progressive. The poem reads as a passionate and rather lengthy ode to a woman named Constantia, who is the fictionalized character of Claire Clairmont, the stepsister to Mary Shelley and mother of Lord Byron's daughter Allegra. Although it is objectively an address to her, it is not necessarily about Constantia at all; rather, it demonstrates the effect of her singing on the speaker. I understand Constantia's character as a metaphor for Shelley's love of language in the same way that Lucy is a metaphor for death. However, Wordsworth minimizes the outward display of love and affection that Shelley praises in his poem, resulting in two vastly different love poems produced under the Romantic Era. I understand their differences in aesthetic production as a consequence of Wordsworth as first-generation Romantic poet versus Shelley as second-generation;¹² the first generation is typically credited with developing a new mode of thought—one that largely opposed the Enlightenment's focus on reason—and the second generation furthered those

¹² This is a generalization. Because there is no unified algorithm to deem one poet or another a "Romantic," there are many reasons as to why poets like Wordsworth and Shelley have little observable aesthetic similarities. There are Romantic features, styles, tendencies, and themes—but not every poet or poem we call Romantic contains all of these qualities. Consequently, some Romantic poets share none of the same qualities as other Romantic poets.

pursuits to explore the sublime capabilities of the mind and its limitations to accept them as “images of the truth.”

Music is the medium by which the speaker transforms song into a sublime experience; its fleeting quality stresses the permanent nature of words, and therefore the immortalization of the imagination upon Shelley’s publication. The speaker idealizes Constantia; she is an aesthetic object that beholds the power of his poetry. He projects his poetic desires onto her character and musical talent, reducing her agency as a human to increase his autonomy as a poet. It is his language that ascribes agency to already established things: Constantia’s eyes, voice, lips, scent, touch, etc. In describing her physical features, the language itself gains autonomy. Shelley’s diction actively breathes life into the poem as it fixates on death: “Thus to be lost and thus to sink and die, / Perchance were death indeed!” (1-2). These opening lines coupled with the title stress the relationship between the cosmic delight induced by song and the sublime pleasure of contemplating death. The language is urgent and evokes movement, thus bringing life to fleeting music—suspending it in time. Additionally, the first stanza fuses Constantia’s physicalities with their more abstract effect on the speaker: in her eyes is where “a power like light doth lie,” and it is “from thy touch like fire doth leap. / Even while [he] write[s], [his] burning cheeks are wet” (3, 7, 8). Constantia is simply the muse by which the speaker explores his “sublime career” (17)—one that is impermanent relative to his lived experience, but immortal in the literary canon.

In the second stanza, the speaker becomes increasingly captivated by Constantia’s singing and the quick pace by which it passes. Although the speaker expresses his inability to articulate the exact sensation, he describes the attempt as “A breathless awe, like the swift change / Unseen, but felt in youthful slumbers, / Wild, sweet, but uncommunicably strange” (10-

12). The speaker occupies this in-between space: between perceptive and imagined reality; he wants to indulge completely in the sublime ecstasy of Constantia's song, but it is impossible, as she breathes in "fast ascending numbers" (13). The effect is perhaps far greater: the transient (musical) experience motivates the poem and it dictates the language that produces its thought and conveys its meaning. Additionally, because the language is so physical, it represents or reproduces aspects of the human experience; the poem is breathed to life, first by the poet or speaker, then to readers, allowing it to live far beyond the poet's physical body and his imagination.

Although the body of the poem largely fixates on the effect Constantia's singing has on the speaker that is separate from Constantia herself, she is named directly in the first and final stanzas. She is what grounds the poem; the speaker admits this, claiming he has "no life, Constantia, now, but thee" (34). This is not the speaker declaring his love for Constantia: the speaker's love is not for her, but for all that she embodies: she is the medium by which the speaker and Shelley's poetic power passes through. It is "the breath of summer night" and "the starry waters sleep" (41-42) that are personified in this stanza. At no point is the speaker truly concerned about his or Constantia's humanity; he knows they will both die, and in some capacity, he understands that they will be immortalized in the poem. The speaker's attention shifts from one thing to the next; once he has moved on, the thing—once Constantia, or rather her singing—is rendered obsolete. In the final line, the speaker surrenders to the sublime trance: "Lingering, suspends [his] soul in its voluptuous flight" (44). Perhaps this is the speaker's attempt to grasp the power beyond—or bestowed in the objects of his attention that are constantly changing; he will continue chasing this sublime ability that gives life to his poetry.

Shelley uses Constantia's music as a metaphor to amplify, or emphasize his love of wisdom which is founded on language. This love is masked in music and clothed with the language necessary to give life and beauty to his brain: "still it was sublime."¹³ Thus, an aesthetic experience is created for readers to witness, or become actors, of Shelley's imagination in real time. The poem is a patchwork of past experiences, including readers' varied encounters with it. Love is metaphysical. Beauty, however, is an idea that Shelley expresses similarly to Loy; it is liminal and the object from which it is distilled is constantly changing. Beauty does not exist in objects: it exists in the mind and the senses. Although Shelley's poem is not quite impersonal in the same regard as Loy's, both manipulate poetic language to assert their fractured ideas of love within an evolving poetic tradition where loss is at the center.

"Somebody's Song"

Dorothy Parker's collection, *Enough Rope*, somewhat mirrors Loy's mode of Modernist impersonality. It critiques modernity to forge a new way of thinking based on traditional methods; she re-makes various modes of communication such as social notes, news items, and lullabies, in order to draw attention to their limitations and exceed them. She was associated with *Vogue* magazine, *Vanity Fair*, and *The New Yorker*, where she frequently published book reviews as well as her own writing. She was also a founding member of the Algonquin Round Table, where respected American literary figures would meet for lunch to engage in witty and

¹³ "Approaching the frontiers, consequently the sea, nature resumed an aspect ruder and ruder, or rather seemed the bones of the world waiting to be clothed with everything necessary to give life and beauty. Still it was sublime." Mary Wollstonecraft "Letter V", *Letters Written in Sweden Norway and Denmark*.

sophisticated conversation. Consequently, she became a cultural icon whose writing does not maintain the outwardly serious candor of Loy's work. Both women's poetry comments on feminism, especially its place within Modernism, separating their subjective understandings of what it means to be a lady from mainstream societal expectations. Both poets undo popular conceptions about love—particularly as it relates to women—to expose its inauthenticity relative to their experiences.

Parker's poem, "Somebody's Song," emphasizes the ironic nature of love through various points in a romantic relationship. It is sectioned into three stanzas, each of eight lines. Her tone is confident as she tracks an experience of love from its infancy to its end. The first stanza characterizes the speaker's initial infatuation with her lover, the second stanza acknowledges the inequality of love in such a relationship, and the final stanza marks her acceptance that love is only a signifier of pain. As a result of its structure and subject, the poem becomes an equilibrium of wit and wisdom, concepts that could be considered synonymous, yet remain starkly distinct within the poem. It is the speaker's close proximity to love that allows her to maintain distance from it. Although she understands the innate desire to love, the poem cautions against it.

The first line of each stanza begins with a declarative statement that positions the speaker in the context of an unidentified romantic relationship. Although the title of the poem is not addressed to a specific person like Loy's *Songs to Johannes*, it can be understood similarly, as a metaphor for how the speaker experiences love in a romantic relationship. Each stanza is a different stage of the relationship, where the first is more idealistic and the last is quite pessimistic. However, the poem as a whole unites each singular stage through the use of punctuation: the first line of each stanza ends with a colon or semi-colon. Whether it is what the

speaker “vows,” “prays,” or “knows” (1, 9, 17), the colon indicates that while the hopeful tone in the first stanza disappears by the last, it does not falsify those feelings; the colon connects sentences and the experiences (subjects) they contain. The first stanza represents the speaker’s close affinity for her lover, promising that he has her “heart to keep,” although “Swift the measured sands may run; / Love like [theirs] is never done” (2, 5, 6). The speaker vows to love forever, a promise she later realizes she cannot keep; love is uncertain and love is conditional. There is a disconnect between her desire for unconditional love and her despair that it is unachievable.

The second stanza acts as a transition from the speaker’s initial hopefulness that her love is limitless, to her understanding that it is not. Although she begins to realize that love is laborious, she prays to “Be the one to love the less” (15). I find this the most striking line in the poem because of its vulnerability, which is in truth, ordinary. True equality in love is impossible because it is subjective and circumstantial. While the capacity to love is innate, love in action is a choice, one that requires conscious effort, imbalance emotions, and sacrifice. The speaker understands this and chooses to love in spite of its shortcomings, praying that she will be happy as long as she knows her partner is more invested than she. Yet, in the final stanza, the speaker returns to her promise; instead of a vow, it is now an oath “thin as rain” (18). She is the divine witness to a love that always includes loss: the loss of intimacy, excitement, desire, commitment... The speaker acknowledges the risks associated with love and accepts them anyway; it is because there is a disconnect between her head and her heart that she continues to seek out love, claiming her lover “is neither last nor first” (23).

The poem is a portrait of a woman yearning for a love that cannot be sustained. It highlights a feminist perspective of love through a Modernist lens. Love, as the speaker

understands it, is not strong enough to sustain a long term romantic relationship; to do so is to sacrifice other opportunities: either to love again with someone new, or to preserve the authentic self. Parker's poem places love's limitations above its celebratory features without denying their truth; it gives life to the idea that there is beauty in traditionally "unidealistic," or non-conforming love.

Romanticism is an all-encompassing concept that can be applied to almost any aspect of life and its subtler meanings. It is not entirely definable because it exists as something sublime and can take the shape of any medium. Within the context of literary tradition, Romantic poetry is influential for ascribing language an autonomy adjacent to that of humans. It is this feature that I believe is extended by movements including Modernism. Poetry is an expression of a poet's subjectivity: their subjective understanding of the world and their linguistic expression of it; it is an expression of experience and knowledge that asserts the subjectivity of poets' and their poems. Yet, the tendency to write and publish poetry is to subject it to the judgement of readers beyond the poet's respective time period. This is key to understanding a poem as a mode of reimagination, something entirely independent from its era and anticipated associations. As a result, many Romantic features have been reimagined, or revitalized in and beyond the Modernist Poetic Movement. Poetry represents the intersection of philosophical thought and personal reflection, where the interests of poetic movements often overshadow the intention of their poets. Language exposes the limitations of literary tradition to exclude poets' subjectivity; it

is a poet's alteration or modification of such tradition that ascribes agency to their work to oftentimes initiate aesthetic experiences and produce meaning in latter poetry.

Although the poems in this chapter outwardly focus on the speaker's love of someone, the way each poet manipulates language tends to overlook that relationship. Instead, these poems paint the speaker's relationship with the beloved as a metaphor for their love of poetry, and more importantly, their love for language. It is through their fixation on personal relationships that revolutionizes their poetry and places it within the literary canon. Additionally, I find it worth noting that all four of these poems contain musical elements: Wordsworth's *ballad*, Loy's *Songs to Joannes*, Shelley's *ode* "To Constantia, *Singing*," and Parker's "Somebody's *Song*." Each poem utilizes music to reveal the beauty of language expressed through the speaker's rumination on a seemingly romantic relationship. Despite their categorization as either Romantic or Modernist, first-generation or second-generation, Futurist or Algonquin Round Table related, each poem is an excessive exploration of subjectivity. The beloved is aestheticized and addressed through imagery, which allows the poet to exercise their power in pursuit of knowledge. Perhaps it is the loss of the beloved's individual beauty, or the reduction of their humanity, that emphasizes the beauty of the poem. Consequently, the analysis of Romantic and Modernist love poems in this chapter reveals the capacity of literary tradition to encompass and connect contradictory methods of poetic expression.

IV. LOVE OF LOCATION

This chapter shifts focus to explore the effects of iconic Romantic and Modernist poetry as it pertains to various locations. An “iconic” poem is one whose fame revolutionizes poetic conventions and critiques broader political concerns like T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*. It is ordinary for poets to write of places that perhaps had a profound impact on their identity—and therefore their art. These poems demonstrate an objectively political turn that produces various effects on the poet, the production of other poetry, and literary tradition. These poems aim to expose and critique political matters such as religious institutions and educational structures; with this focus on public life, the publication of these poems ultimately disrupt conventional love and poetics, thus reforming their meaning in the process.

Like the last chapter, love in these poems is largely defined by a lack of traditional beauty; they describe the adverse circumstances that inspired their creation, the inherent flaws in the cultivation of modern civilization, where beauty is built into a poem by the poet’s politically charged motivation to write. This chapter tracks the progression, distortion, and experimentation of poetic language that resembles a philosophical love of wisdom. While my selection of poems for “Love of the Beloved” certainly express political undercurrents, my intention with this chapter is to illustrate the dynamic of language to have restorative capabilities in their critique of various dimensions of social life. The following close readings are situated in the historical and cultural contexts of the British Romantic Era, the Modernist Poetic Movement, and the singular identities of their poets. Although the sequential emergence of these movements places them in opposition, both Romanticism and Modernism aim to revitalize the value of poetry in the modern world through an assertion of their poets’ aesthetic preferences.

“London”

Like the majority of William Blake’s corpus, “London” was not particularly well received in his lifetime. His poetry, often supplemented with visual art, largely targets areas for social reform; it advocates for non-conformity, thus resisting the oppressive nature of structured society through experimental modes of expression (i.e. form & subject matter). Its unfavorable public reception was likely a consequence of the Age of Enlightenment, the predecessor to the Romantic Era. Enlightened writing, the dominant literary genre of the eighteenth-century, idealizes reason through rational thought and is primarily obtained through religious and scientific inquiry. Blake’s writing demonstrates an alternative aesthetic that critiques Enlightened Rationalism and its influence on industrial society.

“London” was published in Blake’s dual collection *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, subtitled: “Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul.” The title and subtitle alone applies a Romantic lens to concepts presented in Blaise Pascal’s “Paradox of the Greatness and Wretchedness of Man.” Blake captures the complexity of human existence in this poem, where the mind makes abstractions real through its relationship with the body. The mind conveys subconscious, and often abstract thought, which the body can choose to codify into reality in the act of writing. Blake upholds Pascal’s paradox; humans experience two contrary states of being in a lifetime: innocence as man’s greatness, and experience as his wretchedness. However, Blake severs Pascal’s connection between the pursuit of knowledge and faith in God’s existence, asserting that it is the imagination that constitutes the two contrary states of human existence.

“London” is a poem from *Songs of Experience* that explores themes of corruption, oppression, and suffering; the physical structures of the city impose both mental and physical obstacles on human morality. The first stanza marks its melancholic and resentful tone, which is the foundation of the poem. Its diction represents the intersection of the literal and figurative world, which is riddled with limitations. Blake repeats the word “charter'd” to describe the streets of London and the flow of the Thames river, the juxtaposition of which produces “Marks of weakness, marks of woe” (4) on the people passing in the street. The city confines the speaker’s body, as well as the river’s flow, to physical limitations that are mapped out by the minds of others. The “charter'd streets” dictate the body’s physical mobility, consequently constraining the imagination.

Where the first stanza fixates on physical observations, the second appeals to auditory senses, further describing the dichotomy between innocence and experience—greatness and wretchedness. Everyone from infant to man reaps the repercussions of “mind-forg'd manacles” (8). People are prisoners to the limitations of social structures that constitute the human experience and existence. The “cry of every Man... / every Infants cry of fear” (5-6) outlines the pipeline from subconscious to conscious thought; crying is the rebellion of the mind to be free of its manacles. The “bans” of society embody the rejection of imagination as a truth—the submission of the body only to believe the physical reality in which it exists. By this, the speaker wholly rejects Enlightened emphasis on reason and logic, as it yields the oppressive structures the speaker encounters in London. He scrutinizes the subtleties embedded in social life for encouraging people to accept physical limitations as mental constraints.

The third stanza outlines the dire consequences of the mind’s confinement within the urban city. He alludes to another poem in the collection, “The Chimney Sweeper,” to

demonstrate the depth of such corruption. The poorest souls in society suffer the gravest consequences, of which they are undeserving. Chimney sweepers are born into corruption rather than love or family; they never experience the innocence as something blissful, but are burdened with generational wretchedness; they are robbed of an autonomy they never know exists, or never get the chance to form. The speaker describes the church as a “blackening” institution that “appals,” where blood runs “down Palace walls” (10, 12). Structures like church and state are failing the children placed in their care, whom they pledge to protect. The speaker does not conform to the general public’s praise of religion in society, but rather speaks out against it by exposing its inhumane practices. Perhaps this is an allusion to his next collection, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*—one that attempts not only to identify institutional destruction, but recreate it.

The final stanza continues with a similar tone of dissonance and discomfort, concluding the poem with a bleak vision; it juxtaposes Blake’s notions of innocence and experience with a haunting image: “the youthful Harlots curse / Blasts the new-born Infants tear / And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse” (14-16). These lines leave the reader with a jarring image of London’s future under its current circumstances. The speaker makes clear that youth is not synonymous with innocence; younger generations could turn to prostitution because their elders continually submit to the “mind-forg’d manacles.” People have submitted to social and structural norms for so long that their minds—and eventually their offspring—know nothing else; the manacles are mentally inherited by those who come next. The harlot cursing a crying infant could be a metaphor for the collection: when the innocent cry, they are cursed rather than comforted; babies depend on the elder’s “experience”—one that has cursed them with a limited awareness of their autonomy and inability to fully exercise it.

Blake's "London" critiques the values of political institutions such as organized religion, that the speaker believes, hinder the cultivation of a moral civilization. Although the poem is not conventionally beautiful, its beauty resides in action: the poem isn't beautiful, but its effect could be. Blake's art and poetry is an act of undoing; it undoes popular assumptions about poetry and the social life that governs it to include his honest account of life (in London) as he experienced it. Additionally, it is worth noting that the poem employs the sonnet, typical of love poems; his sonnet contains a version of London that is unbeautiful. Perhaps he does so to draw attention away from the city's praise-worthy features, instead calling to areas for social reform. Nothing about the poem is truly subtle: it is blatant, but beautiful in its vital contribution to the birth of Romanticism. It imposes a responsibility upon readers to unchain themselves from the manacles of their own minds, or at least recognize their presence.

The Waste Land

T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* is arguably the most critical Modernist text because its experimentalist form encompasses broader Modernist efforts to restore the aesthetic agency of poetry, education, and broader art forms following WWI. As the title suggests, this poem is largely about brokenness and loss; it is "a heap of broken images" (22) that lament the natural, social, emotional, and psychological collapse of humanity in the wake of the war. The poem is *broken* into five sections that each contain a plethora of allusions to literary tradition that work to regenerate their lost or diluted meaning in the modern world. However, the title sutures the sections together as a representation of tradition both as something tragic and triumphant. The poem then becomes a metaphoric no man's land that emphasizes a desolation and emptiness

parallel to that of war. As a result, Eliot offers a critique of tradition to which the poem is a testament; it is a laborious text to read, one that requires a certain commitment of readers to distill meaning from its many references. It is the fact that labor exists in both the poem's construction and reception by the public that I find particularly reflective of Modernist values.

The Waste Land posits that literary tradition must not be "inherited" as war has. No man's land is a hopeless state where both soldiers and greater society are at a physical and spiritual loss. Yet, Eliot understands that this kind of tradition cannot be entirely abandoned, it must be adapted to. Therefore, the poem's experimental approach is born from the loss of traditional limitations; beauty in the poem is not outwardly defined so as to call attention to the loss of agency in both literature and larger modern life. It is the poem's bleakness and overbearing allusions that attract its beauty, as it showcases Eliot's subjective relationship to intellectualism and modernity. *The Waste Land* is the Modernist text: it is a poem that society at large deemed reflective of its time period. The poem responds to a crisis of representation, taking fragments of history and of tradition to create a reflection of a society in crisis, which many people resonated with. I understand Eliot's poem as an attempt to restore beauty in the modern world, parallel to Blake's "London." In both, London is a landscape that highlights a love for literature, tradition, and life through a rather bleak portrayal of its current—and future circumstances.

Similar to how literary movements contain a variety of poets, styles, and subjects under a unified name, *The Waste Land* combines various forms and literary conventions to create a single poem. Its use of language fuses mythology, philosophy, history, comparative literature... in a way that fragments aspects of social and scholarly conventions; because it is fragmented in its final form, *The Waste Land* creates an equilibrium of life and loss, of pain and pleasure, of empathy and anger, where there is no real distinction between them. The poem tracks a series of

bleak images, voices, and ideas to reimagine the tradition to which the poem is a contribution; it is a cultural artifact that critiques the discourse from which it derived. Similar to Blake's act of undoing, Eliot's poem is devoted to disparaging.¹⁴ Both highlight the underdevelopment of the modern world to which they have become prime examples.

The structure of *The Waste Land* is extremely complex and rather calculated. It consists of five sections that depict the devastation of the modern world through a psychological breakdown of the natural elements of (modern) life: *I. The Burial of the Dead*, *II. A Game of Chess*, *III. The Fire Sermon*, *IV. Death by Water*, and *V. What the Thunder Said*. Each section, complemented by extensive footnotes, acts as a signifier of broader Modernist efforts; to study Eliot's work, one must engage with his notions of intellectualism.

As the footnotes indicate, *I. The Burial of the Dead*, alludes to the Anglican burial service as it refers to the funeral rites in the Book of Common Prayer (BCP). The themes expressed in the BCP, primarily hope and resurrection, are echoed and subverted within *The Waste Land*. The dead are the inhabitants of the modern world, among whom lives the speaker: "I will show you fear in a handful of dust" (30). In the BCP, the soul of the deceased is entrusted to God.¹⁵ Therefore, the speaker assumes the role of God, offering fear in the form of the poem; people of the modern world, or "the dead," are made of earth, ash, and dust. Typically, there is a distinction between the dead and the dying: the dead are liberated and absolved of the pain that the dying are confronted with. Yet, this is not true to the poem; the living are both the dead and the dying. Living in the modern world is not living at all: it is only a prelude to death. If the

¹⁴ "Eliot became a major figure in a culture whose leading tendencies he had devoted his career to disparaging." Louis Menand, "T.S. Eliot and Modernity" (1996).

¹⁵ "For as much as it hath pleased Almighty God of his great mercy to take unto himself the soul of our dear brother here departed: we therefore commit his body to the ground; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; in sure and certain hope of the Resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ." *The Book of Common Prayer*: "The Order for the Burial of the Dead."

natural world is a source of destruction, so is man. However, the theme of resurrection must not be lost: fear is what revives meaning.

The speaker is lost in life's paradoxes; his life—or lack thereof—is mirrored by his physical surroundings. The language of the BCP is further distorted and assumed by the speaker as he clarifies his relationship to it: “I was neither / Living nor dead, and I knew nothing, / Looking into the heart of light, the silence. / *Oed' und leer das Meer*” (39-42). The construction of these lines demonstrate the collapse of the speaker's identity with the social world: he is something between life and death; and the natural world is between “the heart of light” and the “desolate and empty” sea.¹⁶ Water is typically a symbol of cleansing and rebirth, but the speaker attributes its power to desolation and emptiness; it is fearful—especially in the context of line 55 and the fourth section.¹⁷

The second section, *II. A Game of Chess*, shifts focus from the natural world to romantic relationships. Love is calculated like the game of chess; and the construction of this section reflects this sentiment. The first half depicts an outwardly luxurious life, however, the footnote that corresponds to the first line quotes Dante's *Inferno*¹⁸. Therefore, the life the speaker describes is not luxurious at all, but a circle of hell. In Eliot's essay, “Baudelaire,” he argues that the human state, in-between evil and good, is far less favorable than to be wholly evil; to do nothing is more evil than submitting to evil itself. Application of Eliot's thoughts on Dante's *Inferno* illuminates the poem's representation of love, a love that is confined to conventional romantic relationships.

¹⁶ “*Oed' und leer das Meer*” is German for “Desolate and empty is the sea” or “Waste and empty is the sea.” Taken from Richard Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* (1865).

¹⁷ “Fear death by water” (55). Section *IV: Death By Water*.

¹⁸ “The wretched souls of those who lived without disgrace and without praise.” Dante's *Inferno* 3.55-57.

The opening lines focus solely on a chair like “a burnished throne” (77), detailing its extravagant and decorative features. This representation of luxury can be understood as a metaphor for love; like luxury, love is something desirable—something fruitful—often polished and shiny like the glass throne. But these qualities also represent love’s fragility, thus implying that it is impermanent. On this delicate throne lies a golden statue of cupid in addition to another statue who “(hid his eyes behind his wing)” (80). One cupid is outwardly noticed and the other neglects to be fully seen—both within the poem and its syntax, existing in parentheses. Perhaps Eliot is hinting at his relationship to intellectualism; the poem is an excessive demonstration of his belief system, which is a product of his traditional education. But the poem’s physical presentation is the aspect most obvious to readers. No reader can neglect its numerous footnotes and allusions. However, like the cupid statues (who may symbolize love) and the poem, Eliot’s relationship to intellectualism is more than its outward appearance. Although he somewhat upholds the value in higher education, he does so to reveal its limitations, to critique its conventional usage in Modern scholarship.¹⁹ Eliot creates complex images through language that succeeds in extracting multiple interpretations. Consequently, the poem gains agency as an aesthetic object that might have been lost or devalued in traditional poetics.

The third section, *III. The Fire Sermon*, expands on the themes of love present in *II. A Game of Chess*. Fire is symbolic of passion and is a medium through which the senses pass and desire is felt. Like sex, burning is also a (physical) sensation. Therefore, Buddhist spirituality, suffering, and enlightenment, are necessary to regenerate (what the speaker considers) the empty, loveless modern world; readers are given the Thames as an example: “The river’s tent is broken: the last fingers of leaf / Clutch and sink into the wet bank. The wind / Crosses the brown land,

¹⁹ “Modern” with a capital M refers to Modernist scholarship in Eliot’s contemporary context (early–mid 20th century).

unheard. The nymphs are departed” (173-175). Perhaps the river’s tent is humanity: humans are the fingers of the leaf sinking into the river. The Autumn season has dawned and the natural world is decaying—a consequence of humanity—not nature. The modern man is operating at a limited sense of autonomy; the death of the physical world is a product of the decay of man’s spiritual world. Additionally, nymphs symbolize fertility that is dormant during the autumn season, leaving the land brown. Their mythical beauty, along with the Thames natural beauty, have departed.

The sermon continues, morphing into song. Eliot nearly quotes Psalm 137;²⁰ instead of the collective “we,” referring to the exiled Hebrews who cried by Babylon’s rivers, it is “by the waters of Leman *I* sat down and wept” (182). If Babylon reinforces the mythical elements introduced in this section, why would Eliot opt to change it? Despite Leman being Lake Geneva’s previous name, it is also the word for “lover” in Middle English. The waters of Leman could then be the tears of the speaker, weeping into the lake as he writes.²¹ As the narrative progresses, the speaker of this section reveals himself as Tiresias, the blind prophet of Apollo. Tiresias lived as both a man and a woman, “throbbing between two lives” (218). They “throb” because they lack the agency to decide whether they live as a woman or man. Although blind, they can see “the typist home at teatime” (222). The typist is calculated like the “game of chess,” serving as both an object and a metaphor of the poem: the typist and her lover are human machines, but so is Tiresias for recounting this vision, and Eliot for typing up this sequence of events, curating the flow of the poem. The departed nymph then turns into the typist’s “departed lover” (250), whom she is hardly aware of. Her “automatic hand” (255) immediately “puts a

²⁰ “By the rivers of Babylon we sat down and wept / when we remembered Zion.”

²¹ Eliot wrote *The Waste Land* by Lake Leman/Geneva. Perhaps he wrote the speaker of this section as he saw himself reflected in the lake.

record on the gramophone” (256). The typist suffers a spiritual sickness—she desires sex, which she does not enjoy. This is further illuminated by the allusion to Goldsmith’s song.²² Similar to Eliot’s allusion to Dante’s *Inferno* in *II. A Game of Chess*, while the typist is technically alive, she is in-between good and evil, she is nothing until she dies.

IV. Death By Water is the shortest section in the poem, but its situation within the poem is rather interesting; it directly juxtaposes fire with water to illustrate the ultimate consequence of desire. This section’s protagonist, Phlebas the Phoenician, is confronted with his fate: “a fortnight dead” (312). Throughout the entire poem, water appears to be a negative element—perhaps the most destructive out of the four.²³ This short section collapses distinctions between life and death, between characters, and between voices within the poem. Yet, the speaker remains at a distance; he expresses no emotion, only offering his observations: The language he uses to describe Phlebas’s body places him in-between “the profit and loss... / [where] he rose and fell / He passed the stages of his youth... / Gentile or Jew” (314, 316, 317, 319). The speaker notes the contradictory nature of Phlebas’s state—a limp body only kept afloat by the sea that drowned him—to demonstrate that all is obsolete in death. However, obsolescence and uncertainty can coexist; just because something does not matter, does not mean that it is void of curiosity. Phlebas is simply an example presented to readers, reminding them to “consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you” (321). He who was once handsome, youthful, and adventurous, is now adrift—meaningless in his death. By calling upon the reader, Phlebas becomes a metaphor for the modern man: those who are idle in life are obsolete in death.

²² “When lovely woman stoops to folly / And finds too late that men betray / What charm can soothe her melancholy, / What art can wash her guilt away? / The only art the guilt to cover... / is to die.”

²³ Earth, air, fire, water.

V. *What the Thunder Said* is the final and most complex section of the poem. Now that the protagonist (Phlebas) is dead, there is an air of uncertainty about what comes next: how will the poem conclude? What is its meaning? The first three lines all begin with the word “after”: “*After* the torchlight red on sweaty faces / *After* the frosty silence in the gardens / *After* the agony in stony places” (322-324). Each noun that follows “after” correlates to the natural elements of life. It is only *after* man is confronted with fire in the form of a torch, with silence in death (by water—now frost), and agony in the earth’s grave, that the thunder can speak (air). The poem circles back to earlier points, where the speaker who “was neither / Living nor dead” (39-40) in the first section is now “*We* who were living are now dying” (329). After journeying through the waste land, the speaker accepts that the modern world is without meaning other than death. The poem echoes itself—its language, its symbols, its allusions, and its syntax. It is through these elements that all of the characters and voices are created—and so they are the same: they are the collective “we.”

It is the natural world, or rather the devastation of it, that imposes limits on the human mind. The speaker is excluded from this line of thought; he points to himself and points the poem to broader literary tradition: “These fragments I have shored against my ruins” (431). Eliot entangles the poem with literary tradition; it is made entirely of fragments, the fragmented sections are composed of fragmented allusions to other literature; and fragmented is the reader’s understanding of it as a whole. Both its structure and subject complicate the compulsion to extract a clear interpretation of the poem. In this framework, *The Waste Land* mirrors the desire to characterize the subjective human existence as one that always ends in the same fate.

Eliot’s poem is an excellent Modernist supplement to Blake’s “London.” Neither is conventionally beautiful, but each contemplates the absence of beauty. *The Waste Land*

crystallizes the shift in literary tradition to adopt Modernism as a contemporary movement; because Eliot borrows ideas and iterations from famous texts, he is able to his own and embed it in existing tradition. By doing so, the poem pushes back on the function of literary tradition in his lifetime—to often exclude contemporary poets and experimental aesthetics. And while Modernism is generally defined by a definitive break from tradition, the movement is largely defined by *The Waste Land*, a text that clearly does not reject literature respected by tradition. Therefore, its structure and subject matter not only redefine literary tradition, but also defend Modernism—and the poem’s placement—within its continuum: there is no perfect division between modes of Modernist poetry and their relationship to the classical and traditional. Because *The Waste Land* produces such varied interpretations, it is fundamentally characteristic of Modernist ideals; it sustains a unique degree of distance from literary convention and not simply “classical and traditional forms or methods of expression.”²⁴ The profound impact Eliot’s poem has on literary tradition sustains Modernist efforts to revitalize art beyond the time of the movement. It remains relevant, even a century later, continuing to elicit new interpretations—not only applicable to the time of its construction, but also to the past, where its references derive, and to the present time which it currently exists.

“Mont Blanc: Lines Written in the Vale of Chamouni”

Percy Bysshe Shelley’s “Mont Blanc” displays similar themes to *The Waste Land* regarding its exploration of the imagination and its expansion of literary tradition to encompass an experimental aesthetic. The poem explores the physical dimensions of the tallest mountain in

²⁴ OED’s definition of “Modernism.”

Europe to understand the emotional dimensions of the poem as paramount to the Romantic Era. Mont Blanc exists differently in the physical world than it does in observable reality; the speaker's perception of the mountain determines its power, which derives from personal associations rather than physical observations. It is the function of language within this poem that explores the physical world as something fabricated by Shelley's imagination. The speaker attributes human qualities to the mountain while preserving its physical image. For example, the first two lines of the poem fuse physical images with abstract thought—an "everlasting universe of things / [that] flows through the mind" (1-2). I find this an interesting introduction that perhaps speaks to the creative process involved in constructing the poem; the diction demonstrates the interconnected relationship between the universe and the speaker's unconsciousness: Mont Blanc's physical existence is a metaphor for the speaker and/or Shelley's imagination.

The composition of language in this poem ascribes power to the mountain that contrasts with its name: *blank mountain*. Although Mont Blanc is something grand, enormous, and awe-inspiring, it is "blank" because its power cannot be fully realized: its beauty is beyond human comprehension. These unexplainable qualities align the mountain's state of being with the speaker's, where he is entranced by its "sublime and strange [power]... a separate fantasy" (35-36). The speaker acknowledges the mountain's beauty, as well as the beauty of his imagination, as separate from tranquility. Language creates tension between the physical existence of the mountain and the speaker's perception of it, as guided by his imagination.

"Mont Blanc" embodies the "remote, serene, and inaccessible" (97) power of poetry to reproduce the imagination exactly as the speaker or poet experiences it. Yet, its articulation of the imagination is rooted in physical images, a concept that is taken up by many Modernist poets

such as William Carlos Williams.²⁵ These thematic parallels between the (British) Romantic Era and Modernist Poetic Movement create this thesis's paradox of love and intellectual poets; although language dictates the competing aesthetics of Romantic and Modernist poetry, it is also what motivates their varied representations of love.

Perhaps "Mont Blanc" lacks the political fervor of Blake and Eliot's poem's, but it expands the limitations of literary tradition to indulge a similar aesthetic experience. The poem confuses the reader's instinctive interpretation of the physical scene by attributing human-like characteristics to the mountain, "lending splendor" (4) to the speaker's "human thought" (5). Its language is sublime and lacks the limitations of poetic conventions; it represents the reciprocal relationship between the mountain as a material archive and the poem as a psychological archive. One element reflects, or enhances, the peculiarities of the other. The diction unlocks the underlying relationship between the universe and the speaker's unconscious. While the experience itself is intangible to the reader, they are immersed in the psychological dimensions of poetic language, creating a similar experience for them. Like the first generation Romantic poets, Shelley adjusts the reader's experience to focus on the intensity of the poem as an aesthetic object.

Unlike most Romantic poets before him, Shelley's poem forefronts the mountain's sublimity instead of the imagination. Human thought is a consequence of observable reality and of its sublime capability to stimulate the imagination and thus produce poetry. The second stanza describes the mountain's unidentifiable, yet inevitable effect on the mind: "Thy caverns echoing to the Arve's commotion, / A loud, lone sound no other sound can tame; / Thou art pervaded with that ceaseless motion, / Thou art the path of that unresting sound— / Dizzy Ravine!" (24-28).

²⁵ "No ideas but in things." A line from William Carlos Williams's "A Sort of Song" (1944). Abstract ideas should be rooted in physical things.

The speaker incessantly addresses the mountain, desperately seeking the source of life's sublime. Although the mountain is saturated with silence, it communicates a natural consciousness that is connected to the speaker's mind. Nature's capability to control the mind is echoed in the poem's language which describes the mountain's physical features. However, Mont Blanc's inability to talk itself encourages a reconciliation between the natural world and human civilization. The capitalization of "Dizzy Ravine" ascribes both the ravine and poetic language as a kind of agency; it is an elevated being, physically enormous and emotionally evocative. Thus, the language balances Mont Blanc's power and potential for destruction from which its beauty is defined.

The structure and subject of "Mont Blanc" tracks the progression of poetic thought, which I believe represents a philosophical love of wisdom; the ordering of its language obscures the relationship between different realities, primarily that of the mountain and the speaker. The poem is an overanalysis of a natural observation; on a basic level, the poem is simply the speaker marveling at the mountainous landscape, contemplating its effect on his mind. However, it is how Shelley documented such an observation and published it that makes the poem "an eternal now" (75). Although its language is fixed in literary tradition, its effect on and interpretations by readers is subject to change; this is the "power [that] dwells apart in its tranquility" (96). Consequently, "Mont Blanc" embodies the "remote, serene, and inaccessible" (97) power of poetry to immortalize the imagination; the poem preserves the speaker's imagination and experience in its language that allows readers to elicit ever changing interpretations, making the poem anew.

“Cities”

While *The Waste Land* and “Mont Blanc” are more excessive in terms of length and linguistic density, H.D.’s “Cities” takes a more modest approach to explore, contemplate, and interrogate the cultivation of modern cities. Its language demonstrates a preference for the vernacular with a focus on visual observations similar to Blake’s “London.” However, H.D. does not ground the poem in a specific place—a choice that I find reflective of her status as both a Modernist and Imagist, as it extends her critique of (modern) cities to the creative minds of their inhabitants. Its structure and subject fuses avant-garde aesthetics with ordinary images to forge a new perception of poetry within Modern industrial culture.²⁶

Although she is not as highly regarded as Eliot, both were heavily influenced by and associated with poet Ezra Pound, who identified H.D.’s poems as most reflective of his intentions with the Imagist movement.²⁷ Pound published the short essay, “A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste” (1913) where he defines his aesthetic preferences to strictly center imagery: “An ‘Image’ is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time.” By this definition, words are an economy; they are images themselves that represent human thought within a defined space. The language that “Cities” is composed of does exactly this: it is a cluster of images that illustrate the thoughts, feelings, and perceptions from which their words are produced.

The poem naturalizes the urban sprawl, placing it in contrast with ancient architecture which the speaker is fascinated with. It begins with a line of questioning—or perhaps a call to

²⁶ “Modern industrial culture” refers to Modernism as a cultural movement that emerged around the second Industrial Revolution.

²⁷ In a letter to Harriet Monroe, Pound describes H.D.’s poetry as: “Objective—no slither; direct—no excessive use of adjectives, no metaphors that won’t permit examination. It’s straight talk, straight as the Greek!”

action—as an attempt to characterize the design of modern cities. Like the title, the language is inclusive; it implicates readers and urges them to consider their position in the modern world: “Can *we* believe—by an effort / comfort in our hearts: / it is not waste all this, / not placed here in disgust, / street after street, / each patterned alike, / no grace to lighten / a single house of the hundred / crowded into one garden-space” (1-9). The speaker describes cities in terms of what they have lost. Similar to Eliot, the speaker generalizes the decline of urban civilization to become a waste land. Yet, she resists the limitations of time and space: the creative voice fostered by earlier (ancient) architecture is not completely lost. The language creates a pattern that mirrors “street after street,” where the physical body and the abstract mind are confined to the lackluster design of Modern cities. Although the initial images of the conforming crowds and identical streets appear impersonal, the inclusive “we” is personal; there is then tension between the poem’s language and the images it creates.

The diction in the first stanza is recycled in the second, juxtaposing the languishing Modern city with the grandeur beauty of ancient civilization. It is how the words are arranged that demonstrates the importance of physical space in both the creation of cities and the poem: “Crowded—can we believe, / not in utter disgust, / in ironical play— / but the maker of cities grew faint” (10-13). These words appear in a different order in this stanza than they do in the first, likely due to the difference in subject matter; the progression of the poem’s spatial design reflects the intentional design of ancient cities to foster creativity. The speaker dwells on the beauty of these cities in contrast to her outward disgust of Modern cities, describing “the beauty of the temple / and the space before the temple, / arch upon perfect arch” (14-16). Unlike the other poems in this chapter, “Cities” is not necessarily critiquing tradition, but rather the

unfolding of modern tradition, separate from Modernism.²⁸ The structure of modern cities encourages conformity, consequently suppressing creativity. It is because the physical structures (temples) of ancient society respected the natural world that they appreciated the creative mind. Therefore the industrial structure of the modern city hinders the creative prosperity represented by the ancient world.

Although this linguistic pattern continues throughout the poem, there is a shift in the fourth stanza. The speaker and “the maker of cities” are consumed with beauty, but because the city is so crowded, “men could not grasp beauty, / beauty was over them, / through them, about them” (31-33). Here, beauty is something present, but not attainable. The construction of cities has become so ordinary, people no longer recognize its beauty—but beauty is not merely referring to architecture. It is the beauty of human nature—to adapt to an environment or potentially stand out against it. Beauty is like blood; it unlocks the senses to identify beauty in natural environments and their effect on the creative mind. The speaker seems to blame the crowded, impersonal construction of cities for a lack of creativity in its men. And so a new city is built—but it is built “with no trace of beauty” (50).

Just as beauty dwells above men, the speaker dwells above their conformity to the lackluster modern cities. She assumes the task of revitalizing beauty in industrial society by shifting her address from the general “men,” to a personal “you,” to a collective “we.” Doing so implicates people as both individuals and members of a collaborative society, calling on them to “protect our strong race” (64). Perhaps the poem is an act of protecting artistic autonomy—a metaphor for Modernist efforts. There is a distinction to be made between the narrative of the poem, which discusses the progression of civil society through cities, and the function of the

²⁸ This is a general statement on *contemporary* urbanization, not restricted to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

poem to build a metaphorical city from the rubble of the past; the language reveals itself as a critique of literary tradition, where the city that is the poem is one where the poet has complete autonomy over its aesthetic production.

The structure of the poem allows the speaker and/or H.D. to insert herself into tradition because the images of the cities are reflections of a creative struggle: what was once revolutionary is now ordinary. The poem acts as a reconciliation between the past and present; it recognizes this plateau in creativity as a product of a time period where war and industrialization were prominent. And although the poem dwells on Modern cities as a “waste,” the final two stanzas reveal the potential of people to restore beauty in an otherwise bleak way of living: “*The city is peopled / with spirits, not ghosts*” (78-79). The crowdedness of cities that were once a negative feature of Modern cities are now imagined to be something positive. The choice to describe the city as “peopled” humanizes this creative struggle, where the image of the metaphorical city is ascribed agency by the poet’s imagination. It is her imagination that transforms ghosts into spirits. It is the uninviting landscape of cities and urban life that is ultimately a “*gift / their beauty, your life*” (82-83). The mode of address shifts to the readers, where the language grants them awareness of their own autonomy, to find beauty where it is not outwardly present. Language works to build beauty into the poem, bringing it to life through the imagination; maybe all modern cities are not objectively beautiful, but beauty is only a lens to look at life. The poem itself is an aesthetic experience, it is an excessive exploration of human subjectivity within modern societal structures.

Tradition in this poem is largely presented as nostalgia: the aesthetic production of the poem is the nostalgic beauty of ancient civilizations, or rather the emotions they invoke to inspire art. H.D. uses cities as a point of critique for broader Modernist concerns regarding literary

tradition—to “make it new.” The language exposes the limitations of literary tradition to largely exclude (Modernist) poets’ aesthetic autonomy to expand tradition so as to encompass their subjective understanding of it. In this framework cities are aesthetic objects. The poem, or the city the poet creates, are the medium by which an aesthetic experience can be achieved. Just as the speaker recognizes the potential of Modern life to become beautiful, the reader has only the potential to accept it as an “image of the truth.”

The role of location in the production of poetry functions on multiple levels: the subject of each of these poems concerns a place, whether it is a specific location such as Blake’s “London,” or a conceptual place as in H.D.’s “Cities.” However, location also applies to the life of the poet: where they were born, where they lived, where they were writing, etc. Therefore, location is both an external and internal feature of a poem. It is a poet’s characterization of the world that influences *how* they write (the structure of a poem) and *why* they write (the subject of a poem). Generally, the “why” ascribes a poem political agency because it considers the poet’s motivation to critique or comment on certain aspects of social life. Although, the “how” is also political because the biological human life is dictated by their political existence in a social world.²⁹ As a result, poetry is politicized because it marries the physical and psychological dimensions of life. A poem is a reflection of the poet’s psychological landscape, their perception of the social world that exists in a physical form.

To write poetry—but especially to publish poetry—is to invite competing interpretations. Poetry is meant to be contemplated, resented, resisted, and reformed. Both Romanticism and Modernism emerged as reformation projects, to disrupt the mechanics of an ordinary life. Both

²⁹ In Ancient Greek, the term “life” includes two words: “zoe,” which refers to bare biological life, and “bios,” referring to a living being’s political existence or ability to form a biography. See also Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* and Giorgio Agamben’s *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1995).

are considered literary movements because they express a desire to redefine societal ideals through exercise of the imagination in literature. The selection of poems I chose to include in this chapter explores the limitations of life through special attention to various locations. The choice of location, as a subject, and the language that structures it into a poem, grants the poets' imagination the power to critique tyrannical power structures. Where Romanticism pushes back on the ideals of the Enlightenment, Modernism pushes back on Romanticism because one movement cannot contain the dynamic of social life across so many generations.

The Enlightenment largely provided the intellectual framework that inspired the first Industrial Revolution; the emphasis of logic, reason, and scientific inquiry that is especially evident in Kant and Pascal's philosophies were applied to city planning, resulting in a number of humanitarian issues. And because the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution began in Western Europe, Romanticism was heavily concentrated in areas like Great Britain. While "London" and "Mont Blanc" both comment on the corrupt application of Enlightened values on industrial society, they chose oppositional methods of doing so. Blake focuses on London as an industrial city, explicitly noting aspects of social life that had been compromised at the height of the Industrial Revolution such as (organized) religion. Shelley's approach focuses on the sublime and grandiose natural existence of Mont Blanc as an attempt to characterize human existence. Doing so not only asserts his authority as a Romantic poet to employ a characteristically different aesthetic than first generation poets like Blake, but also emphasizes the authority of the imagination to have restorative capabilities. It focuses on beauty in the natural world and in human nature perhaps to draw focus away from industrialization.

Although Modernism largely sought to denounce the aesthetic politics that govern Romanticism, the (Modernist) movement emerged from a similar resentment of industrial

culture.³⁰ Modernist poets were writing at the height of global conflict. The physical landscape of the world was changing under mass warfare, thus altering the standard for social life. WWI was a catalyst for technological development that quickly spread to civilian life. One of the primary motivations of Modernists was to capture these rapid changes in day-to-day life. Therefore, Modernism can be considered a critique of twentieth-century social life that exposes the inability of prior (literary) tradition to contain the desires of creative minds who wrote at that time.

The coupling of *The Waste Land* and “Cities” in this chapter echoes “London” and “Mont Blanc” in terms of their structures and subjects. Both Eliot and Blake ground their poems in the city of London to explore the emotional landscape of its people; when placed in conversation, critical themes concerning the decline of social life under eras of intense urbanization are recycled over multiple generations. Although “London” is more explicit in terms of its location, and rigid in terms of its form, the fragmented composition of *The Waste Land* matches the urgency of Blake’s poem because Eliot’s references include a “historical sense” of the literary tradition and social life that Blake lived through. And while *The Waste Land* can be considered highly abstract in both structure and subject, I understand it as the more rigid counterpart to “Cities” because H.D. does not comment on a specific location. Rather, she conceptualizes cities similarly to how Shelley portrays Mont Blanc, where the location of the poem is secondary to its function as an aesthetic object. In the narrative of the poem, the “maker of cities” is a man, yet H.D.—a woman—is the maker of the poem. I understand this as a reclamation of literary tradition, where most recognized poets—especially Romantic poets, are men.

³⁰ The first Industrial Revolution occurred around the emergence of the Romantic Era, where the second Industrial Revolution heavily motivated the Modernist Movement. The rapid ascent of industrialization resulted in a reduction of individualism, which was assigned a market value. Technological advancements tended to displace the desires and fantasies of creative minds.

Despite their obvious stylistic differences, all four of these poems work within the limitations of language to refine a landscape that is both symbolic of literary tradition and societal values.

V. LOVE OF (ALL) EMOTION

Although each chapter in this thesis has a definitive focus: love of the beloved, love of location, and love of (all) emotion, they are only lenses for which I analyze their poems and place them into conversation. The beloved explores overarching themes of subjectivity of the poet and the person they write of. Location functions to expose the political nature of Romantic and Modernist poems in terms of their aesthetic production and cultural existence within and beyond their respective time periods. This third and final chapter is titled “Love of (all) Emotion” because it is the sum of all of the concepts expressed in the earlier two chapters. Emotion is at the core of human existence. It encompasses one’s subjectivity, their relationships, how they experience the world, and provides insight as to why they might want to write about all of these things.

The poems in this chapter all express emotion in some capacity, but the overlap of various emotions, or emotional experiences vital to their meaning and influence are difficult to grasp. It is as if every poet is a pilgrim of tradition, where these poems are only passing thoughts or offerings brought to something sacred. These poems are ordinary in subject: they are about time, the passing of time, melancholy, and obsolescence. But they transform what is ordinary into something uncertain in language. In describing emotion, they question and leverage it—likely to define what it is that makes them human and poet. It is emotion that obscures fundamental differences between people, and for the purposes of this thesis, the Romantic Era and Modernist Poetic movement.

“Spots of Time”

“Spots of Time” is a rather peculiar section of William Wordsworth’s *The Prelude*, a long autobiographical poem. It is a dense and detailed rumination about the poet’s life, mind, and sense of self. And although the life—and the poem—are chronological, they are not straightforward. Therefore, I understand *The Prelude* as a poem about remembering, or the emotions associated with remembering, specifically in the writing process. Wordsworth characterizes the recollection of certain moments as “spots of time”; they are neither happy nor sad; they are a site of stability, a source of both stress and repair. Wordsworth emphasizes their existence as an unidentifiable, yet renovating virtue, that “whence--depressed / By false opinion and contentious thought, / Or aught of heavier or more deadly weight... / A virtue, by which pleasure is enhanced, / That penetrates, enables us to mount, / When high, more high, and lifts us up when fallen” (XII.208-12, 216-18). It is the spontaneous appearance of these “spots” that have the potential to ground the speaker and their thoughts. However, they do not offer happiness, but contentment or stability. They are “efficacious spirit[s]” (XII.219), not ghosts. These “spots” are the coexistence of the past and present—a collision of pain and pleasure. Pleasure derives from the pain of reflection, where pain stems from the loss of that (past) pleasure. They reflect innocence with the perspective of experience, where “the mind is lord and master” (XII.222). It is the mind that detects emotional (or physical) unrest and sends the “spots” perhaps to restore composure. But in examining these spots, Wordsworth arrives at no objective conclusion.

This passage from *The Prelude* mentions two specific “spots of time” from Wordsworth’s childhood. First, he discusses the story of himself as a young boy who encounters a “gibbet-

mast” (XII.237) where a man was executed. Second, he is waiting for horses to take him and his brothers home while overlooking a cliff where two highways meet. The juxtaposition of these moments seem to suture adult Wordsworth’s imagination to a real event from his childhood, where this part of the poem is the “meeting-point / Of two highways” (XII.294)—one that is the true event and one that is Wordsworth’s distant reinterpretation of it. The pairing of these specific “spots of time” echo what William Blake called the “two contrary states of the human soul”—innocence and experience. Wordsworth’s encounter with the “gibbet-mast” illustrates his innocence as it was threatened by experience; the description is underdeveloped, representing his childlike state—his struggle to characterize the event as something sublime. Additionally, the second “spot” seems to be a more realized interpretation of a similar event, thus providing clarity to the first; it is a “visionary dreariness” (XII.256)—a rhetorical contradiction. The speaker finds inspiration in ordinarily dull moments. It is his imagination that preserves painful moments to later “enhance pleasure” (XII.216).

Each “spot of time” is a disparate image of death, or the speaker’s encounter with death that reveals changes in their consciousness. Language then becomes the landscape that is a symbol of the speaker’s mental disposition. But their imagination—or rather its reflection in the poem—is not singular. Like Romanticism, “Spots of Time” is a perspective: it is the objectification of the imagination that exposes the emotion and intuition embedded in ordinary perception. “Spots of time” are what mount the speaker between childhood and adulthood; they are the ideas which freeze an indefinite (lived) experience. Consequently, the imagination always takes precedence over the original event—because it is the dynamic memory of it that is preserved. The speaker extends this idea to readers: it is not *his* childhood, but “*our* first childhood.” Because “spots of time” are ordinary, they are *ours*; his singular experience does not

matter because the principle is the same: words and life alike demonstrate a dynamic reciprocation—life is returned in fragments, whose meaning is defined by the certainty of death. Consequently, words represent a metaphysical presence that throbs between images of the past and their placement in the present.

Additionally, the speaker does not specify the “colours and words that are unknown to man” as an attempt to forge a new reality which extends beyond the body. No language can accurately capture the colors he sees and the effect they have on him in that exact moment. His imagination cannot truthfully preserve moments as they once existed, so he constructs new ones where colors and words do not need names to be considered real. Therefore, the poem mimics the imagination, reproducing its reflections as written truths. The poem and the poet’s life are defined by these truths: *The Prelude* is the poem of Wordsworth’s life in which “spots of time” are a defining aspect. Its placement in the poem serves as an interruption—a dissonance from which meaning derives; the poem is the whole presented experience that is composed of the speaker’s fractured experiences. Therefore, the poem itself provides stability or structure to these ordinarily shapeless moments; “spots of time” impose the extraordinary capabilities of the mind over otherwise mundane moments. The effect is a continuous meditative contemplation that is the eternal coexistence of innocence and experience, where the poem is the immortal embodiment of the poet’s life.

“I Know My Soul”

I chose to pair Wordsworth’s “Spots of Time” with McKay’s “I Know My Soul” because both poems offer highly introspective personal experiences which highlight the human condition

to feel; and they do so in ways that do not necessarily align with the characteristics of their associated movements. Unlike most Modernist poets, McKay primarily wrote in fixed forms, as evident in this poem. “I Know My Soul” is a petrarchan sonnet—a form largely associated with love poetry—but it does not express a love for someone, or even the self; I understand it as a love for the competing and often contradictory emotions of the speaker and his soul. Perhaps McKay opts to use the sonnet form to liberate his poem from the perceived constraints of writing in fixed forms. The poem is confident in its language, yet conceptually unsure—the speaker might not wholly understand their soul, but the soul is something inherently uncertain. It is as if “spots of time” are what defines the soul as McKay’s speaker examines it.

Although the soul largely defines one's character—their demeanor, their desires, and their interests—the poem is rather impersonal. There is then tension between the sonnet form and the subject of the soul. The poem itself appears to be a kind of paradox: it impersonalizes what is typically personal (the soul), and personalizes what is typically impersonal (the sonnet). The tension within the poem could mirror the tension between McKay’s identity as a human and a poet. Although he was associated with the New Negro Movement, Modernism, and the Harlem Renaissance, his interests and identity place him in the periphery. His poetry exhibits European, and overtly Romantic tendencies: the sonnet is a traditionally white form—a form which produces a musicality indicative of lyric poetry from the Romantic Era. The poem is then a balancing act—of the integrity of poetic forms that most resonated with him and the emotions of the black poet. Therefore, the reader’s desire for certainty over the speaker’s soul is destabilized by the poem’s structure.

The speaker examines his soul as the public (or poetic community) might have scrutinized McKay.³¹ His aesthetic preferences challenge the motivations of his associated movements: instead of creating new poetic forms that celebrate blackness, McKay adopts a traditionally white literary style. Yet, the poem appears unfazed by such criticism; although the speaker is ostracized, he represents a metaphysical presence by which he contemplates his biopolitical existence. Language is what animates the imagination and defines human political existence. When the speaker “plucked [his] soul out of its secret place, / And held it to the mirror of [his] eye” (1-2), he examines the soul as something separate from his body. The soul is not something tangible: it is a spiritual presence defined by energy. Therefore, the mind, the imagination, and the body are only portions of it; the physical body and its imaginative capabilities mirror the soul, bridging sensory and intellectual experience.³² The speaker plucks his soul from the social structure where his body exists, perhaps to imagine its celestial existence that “is like a star against the sky, / A twitching body quivering in space” (3-4). Because his soul belongs to the sky, his body is displaced. The space where his body “twitches” and “quivers” could refer to the sonnet form and/or its relationship to McKay as a Modernist, Harlem Renaissance poet. By employing the sonnet form, McKay ties himself to acclaimed literary tradition—but he does so in a way that highlights his subjective experience and passions as a black poet.

Where the opening five lines of the poem present the soul and its relationship to the speaker’s body, the latter half of the poem explores his emotional response: he examines his soul

³¹ “Some critics claim that McKay’s choice of the sonnet form shows compromise with the dominant white-colonialist culture; they criticize this choice saying that while his content may be subversive, the sonnet form takes down the radical effect.” See Lily Jensen, “Claude McKay’s Protest Sonnets” (2023).

³² “Man has no Body distinct from his Soul; for that called Body is a portion of Soul discerned by the five Senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age.” William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790)

“to determine why / This awful key to [his] infinity / Conspires to rob [him] of sweet joy and grace” (6-8). The language here is confident, as the speaker explicitly states why he writes of his soul: on one hand, he asserts that it is his soul which is responsible for his suffering, however, it is this suffering that is the “key” to his poetic aspirations. Perhaps this “awful key” is not necessarily something bad or unpleasant, but rather something *awe-filled*—something sublime. His soul—the very thing that defines him as both a human and a poet—is what robs him of happiness. But the speaker does not wholly accept that he is destined to eternal suffering if that claim is “the sign that may not be fully read” (9). Because the syntax of lines 6-8 allow for two contradictory interpretations, it cannot be fully understood. Therefore, the nuances of the poem mirror the nuances of the poet, who “can comprehend but not control” (10) their fate; it is beyond objective beauty precisely because the speaker can only “see a part and not the whole” (11). It is because the speaker knows that the body is only a portion of the soul, that he is “comforted / By this narcotic thought: [he] know[s] [his] soul” (13-14). Unlike Wordsworth’s “spots of time,” “I Know My Soul” comes to an objective conclusion: the speaker knows his soul because it can never be known completely.

I understand the poem as a figment of McKay’s soul which reveals his motivations as a poet to be set apart from the mainstream Modernist movement. Modernism is defined by its objective deviation from poetic tradition; and while McKay inserts himself into this tradition, his poem represents Modernist ideals because doing so modifies tradition to encompass even his most enigmatic poetic impulses. It is linguistically innovative in a way that transcends the limitations of both the sonnet form and the broader Modernist movement; love is not outwardly defined, but described in the speaker’s acknowledgement of the limitations of language to

authentically express their soul. These limitations of language and form mirror the scope of poetic movements (i.e. Romanticism and Modernism) to limit poets' individual aesthetics.

“Ode on Melancholy”

Like Wordsworth and McKay, John Keats's “Ode on Melancholy” indulges in a similar contemplation of “the strange” through an otherwise ordinary subject matter. For Wordsworth it is remembrance, for McKay it is the soul, and for Keats, it is the melancholy emotion. It is strange that Keats's speaker finds comfort in an ordinarily uncomfortable emotion; perhaps it is comfortable because it is familiar, however “narcotic [a] thought” it may be. It is their linguistic exploration of these ordinary subjects that objectifies their imagination and transforms them into something strange, but fundamental to their personal and poetic identities. Although each of these poets offer excessive explorations of subjectivity, the speaker in Keats's poem has no personal presence; it is personal only in the speaker's passion for the object that is melancholy.³³ It is the poet's passion for the subject that results in an impersonal poem—what T.S. Eliot might consider a “self sacrifice.”³⁴ In examining melancholy, the poet escapes from the emotion and his personality because the “Body” that he fills in for is exactly the emotion; the human is separate from the poet.

Similar to McKay's use of the sonnet form, Keats works within the ode, a form that originates in ancient Greece and Rome that was most commonly used to celebrate things like love and beauty. However, it was popularized by poets like Keats during the Romantic Era, who

³³“ A poet is the most unpoetical of any thing in existence; because he has no identity—he is continually in for—and filling some other Body.” John Keats letter to Richard Woodhouse (1818).

³⁴ See chapter II, page 16 on T.S. Eliot's “Tradition and the Individual Talent.”

complicated its traditional function by taking up subject matters such as melancholy. Therefore, the pairing of a celebratory form and a typically unsung emotion ultimately addresses questions concerning the contradictory human state. Because the poet personifies the melancholy emotion that is the “Body” of the poem, the poem is the human and the poet has “no identity.” However, the speaker acts as a third party who guides the reader’s perception of “melancholy fits” by attempting to create one. He outlines its experience by explaining what not to do when you feel melancholic, followed by what to do, then what happens. The diction is physical and overwhelmingly negative, yet the poem is something beautiful. Therefore, the poem’s beauty is largely defined by the absence of familiar associations, where beauty is built from a bleak emotional state. Melancholy is an inherent part of life, just as negative imagery is an inherent part of the poem.

Both its structure and subject work in tandem to surprise or provoke the reader; because the poem dwells in melancholy, the reader must also. The poem attends to the overtly physical and profuse qualities of the emotion, setting an urgent tone from the initial string of negations: “No, no, go not to Lethe, neither twist / ...Nor suffer thy pale forehead to be kiss'd / ... Nor let the beetle, nor the death-moth be / Your mournful Psyche” (1, 3, 6). Unlike most odes which address the subject, “Ode on Melancholy” addresses the reader. The opening line functions on two levels: (1) the etymology of the word “Lethe” in Greek translates to “oblivion” and (2) the River Lethe is the River of Forgetfulness. The literal translation tells readers not to be oblivious, not to overlook melancholy’s restorative qualities and allow death to cloud their psyche. Whereas the river represents the threshold of life and death; it is where one could *choose* to drink its water or to forget themselves and be reborn. Therefore, the latter symbolic meaning of the river captures the contemplation surrounding suicide that is ultimately a contemplation of

melancholy. Lethe is but a symbol of a specific place, a place where death resides; there exists an abundance of poisons, the temptation to kill oneself in a time of pain. But the speaker instructs readers to “Make not your rosary of yew-berries” (5)—not to consecrate death because it will “drown the wakeful anguish of the soul” (10). In these lines, there is a shift from the possessive pronoun “*your* rosary” to the impersonal “soul” and the significance lies in McKay’s notion of the soul: it is an immortal metaphysical presence by which a human is only part of the immaterial whole. Because the soul is an eternal entity, it cannot die by drowning; it is self aware—*wakeful* in its anguish.

Where the explicit mention of melancholy is absent in the first stanza, it appears in the second stanza as a “fit” rather than a pure emotion. Perhaps a “melancholy fit” (11) is adjacent to the soul, where melancholy is its human portion. Much of the imagery in this stanza borders on cliché, such as the melancholy fit that falls “Sudden from heaven like a weeping cloud, / That fosters the droop-headed flowers” (12-13). It is almost carnivalesque in that it subverts the function of the cliché in dominant culture to construct new meaning within the context of the poem.³⁵ These are images that suspend death to capture what is dying—something that is typically mournful; but the syntax of these lines rejoices in the sadness of such images. While rain causes flowers to “droop,” they need water to survive for their beauty to see fruition. Therefore, when “when the melancholy fit shall fall,” the reader mustn’t go to Lethe: they should “glut thy sorrow on a morning rose” (15) to transform their source of misery into a source of luxury. This is not a poem about how to survive a “melancholy fit,” but rather how to extract pleasure from an otherwise painful experience.

³⁵ “Carnavalesque” is a term coined by the Russian philosopher and critic Mikhail Bakhtin in his book *Rabelais and His World* (1968). It refers to an inversion of power dynamics, which mocks authority, and emphasizes the body—all while channeling the playful spirit of the carnival.

The poem only pretends to guide readers through “melancholy fits” to find where beauty dwells: the act of describing is really an act of defining what exactly melancholy is. The speaker does not intend to deliver readers to melancholy or beauty, instead he suggests a route one can take. This route is an exuberant sensory description that outlines how it feels to experience one of these “fits”; however, the feeling, or experience, is precisely the definition. By the third and final stanza, melancholy assumes a sacred mythological presence: “She dwells with Beauty—Beauty that must die / And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips / Bidding adieu; and aching Pleasure nigh” (21-23). Melancholy is a collision of death and beauty—of pain and pleasure; each emotion or sensation is inseparable from the rest. Pleasure only arrives because beauty is defined by its departure. Melancholy is but a pilgrim of mental disposition; she exists not at Lethe, but “in the very temple of Delight / ...her sovran shrine” (25-26). It is melancholy’s shrine that is something divine, where emotions such as pleasure, joy, and pain, are offerings to unlock an enlightened state. Additionally, the possessive pronouns introduced in this stanza complicate the speaker, poet, reader dynamic: she is melancholy, so perhaps he is beauty—it is his soul that “taste[s] the sadness of her might / And [is] among her cloudy trophies hung” (29-30). He who is beauty is also melancholy—he is every emotion that composes the “Body” of the poem—the body that the poet (Keats) fills in for. The speaker operates from a position of higher awareness and wisdom, where the poet submits to the divine authority of the melancholy emotion, to which the reader is simply a witness. The poet is “hung” like a trophy; the syntax of this articulation places the poet physically above the speaker, in the clouds; it is as if the poet himself is the object of his affection: although melancholy is debilitating, it is also awe-inspiring. Therefore, the poet and the poem serve as metaphors for the complex and contradictory human condition.

“The Rose is Obsolete”

Where “Ode on Melancholy” is unconventional in its subject matter—or rather its deployment within the ode structure, “The Rose is Obsolete” is unconventional in its symbolism. For Keats, it is passion that is responsible for the poem’s impersonality. For Williams, it is the absence of such passion that results in an impersonal poem hallmark of Modernist poetry. By this I mean that the language is not urgent as it is in Keats’s poem: it is mechanical, where emotion is embedded in symbolism rather than statements. Both are experimental, especially in the context of their respective movements. Each poem represents a reclamation of symbols as signifiers of poetic tradition, where their stylistic differences highlight the subjective motivations of poets under broader movements.

“The Rose is Obsolete” is one of twenty seven poems in Williams’s 1923 collection *Spring and All*; every poem is essentially nameless, but ascribed a number. However, “The rose is obsolete” is the only poem that is not explicitly marked by a number, although it is seventh in the series. It appears spontaneously in the middle of a prose passage, similar to positioning of “Spots of Time” in Wordsworth’s *The Prelude*. While the prose intertext is largely disillusioned and not grammatically correct, it serves as the poem’s more personal counterpart, where isolated statements are objective in defining Williams’s artistic vision. The prose which prefaces the poem is as follows:

But such a picture of Juan Gris, though I have not seen it in color, is important as marking more clearly than any I have seen what the modern trend is : the attempt is being made to separate things of the imagination from life, and obviously, by using the forms common to experience so as not to frighten the onlooker away but to invite him, (p 30)

It is in the middle of this articulation that the poem interjects: “The rose is obsolete” (1). Perhaps the strange syntax is intended to mimic cubist painter Juan Gris’s subtle mode of (Modernist) defamiliarization, so as to not startle readers as “onlookers” of Williams’s avant garde aesthetics. Poetry and broader art forms assume an in-between space—between perceptive and imagined reality—where the imagination provides poetry the agency and potential to have tangible, reformist effects. In doing so, Williams’s imagination attempts to reconcile the then emerging conflict between the isolated object and its modernized production. Reading *Spring and All* as a reconciliation of objects technological modernization exposes Williams’s interests as a Modernist poet, seeking to “make new” or make visible their aesthetic production.

Roses are often considered a paragon of love, yet Williams’s poem offers a version of a rose that pushes back on its romanticized status; instead of being something symbolic (of love), it is obsolete. However, this dichotomy is ironic precisely because Williams states that “the rose is obsolete” to erase its previous (romantic) symbolism only to ascribe it new agency that is symbolic of the human experience—the obsolescence of a human life relative to its existence in the universe. The structure of the poem compliments its subject matter to reimagine love within a liminal space: the rose within the universe and the poem on the page. The poem is fragmented—riddled with incomplete sentences and thoughts. Yet, Williams actively acknowledges the poem’s incompleteness, using the imagery of the rose to “penetrate space” (42) within the threshold he’s created. Each petal of the rose “ends in / an edge, the double facet / cementing the grooved / columns of air — The edge / cuts without cutting” (2-6). The speaker of the poem describes what the poet (Williams) is doing, where the physical poem is the metaphorical petal that cuts between the prose without physically cutting the paper. It “meets — nothing — renews / itself in metal or porcelain —” (7-8). The rose is simply an idea—it is nothing but a reflection

of the poet's imagination; it is renewed in the poem because the poet describes it as metal or porcelain, suturing his imagination to the material world.

The petal is both abstract and concrete; it is double faceted—on the threshold of the two dimensions: “wither ? It ends— / But if it ends / the start is begun / so that to engage roses / becomes a geometry” (9-13). The use of “wither ?” can be understood as a symbol for the rose or petal's multi-dimensional purpose; on one level, the poem is asking “where to?”—to which the speaker responds “it ends.” It is not solely a question of direction, but of deterioration that springboards the poem into philosophical reflection: the poem is the death, or “withering” of literary tradition. But this kind of decomposition is necessary to the natural cycle of life, in which tradition is suspended. Therefore, the rose is both a symbol of tradition and of geometry. In order for the rose to “become a geometry,” writing must become a technology. The diction then becomes “Sharper, neater, more cutting / figured in majolica — / the broken plate / glazed with a rose” (14-17). Nowhere in the poem is the speaker or poet present: there is no “I” or even any possessive pronouns; the language is only concerned with objects. But it is language through which the authority of the poet's imagination operates: the rose is an idea that is transformed into various objects. These objects, such as the broken plate, are created and destroyed with words that are images and ideas themselves; and they are what freeze the otherwise constant shifting phantasmagoria of lived experience.³⁶ Although the plate is breakable, the image of its brokenness is something eternal, something that does not “wither.”

The concept of the rose evolves through the senses, where the poem shifts between concrete and abstract imagery. The first half of the poem is rather fixated on the material quality

³⁶ “We live entirely, especially if we are writers, by the imposition of a narrative line upon disparate images, by the ‘ideas’ with which we have learned to freeze the shifting phantasmagoria which is our actual experience.” Joan Didion, *The White Album* (1979).

of the rose that is pushed into a new aesthetic dimension in the latter half. There, the traditional (romantic) symbolism is addressed: “The rose carried the weight of love / but love is at an end — of roses” (21-22). This couplet marks the exact beginning of the second half of the poem, where all of the material roses from the first half have accumulated in “the weight of love.” If the rose is obsolete, love is too—both are “at an end.” But “love waits” (24) while the petal is “Crisp, worked to defeat / laboredness — fragile / plucked, moist, half-raised / cold, precise, touching” (25-28). Love is labor—it is contradictory by nature; it can be both “half-raised” and “precise” because love exists in multiple dimensions. Two people might love each other, but their ideas of love are inherently different. There is a chasm in conscious thought among people—a space in which the poem “penetrates / the Milky Way / without contact... / The fragility of the flower / unbruised / penetrates spaces” (35-37, 40-42). The poem is fragile, yet unbruised; it is immortal and assumes various spaces across then and now. What was once a rose is now a flower stripped of its previous symbolism; it is an agent by which the poem explores consciousness or *penetrates* abstract spaces: the Milky Way, the reader’s headspace, the space in the collection *Spring and All*, space in the Modernist Poetic Movement, and space in literary tradition. If the poem represents the capabilities of the imagination in the context of industrial Modern societies, then it only extends the efforts of other poets such as those from the Romantic Era; both movements then intend to critique literary tradition so as to capture the chasm between the past and present.

I find the irony of the rose image representative of Modernism’s relationship to Romanticism. “The Rose is Obsolete” crystallizes the shift from Romantic to Modernist modes of (love) poetry because it indirectly considers how the socio-political context surrounding the Modernist Poet Movement influenced the poetry produced during its time. Williams challenges Romantic representations of love by revitalizing its traditional symbols in poetry such as the

rose. Because Modernism was largely mobilized by the devastation caused by WWI, many Modernists criticized the Romantics for idealizing love in ways that somewhat gloss over the bleak circumstances from which their beauty emerges. Williams attributes his poem and its subject (the rose) agency as an artistic object whose function is to restore beauty in the modern world; the rose is not necessarily natural, as it might be depicted in the Romantic Era: it is more mechanical, representing the influence the second Industrial Revolution had on the Modernist movement. Yet, the Romantics were also influenced by the effects of the first Industrial Revolution. Where Modernists like Williams demonstrate the imposition of technology through a heavy focus on objects, Romantics tend to focus on the self, or the effect of technology on the natural world and its human inhabitants. Therefore, this poem demonstrates how the Modernist Poetic Movement's rejection of Romantic ideals derives from a shared emotional objective to utilize unconventional methods of poetic expression to restore love that was lost, or rendered obsolete in their respective time periods.

Poetry is an emotional exchange, but emotion is not entirely definable or identifiable. The poems in this chapter, but really in any poem, consecrate the intermingling of emotional sensations. There is no isolated emotion: melancholy is not simply sadness, nor is nostalgia only recollection. Knowing is not certainty; and love is not always celebratory. Emotions are images of address; they are objects created by language and by human consciousness that addresses aesthetic politics. Poetry is political because poets are humans who live (or lived) in a biopolitical state; emotion is embedded in human biology. Because humans have language, we have the ability to reason, debate, and consider our position within and beyond the social world, one that operates through categories: of gender, age, emotion, location, time... To name

something is to recognize its singular function and assign it value; naming is necessary to sustain a functional biopolitical state. However, names place limitations on people's perception of things, thus implicating their emotional awareness. To live is to feel. To write poetry is to articulate feeling. To *publish* poetry is to sacrifice the subjective feeling—to allow the emotion of the poem to be categorized and contemplated by other minds beyond the time period of the poet.

Each poem in this chapter offers a unique emotional experience in which beauty is more decayed than defined. Wordsworth reconstructs moments from his childhood to contemplate their effect on his adulthood, on his career as a poet and his aesthetic preferences. “Spots of time” is excessive in length and ambiguous within *The Prelude*'s autobiographical structure. Like Williams's “The rose is obsolete,” Wordsworth does not name or explicitly mark the “Spots of time” passage—it is simply a fragment of a larger whole. In this framework, the construction of both Wordsworth and Williams's poems mimic the subject of McKay's “I Know My Soul,” where their poems are only “a part and not the whole” of the poets' souls. Additionally, if melancholy is the object of Keats's “Ode on Melancholy,” then it is also a poem about the soul to which the melancholy emotion is only a portion. In exploring the nuances of human emotion, these poems exploit literary tradition to offer a political critique of philosophical reflection, where perceived differences between the (British) Romantic Era and Modernist Poetic Movement are rendered obsolete.

VI. CONCLUSION: MODALITIES OF LOVE IN LITERARY TRADITION

“For me, trees have always been the most penetrating preachers. I revere them when they live in tribes and families, in forests and groves. And even more I revere them when they stand alone... In their highest boughs the world rustles, their roots rest in infinity; but they do not lose themselves there, they struggle with all the force of their lives for one thing only: to fulfil themselves according to their own laws, to build up their own form, to represent themselves.”
—Hermann Hesse, *Wandering*

In the previous chapters, I have attempted to outline the ways in which British Romantic poetry and broader Modernist poetry intersect, to identify their shared characteristics in spite of their opposition within the literary canon. Literary movements are attempts to develop and discern the general attitudes of artists who capture the urgency to which their own modernity is defined. However, it is the grouping of individual poems and poets under a unified movement that tends to overlook the individual struggle of the artist to “represent [themselves] according to their own laws.” The artist’s struggle is twofold: 1) to define the individual before the imposition of literary tradition—of its authority to sway or determine how their work will be received, and 2) to represent this struggle linguistically—to reveal how the poet struggles to portray their position in modernity. Although the majority of poems I chose to include in this thesis are considerably dissonant and are not typically categorized as love poems, they are all poems I revere. I revere them because they live in the “forests and groves” that are literary tradition, but also because they stand alone. To me, they are love poems because they struggle desperately to represent themselves—to acknowledge, but not to conform to the collective. Particularly within

the context of literary tradition, love is not merely affection, nor is it wholly pleasure—of the writing process. Often, it is the absence of “traditional” love that communicates the poet’s wisdom as an act of love, to modify modernity and therefore, literary tradition.

There are a number of contemporary writers whose work certainly demonstrates the preservation and extension of literary tradition, who undoubtedly understand that beauty is suspended between life’s profit and loss; there are poets whose poems might better demonstrate the trajectory of literary tradition to contextualize the dynamic, reciprocal relationship between British Romanticism and Modernism in the twenty-first century. However, I choose to offer my concluding remarks as they are informed by Hermann Hesse. Although he was writing at the height of the Modernist movement, he is not often considered a Modernist writer, nor is it my intention to view him as such. The choice to bring in a quote from his collection *Wandering* as an epigraph is not meant to complicate the scope of this already ambitious thesis, but rather to define it. It is how he portrays trees as “penetrating preachers” that I find remarkably similar to this thesis’s portrayal of (British) Romantic and Modernist poetry. Like Williams’s portrait of the rose, Hesse offers us the tree of tradition; it is as if he stood on the threshold of tradition as a tree who is witness to an ever-evolving modernity. The quote oscillates between opposites—between the tree of the tribe and the tree of great solitary—between its struggle and its stability—between motion and stationariness. It is the idea that because there is space between these things that they are opposites: that they are incomplete. Perhaps we strive for completeness because it cannot be achieved; the human condition is not and will never be complete—and it is through this tension that tradition is created.

Movements such as Romanticism and Modernism wage war against convention. Human biopolitics require things to be named and categorized, whether they are trivial or vital to our

existence. But the necessity to name things such as literary movements imposes obstacles on itself. Tradition does not disappear, nor can it be abandoned, although many poems express a desire for its abandonment. So, poems belonging to either movement tend to attack established authority; tradition is half strategic and half spontaneous... It provides a level of stability within the literary canon with the caveat of accountability and poets must revise and renovate poetic tradition, fixing its gaze towards a newly informed future. No one poet is responsible for defining a movement, or redefining literary tradition; it is only possible through the collective effort of stylistically different poets, which is the primary concern of this anthology-style thesis. The poems I examine represent the past in ways that highlight the poet's modern reaction to it. They seek "balance between tradition and innovation"³⁷ so as to explore the capacity of tradition to resist—and not to sever its roots. Eliot probably best exemplifies this; he explicitly references aspects of history across centuries, which belong to various cultures and countries, to reinterpret their significance to tradition, thus redefining it in the process. But in every poem we see a resurgence of traditional values and characteristics from preceding tradition, whether or not the poet acknowledges it. The recurrence of certain structures and subjects across movements is due to their vigor and their ability to withstand reinvention tailored to different time periods. Although poets like McKay were attacked for utilizing traditional poetic forms such as the sonnet, his choice to take up such forms demonstrates the balance between tradition and innovation, between the individual poet and the collective Modernist Poetic Movement. The same goes for Romantic poets like Keats for his alternative use of the ode; instead of celebrating something already acknowledged as praise-worthy, he takes an undesirable emotion,

³⁷ Quote from Theodore Jackson's "Hermann Hesse as Ambivalent Modernist" (2010).

melancholy, to reveal that what is overwhelmingly bleak can also be beautiful, thus modifying a traditional form to contain his modern perspective.

Because literary tradition simultaneously contains the history and future of humanity, this is a thesis that demands a holistic approach. These poems and their associated movements can only be explained in reference to the whole continuum of literary tradition; they focus first and foremost on the human: it is the poet's thinking, their thoughts and their motivation to contemplate, order, and string together words so as to produce meaning that is a byproduct of love. And it is the dichotomy of love and loss that yields literature as a figment of a human life; once published, poetry becomes the intellectual property of readers beyond the poet's lifetime. McKay is one poet who deeply understood this sacrifice: the poet is one who "can comprehend but not control" the reception of their poetry because it is only "a part and not the whole" of their subjective being that is included in literary tradition.

This is not a thesis that strives for completeness, but rather one that explores incompleteness as a means of expanding consciousness: to view writing as a reconciliation of opposites—to remember that what is now considered Romanticism or Modernism was once contemporary. It is the impossibility of literary tradition to ever be complete that sustains contemporary poetic ambitions, the relevance of Romantic and Modernist poetry, the human pursuit of knowledge, and our love of wisdom. Because each reader inevitably has a different encounter with a poem—and poems continue to be read generation after generation—whether it is regarded under a certain movement is obsolete. It is only beneficial to look at literary movements holistically—as an ecosystem of historically significant and culturally innovative texts, authors, and ideas, as opposed to understanding them as separate entities.

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